POLITICAL BRANDING IN AUSTRALIA: 
A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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Abstract
In 2007, Australian voters elected a Labor Government and installed Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister. Rudd became Australia’s most popular leader, however, by mid-2010 he had been abandoned by voters and cut down by his party. His successor, Julia Gillard, suffered a swifter reversal of fortune. Following a surge in support, Gillard raced to the polls only to emerge with a minority Government. Commentators see the rise and fall of Rudd as the creation and destruction of a political brand, and the switch to Gillard as a failed attempt at rebranding to stave off electoral defeat. Since Rudd’s election, commentators and practitioners increasingly have spoken of politicians and parties as brands. So, too, have researchers who offer valuable studies to support their arguments. There are, however, no tools for conceptualising the practice of political branding. To fill this gap and build understanding of the practice, I offer a conceptualisation of the brand oriented party and a model of political branding in Australia. The conceptualisation builds on the idea of political brand orientation (O’Cass and Voola 2011) and the market-oriented party model (Lees-Marshment 2001). The brand oriented party consciously chooses branding as a long-term strategy to create and sustain voter attachment and support. This conceptualisation takes account of a party’s ideology, organisation and normative responsibilities. The model builds on the conceptualisation above, as well as a strategic commercial branding process (Keller 2008) and an argument that branding is the new version of the permanent political campaign (Scammell 2007). The model takes account of the Australian electoral system, as it intersects with the dual tasks of governing and electioneering in the permanent campaign. Together, these new tools may assist in more rigorous analysis of political branding in Australia and similar systems.
“There is no longer that core political constituency. So to be contestable, you’ve got to lead with something that people find tangible...it’s the person rather than the party.”

Cameron Milner, Australian Labor Party campaign strategist

**Introduction**

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, her predecessor Kevin Rudd and the Australian Labor Party are regularly described as brands by political practitioners (e.g. Milner 2012), commentators (e.g. van Onselen 2010a: 4) and researchers (e.g. Dann and Hughes 2008). Similarly, their campaigns and governments are viewed through a branding lens (e.g. Feeney 2012; Hughes, Dann and Neale 2008: 3; Keane 2011). Key figures (e.g. Gartrell 2012; Hawker 2012; Utting 2012) in the 2007 federal election campaign that brought Rudd and Labor to power say they consciously undertook a branding exercise. Indeed, one (Utting 2012) describes it as the “high water mark” of political branding in Australia. As Rudd became Australia’s most popular Prime Minister (van Onselen 2010b), commentators (e.g. Colgan 2010; Kelly 2010; van Onselen 2010a: 4) increasingly referred to “Brand Rudd” or “Brand Kevin”. However, public support for Rudd and Labor started sliding in late 2009 and never stopped. After Rudd was abandoned by his colleagues in mid-2010, the only first-term Prime Minister dumped by his own party (Megalogenis 2010), one Labor strategist (Milner 2012) argued “he’d done a lot of brand damage while Prime Minister”. Many other practitioners, researchers and commentators (e.g. Hughes 2011; Utting 2012; van Onselen 2010a: 4) also see the rise and fall of Rudd as the creation and destruction of a political brand.

Gillard’s fortunes, too, are often portrayed as the story of a political brand. Despite an immediate surge in popularity for the new Prime Minister (Cassidy 2010: 245), just eight weeks later Gillard lost majority government at an election - the first time this had happened to a first-term administration since 1931 (Cassidy 2010: 246). Key figures from the 2010 campaign attribute this swift reversal to a range of factors: poor pre-poll definition of “the brand, brand attributes...and offering” (Feeney 2012); “brand damage” caused by the manner of Gillard’s ascension (Hawker 2012) and by her opponents within and without (Milner 2012), and; Gillard’s mid-campaign vow to unveil “the real Julia” (Milner 2012). Heading into the 2013 election year, one commentator declares “Gillard’s brand is...very likely terminally damaged” (Keane 2011) while one Labor strategist (Milner 2012) argues “the brand is still developing and its going to take the next election to define it”.

Branding is now firmly part of the Australian political lexicon. This is problematic for two reasons. First, as noted by Feeney (2012), some practitioners and commentators seem to speak about political branding without due understanding of its commercial antecedents. Numerous researchers (e.g. French and Smith 2010: 460; Keller 2002: 171; Reeves et al 2006: 419) make the point that commercial branding is a discipline and a practice with specific concepts and tools that do not translate directly to the discipline of political science and the practice of politics. This raises questions about whether practitioners and commentators are undertaking and witnessing political branding strategy, or simply the ad hoc use of commercial marketing tactics and language. Second, while researchers do appreciate the differences between commerce and politics, they are yet to fully translate
developments from the commercial branding field or reflect political practice (Needham 2006: 179; O’Cass and Voola 2011: 633). A few researchers (i.e. Hughes, Dann and Neale 2008; Hughes and Dann 2010; Hughes 2011; O’Cass and Voola 2011) have offered valuable studies to argue that Australian politicians and parties - including Gillard, Rudd and Labor - undertake branding. There are, however, no models or tools for conceptualising, identifying or evaluating the practice of political branding in Australia. These gaps in understanding and research raise questions about whether parties and politicians do consciously and strategically employ branding.

This paper fills one gap by offering a new conceptualisation of the brand oriented party and a new model of political branding in Australia. I argue the brand oriented party consciously chooses branding as a strategy for a permanent campaign throughout the electoral cycle. I offer the model as a heuristic of a political branding strategy and the Australian electoral cycle. This work draws on the concept of political brand orientation (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 634), the market-oriented party model (Lees-Marshment 2001: 697), a process of strategic commercial branding (Keller 2008: 39), and the idea of branding as the new form of permanent political campaign (Scammell 2007: 188).

The paper proceeds in six parts. The first defines political branding. The second argues that political branding offers a new perspective on historical and contemporary voter and party behaviour. The third considers the central role of parties in political branding. The fourth presents the conceptualisation of the brand oriented party, and the fifth presents the model of political branding in Australia. The final part offers a summary and suggestions for next steps.

A definition of branding
This part provides an overarching definition of political branding, then unpacks the details. It next considers how branding works for voters and parties, and finishes with a discussion of the importance of emotion, as well as rationality.

With “no universal consensus about the difference between ‘branding’ and ‘marketing’” (Burkitt 2002: 7), it is important to state that I consider branding strategy the precursor to, and driver of, marketing strategies and tactics. I conceptualise political branding from a practitioner’s perspective, which is a managerial approach (French and Smith 2010: 462), while being ever mindful of the consumer’s perspective, which is a cognitive psychological approach (French and Smith 2010: 462). I broadly define political branding as a consciously chosen strategy (Barberio and Lowe 2006: 7, 11; Burkitt 2007: 7) to identify and differentiate (Smith and French 2009: 211) and instil political offerings with emotional as well as functional values (Scammell 2007: 187; White and de Chernatony 2002: 47), to enhance voter appeal (Burkitt 2002: 4; White and de Chernatony 2002: 47) and attachment (Lees-Marshment 2011: 73; Needham 2006: 182).

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition” (Keller 2008: 2). Brands are attached to products which include physical goods, intangible services, retail outlets, people, organisations, places and ideas.
(Keller 2008: 3). At its most fundamental, the political product is “the service of governing” (Harrop 1990: 278). Digging deeper, Butler and Collins (1999: 58) describe the product as the usually indivisible components of “the candidate, their party and ideology”. Digging deeper still, Dann and Hughes (2008: 8) see it as “a complex bundle of benefits for the voter” consisting of “a variable combination of politician, political party reputation, policy, ideology and active promises made to the electorate during the campaign”. In short, the political product is a “complex intangible” (Lock and Harris 1996: 15) encompassing “everything a party does” (Lees-Marshment 2011: 45). The “central and unifying core” (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy 2007: 20) of the product is the party leader and their image (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy 2007: 20-21). That’s because leaders “not only deliver the service, they also personify it” (Harrop 1990: 279); they “serve as the primary source of identity” (Parker 2012: 209). Thus, the political product may be offered via a branded leader in candidate-centred systems such as America’s (Hughes 2007: 1116), or a leader co-branded with their party in party-centred systems like Australia’s (Hughes 2007: 1116). The product is marketed to political consumers who encompass voters (Lees-Marshment 2001: 693), most importantly (Baines 1999: 403), but also the media and “all audiences which the party wishes to influence” (Burkitt 2002: 7). Marketing “consists essentially in projecting belief in...ability to govern” (Harrop 1990: 278), which is offered in exchange for votes (Baines, Brennan and Egan 2008: 48).

Keller (2008: 2) believes good brands not only identify and differentiate, but also create emotional connections as they “take on special meaning to consumers” (Keller 2008: 6). All this provides the consumer with a decision-making shortcut for purchases (Keller 2008: 6) and the producer with financial value (Keller 2008: 9). Similarly, political branding is said to identify and differentiate (Smith and French 2009: 211) while seeking emotional connections with voters by attaching “emotional values” (White and de Chernatony 2002: 47). Thus, a political brand “relieves voters of the need to familiarise themselves with all the party’s policies” (Needham 2006: 179), offering a decision-making shortcut at elections (Smith and French 2009: 217) and providing parties with “electoral payoffs” (Needham 2006: 181).

Both rationality and emotion are important in branding. Branding differentiates similar products by highlighting differences that are “rational and tangible - related to the performance of the brand - or more symbolic, emotional and intangible - related to what the brand represents” (Keller 2008: 5). Therefore, branding must appeal “to both the head and the heart” (Keller 2008: 77). Kornberger (2010: xii) distils this into a formula - “branding = functionality + meaning”. Keller (2008: 74) argues a brand’s strength is built on how consumers “think, feel and act with respect to that brand” and, therefore, that “customers own brands”. Similarly, the voter determines the meaning (Burkitt 2002: 7) and the success (Scammell 2007: 181-182) of a political brand. Burkitt (2002: 5) argues for the “enormous importance of the intangible, the irrational and of emotional perceptions (in addition to considered opinions) in voters’ relationships with political parties”. From the voters’ viewpoint, political brands are “almost entirely psychological constructs” (Burkitt 2002: 7). Therefore, Burkitt (2002: 7) suggests, “brands and brand perceptions are even more important in political markets than in commercial markets” and that a political party may be “the ultimate form of brand”.

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A new perspective

I argue here that political branding offers a new perspective on voter and party behaviour, past and present. I contend that two widely used models of voting behaviour are no longer fully satisfactory as voters increasingly disconnect from politics, and make a case for revisiting the work of Kirchheimer (1966: 177-200). This leads to a discussion of a growing body of political branding literature which offers a new take on contemporary voter and party behaviour, as well as the permanent campaign.

Over the past century, explanations for voter behaviour have evolved from social cleavages (Farrell 2006: 123), to psychological and social factors (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 20) and "material interest" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 28). Initially, voter behaviour was viewed in the context of fixed social cleavages, with class and religion "particularly salient" (Henneberg and Eghbalian 2002: 77). People voted in line with these cleavages (Farrell 2006: 123), and party ideology (Vassallo and Wilcox 2006: 414) and organisation (Butler, Collins and Fellenz 2007: 95) emerged from them. However, from the mid-20th century, there has been a "loosening of ties between particular parties and particular segments of society" (Katz and Mair 1995: 13). Two "mainstream" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 30) models of voter behaviour were subsequently developed. The first, the Michigan model, brings together psycho-social factors (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 21), including "a social class, an ethnic group or a political party" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 21). Voting is seen as "inherently complex" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 20), requiring the use of simplifying devices. The most important of these is voter loyalty to, or identification with, a party (Campbell et al 1960: 121); "an enduring emotional attachment" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 20). In contrast, the rational choice model draws from "neoclassical economic theory" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 25). It sees voters as "utility-maximising consumers" (Downs 1957, cited in Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 25) in a "political market" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 25), who eschew "habit, irrationality and error" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 26). This model sees voters "applying heuristics to...reduce the cost of requiring information" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 26). Voters may reference their socio-economic group, choose the party whose ideology best fits their own, or develop a "standing vote" (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 26).

Neither model is fully satisfactory in the face of declining party identification (Crotty 2006a: 502) and political engagement (French and Smith 210: 461), and the emergence of postmaterialist "expressive values" (Inglehart 1977, 1990 cited in Vassallo and Wilcox 2006: 415). There is general, although not universal, agreement that party identification has declined in Western democracies over the past few decades (Crotty 2006a: 501-502). At the turn of the century it was around two-thirds of voters in America and Western European democracies, including Britain (Dalton 2000:19), and the levels (French and Smith 2010: 463) and strength (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 23) continue to fall. In Australia, party identification is slightly higher and more stable than in many similar systems (Bean and McAllister 2012: 343), but levels and strength generally have declined over the past two decades or so (Bean and McAllister 2012: 343). There is also declining engagement with politics in general. Voters in Western democracies, including Australia (Altman 2012; Ward 1991: 156), have low levels of involvement in party politics (French and Smith 210:
Some voters reject traditional parties and policies (Vassallo and Wilcox 2006: 415) as they embrace expressive issues like “gender, sexual identify, civil liberties, and the environment” (Vassallo and Wilcox 2006: 415). Gunther and Diamond (2003: 3 cited in Crotty 2006a: 511) argue contemporary parties “lack the depth of involvement and emotional and ideological attachment they commanded a century, even two or three decades ago”. This means voters are more “promiscuous” (O’Shaughnesssey and Henneberg 2002a: xi), and this means a new explanation for voter behaviour is required.

A compelling explanation, that of political branding, can be found in a re-reading of Kirchheimer’s work on the catch-all party which emerged in Western Europe after World War Two (1966: 177-200). Henneberg and Eghbalian (2002: 67-91) apply a political marketing perspective to reinterpret the work as “a proto-political marketing concept” (2002: 68). Kirchheimer was “thinking in an economic framework” (Henneberg and Eghbalian 2002: 71) and “an astonishing affinity to economic terms can be noted, obviously fostered by the impact of Downs’s (1957) study” (Henneberg and Eghbalian 2002: 71). Kirchheimer did, indeed, explicitly employ the logic and language of economics. He argued that the catch-all party, seeking the “attraction of a maximum number of voters” (1966: 192) whose “relation to politics is both tangential and discontinuous” (1966: 193), could not count on member loyalty (1966: 193). It would win power by “entering into millions of minds as a familiar object fulfilling in politics a role analogous to that of a major brand in marketing, of a universally needed and highly standardised article of mass consumption” (Kirchheimer 1966: 192). Kirchheimer saw the parties acting like “the brand whose name has become a household word” (1966: 192) and the voter acting like a “customer” (1966: 192) in a “political market” (1996: 184). He saw parties changing their structures (1966: 184, 190) and reducing “ideological baggage” (1966: 190), and leaders adjusting their behaviour to suit voters (1966: 192) while still maintaining “brand differentiation” (1966: 192). He also saw parties exposed “to the hazards of all purveyors of non-durable consumer goods: competition with a more attractively packaged brand of a nearly identical merchandise” (1966: 195). Applying a political branding perspective for my own reinterpretation of Kirchheimer’s work, I argue he was making two critical points. First, that voters and parties would engage in branding behaviour. Second, that voter attachment did not only emerge from factors on the part of voters but could also be created from activities undertaken by parties.

Political marketing has built on the Downsian models in particular (Lees-Marshment 2001: 694) to offer more sophisticated explanations of party and voter behaviour. Political marketers sought “refinements of the economic model” (Scammell 1999: 726-727) via commercial marketing literature, which they believed may offer “more precise and useful analytical tools for party behaviour than Kirchheimer’s ‘catch-all party’” (Scammell 1999: 726). They adopted marketing models of voter behaviour which “accept that preferences can stem from both from group identities (as in the Michigan model) and from perceptions of material interest (as in the economic models)” (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 28). They also offer “broader theories” about voter choice (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 28). They recognise, unlike the Michigan and Downsian models (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 28-30), the importance of expressive values (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 28-29) and party images (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 28). Such models "are not designed to produce post-hoc scientific explanations for
voter behaviour but...a broad-brush framework (for)...the development of party strategy” (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 30). Party strategy has increasingly evolved into branding strategy (Scammell 2007: 188) and political branding now offers, I argue, an even more refined account of contemporary voter and party behaviour.

Branding explains how some voters perceive and respond to parties. In brand-saturated societies (Reeves et al 2006: 418), voters increasingly see “political parties as they do other service brands” (French and Smith 2010: 461) and are “ready to transfer and make use of their knowledge of consumer brands into the political sphere” (Reeves et al 2006: 423). People use political brands in a similar way as they do commercial brands, “to reduce complexity in an environment of proliferating choice and information” (Needham 2006: 184). Branding creates a decision-making heuristic for voters (Smith and French 2009: 217; Popkin 1991: 7) who have low involvement in politics (Popkin 1991: 7), diminishing party loyalty or none at all (Needham 2006: 180). Needham (2006: 179) argues that political brands “provide reassurance”, are “aspirational” and, if successful, are seen as “authentic and value-based”. And just as people “buy products to express the sort of person they are (or would like to be), so they might vote in order to express themselves” (Bartle and Griffiths 2002: 28-29). Thus, the voter’s connection to the political brand is both functional and emotional. As a result, brands provide “a basis for long-term loyalty in an environment where products (policies) are fairly fluid” (Needham 2006: 180).

Branding also explains how some parties and politicians approach campaigning and governing. Branding is “crucial to strategy” (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 635). It “provides a conceptual framework to distinguish and fathom links between the functional perceptions...and the emotional attractions” (Scammell 2007: 187) of leaders and parties. It is “the primary mechanism” (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 635) to differentiate from competitors and build voter awareness. It also provides “a conceptual structure to link advertising insight into all aspects of the brand, positioning, development, and promotion; and unlike advertising, it is not wedded to a particular form of communication” (Scammell 2007: 188-189). Branding’s “emphasis on image is a more developed version of service marketing’s key concern for reputation, based on record and credible promises, which...is pretty much the only thing of substance (politicians) can offer to voters before election” (Scammell 2007: 188). Branding is also a way for a party to “reconfigure loyalty” (Needham 2006: 182), by offering a branded leader as “a shortcut to sum up all the desirable attributes of a party” (Needham 2006: 182). A branding perspective, therefore, “combines internal values, external presentation and consumer perception” (Barwise et al 2000: 75). Ultimately, branding “yields electoral performance” (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 634).

In addition, branding provides a new perspective on the permanent campaign, the “daily activity of electioneering and governing” (Henneberg and O’Shaughnessy 2007: 19) that is a feature of contemporary politics (Blumenthal 1982: 23; van Onselen and Errington 2007: 78). Needham (2005: 343) argues the term permanent campaign “is too blunt an instrument to usefully describe or evaluate incumbent communications” which must “provide post-purchase reassurance, and maintain their winning coalition of voters until the next opportunity for a sale”. Instead, campaigning from government is “analogous to relationship marketing” (Needham 2005: 357) which commerce sees as providing “a more holistic, personalized brand
experience to create stronger consumer ties” (Keller 2008: 194). Scammell (2007: 188) reinvigorates the concept by arguing that branding is the new version of the permanent campaign. In this version, a short-term focus on “the instruments of media politics” (Scammell 2007: 188) is replaced by a long-term focus on “underlying strategic concerns of efforts to maintain voter loyalty” (Scammell 2007: 188).

In sum, branding is increasingly seen as a new psychological connection used by voters and a new organising principle used by parties. A decade ago, Scammell (1999: 719) noted that “political marketing claims to offer new ways of understanding modern politics”; today, a small but growing body of literature makes that claim for political branding (e.g. French and Smith 2010: 472; Hughes 2007: 1118; Needham 2006: 179; O’Cass and Voola 2011: 629; Parker 2012: 208; Reeves et al 2006: 425).

The central role of parties
Parties are central to a discussion of political branding. Parties are vehicles for electoral competition (Farrell 2006: 122) and formation government (Keman 2006: 160), which means they are the organisations that undertake branding in campaigns and in office (Needham 2006: 178). They are also vehicles for the expression of the “defence/ transformation of the social and political order” (Panebianco 1988: 268), which means they carry ideologies (Panebianco 1988: 268). Organisation and ideology influence if, and how fully, a party undertakes branding. More than that, however, parties are fundamental to democracies (Aldrich (2011: 3) which means they should undertake branding with care.

Democratic politics “is grounded in conflict” (Crotty 2006b: 26) and parties “allow peaceful resolution of differences” (Crotty 2006b: 26). In campaigns, “parties help candidates undertake that communication effort, and they help make sure voters hear the message” (Brox and Shaw 2006: 155-6). In office, parties provide the elected representatives who have “a ‘mandate’ to make policy choices and the ‘assignment’ to control government” (Keman 2006: 160). Party government, “the executive body responsible for policy-making” (Keman 2006: 160), is “the distinctive feature of modern politics” (Clokie 1949, cited in White 2006: 8). In short, parties have normative roles (Lees-Marshment 2001: 693). Misapplied marketing “can be diametrically opposed to the principles of ideology, leadership and politics” (Dann and Hughes 2008: 2). This can happen when parties, while campaigning, ignore members and loyalists in favour of swinging voters (Dann and Hughes 2008: 2). Or when parties, while governing, ignore the broader community; commerce “is about exclusion... targeting narrowly defined markets, tiny segments of audience shares” (Dann 2008, cited in ANU Reporter 2008) while governing “is the reverse” (Dann 2008, cited in ANU Reporter 2008). Parties, therefore, have an obligation to ensure political marketing is “imbued with a normative aim” (Henneberg et al 2009a: 29).

Historically, ideology and organisation were tightly interconnected and dictated electoral strategy. Ideology - seen as “a belief system that goes to the heart of a party’s identity” (Mair and Muddle 1998: 220, cited in Vassallo and Wilcox 2006: 414) or “a means of obtaining votes” (Downs 1957, cited in Vassallo and Wilcox 2006: 414) - provided the motivation for electoral strategy. Organisation - comprising the interactive “faces” (Mair 1994: 4) of the party in public office, in central office and on the ground - provided the means of enacting electoral strategy. As social cleavages eroded and voter support weakened over the past half century, however, the
connection between ideology and organisation loosened. Ideologies become more flexible and organisations become more professional, which enabled and encouraged new electoral strategies. There is a direct link from the decline in voter loyalty and party organisational strength to the professionalisation of parties and the development of political marketing in Europe (Plasser, Scheucher and Senft 1999 cited in Butler, Collins and Fellenz 2007: 96). The same is true for Australia (Hughes and Dann 2010: 82-95). The original 19th century European mass parties had socialist ideologies (Rae 2006: 201) and bottom-up hierarchies (Mair 1994: 17). Electoral success prompted right-wingers to emulate the “organizational form and political style” (Rae 2006: 201) of mass parties. As “social and political prerequisites for mass parties began to erode” (Katz and Mair 1995: 12), parties became “catch-all” (Kirchheimer 1966: 184) with “an indistinct ideological profile” (Krouwel 2006: 258) and increasingly top-down hierarchies (Mair 1994: 17) with the party in public office emerging as dominant (Mair 1994: 17). Increasing professionalism produces “electoral-professional parties” (Panebianco 1988: 264), which seek “the mobilisation of support in the electorate at large” (Mair 1994: 13). These parties seek “organization of consensus” (Panebianco 1988: 266) and are “increasingly top-down” (Mair 1994: 7), with the central office more responsive to the party in office than members on the ground (Mair 1994: 13). Some parties continue to evolve into cartel organisations which “become agents of the state and employ the resources of the state...to ensure their own collective survival” (Katz and Mair 1995: 5). Australia’s major parties, Labor and Liberal, similarly evolved from mass to catch-all (Ward 1991: 167) and electoral professional organisations (Ward 1991: 169-170).

Parties become less ideological as they evolve from mass organisations (Kirchheimer 1966: 190). As parties become less ideologically-driven, they become more “voter-driven” (Reeves et al 2006: 424), seeking to satisfy “the electorate’s needs and wants” (Henneberg and Eghbalian 2002: 74). In political marketing terms, a voter-driven party is market-oriented (Reeves et al 2006: 424). Such a party “designs its behaviour to provide voter satisfaction” (Lees-Marshment 2001: 696), unlike a sales-oriented party which “focuses on selling its argument to voters” (Lees-Marshment 2001: 696) or a product-oriented party which simply “argues what it stands for” (Lees-Marshment 2001: 696). Last century, British and European parties generally evolved through product and sales orientations to a market orientation, as the electorate changed (Lees-Marshment 7001:708). Australia’s major parties were evolving from sales to market oriented organisations by early this century (Hughes and Dann 2010: 82). It is worth noting that parties may “adopt any orientation at any time” (Lees-Marshment 2001: 708) in response to specific electoral changes, and also that these orientations are “only ideal types” (Lees-Marshment 2001: 702). Nonetheless, it may be broadly argued that the electoral professional party is the most voter-driven, or market-oriented, of the types. However, market-oriented parties, or at least some parts of them, do not wholly abandon ideology. Marketing has been used by “the most ideologically-committed parties” (Scammell 1999: 730) including America’s New Right. Britain’s major parties have retained “core brand values” (Smith and French 2009: 213) despite recent repositioning. The Australian Labor Party “despite the apparent market orientation exhibited in the 2007 election campaign...remains divided between its desire to become more market-driven and the desire to remain faithful to the original ideologies” (Hughes and Dann 2010: 88). At times, “parties seemingly ignore the needs of the consumer...and adopt a more ideologically-driven model” (Reeves et al 2206: 424). Ideological commitment is
evident in party leaders who are “emotionally wedded” (Burkitt 2002: 4) to particular policies and party members who retain some, albeit diminished, policy clout (Lees-Marshment 2001: 696). Pragmatism, too, may play a role. Ideologies “provide a conceptual map to politics for party leaders, activists and voters to interpret campaigns and issues” (Vassallo and Wilcox 2006: 414) and “consistent platforms...convince voters of...reliability” (Downs 1957, Budge 2003, cited in Vassallo and Wilcox 2006: 414). In addition, Reeves et al (2006: 425) note a party’s responsibility to provide good government over the longer term. Thus, commitment by some part of a party to even a remnant ideology, a long-term view of electoral success and the responsibility of office will mitigate against a purely market-driven approach. Similarly, not all parties can, or do, entirely disregard the members of their organisation. A party’s ideology and history “imposes rigidities” (Henneberg and Eghbalian 2002: 79), and explains why the Australian Labor Party retains a mass structure even though it operates as an electoral-professional organisation (Parkin and Warhurst 2000: 28). Some parties may continue the tradition of allowing members some say (Mair 1994: 15). Others may see members as valuable “legitimizers” (Mair 1994: 15) of the pursuit of power, as “warm bodies which can occupy official positions” (Mair 1994: 14) or as fee generators (Mair 1994: 14). Therefore, ideology and organisation still influence a contemporary party’s motivation and ability to undertake branding as an electoral strategy.

Overall, parties matter in a discussion of political branding. The ideological weakening and organisational change that accompany a party’s shift towards electoral professionalism, assist it in achieving market orientation. However, a party’s ongoing commitment to some measure of traditional ideology and organisation, as well as society’s normative expectations of office-holders, work against a wholly market-driven approach.

The brand oriented party

The arguments above lead to my conceptualisation of the brand oriented party. Political parties, like commercial firms, are increasingly using strategic branding. However, unlike their commercial counterparts, parties cannot become brand driven organisations. I make the case, instead, for parties as brand oriented organisations, by building on a conceptualisation of political brand orientation (O’Cass and Voola’s 2011: 635) and a model of the market-oriented party (Lees-Marshment’s 2001: 697).

Strategic branding has become more common in political practice (Scammell 2007: 188) as it has in commerce over the past few decades (Scammell 2007: 177). Commercial marketers turned to branding because they realised “a respected brand translates into financial value” (Scammell 2007: 177), as well as “the perception of increasing consumer power...and...consumer research which insists on the importance of emotional engagement” (Scammell 2007: 177). In addition, they had to face “the haunting truth that traditional marketing is not working” (Kotler 2005: ix); that it could not encompass “all the details, big and small, that create brand image” (Scammell 2007: 189). Likewise, in politics, “the mass-media dominated, agenda-setting, advertising model of political campaigning, while far from dead, is in decline” (Scammell 2007: 189). The Blair Government in Britain learnt that “spin and news management were not only insufficient to maintain political leadership; they ultimately “contaminated” the Labour brand and undermined public trust” (Scammell
Political branding, which focuses on strategy to retain voter loyalty (Scammell 2007: 188), is “the new form of political marketing” (Scammell 2007: 176).

Kotler (2005: ix) argues for creating a commercial brand that “becomes the whole platform for planning, designing and delivering superior value to the company’s target customers”. The exemplar is the “brand-driven organisation” (Davis 2005: 226) with all employees “living the brand” (Davis 2005: 233). Tweneboah-Koduah et al (2009: 606) argue that a political party’s external presentation can become “brand driven” through a series of steps including clarification of brand values and propositions, alignment of leadership and management to brand values, education of party members, and communication with voters. However, the concept of a brand driven party may be a bridge too far, for a few reasons. First, the idea of the brand driven organisation is not wholly accepted nor achieved in commerce. Kornberger (2010: 269) predicts failure for “managerial control fantasies” which see “employees turning into living brands”. This view may be even more pertinent in politics where parties “seldom…achieve the level of discipline that business firms regard as normal” (Butler and Collins 1999: 65). As well, political branding practice is still developing. Few practitioners achieve “an integrated and sophisticated understanding of marketing applications for their specific political exchange situations” (Henneberg 2008: 155). In addition, parties have ideologies which are unknown in commerce (Burkitt 2002: 23), and party organisations that differ significantly from commercial organisations “where power devolves from ownership” (Scammell 1999: 725).

A more realistic, and therefore, useful conceptualisation is that of political brand orientation (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 634). Political brand orientation is “a proactive strategic choice that influences a party’s competitive edge and facilitates its long term survival” (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 635). It is “the degree to which the party values and its practices are oriented towards building brand capabilities” (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 635), and involves “generating and sustaining a shared sense of brand meaning across the party that provides superior value to voters and other stakeholders” (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 632). Political brand orientation is one of three key capabilities of a party, along with proactive and responsive political market orientation (O’Cass and Voola 2011: 627).

Lees-Marshment (2001: 697) provides a model that adapts commercial firm typology to politics. The model (Figure 1) classifies the behaviour of parties as sales, product or market-oriented, and depicts each as a sequence of up to eight stages throughout the electoral cycle (Lees-Marshment 2001: 697). A ninth stage, maintaining a market orientation in Government or Opposition, was subsequently added to the market-oriented column (Lillker and Lees-Marshment 2005: 225). The model’s key strength is as a framework to consider party behaviour throughout the electoral cycle (Hughes and Dann 2006: 1075), while accounting for “members, voters, leaders, policy, organisation and ideology” (Lees-Marshment 2006: 119). Originally developed to analyse British parties (Lees-Marshment 2001: 692), the model has since been applied to other systems including Australia’s (Hughes and Dann 2010: 82-95). Analysing the 2007 federal election campaign, Hughes and Dann (2010: 82) note “the Australian political landscape is shifting from a sales orientation of ‘pitching and persuading’ to a market orientation of ‘listening and addressing’ the issues that concern the Australian voting public".
Figure 1: The marketing process for product, sales and market-oriented parties (Reproduced from Lees-Marshment 2001: 697).

No model can perfectly capture the "messy, unpredictable and often random nature of politics as it happens" (Gould 2002, cited in Scammell 2007: 187), and Lees-Marshment (2001: 699-700; 2006: 120) acknowledges her model has limitations. For my purposes, there are three. First, the model seeks to show party behaviour (Lees-Marshment 2001: 695-696) but combines in one column both stages of party behaviour and stages of the electoral cycle. Thus, in the original market-oriented party column there are six stages of party behaviour (market intelligence, product design, product adjustment, implementation, communication and campaign) followed by one stage of the electoral cycle (election) and another stage of party behaviour (delivery). Second, a linear model doesn't accommodate the dynamism of political practice. For example, in the market-oriented party column, product adjustment for competition is placed at Stage 3. In reality, a party in a democratic system - the only organisation that always has a competitor in the field - constantly assesses its competition and environment and adjusts its product accordingly. This process may be almost unending from conception through to the last stages of delivery. Third, and most important, the model does not consider branding. In the decade since the model was developed, parties and politicians have increasingly undertaken branding (Scammell 2007: 176) and Lees-Marshment (2006: 120) has expressed the hope that the model would be updated to include branding, among other things.
I combine and adapt Lees-Marshment’s model (2001: 697) and O’Cass and Voola’s conceptualisation of political brand orientation (2011: 635) to produce the concept of the brand oriented party. I see the brand oriented party as consciously choosing branding as a strategy for its long-term future. Such a party undertakes branding deliberately, with an understanding of political branding theory, and a comprehensive approach that encompasses long-term strategy and mid to short-term tactics. I see the brand oriented party using branding as its organising principle, directing its core values, leadership, organisation, internal culture, external presentation and resources towards a permanent political branding campaign throughout the electoral cycle. It actively seeks to create and sustain voter attachment and support, instead of expecting to be gifted an enduring attachment. Not every party that attempts branding will do all these things, by choice or through lack of organisational ability or resources, and therefore not every party that attempts branding can be considered a brand oriented party. A party may choose to use a few branding techniques but not an entire strategy, or the central office may want to undertake branding while the leadership does not. Sometimes the whole party may be willing but the right skills or sufficient resourcing may be lacking. It is worth noting here the extra resources available to a Government, and unavailable to an Opposition (van Onselen and Errington 2007: 90), that may be used for branding. Conversely, evidence (Lees-Marshment 2011: 168) suggests ongoing branding is more challenging in office than in Opposition.

I see the party as brand oriented, rather than branding oriented, because this better reflects a party-wide approach. This argument follows the distinction between being market-oriented and marketing-oriented (Ormrod 2005: 49, 2006: 113; O'Shaughnessy et al 2012: 353). The former is about a party-wide recognition of the importance of relationships with all internal and external markets (Ormrod 2005: 49; O'Shaughnessy et al 2012: 355); the latter is about marketing as a function that caters to voters (Ormrod 2005: 49; O'Shaughnessy et al 2012: 355). I see the party as brand oriented, rather than brand driven, because this better reflects political reality and expectation. The reality is that ideology still influences electoral strategy. Market oriented parties move back and forth along a continuum of being ideologically or voter driven and, consequently, back and forth along a continuum of leading and following the political market (Henneberg and Eghbalian 2002: 80). So, I argue, do brand oriented parties. The expectation is that parties will fulfil their normative responsibilities to deliver good government. Democratic competition must be “enacted appropriately, measured against some normative ideals” (Henneberg et al 2009b: 180). In other words, market-driven and market-driving strategies should be balanced for the good of the nation (Reeves et al 2006: 424-425).

In sum, the concept of a brand oriented political organisation is less prescriptive than the commercial ideal of the brand driven organisation. It recognises the strategic branding efforts of parties, but also makes room for the mitigating effects of ideology, organisation and normative expectations.
A model of political branding in Australia

Building on this concept, I develop a heuristic model of political branding in Australia. It combines the idea of customer-based brand equity (Keller 2008: 48) and a strategic commercial branding process (Keller 2008: 39), with Scammell’s (2007: 188) reinvigorated concept of the permanent campaign.

Keller introduced the idea of “customer-based brand equity” (1993: 1), or value. He believes “the power of a brand lies in what resides in the minds of customers” (2008: 48) and this drives his branding strategy. Good marketing helps develop customer knowledge of a brand, and more particularly “strong, favourable and unique associations” (Keller 2008: 39). Keller’s (2008: 39) strategic brand management process, with four steps and 16 key concepts, is shown in Figure 2. The first step, and the “heart of the marketing strategy” (Keller 2008: 98), is identifying core brand values and positioning against competitors, and establishing these in the minds of target customers. The next step is choosing brand elements such as name and slogans (Keller 2008: 140) and planning and implementing integrated marketing programs (Keller 2008: 185). The brand’s performance is regularly and comprehensively measured and interpreted (Keller 2008: 316) and, finally, the brand is reinforced or revitalised as necessary to grow and sustain equity (Keller 2008: 433).

Strategic Brand Management Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEPS</th>
<th>KEY CONCEPTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify and Establish Brand Positioning and Values</td>
<td>Mental maps</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Competitive frame of reference</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Points-of-parity and points-of-difference</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Core brand values</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brand mantra</td>
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<td>2. Plan and Implement Brand Marketing Programs</td>
<td>Mixing and matching of brand elements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Integrating brand marketing activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leveraging of secondary associations</td>
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<td>3. Measure and Interpret Brand Performance</td>
<td>Brand Value Chain</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brand audits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brand tracking</td>
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<td>Brand equity management system</td>
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<td>4. Grow and Sustain Brand Equity</td>
<td>Brand-product matrix</td>
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<td>Brand portfolios and hierarchies</td>
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<td>Brand expansion strategies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brand reinforcement and revitalization</td>
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Figure 2. Strategic Brand Management Process (Keller 2008: 39).
Keller’s work fits with politics. His idea of customer-based brand equity is echoed in Burkitt’s argument that the political brand is “the psychological representation of the ‘product’ or ‘service’ in the mind of ‘consumers’ ” (2002: 7). His strategic brand management process resonates with political practice generally and Australian practice specifically. A global study of political marketing (Lees-Marshment 2011) notes the use and importance of a number of the steps and concepts identified by Keller, including positioning a candidate in relation to a competitor (2011: 60-66) and targeting voter segments (2011: 20-24). Current and former Australian Labor Party practitioners confirm the use and importance of many of these steps and concepts, generally (e.g. Feeney 2012; Milner 2012) and specifically in Labor’s 2007 (Gartrell 2012, Hawker 2012; Utting 2012) and 2010 federal campaigns (Hawker 2012; Milner 2012; Utting 2012). Speaking generally, Kaiser (2012) describes positioning against a competitor as “absolutely critical”. Values were important in the 2007 campaign “to stake out who owns the future” (Gartrell 2012) and in the 2010 campaign to provide points of difference on issues like a national broadband network (Hawker 2012).

Keller’s strategic, long-term and customer-focused approach tallies with Scammell’s (2007: 188) concept of branding as the new permanent campaign. Such a campaign focuses on “underlying strategic concerns of efforts to maintain voter loyalty through communication designed to provide reassurance, uniqueness (differentiation from rivals), consistency of values, and emotional connection with voters’ values and visions of the good life” (Scammell 2007: 188). Australia’s major parties have been running continuous campaigns for the past decade (van Onselen and Errington 2007: 90) or two (Ward 1991: 170). They are also increasingly using branding (Hughes and Dann 2010: 84), especially of party leaders (Hughes and Dann 2010: 86), giving rise to “permanent leader-based campaigning” (Hughes and Dann 2010: 86).

These two components - strategic brand management and the permanent political branding campaign - are coupled with the concept of the brand oriented party to develop a model of political branding in Australian federal politics. This is depicted in Figures 3 and 4. Two cycles are used to separate the electoral cycle from the political branding process. Figure 3 shows stages in the three-year Australian federal electoral cycle and how a permanent campaign overlaps with governing. There are four stages. Stage 1 represents the period immediately after the formation of a new Government and Opposition, when governing takes precedence over campaigning. This period lasts for about two years. Stage 2 represents the “informal campaign” (Shanahan 2013: 1) when obvious electioneering starts to ratchet up. By recent convention, the informal campaign generally begins about 12 months out from the likely election date (Gartrell 2012; Milner 2012; van Onselen and Senior 2008: 10). Stage 3 encompasses the formal campaign period which, by law, may range from 33 to 68 days (AEC 2011). Stage 4 spans the period from polling day to the formation of the new Government and Opposition. The new Government may be known on election night, as it was in 2007 when Labor won a majority in the House of Representatives (National Archives of Australia), or much later as happened in 2010 when it took 17 days of negotiations before Gillard could form a minority administration (Cassidy 2010: x)
Figure 3: Stages in the Australian federal electoral cycle. Governing, or Opposition, is shown as light grey in Stages 1 and 2. The permanent campaign is shown as black in Stages 1 and 2. A complete overlap of campaigning and governing, or Opposition, is shown as dark grey in Stages 3 and 4.

Governing, or working in Opposition, is depicted as light grey in Stages 1 and 2. The permanent campaign is shown as black in Stages 1 and 2. A complete overlap of campaigning and governing, or working in Opposition, is shown as dark grey in Stages 3 and 4. The width of the ring representing the permanent campaign is a broad indicator of the extent to which campaigning overlaps with governing. In the early stages of a new or returned Government or Opposition, the focus is more on policy delivery or development and less on campaigning. This balance progressively shifts in favour of campaigning as the next poll draws nearer, until there is a complete overlap and the daily work is all about campaigning. Therefore, in Stage 1 campaigning occupies a quarter of the circle. In Stage 2, campaigning occupies three-quarters of the circle. In Stages 3 and 4, the focus is solely on campaigning.

Figure 4 shows the steps in the political brand management process. The four steps - Step 1: Identify and establish brand positioning and values, Step 2: Plan and Implement Brand Marketing Programs, Step 3: Measure and Interpret Brand Performance, and Step 4. Grow and Sustain Brand Equity - match those in Keller’s model of strategic brand management (Figure 2).
Two cycles are used to also demonstrate dynamism, because there are multiple possible connections between the electoral cycle and a political branding strategy. I make three arguments here. First, I argue that branding activities don’t necessarily correspond to just one step of the electoral cycle, and may be different for a Government and an Opposition at the same step of the electoral cycle. For example, a new Government which has just won convincingly at the polls and employs strong brand management may simply need to continue this process. This party would be at Stage 1 of the electoral cycle and Step 2 of the brand management process. It may use all concepts in Steps 2 and 3. Step 4 is unlikely to be used at this stage but may be needed closer to the next poll. The picture would be quite different for an Opposition at this stage of the electoral cycle. Two concepts from Step 4 - brand reinforcement and brand revitalisation - may well be the starting point for an Opposition that was soundly beaten at the poll. This would particularly be the case if the party decided to revitalise by going back to basics or reinventing itself. The party would then move through Steps 1 to 3 of the brand management process. Second, I argue that branding activities are not necessarily linear and the model is not intended to be linear. For example, a Government or Opposition may move back and forth between Steps 2 and 3 of the branding process, as it undertakes marketing (Step 2), measures the results (Step 3), re-visits the marketing programs (Step 2) and measures again (Step 3). Third, I argue that a party may also move back and forth between steps of the branding process as it moves back and forth on the branding continuum. For example, a Government may decide on a significant ideologically-motivated policy that is unpopular with all but traditional supporters. In doing so, it moves towards the ideological end of the continuum. The Government may be at
Stage 1 of the electoral cycle and could be expected to be at Step 2 of the political branding process. In the wake of its ideologically-motivated policy, however, it may need to return to Step 1 of the brand management process to re-establish its competitive frame of reference, then return to Step 2 to develop appropriate marketing programs. There are some matches between the two cycles that are unlikely or ill-advised, for example, the use of brand reinforcement or revitalisation from Step 4, during a formal election campaign.

The model, naturally, has limitations. First, it is a heuristic, a guide to understanding a complex process. Second, it is developed to study national elections in Australia which has a party-based, federal system dominated by two major parties. With reworking of the specific timeframes for informal and formal campaigns, the model could fit similar party-centred systems, such as Britain’s, or America’s Presidential campaigns. It would require greater reworking to fit multi-party or candidate-centred systems. Third, the model does not account for an early election, which may significantly reduce the informal campaign period and disrupt election-related brand preparations.

**Conclusion**

This paper presents two offerings to fill a gap in the political branding literature and help build understanding of the practice in Australia. The conceptualisation of the brand oriented party seeks to explain what practitioners really do, taking account of a party’s ideology, organisation and normative role. The model of political branding in Australian federal politics offers a heuristic, which takes account of the realities of the electoral system as it intersects with the dual responsibilities of governing and electioneering in the permanent campaign. Together, these tools could be used to more rigorously analyse political branding in Australia, and could provide the basis for development of other tools for empirical studies of the practice in Australia, and similar systems.

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