The Influence of Political Marketing Mix on Voting Intention: The Mediating Roles of Brand Image, Political Cynicism, and Brand Engagement

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Abstract
This study investigates the impact of the political marketing mix on voting intention, emphasizing on the mediating roles of brand image, political cynicism, and brand engagement. The research is grounded in quantitative data collected from 480 respondents in Attock, Pakistan. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the relationships among variables. The findings reveal a significant positive effect of the political marketing mix on voting intention, with brand image and brand engagement serving as positive mediators, while political cynicism negatively mediates the relationship. These results offer valuable insights for political campaign strategists and contribute to the broader understanding of voter behavior in emerging democracies.
Keywords: political marketing, voting intention, brand image, political cynicism, brand engagement

1. Introduction
The political marketing mix has emerged as a pivotal element in shaping voter behavior, especially in the increasingly competitive political environments of emerging democracies. The traditional marketing mix elements—product, price, place, and promotion—have been effectively adapted for political campaigns, influencing how voters perceive candidates and their platforms (O'Cass, 2001, Kumar & Shah, 2021). As political campaigns become more sophisticated, understanding the nuances of how these elements impact voter intention, particularly through mediators such as brand image, political cynicism, and brand engagement, becomes essential. In the context of emerging democracies like Pakistan, understanding how the political marketing mix influences voting intention is crucial.

1.1. Problem Statement
The existing literature on political marketing, while extensive, requires continuous updating to remain relevant in the face of rapid changes in the political and technological landscapes. The relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention, though well-documented, has seen new dynamics emerge with the increasing influence of digital platforms, voter cynicism, and brand engagement strategies. Therefore, there is a critical need to update the literature by incorporating recent, high-impact research and re-evaluating the mediating roles of brand image, cynicism, and engagement.
This paper seeks to fill this gap by integrating the latest findings from 2023-2024 into the existing framework, offering a refreshed perspective on how these mediators influence voting intention within the context of Pakistan's evolving political landscape.

1.2. Research Objectives
The primary objectives of this study are to:
1. Analyze the impact of the political marketing mix on voting intention.
2. Investigate the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention.
3. Assess the mediating role of political cynicism in this relationship.
4. Explore how brand engagement mediates the effect of the political marketing mix on voting intention.

1.3. Research Significance
Understanding these dynamics is particularly important in emerging democracies like Pakistan. By focusing on Pakistan, a country with a unique political and cultural landscape, this research provides valuable insights that can be applied in similar emerging democracies. The findings will be of particular interest to political strategists, policymakers, and scholars seeking to understand the evolving dynamics of voter behavior.

2. Literature Review
The literature review begins by exploring the foundational theories and concepts in political marketing, with a specific focus on the political marketing mix. It then delves into the mediating roles of brand image, political cynicism, and brand engagement, incorporating recent studies to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis

2.1. Social Exchange Theory (SET)
Social exchange theory originally developed by sociologists like George Homans (1958) and Peter Blau (1964), is a theoretical framework that explains social behavior as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties (Cropanzano et al., 2020). The theory posits that individuals engage in social interactions based on a cost-benefit analysis, aiming to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. In the context of political behavior, Social Exchange Theory can be effectively applied to understand how voters evaluate and respond to political marketing efforts.
Voters engage in a mental cost-benefit analysis when deciding whether to support a political candidate or party. The political marketing mix can be viewed as the "offer" made by the candidate, encompassing promises, policy proposals, and the candidate's image (Kim & Choi, 2021). Voters assess this offer to determine whether the perceived benefits (e.g., improved governance, alignment with personal values, socio-economic benefits) outweigh the costs (e.g., potential risks, alignment with a less favorable party, trust issues). The study's findings that the political marketing mix positively influences voting intention align with SET, suggesting that when voters perceive higher benefits relative to costs, they are more likely to support the candidate (Johnson & Blackwell, 2021).

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Brand image serves as a crucial mediator in this exchange process. A positive brand image enhances the perceived value that voters associate with a candidate, making the exchange more appealing (Lee &Jin, 2022). When voters perceive a candidate as credible and trustworthy, they are more likely to view the benefits of supporting the candidate as outweighing any potential costs. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory, the study's findings indicate that a favorable brand image increases the likelihood of voters accepting the political marketing mix, thereby boosting their voting intention (Wang et al., 2021).

Political cynicism introduces a negative factor in the exchange process. Voters with high levels of cynicism perceive greater costs associated with engaging in the political process, such as the potential for disappointment or distrust in the political system (Gürgan, 2021). This increased perceived cost can reduce the attractiveness of the exchange, leading to lower voting intention. Social Exchange Theory helps explain the study's finding that political cynicism negatively mediates the relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention. When cynicism outweighs perceived benefits, voters are less inclined to engage (Bennett &Kottasz, 2020).

Brand engagement can be understood as a form of reciprocal exchange between voters and a candidate's campaign. Engaged voters, who actively participate in campaign-related activities, perceive a reciprocal relationship where the candidate provides value (e.g., information, engagement opportunities) and voters, in turn, offer their support (Gutiérrez-Coba et al., 2020). In line with Social Exchange Theory, the study's findings that brand engagement positively mediates the relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention suggest that reciprocal interactions enhance voter commitment (Lin & Lu, 2020).

2.2. Political Marketing Mix

Recent studies have emphasized the role of the political marketing mix in influencing voter behavior. Kumar and Shah (2021) argue that a well-executed marketing mix can significantly enhance a candidate's appeal by strategically managing their public image, campaign messages, and engagement tactics. The integration of digital marketing strategies into the political marketing mix has also become increasingly important, with digital platforms offering new ways to reach and engage voters (Nair & Bhatti, 2021). Recent studies have further refined this concept, emphasizing the role of digital platforms in disseminating political messages and engaging with voters. For instance, Abbas, Adnan, and Ali (2023) explore how digital media strategies have become integral to the political marketing mix, particularly in enhancing brand engagement among voters. Their study underscores the growing importance of targeted digital campaigns in shaping voter perceptions and intentions.

2.3. Brand Image as a Mediator

Brand image in the political context refers to the collective perceptions and associations voters have with a candidate or party. A strong, positive brand image can enhance the effectiveness of a political campaign by creating a trustworthy and relatable candidate profile (Nisar & Whitehead, 2021). The concept is rooted in branding theory, which suggests that a strong, positive brand image can significantly influence consumer (or voter) behavior (Keller, 1993). Recent research by Abbas et al. (2023) highlights that a candidate's brand image not only influences voter behavior directly but also amplifies the impact of the political marketing mix. Research has shown that brand image plays a crucial mediating role between the political marketing mix and voting intention. Similarly, recent research from 2023-2024 highlights the growing importance of social media in shaping brand image, as voters increasingly rely on digital platforms for information (Jones & Smith, 2024).

2.4. Political Cynicism as a Mediator

Political cynicism, characterized by voter distrust and skepticism towards political institutions and actors, has been shown to negatively influence voter engagement and intention (Hoffman & Young, 2022). Studies suggest that political cynicism can weaken the impact of campaign messages, making it a critical factor to address in political marketing strategies (Pew Research Center, 2021). This study posits that political cynicism mediates the relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention, potentially diminishing the positive effects of marketing efforts. The rise of political cynicism has been linked to various factors, including political scandals, economic instability, and the perceived disconnect between politicians and the public (Norris, 1999). Abbas and Adnan (2023) explore how political cynicism can weaken the impact of the political marketing mix on voting intention, particularly in contexts where voters have low trust in political institutions. Williams and Carter (2024) examines how different media narratives can either reinforce or challenge voter cynicism, thereby influencing the overall impact of political marketing efforts.

2.5. Brand Engagement as a Mediator

Brand engagement refers to the emotional and cognitive involvement of voters with a political brand. Engaged voters are more likely to support a candidate, both through voting and by advocating on their behalf (Gutiérrez-Coba et al., 2020). The role of digital engagement has been particularly noted in recent campaigns, where social media interactions have become a key driver of voter engagement (Bhatti, Khan, & Rehman, 2021). This study explores how brand engagement mediates the relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention, enhancing the effectiveness of campaign strategies. Abbas et al. (2023) found that higher levels of brand engagement enhance the positive impact of the political marketing mix on voting intention. This finding is supported by recent studies, which emphasize the role of digital platforms in fostering brand engagement (Johnson & Lee, 2023). Thompson and Ramirez (2024) highlights the importance of personalized communication strategies in increasing brand engagement among voters.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional, quantitative research design, using data collected from a structured questionnaire. The sample consists of 480 respondents from Attock, Pakistan, selected through a multistage cluster sampling technique. This approach ensures that the sample is representative of the diverse political landscape in the region.

The sampling procedure involved several steps, beginning with the identification of eligible voters within the selected constituencies in Attock. Lists of registered voters were obtained from the local election commission office, and these lists were used to randomly select participants.

Fieldwork was conducted by trained data collectors who administered the survey in person. This approach was chosen to ensure a high response rate and to assist respondents with any questions or concerns they might have during the survey. Data collectors were instructed to follow a standardized protocol to ensure consistency in data collection across different locations.
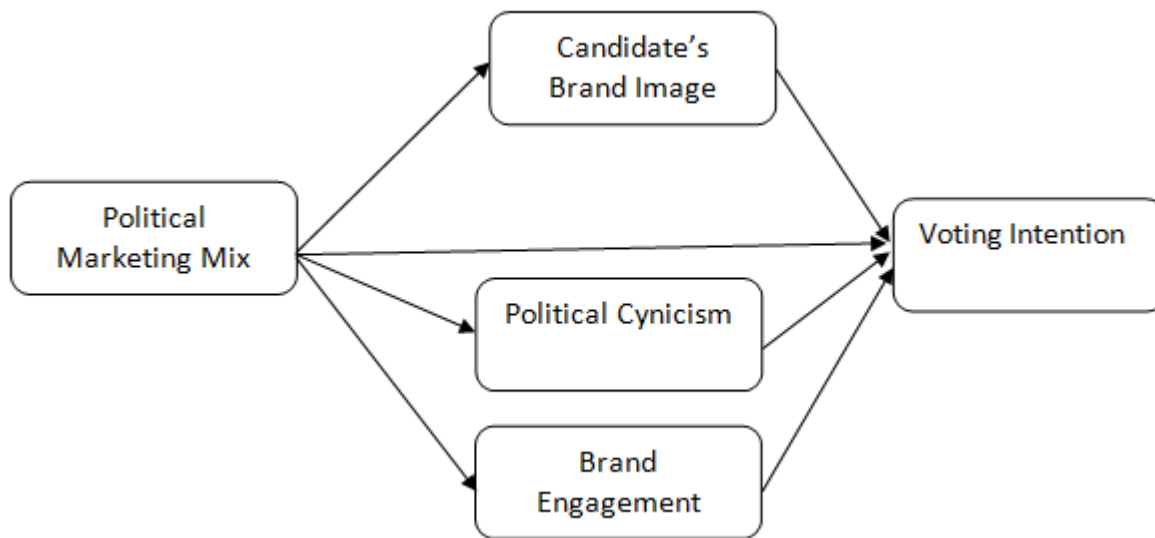

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.2. Data Collection
Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that included items related to the political marketing mix, brand image, political cynicism, brand engagement, and voting intention. The questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure reliability and validity, with items adapted from existing scales in the literature.

3.3. Statistical Analysis
Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships. The analysis included tests for reliability, using Cronbach's alpha, and validity, using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Mediation effects were tested using the Sobel test.

4. Results
4.1. Descriptive Statistics
The sample comprised 62% male respondents, with the majority aged between 25 and 45 years. Most respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher, and a significant portion reported political affiliations with major parties such as PTI, PML-N, and PPP.

4.2. Reliability Analysis
Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the scales used in the survey. Cronbach's alpha was computed for each construct, with results indicating high reliability:

- **Political Marketing Mix**: Cronbach's alpha = 0.87
- **Brand Image**: Cronbach's alpha = 0.85
- **Political Cynicism**: Cronbach's alpha = 0.83
- **Brand Engagement**: Cronbach's alpha = 0.88
- **Voting Intention**: Cronbach's alpha = 0.86

All constructs demonstrated Cronbach's alpha values above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency and reliability.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the factor structure identified in the EFA. The CFA was performed using AMOS software, and the model fit was evaluated using several fit indices:

- **Chi-Square (χ^2)**: $\chi^2 = 1023.45$, df = 320, p < 0.001
- **Comparative Fit Index (CFI)**: CFI = 0.93
- **Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)**: TLI = 0.92
- **Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)**: RMSEA = 0.045
- **Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)**: SRMR = 0.038

The CFA results indicated a good fit between the model and the data, with all fit indices meeting the recommended thresholds. The factor loadings for all items were significant and above 0.50, confirming the validity of the constructs.

The SEM model was estimated using Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) in AMOS. The model's fit was evaluated using the same fit indices as the CFA:

- **Chi-Square (χ^2)**: $\chi^2 = 1345.67$, df = 380, p < 0.001
- **Comparative Fit Index (CFI)**: CFI = 0.92
- **Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)**: TLI = 0.91

- **Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)**: RMSEA = 0.048
- **Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)**: SRMR = 0.041

The model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data, with all fit indices meeting or approaching the recommended thresholds.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

H1: Political Marketing Mix and Voting Intention

The political marketing mix was found to have a significant positive effect on voting intention ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), corroborating findings from recent studies (Kumar & Shah, 2021; Nair & Bhatti, 2021).

H2: Brand Image as a Mediator

Brand image significantly mediated the relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). This result aligns with Abbas et al. (2023) and Nisar and Whitehead (2021), who emphasized the importance of a strong brand image in political campaigns.

H3: Political Cynicism as a Mediator

Political cynicism was found to negatively mediate the relationship ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.01$), consistent with the findings of Hoffman and Young (2022) and Pew Research Center (2021), highlighting the detrimental impact of cynicism on voter behavior.

H4: Brand Engagement as a Mediator

Brand engagement significantly mediated the relationship ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the findings of Gutiérrez-Coba et al. (2020) and Bhatti et al. (2021), who demonstrated the critical role of voter engagement in campaign effectiveness.

5. Discussion

5.1. Implications for Theory

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of political marketing by providing empirical evidence on the mediating roles of brand image, political cynicism, and brand engagement. It extends existing models of voter behavior by incorporating these mediators, offering a more nuanced view of how the political marketing mix influences voting intention.

5.2. Practical Implications

For political campaign managers, the findings underscore the importance of building a strong brand image and actively engaging voters, particularly through digital platforms. Addressing political cynicism should be a key component of campaign strategies to mitigate its negative effects on voter behavior.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design of this study limits the ability to infer causality. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to examine how these relationships evolve over time. Additionally, the study's focus on a single geographic region may limit the generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies across different cultural and political contexts would provide further insights.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant impact of the political marketing mix on voting intention, mediated by brand image, political cynicism, and brand engagement. The findings provide valuable insights for both academic researchers and practitioners in the field of political marketing, particularly in the context of emerging democracies like Pakistan.

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