

Is the African National Congress (ANC) Living Up to Its Brand Promises? Evaluating Its Brand Equity Using Asker's Brand Equity Framework

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Abstract

The African National Congress (ANC) brand has been in existence since 1912 and continues to be dominant in the South African political landscape. The party has won national elections since the country's first democratic elections were held in 1994. However, in the last elections which took place in 2019, the party dipped under 60% for first time since 1994 and won the elections by 57.50%. Considering this decline and the fact that the ANC is competing with other political parties, this study aimed to evaluate the value of the ANC brand and identify factors that could be attributed to this drop in votes.

A narrative review method was adopted and twenty-two articles sourced from Google Scholar were analysed to determine the state of the ANC brand. The study revealed that the ANC brand is affected negatively by factors such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, protests and riots, unequal distribution of land among citizens, crime, inadequate housing, corruption and looting, unethical and immoral leaders, trust deficit, factional fights, and diminishing loyalty among the youth. This study provides a conceptual framework for political parties in general to grow and preserve their brand value among the voters.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The marketing concept of brand management and particularly brand equity is associated with conventional products such as those found in the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) and retail industries. In this study, a demonstration that the concept of brand equity extends beyond conventional products to areas and sectors such as politics and political parties, respectively, is undertaken. According to Tien, Hung and Tien (2019), brand management is the use of internal marketing plans and strategies by an organisation aimed at enhancing the brand equity or value of products and brands among the target market. In the context of politics, Gupta, Gallear, Rudd and Foroudi (2020) assert that in a competitive market, brand owners (political parties) should communicate the benefit/s offered by the brand to consumers (voters) in relation to competitors (opposition political parties). Brand equity is defined by Aaker (1991) as ‘a set of categories of brand assets (liabilities) linked to a brand’s name or symbol that add to (subtract from) the value provided by a product or service’.

In order for an organisation like the African National Congress (ANC) to withstand competition from opposition parties such as the Democratic Alliance (DA), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Freedom Front Plus (FF+), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), African Transformation Movement (ATM), African Independent Congress (AIC), United Democratic Movement (UDM), Congress of the People (COPE) and National Freedom Party (NFP), it is compelled to have a brand that is credible and trusted by consumers (voters) in order to remain competitive in the fiercely contested political environment considering the similarity in product offering/ideas (Saidarka & Rusfian, 2019).

South Africa (SA) is a brand on its own, hence an entity called Brand South Africa was created 21 years ago with the intention of developing brand and marketing strategies to position the country as a destination of choice in terms of investment and tourism. This is consistent with what companies in the private sector are doing by investing significant capital expenditure towards marketing and branding strategies aimed at creating a competitive advantage for products and brand over those offered by their competitors. In the context of politics, the ANC, which is the current governing party in SA, is also a brand. In a highly changing political environment in SA, political marketing and branding is imperative

since it can assist political parties to portray their brands in a positive manner to the voters and/or public. According to Aaker (1991), organisations such as political parties can assess the strength of their brand by evaluating four (4) elements, which are brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand image/associations. Therefore, these elements, which will be used as the basis for assessing the equity of the ANC brand, will further be delineated in the literature review of this study.

1.2. Problem Statement

The ANC was formed on the 8th of January 1912 in a gathering in Bloemfontein, also known as Mangaung. This means that as of 2023, this political organisation has been in existence for one hundred and eleven (111) years. On June 1955, the ANC convened a congress where the Freedom Charter document was adopted (South African History, 2005). In 1994, the country held its maiden democratic elections where all citizens, irrespective of the ethnicity, were allowed to vote. According to de Kadt (2017), this gave an opportunity to approximately eighteen (18) million previously disadvantaged voters, in particular black Africans, to partake in the elections for the first time in history. The 1994 national election results processed and presented by the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) demonstrate that out of 19,533,498 votes casted for eighteen (18) political parties who contested the elections, the ANC was voted by 12,237,655 voters, which basically means that the political party attained a majority vote of 63%. Subsequently, in the 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 national elections, the ANC managed to achieve a consistent majority win of 66%, 69.69%, 65.90% and 62.15%, respectively. However, in the last national elections in 2019, the ANC dropped considerably and was voted for by 57.50% voters. This outcome indicates that the ANC experienced a decline of 7.5% in the 2019 national elections compared with the 2014 national elections. Furthermore, in the 2019 national elections, twenty-nine (29) political parties participated, thus an increase of 56% in opposition parties, which implies competition for the ANC. Irrespective of this decline, Khambule, Nomdo, Siswana and Fokou (2020) state that the ANC's dominance of the country's political landscape has potential limitations such as dictatorship, patronage, and obliteration of the economy. According to a poll conducted by Imposes (2022), it is forecasted that in the upcoming 2023 national elections, the ANC will receive 45% of the votes, thus losing elections for the first time since 1994.

In the commercial world, if the ANC was a profit-making company, the gradual reduction in votes would be equivalent to a loss in market share, revenue, shares, and ultimately brand equity/value. Furthermore, the emergence of political parties such as EFF, ATM, ActionSA and so forth, is a potential threat to the ANC and its brand.

Based on this contextual background, the study aims to evaluate the strength of the ANC brand and the factors attributed to the growth and/or decline of the brand's value. The study further aims to ascertain

if the ANC is fulfilling its obligations or brand promises as expressed in its Constitution and the Freedom Charter.

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate the ANC's brand equity using Aaker's brand equity framework.
- To apply the four elements in the Aaker's framework to determine whether the ANC is living up to its brand promises.
- To provide a conceptual framework which could be used by the ANC and other political parties to measure their brand value.

2. Literature Review

In this section, the concepts of brand management and brand are defined. A discussion on the political landscape in SA and the role of political branding is undertaken. Furthermore, the elements contained in the Aaker's brand equity framework is delineated. Thereafter, a brief discussion on the ANC, its values, Constitution, and Freedom Charter is presented.

2.1. Brand management and brand

Tien et al. (2019) assert that the ultimate objective of brand management is to make consumers perceive the company's products or brands in a positive manner, thus increasing their (product and brand) equity in the market. A brand is defined as a "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (Hunt, 2019:408). According to Beig and Nika (2019), brands are a fundamental element used by organisations to differentiate their product offering from competitors in the market. In the context of this study, the brand ANC is represented by the spear, shield, and the dominant colours of green, black and yellow among other symbols. This is one of the aspects that differentiates the ANC from opposition parties such as the DA, EFF, ATM, UDM to mention a few. In order for companies and political parties like the ANC to maintain and grow its market share and votes, it is imperative that the brand is promoted and protected to preserve its brand equity/value.

2.2. Political landscape in South Africa and the role of political branding

The 2019 national election results presented by the IEC indicate that there were forty eight (48) political parties in SA. The outcome of the election was dominated by the ANC, DA, EFF, IFP, and FF+ in this particular order. The continuous registration of new political parties such as Rise Mzansi and Xiluva exacerbates competition in the country's political landscape. It is on this basis that political parties should embrace the fact that marketing and branding is not confined to conventional products and services. Omo-Obas (2016) argues that in order for political parties to have loyal voters and positive

image among the public, they need to invest in political branding. Political branding entails the use of the party's brand identity elements such as the logo, name and image of the representatives to portray the organisation positively in the eyes of the public. The outcome of political branding is brand equity. The concept of brand equity and how it is measured is discussed in the next section below.

2.3. Aaker's brand equity framework

The seminal paper by Aaker (1996) posits that the brand equity construct consists of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image/associations, and brand loyalty. These elements are depicted in Figure 1. In order to understand this discussion holistically, it is important to define the brand equity construct, which underpins these elements. According to Saidarka and Rusfian (2019), companies operating in a sternly competitive industry with similar products rely on brand equity to sustain their operation. This assertion is applicable in the politics arena and political parties like the ANC are competing with each other for votes, national, provincial and local municipality control. Hunt (2019) defines brand equity as a value that an organisation's product or brand accumulates over time. This value is accumulated as result of the aforementioned elements.

Brand awareness occurs when a current and prospective consumer is able to recognise or recall the brand in his/her mind in relation to competing brands (Mahaputra & Saputra, 2021). Susilowati and Sari (2020) and Mateen (2019) assert that perceived quality is the consumer's evaluation of the performance, quality, and reliability of a product/brand in comparison to competing products. According to Shanahan, Tran and Taylor (2019), a consumer who has a favourable perception about the quality of the product is susceptible to being loyal. Brand image/association is one of the fundamental elements that organisations focus on when growing their brand (Zia, Younus & Mirza, 2021). Brand image/association relates to a consumer's attitude towards the brand based on his/her positive or negative convictions, perceptions, feelings and experiences (Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022). In the context of politics, if a particular political party has a reputation of delivering services to the public and is anti-corruption, the public/voters are likely to have positive perceptions and convictions about the political party. Zia et al. (2021) purport that there is a correlation between brand image/association and brand loyalty in the sense that consumers who have a positive attitude about a product are likely to be attached and remain loyal towards the brand despite the existence of alternatives. For instance, the ANC has won national elections for six (6) consecutive periods since the first democratic elections were held in 1999. Despite the evident gradual decline in the 2014 and 2019 elections, attaining majority votes over the past years is a demonstration that the ANC has, to a certain degree, benefited from brand loyal consumers/voters.

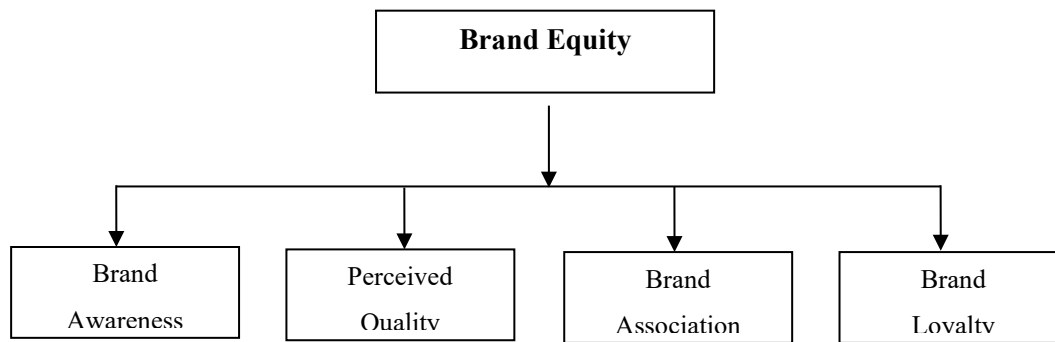


Figure 1: Aaker’s brand equity framework

Source: Aaker (1996)

2.4. The ANC’s Constitution and Freedom Charter

The ANC’s political activities and agenda is based on the principles espoused in its Constitution and the Freedom Charter. Upon scrutinising the two (2) documents, it is evident that there is a synergy between the nine (9) fundamental principles enshrined in both documents as captured and summarised in Table 1.

Bhargava and Bedi (2021) describe a brand promise as an undertaking made by the company to its consumers. In the political context, parties such as the ANC make promises to voters through campaigns with the intention of securing votes (Susila, Dean, Yusof, Setyawan & Wajdi, 2020). The credibility of a political party among voters or the public is mainly dependent on whether it can execute what it has promised. In the case of the ANC, their brand promises are not only based on the election campaigns but also on what is prescribed in its Freedom Charter and the Constitution. Therefore, considering that the Constitution and the Freedom Charter contains the ANC’s brand promise (principles), these documents were also used in this study as a basis for evaluating the value/equity of the ANC’s brand.

Table 1: A summary of the ANC's Constitution and Freedom Charter

Constitution principles	Freedom Charter principles
To unite all the people of South Africa, Africans in particular, for the complete liberation of the country from all forms of discrimination and national oppression.	The People Shall Govern.
To end apartheid in all its forms and transform South Africa as rapidly as possible into a united, nonracial, non-sexist and democratic country based on the principles of the Freedom Charter (Appendix 2) and in pursuit of the National Democratic Revolution.	All National Groups Shall have Equal Rights.
To defend the democratic gains of the people and to advance towards a society in which the government is freely chosen by the people according to the principles of universal suffrage on a common voters' roll.	The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth.
To fight for social justice and to eliminate the vast inequalities created by apartheid and the system of national oppression.	The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It.
To build a South African nation with a common patriotism and loyalty in which the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the people is recognised.	All Shall be Equal Before the Law.
To promote economic development for the benefit of all.	There Shall be Work and Security.
To support and advance the cause of women's emancipation.	The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened.
To support and advance the cause of national liberation, development, world peace, disarmament and environmentally sustainable development.	There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort.
To support and promote the struggle for the rights of children and the disabled.	There Shall be Peace and Friendship.

Source: Author's own compilation

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research paradigm

This study adopted the interpretivist paradigm in order to gain insights on the state of the brand of the oldest political party in SA and the African continent at large. According to Irshaidat (2022), the interpretivist paradigm is adopted in political marketing research due to its proficiency in unpacking complex issues and generating precise insights. Ugwu, Ekere and Onoh (2021) further state that the interpretivist paradigm enables a researcher to comprehend how individuals interpret their social realities. In this study, the researcher's main objective was to assess the brand strength of the ANC's brand based on a number of factors and different contexts.

3.2. Research approach and method

A relevant approach that complements the interpretivist paradigm is the narrative review method. The narrative review method's emphasis is on the synthesis and interpretation of qualitative information focusing on a specific topic (Lupton, 2021). According to Mair, Chien, Kelly and Derrington (2023), unlike the systematic review approach, the narrative review method does not confine itself to presenting a summary of previous studies' findings but focuses on discovering new insights. Presently, there is no consensus on how the narrative review method should be executed (Ferrari, 2015). In general, a researcher adopting the narrative review method uses his/her expertise and discretion to identify and include relevant studies to provide an opinion on a particular research topic (de Vries, Wever, Avey, Stephens, Sena & Leenaars, 2014). In this study, the author used his research expertise to identify the relevant content based on the objectives of the study and also what the elements in the brand equity model prescribe. Furthermore, in an effort to avoid bias, the author requested a peer review by an independent researcher/academic on the research approach and method adopted in this study. In Table 2, a distinction between the narrative and systematic review method is outlined.

Table 2: A distinction narrative and systematic review method

	Narrative review method	Systematic review method
Characteristics	Describe and appraise published articles but the methods used to select the articles may not be described.	Clearly defined criteria for the selection of articles from the literature. Explicit methods of extraction and synthesis of the data.
Application	General debates, appraisal of previous studies and the current lack of knowledge. Rationales for future research.	Identify, assess and synthesise the literature gathered in response to a specific query. Collect what is known about a topic and identify the basis of that knowledge.
Restrictions	The assumptions and the planning are not often known.	The scope is limited by the defined query, search terms, and the selection criteria.

Source: Ferrari (2015)

Based on the aforementioned and in line with the narrative review method, the researcher used various journal articles and other relevant sources such as reports and theses to evaluate the equity of the ANC brand using the Aaker's brand equity framework, ANC's Constitution and the Freedom Charter as the basis for this study.

3.3. Research Design and Sample

The approach undertaken to execute the narrative review method in this study contained a comprehensive search of publications published between 2019 and 2023 on Google Scholar. This database was elected because it is a reputable and credible source with a wide range of publications such as journal articles, chapter books and research reports. The period starts from 2019 because this is the year the ANC's national vote results dipped under 60% since 1994, hence the importance of evaluating the equity of this political party's brand. The search was executed to source publications written in English using the following key words: "African National Congress" "opinion survey", "African National Congress" "brand equity", "African National Congress" "brand management", "African National Congress" "reputation". The results obtained in these searches and the process followed is depicted in Figure 2. Due to a large volume of results, the researcher adopted the purposive sampling method to identify and select the relevant articles. Each article was screened using the title and abstract to ascertain their relevance to the study's objectives. The articles included in the study are those that concerned the ANC, its accomplishments and challenges faced by the political party. The study excluded articles not published on Google Scholar, articles not published in English, and articles

not accessible in full-text. This criteria is consistent with the approach adopted by Worku and Worku (2019) and Azizi, Atlasi, Ziapour, Abbas and Naemi (2021). Subsequently, this process resulted in 22 relevant publications being used as a sample to determine the state of the ANC brand.

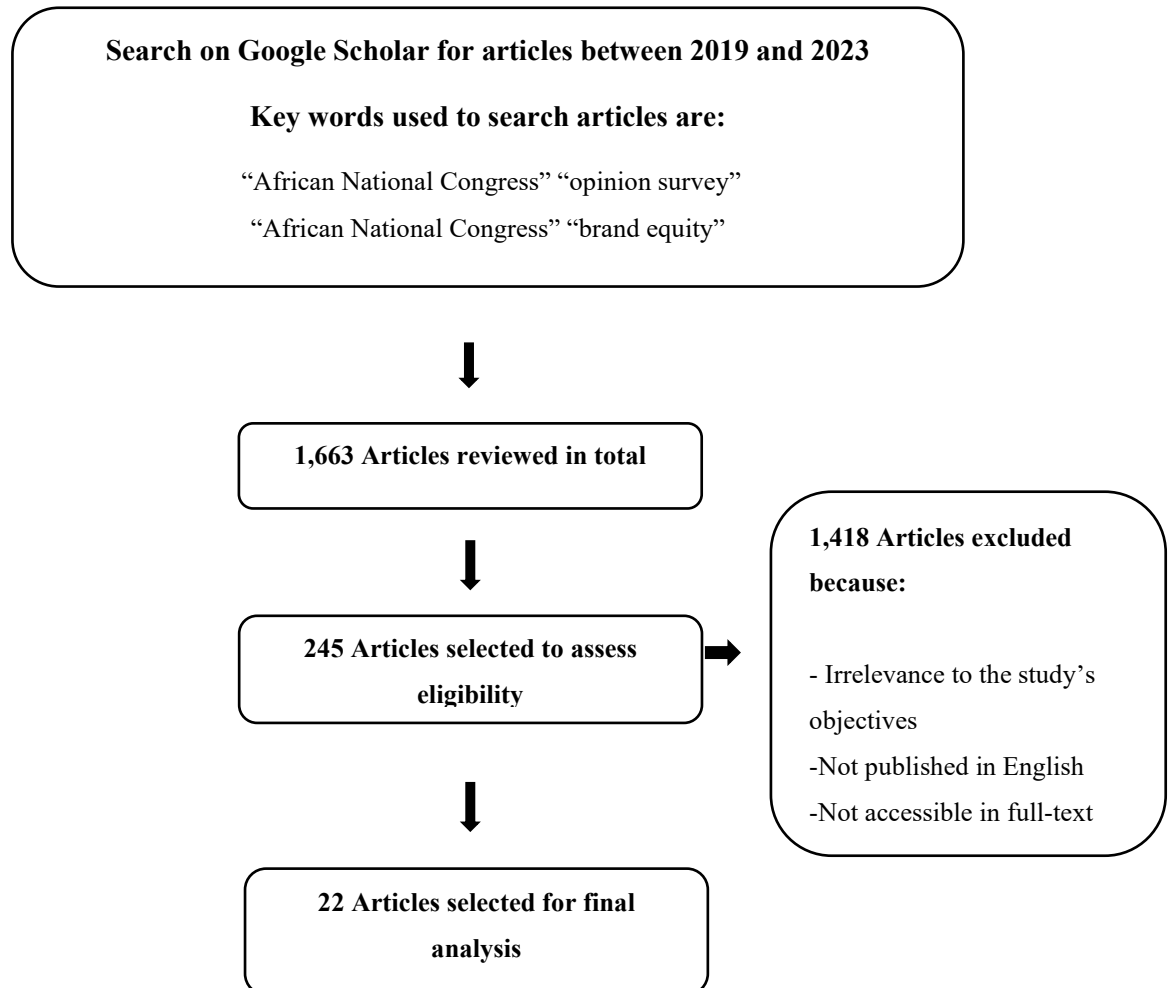


Figure 2: The screening process to select articles for final analysis

Source: Author's own compilation

3.4. Data analysis

The articles used in this study were assessed based on the Aaker's brand equity framework, which provides four (4) elements to assess a brand equity of a particular brand, in this instance, the ANC. Furthermore, the articles were assessed in line with the principles expressed in the ANC's Constitution and the Freedom Charter, which in essence, represent what the ANC brand stands for. The data analysis entailed using frequency distribution table to quantify the various factors associated with each brand equity element. This is illustrated in Table 3 and Table 4.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Brand equity elements

The results and findings of this study pertaining to the evaluation of the ANC's brand equity are presented in Table 3 and Table 4. In this section, a presentation on each brand equity element is discussed.

4.1.1 Brand awareness

There is no doubt that the ANC, which was formed in 1912, is an established political brand both locally and internationally. The logo of the ANC is dominated by three main colours, namely black, green and gold. In this study, articles 21 and 22 confirm this undisputed fact.

4.1.2 Perceived quality

The ANC is associated with a number of factors which affect the quality of life of the citizens. The most concerning factors is unemployment, poverty, inequality, protests and riots, unequal distribution of land among citizens, crime, and inadequate housing (Articles 3, 4, 6, 9, 10 & 13). These constitute 58% of all the factors highlighted by various authors. Although the ANC has made progress to alleviate poverty in the country by introducing social grants, provision of low-cost houses, and policies to promote access to institution of higher learning such as universities and technical and vocational colleges (see Articles 11, 12 & 14), 36% of factors such as economic insecurity and marginalisation, service delivery issues, violence, and access to health facilities are areas the ANC needs to focus on in order to fulfil what is expressed in its Constitution and the Freedom Charter (see Articles 3, 4, & 10).

4.1.3 Brand association/image

According to the results contained in Table 3 and as reflected in Articles 1, 2, 3, 5 & 7, 54% of the brand image factors link the brand ANC to corruption and looting, unethical and immoral leaders, trust deficit, and factional fights. Furthermore, the ANC is associated with other adverse factors like nepotism, political infighting, assassinations, dissatisfaction and interference with democratic institutions (see Articles 1, 2 & 5).

4.1.4 Brand loyalty

In terms of brand loyalty, the ANC has dominated national elections since the first democratic elections were held in 1994 by winning with over 60% majority. Therefore, the ANC has been in power since 1994 but according to the last election results which took place in 2019, there are signs that the loyalty of the political party is diminishing more especially among the youth voters (Articles 16, 17, 18, 19 & 20).

Table 3: Summary of factors associated with ANC

No.	Year	Author/s	Title of article	Summary of factors relating to the ANC
1	2021	Mbinjama	# VoetsekANC and COVID Corruption: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of “A Song for the ANC”.	Corruption, Unethical and immoral leaders, Nepotism.
2	2023	Jacobs	The ANC will rule until Jesus comes”: The determinants of loyalty, switching and exiting for the African National Congress in the 2019 elections.	Dissatisfaction with the ANC, Low trust in the ANC.
3	2021	Patel	Social cohesion hangs in the balance as South Africans feel economically insecure: Reflections from the South African reconciliation barometer.	High and persistent unemployment, deteriorating employment opportunities, Poverty, Inequality, Lack of access to resources, Lack of access to education, Economic marginalisation, Increasing protests and riots, Economic insecurity. Incoherence policies and lack of unified economic vision, Looting, fraud and corruption, Low trust in the ANC, Dishonest leaders.
4	2019	De Juan & Wegner	Social inequality, state-centered grievances, and protest: Evidence from South Africa.	Social inequality, Protests, Service delivery inequality.
5	2023	Mbandlwa	Political parties choose themselves over the general population in South Africa, a case of the top three parties	Political infighting for positions and resources, Factions, Assassinations,

			in South Africa.	Corruption.
6	2019	Staal	Land reform in South Africa: a case study of the Witzenberg pals initiative.	Unequal distribution of land.
7	2022	Yende	A Narrative on violent protests at the local sphere of government from Mbeki to Zuma's Administration.	Protests, Service delivery, Factions, Corruption.
8	2019	Southall	Polarization in South Africa: toward democratic deepening or democratic decay?	Politicisation of democratic institutions, Increasing social inequalities.
9	2023	Manea, Piraino & Viarengo	Crime, inequality and subsidized housing: Evidence from South Africa.	Crime, Inequality, Lack of housing.
10	2021	Marutlulle	A critical analysis of housing inadequacy in South Africa and its ramifications.	Inadequate housing, Corruption, Poverty, Unemployment, Protests, Access to health facilities, Crime, Violence, Xenophobic attacks.
11	2022	Makole, Ntshangase, Maringa & Msosa	Can a basic income grant improve the quality of life for the poor in South Africa: An analytical review.	Introduction of social grant.
12	2019	Williams-Bruinders	The social sustainability of low-cost housing: The role of social capital and sense of place.	Provision of low-cost housing.
13	2020	Nare & Mataire	The future of the youth under siege, implications of the democratic and economic trajectories of post-apartheid South Africa.	High crime rate, Rampant unemployment rate, Unequal distribution of resources between racial groups.
14	2020	Chitsamatanga	Children's rights to education in	Policies to promote right

		& Rembe	South Africa twenty years after democracy: A reflection on achievements, problems and areas for future action	to education, Schools with no electricity, water supply, ablution facilities, stocked libraries, laboratory facilities, computer centers.
15	2021	Blackmur	International resonances of the (hashtag) FeesMustFall movement in South African universities, 2015-2017.	Lack of access to higher education
16	2022	Cilliers	The ANC and South Africa	Decline in 2019 national elections
17	2019	Musitha	Investigating how Cyril Ramaphosa turned the fortunes of the African National Congress in the 2019 national elections: individualism versus collectivism.	Power and ruling since 1994
18	2019	Schulz-Herzenberg	The decline of partisan voting and the rise in electoral uncertainty in South Africa's 2019 general elections.	Reduced national vote in 2019 elections, Decline of national votes from 62% in 2014 to 58% in 2019, Young voters are not attached or loyal to a specific party, Dominance in five national elections by getting over 60% of votes between 1994 and 2014.
19	2020	Gumede	Elusive pursuit of reconciliation and development in post-apartheid South Africa.	Decline of over 7% in the number of votes between 2014 and 2019 national elections.
20	2020	Harris	Toward performance-based politics: Swing voters in South Africa's 2016	ANC's national votes under 60% for the first

			local elections.	time since 1994.
21	2020	Irwin	The ANC and its use of history to build its brand.	Brand in existence for over 100 years since 1912, Internationally recognised brand.
22	2011	Archer & Stent	Red socks and purple rain: The political uses of colour in late apartheid South Africa.	The use of black, green and gold colours as a brand identity.

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 4: Categorisation of factors according to brand equity elements

Brand equity dimension	Factors	Frequency	%	Articles
Brand association/image	- Corruption, looting and fraud	4	21%	1, 3, 5, 7
	- Unethical and immoral leaders	2	11%	1, 3
	- Nepotism	1	5%	1
	- Dissatisfaction with the ANC	1	5%	2
	- Low trust in the ANC	2	11%	2, 3
	- Incoherence policies and lack of unified economic vision	1	5%	3
	- Political infighting for positions and resources	1	5%	5
	- Factions	2	11%	5, 7
	- Assassinations	1	5%	5
	- Protests	1	5%	7
	- Service delivery	1	5%	7
	- Politicisation of democratic institutions	1	5%	8
	- Increasing social inequalities	1	5%	8

Perceived quality	- High and persistent unemployment	4	13%	3, 10, 13
	- Poverty	2	6%	3, 10
	- Inequality	3	9%	3, 4, 9
	- Lack of access to resources	1	3%	3
	- Lack of access to education	1	3%	3
	- Economic marginalisation	1	3%	3
	- Increasing protests and riots	3	9%	3, 4, 10
	- Economic insecurity	1	3%	3
	- Service delivery inequality	1	3%	4
	- Unequal distribution of land and resources between racial groups	2	6%	6, 13
	- High crime rate	3	9%	9, 10, 13
	- Lack of housing	2	6%	9, 10
	- Access to health facilities	1	3%	10
	- Violence	1	3%	10
	- Xenophobic attacks	1	3%	10
	- Introduction of social grant	1	3%	11
	- Provision of low-cost housing	1	3%	12
	- Policies to promote right to education	1	3%	14
	- Schools with no electricity, water supply, ablution facilities, stocked libraries, laboratory facilities, computer centres.	1	3%	14
	- Lack of access to higher education	1	3%	15

Brand loyalty	- Decline of national votes from 62% in 2014 to 58% in 2019	5	62%	16, 18, 19, 20
	- Power and ruling since 1994	1	13%	17
	- Young voters are not attached or loyal to a specific party	1	13%	18
	- Dominance in five national elections by getting over 60% of votes between 1994 and 2014	1	13%	18
Brand awareness	- Brand in existence for over 100 years since 1912	1	33%	21
	- Internationally recognised brand.	1	33%	21
	- The black, green and gold colours.	1	33%	22

Source: Author's own compilation

5. Discussion

The people of South Africa and the globe are aware about the existence of the ANC. This is attributed to the fact that the political party has an impeccable reputation of being a liberation movement in SA. This is complemented by prominent leaders such as the late former statesmen Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and the incumbent, Cyril Ramaphosa. The ANC is the ruling party in the country and this makes the brand to be visible and recognised by the society on a regular basis. Irwin (2020) confirms this notion by inferring that the ANC brand is underpinned by being recognised by voters. According to Jakeli and Tchumburidze (2012), it is imperative for political parties to invest resources towards creating brand awareness among voters as it contributes to the positive image of the party. Based on the findings of this study, it is evident voters are aware about the ANC brand and what it stands for.

The ANC's Constitution and Freedom Charter declares that people shall have access to houses, healthcare, and education. The political party's brand promise also stipulates that people shall be

employed and live in a secure country. However, despite being in power for 30 years, Rapanyane (2022) states that the country (SA) is riddled with challenges such as high unemployment, inequality and poverty. According to Statistics South Africa (2023), the South African unemployment rate is between 32.9% and 42.4%. According to Ayang, Christel and Fossong (2022), there is a correlation between unemployment and crime. It is therefore not surprising that in Quarter 4 of 2023, South Africa's murder rate, attempted murder rate, common assault rate, and robbery increased by 3.4%, 8.3%, 7.6%, and 8.9%, respectively (South African Police Services (SAPS) Crime Report, 2023). These factors have a negative effect on the quality of life for the citizens and this is in contrast with the principles captured in the ANC's Constitution and the Freedom Charter.

The ANC is not only perceived adversely in terms of quality of life experienced by the citizens, but its brand is associated with negative elements such as corruption and unethical politicians. The concerning issue regarding corruption is that the South African citizens do not have faith in the law enforcement agencies such as SAPS to deal with this scourge (Rapanyane, 2022). According to Thusi and Selepe (2023), the unethical conduct of ANC's deployed comrades is demonstrated through nepotism and the manipulation and awarding of tenders to their friends, acquaintances, and family members so that they can benefit personally. This behaviour by ANC politicians is impairing the image of the political party in the eyes of the public. Milewicz and Milewicz (2014) assert that for political parties to improve their image, they need to consider the associations voters have about them and their representatives.

The findings of this study discovered that the ANC is being voted by the majority of the citizens. However, this persistent loyalty towards the ANC brand is diminishing gradually. The major contributing factor is that the youth of SA is faced with unemployment, poverty and do not believe that politicians have their interests at heart (Maree, 2022). This assertion is echoed by Oyedemi and Mahlatji (2016), who posit that young people are skeptical of politicians and do not trust government. Furthermore, the youth is becoming uncomfortable with one party dominance (Mattes & Richmond, 2015). In a study conducted by Dabula (2016), it was found that political marketing and branding contributes to the loyalty of voters towards a particular party. Therefore, this is the marketing tool political parties like the ANC can adopt to arrest the decline in brand loyalty among youth voters.

The ANC and by extension, other parties can use these findings to identify factors they need to be cognisant of so that the value of their brands is preserved. In order to embark on this trajectory successfully, the study proposes a conceptual framework in Figure 3 depicting factors to be watchful of since they could have an adverse effect on the political parties and their respective brands. The factors illustrated in Figure 3 indicate what the ruling party (i.e. ANC) is associated with based on the

information in the public domain. These factors have been categorised into four (4) dimensions of brand equity, which should be considered by political parties in their efforts to capture the attention of the audience, which is the voters.

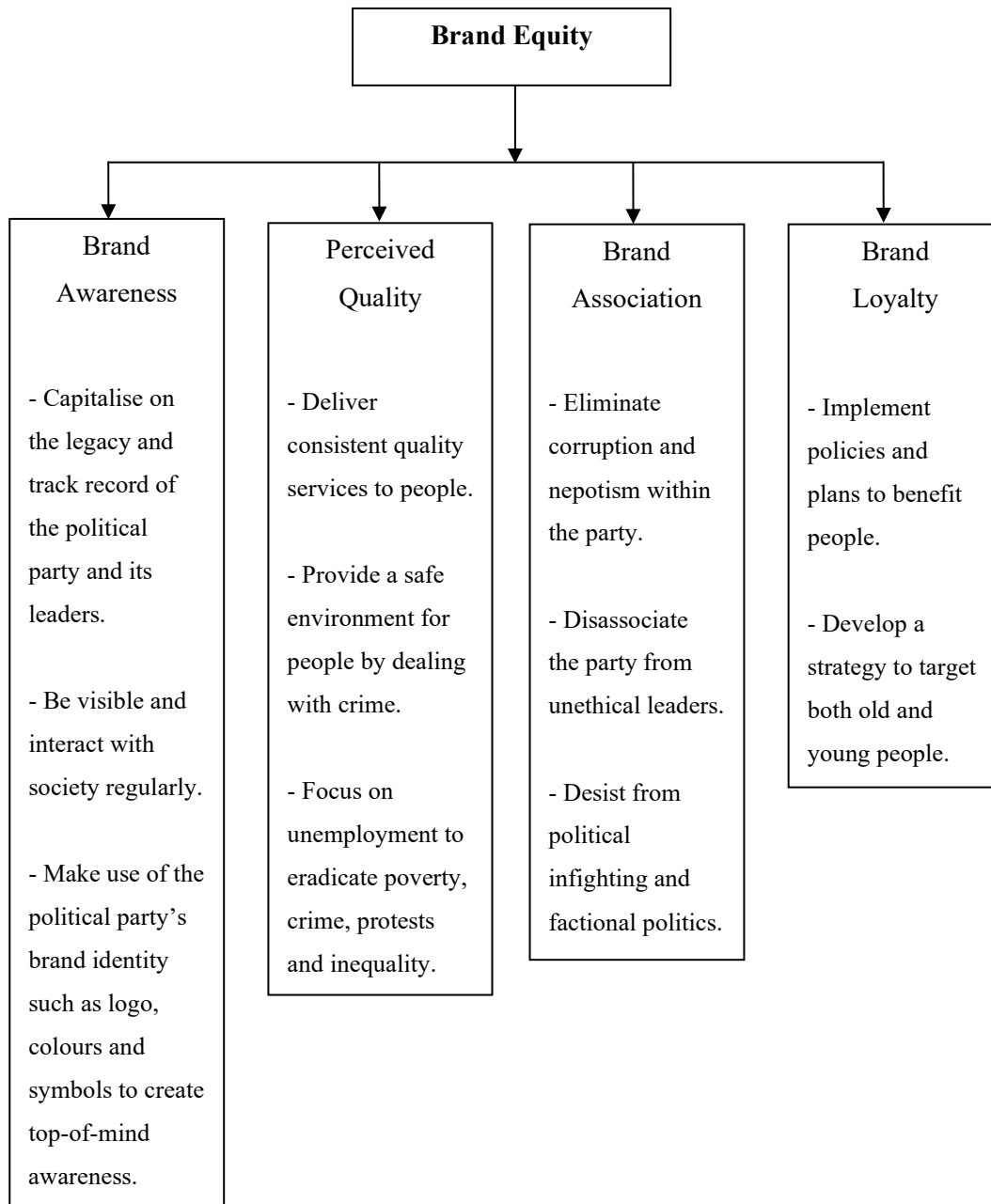


Figure 3: Conceptual framework for measuring political parties' brand value

Source: Author's own compilation

6. Managerial Implications

The political landscape in the country has changed and voters have alternatives to choose from due to the mushrooming of new political parties. The findings of this study can be used for theoretical and practical purposes. In terms of theoretical contribution, the brand equity model has been adopted in various industries. However, there is scant evidence that it has been applied in the political domain. Therefore, this study presents an opportunity for future researchers in the field of politics to use the conceptual model as the basis for their respective studies. Furthermore, the study identified certain factors linked to the four (4) brand equity elements, which revealed what the ANC brand is associated with. The conceptual model can be adopted to empirically determine the relationship between the factors and their effect on the ANC and other political parties' brand. The practical contribution of this study is that the ANC can use the findings to improve its weaknesses such as negative image and diminishing brand loyalty. For instance, the ANC is losing voters especially among the youth, who are the future of this country. The ANC can therefore use this finding to develop and execute political strategies that resonate with the youth voters. The findings of this study are not only insightful to the ANC. Political parties in SA are jostling for local, provincial and national representation and political branding is one of the fundamental strategies they need to embrace. In order to build their brands, opposition parties can use these findings to understand what they need to do or avoid when formulating their political branding and marketing strategies. The findings of this study have provided a blueprint of what political parties in general can focus on in order to grow and preserve their brand value among voters.

7. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

Political parties should embrace the fact that they are no different to companies who are competing with each other for consumers, profit, and market share. In order for companies to grow and preserve their position in the market, they invest in brand building and management strategies. Political parties like the ANC are competing with each other for votes and seats in Parliament and to achieve the desired results, they need to compile a manifesto or brand promise, invest money in designing posters, brochures, branded t-shirts and so forth to persuade voters to vote for them. The findings of this study indicate that overall, the value of the ANC brand is affected negatively due to factors such as corruption, crime, unemployment, service delivery, and unethical leaders.

The study has some limitations. Firstly, the researcher used Google Scholar as the main database to source articles analysed in this study. Therefore, it can be argued that more could have been uncovered if the scope of databases was broadened. Secondly, the narrative review method adopted in this study enabled the researcher to use his discretion to select articles, thus a potential of bias. The conceptual framework presented in this study was not tested empirically and in future, this can be done to comprehensively understand the impact of the identified factors on the brand equity of the ANC and

other political parties. Furthermore, due to the narrative nature of the study, although the approach was useful to identify factors affecting the ANC brand, future studies can adopt the systematic review method to expand on what is concluded in this study.

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