

## **A blessing in disguise? Political branding through covid-19 pandemic in Tanzania.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Like other brands in the market, politicians and political parties constantly brand themselves to influence consumer (voter) behaviour. Through political advertising, political brands are established and maintained in order to establish a clear difference from one another. Normally, this takes place irrespective of time and context. This article analyses political branding strategies adopted by Tanzanian politicians during the covid-19 pandemic. The analysis covers all branding cases of both individuals and parties as reported through their Facebook accounts and those of influential partisans between March and May 2020, the months that mark the start and end of covid-19 reporting in Tanzania in 2020. Coverage is made for two of Tanzania's major parties as of 2020, namely Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA). The analysis was made in line with branding features such as names, symbols, signs, and slogans as per political advertising and branding strategies. Results show that branding was made for both individual politicians and parties. Human and party brands were advertised through their aid to the economically disadvantaged population during the covid-19 pandemic, with the aim of establishing public attraction to their brands. The study uses the rational choice theory to link the advertising to the political choices the public makes. Both individuals and parties labelled all their aids, especially masks and sanitisers, with their names, colours, and slogans. Some advertisements of their aids were accompanied by explanations that openly said why a party or an individual was a better choice from all others, explicitly showing their political motives. The article concludes that any event, irrespective of the impacts on the wider population, can serve political purposes, especially branding. Disasters such as pandemics come with political blessings as they offer opportunities for parties and individuals to grow their traffic. The article recommends that political moves should always focus on service to humanity than fostering their political brands.

### **KEYWORDS**

Brand, branding, political advertising, covid-19



## 1. Introduction

Pandemics are not known for blessings, and the coronavirus (also known as covid-19) is no exception. Since its outbreak at the end of 2019 in Wuhan-China, the novel virus has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives globally. However, the outbreak was not always bad news to everyone as it benefitted many in the process, among them, the world's wealthiest people who were reported to have amassed fortunes amid lockdowns. Like other beneficiaries, politicians in Tanzania did not let the opportunity go as they sought sterner identities in the year the country prepared for general elections. Between march and May 2020, Individual politicians, as well as parties in Tanzania, used supply of utilities such as masks and sanitizers to brand themselves, painting themselves as saviours of the coronavirus victims, thereby advancing their political agenda. This article unearths the strategies used by politicians, and political parties, to advertise themselves and boost their political brands using covid-19 as a brand vessel.

A report by WHO (World Health Organisation), as of June 24, 2020, shows that Africa alone had already recorded over 200 000 cases, with 5257 deaths. Tanzania recorded her first case of covid-19 on March 16, 2020, as an imported case (Tarimo & Wu, 2020). Since then, measures were taken to fight the deadly virus in line with the directives from WHO and other international bodies. However, at the time of the outbreak, it was always going to be difficult to filter the type of help or the style by which the public would receive assistance from influential people and entities. Governments, businesses and other institutions were already lining up various initiatives to help the vulnerable population; politicians would be expected to take the opportunity in dealing with the pandemic.

The fight against coronavirus involved the use of sanitizers, hand washing, wearing of masks, among other scientific measures brought forth by WHO. This led to a wave of donations from in and outside Africa, with people and businesses donating to the poor. Jack Ma, the Chinese billionaire and founder of the online conglomerate, Alibaba Group was among donors of covid-19 medical equipment and supplies to Africa. On April 27, 2020, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) reported to have received 4.6 million masks, 500000 swabs and test kits, 300 ventilators, 200000 face shields, 2000 temperature guns, 100 body temperature scanners, and 500000 pair of gloves from Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation (Africa CDC, 2020) It was the time to see what the political core would do to register their presence in the midst of a life-threatening pandemic.

As the virus continued to spread all over Africa, politicians took advantage of donations to brand themselves. It was reported in Kenya, that a governor branded donor-funded sanitizers with his portrait (Mwangi, 2020). The act was reported on capital news as 'craving for publicity,' which is why businesses brand themselves. The wave of political branding through donations spread, with Tanzanian politicians taking the initiative. Hand sanitizers, masks, hand washing centres were distributed in the name of politicians and/or their parties to strengthen people's perceptions of them.

In their minds, politicians meant to build a lasting memory in their followers' (and non-followers) perception of them. Marketing research shows that constant advertisements build a strong image of a particular business in consumers' minds. In the same breath, Sandage, Fryburger and Rotzoll (1989) asserts that consumers are usually tempted to build emotional relationships with the brand, which is made familiar to them through the years of the mental picture left by ads. Although the political style of advertisement through events might not take an overt marketing strategy, their approach is implied and delivers the same message, and attracts memory. Among

other motives, politicians advertise their brands (individual and party) because they want to remain relevant. Nielsen (2015a) terms this behaviour as 'activation,' where it is noted that politicians brand themselves because they do not want to be dormant in the voter's memory. Such a view is shared by Kooyman (2018), who argues that a political party or candidate receives more support or votes depending on how salient they are. Therefore, the purpose is relevance, and consistent presence of their brands in the voter's memory; the more they are remembered, the better.

Consistent political advertising aims at building a lasting brand in order to have electoral advantage. The branding intention is, therefore, to perfectly position the party or an individual in the right place. Positioning is a key element in the marketing of any brand (Lindblad, 2018). Lindblad's stance is partly extended from Ries and Trout (2001), whom she cites as enthusing that positioning is what is done to the mind of the prospect. It is in this line of thought that Tanzanian politicians, political parties, and other partisans invested in branding amid the coronavirus threat. They meant to remain the memory of their voters, especially with covid-19 interfering with the election year-2020.

This article, therefore, explores branding strategies that were used by various politicians during the covid-19 pandemic. The analysis covers aids from individual politicians and political parties to the disadvantaged population in the fight against the novel coronavirus. Data was collected from Facebook advertisements of political actions in line with the covid-19 fight, most notably, supply of masks, sanitizers, and handwashing machines branded with party logos and/or slogans, or individual politicians' particulars. All posts by Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA) and individuals attached to the two parties, between March and May 2020, were analysed. This was the period when Tanzania covered and shared covid-19 reports, thus, making it the most critical period of the pandemic in the country. The choice of the two parties, CCM and CHADEMA was based on the size and level of influence in Tanzania.

The two parties are the biggest in the country, with a considerable advantage in the number of members. They were also the top two contenders in the 2015 general elections, CCM winning with a 58.46% margin with CHADEMA a runner up on 39.97% (NEC, 2015). Given the fact that statistics on registered members for each party consistently fluctuate (Shayo, 2005), electoral turn-ups appear to be the only reliable measure of party strength and size. Posts were from official party sites (including party affiliates such as youth league) and individual leaders and fanatics from the same parties.

## **2. Political advertising and branding**

Various studies have been done on political advertising and branding globally. Researchers in political studies have, for a long time, shown interest in the growth of branding and advertising, areas traditionally seen in business and marketing studies. Much to this shift was the fact that politics were increasingly becoming 'business' just like others. In support of this, O'Shaughnessy (2017:121) asserts that "political brand perceptions affect voter choice as with such items as toothpaste." Consumers are, therefore, important in politics as in any other business.

The American Marketing Association – AMA, (1960) as cited in Smith and French (2009:211) defines a brand as: "name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors." The definition captures two essential aspects: image (in name, sign, symbol, or design) and distinctness (in

differentiating competitors). The image that sticks in the mind of the consumer longer makes the difference.

The aspect of differentiating competitors remains relevant in politics as it is adopted in the definition by Nielsen (2015b), who defines a political brand as encompassing representations located in a pattern that can be identified and differentiated from other political representations. Like in the AMA, this definition includes symbols and names among other realizations of political representations (brands); others include artifacts, sentiments, and policies. Smith and French (2009) further clarify the political brand concept by unpacking it as consisting of elements such as party, leader/politician, and policies. In this case, the leader and party elements carry features such as names, symbols, signs, designs, and artifacts, while policies can complement both. Sentiments, on the other hand, can stem from all angles: from individual leaders/politicians and policies.

Consumers in the political business (voters) use association in their judgment of brands. They rank parties and individual politicians depending on what they associate them with; what is in their immediate memory. In a study on brand equity, Keller (1993) establishes associative network in brands, which is unpacked into two parts. The central node which denotes the name of the brand and the number of specific features associated with the concept through learning. In this specific line, he argues that properties associated with the brand matter the most in what is to become of it.

On the same note, Smith and French (2009) pose an argument that, like other business consumers, electorates retain a high level of recall of party names and their symbols, further cementing the importance attached to names, 'the central node' put forth in Keller's associative network. In support of this viewpoint, they also cite Singer (2002), who further establishes that party brands offer cohesion, recognition, and predictability to voters. By establishing stable, distinctly appealing brands, politicians can be certain of their fate in elections.

Voters' power to create associative images about parties and individual politicians establishes a long-standing valuation of the same. According to Scammell (2007), the value of the brand depends on the experiences and perceptions of the public regarding the brand. She extends her viewpoint by noting such experiences and perceptions put the brand of a party or candidate at the core of its proposition. This implies that by advertising their party and individual brands, politicians aim to build a strong connection that links them with voters and associates them with positivity. They build a lasting mental market share, which is a predictor of the popularity/popular vote of a political brand (Kooyman, 2018). Such an image, if well built and maintained, can win someone elections. It is in this line of thought that politicians take their chances as they come, to ensure they keep high chances of winning elections at any time.

In order to establish stable brands, able to be clearly differentiated from competitors, politicians invest heavily to sponsor their advertising missions. Studies show that there has been an exponential increase in political ads financing for decades. Klemperer (1998) is quoted in O'shaughnessy (2017) as labelling Germany's Nazi as the 'best advertisers the world had yet seen.' According to him, their investment in the emotions of the public made their strategy more of 'advertising' than propaganda.

A repeat of the Nazi maneuver has been underway for years. As per reports by Alliance for Better Campaign, advertising in U.S. politics rose to about \$1.6 billion in 2004 (Franz and Riout, 2007), with a reported total of \$4.2 billion (political.com). The trend was not expected to drop, with more money invested in creating appealing images of parties and politicians. Fulgoni et al. (2016) estimated a rise up to \$11.6 billion. However, Reports in the Washington Post (Ingraham, 2017) indicate a sum of \$6.5 billion was spent in 2016, about half the estimated amount. It remains evident, though, that a lot of money is still spent in politics for ads, as much as in other businesses.

Sub-Saharan African democracies have also been spending big in politics, notably in

election campaigns. Tanzania was reported to have spent over \$100 million in parliamentary constituency elections alone in 2015 (Msuya, 2019), while neighbouring Kenya reportedly spent half a billion dollars in the 2017 general elections (Nyabola, 2017). However, unlike the U.S. and other first world countries, it remains difficult to account for reports on advertising cost alone in sub-Saharan Africa, especially with the nature of communication infrastructure, which affects the way advertising money is spent. Nonetheless, advertising is a key aspect in the political activities in these countries, especially in election years.

Spending trends in political advertising all over the world are not expected to drop. Parties and individual politicians seek to establish stronger identities, building brands that last forever in the voters' minds. As observed by Franz and Ridout (2007), when people are exposed to advertising, their vote choices can be moved, and attitudes towards candidates influenced. Consistent advertising, therefore, serves political brands with positive associations that trigger vote decisions whenever voters are called upon.

Apart from winning elections, political branding may come with various purposes. Although the influence of the electoral prospects remains the main focus, politicians also target other strategic purposes such as positioning, repositioning, enhancing, or defending reputation (Speed, Butter & Collins, 2015). In this case, it should be expected that parties and leaders consistently build desirable, sustainable images if they are to meet their ultimate goal: winning elections. Tanzanian politicians might have seen the covid-19 pandemic as a chance to build their names, reposition themselves and defend their reputations. Through the pandemic, a vulnerable community can use any help they can find, and remember fondly, the person that made it possible.

Updating brands (both for individuals and parties) is an endless process that seeks to maintain standards for as long as relevance is required. When a brand is updated, it triggers continued followership, which offers assurances in elections. As observed by Nielsen (2015a), a brand signals the appeal of a party to the voter, and it represents public feelings about the party, whether it is viewed as cool, outdated, or incompetent. The amount of energy, skills, and resources invested in branding a party or leader determines what the public/voters think and what their decisions in elections might be. It is safe to agree that branding remains the way to go for political parties, leaders, and other hopefuls. As outlined in various studies, constant updating of public domain information through advertising helps establish images and identities that shape voters' sentiments over parties and leaders. Although the accuracy of outcomes may be challenging to establish, it remains an undisputed fact that branding of parties and leaders shapes political outcomes, especially in elections. The observation made by Nielsen (2015a: 5) sums up this whole idea: *"like birds building nests, voters collect bits and pieces of information they encounter in their everyday lives, which are stored in the voters' memories."*

### **3. Theoretical basis**

Various theoretical approaches have been adopted to explain political behaviours, particularly voting decisions. Most of the political theories explain voters' behaviours, with the effort to establish grounds on which people decide to choose one party or person over the other, despite both campaigning almost on the same grounds. Although this study is not into voting behaviour per se, it is essential to establish a proper link of voters' thinking and motives of choice in relation to party and human branding. In the study on theoretical models of voting behaviours, Antunes (2010) marks the era of the scientific study of voting behavior with three major research

schools from the early 1940s to 1960s: sociological model/school of Columbia which focuses on influences of social factors in voting decisions, psychological model/school of Michigan, which states that party identification determines the behavior of voters, and Rational choice theory/model of economic voting/school of Rochester which emphasises the variables such as rationality, choice, uncertainty, and information. Therefore, this article uses the rational choice theory by Anthony Downs (1957).

The rational choice theory sheds more light on voter expectations and the effects of branding on the same. Developed by Anthony Downs (1957) in his work "An Economic Theory of Democracy," the theory establishes relevant lines of thoughts in relation to branding and voters' decisions. It is a political version (by Downs) of an economic model, 'Expected utility model' by Daniel Bernoulli in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was formally developed through a work by John von Neumann and Oscar Morgenstern (1944) titled "Theory of Games and Economic Behavior" mainly focusing on lottery and prizes (Levin, 2006).

The rational choice theory brings forth an interesting premise which states that decisions (by both voters and parties) are rational in the sense that they are guided by self-interest and enforced by the principle of maximisation of action's utility. As in lotteries, each citizen uses forecasts to determine whether their preferred party is part of the relevant range of choice. When they realize the party has lost ground, they rationally go for other parties Downs (1957 in Antunes, 2010).

Since branding seeks to establish lasting connections with voters, it is reasonable to argue that the information voters are fed with through brand advertising affects their rationality; it gives them reasons to pick one party/person over another. Observation by Keller (2002 cited in Smith & French, 2009) shows that brands provide sociological, rational, psychological, and cultural benefits for consumers. Political brands look to influence consumers' choices in their favour, like other business brands do (O'shaughnessy, 2017).

Establishments by the theory of rational choice prove the role of branding efforts in turning voters in the party or leader's favour. It is the way of triggering consumers' (voters) rationality into desired decisions. In line with the expected utility model, Smith, and French (2009) argue that consumer utility is informed by the functional and economic benefits offered by the political brand. It is, therefore, safe to argue that functional, economic, and other benefits offered to the citizens by parties or leaders strengthen party/human brands. A consistent practice of such feats is likely to positively trigger voters' rationality, leading to votes for the party/person in question.

Despite the relevance of the rationality theory in the branding business in politics, it is difficult to task one theory with the impact of party and human branding on voting decisions. Analysis of the voting behavior models by Antunes (2010) further proves that other factors such as social influence (Lazarsfeld, 1944 in the sociological model), partisanship (Campbell et al., 1960 in the psychosocial model), and rationality (Downs, 1957 in the rational choice theory) play a significant role in determining voter decisions. However, like other businesses, political parties, and leaders keep investing in building sustainable brands as a way to keep their memory alive and affect voting decisions.

#### **4. Political branding strategies amid covid-19 in Tanzania**

Since the first coronavirus case was reported in Tanzania, various safety measures such as hand washing, wearing of face masks, and use of sanitizers were implemented. The government started to devise plans to protect the citizens, which further opened opportunities for private entities and political parties to help communities at risk. Politicians and political parties took the opportunity to build their brands by offering various aids to the population, particularly in their voting areas. It is important

to remember that 2020 is the year of elections in Tanzania, and politicians in different capacities were seemingly not ready to be crippled by the pandemic.

Voters, like other business consumers, prefer shortcuts in making consumption decisions. This behavior led to Simon (1957) labelling humans as 'cognitive misers' who use shortcuts to make reasonable choices with minimal effort in many consumption situations (Smith & French, 2009). Politicians in Tanzania exploited this human trait by making sure they remain the reasonable choices come general elections. They used the covid-19 pandemic to create the image as saviours of the disadvantaged people by directly offering branded assistance to the people. Party and leaders' names, logos, and slogans were branded on face masks, sanitizers, and water tanks donated by parties and individual leaders to maintain their position in the voters' minds.

### *Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)*

Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) is the oldest and ruling party in Tanzania. It is estimated to have about six million registered members as of 2013 (*Daily News Tanzania*); however, Shayo (2005) insists the numbers are undisclosed. Having been in power for over 50 years, CCM boasts an advantage over rivals. It has won all elections since the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in Tanzania in 1992 and managed to dominate the national parliament for as many years.

Despite clear advantage over other parties, CCM continues to brand itself through different ways of advertising to remain relevant in the minds of voters. During the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (covid-19), CCM played a role in helping the people through the supply of necessary utilities, among other things. Distributed supplies were branded with party particulars such as name and logo, a move that appears to keep consumers updated on what the party means to their lives.

Through their Facebook account and those of their affiliates, CCM announced to have helped the needy population in various ways, including supplies in ready-made utilities and infrastructure to support more production of the same. Through a post on April 20, 2020, CCM unveiled the launch of the campaign by the party's Youth Union to fight the spread of the coronavirus led by Chair of the union, Mr. Musa Kilakala. The event saw five leaders of the youth union handed utilities necessary for the fight against the spread of covid-19, including water tanks, masks, and sanitizers, all of which were branded with CCM colours (green and yellow).

The post carried a tasty language in its title to suggest the move was decisive and most needed to rescue lives. The title read:

*Musa Kilakala aongoza mapambano ya kukata mnyororo wa maambukizi ya virusi vya korona Dar Es Salaam*  
(Musa Kilakala leads the fight to break corona virus spread chain in Dar Es Salaam).

The post further reveals that the launch of the campaign was marked by handing protective utilities to leaders of the CCM youth union in five Dar es Salaam districts, sanitizers to boda-boda drivers, and water tanks to the leaders of Dar es Salaam's *feri* (ferry) market. The post concludes by insisting on the government's efforts (CCM's government) on combating the spread of the corona pandemic, calling on other stakeholders to follow suit.

*Zoezi hili ni endelevu na linatoa wito kwa wadau wote kuunga mkono juhudi za serikali za kukata mnyororo wa maambukizi ya virusi vya korona Tanzania hususani mkoa wa Dar es Salaam ambapo ndio kunaongoza kwa maambukizi mengi*

(This initiative is progressive, and it calls upon all stakeholders to join government's effort to break the coronavirus spread chain in Tanzania especially Dar Es Salaam region where the spread of the virus is on the front foot).

On April 26, 2020, a CCM page announced to have handed sewing machines to Ihemi vocational college as part of capacity building in the production of masks and other products. Part of the post read:

*Katibu Mkuu wa Umoja wa Wanawake wa CCM Tanzania (UWT) Mwalimu Queen Mlozi amepokea mashine za kisasa za kushonea 70 zenye thamani ya zaidi ya shilingi milioni 100 kwa niaba ya Chuo cha Mafunzo Ihemi mkoani Iringa ambazo zimetolewa na Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) kama sehemu ya kukijengea uwezo chuo hicho katika mkakati wake wa uzalishaji wa barakoa na bidhaa nyingine.*

(The General Secretary of national CCM women's union (UWT), Mwalimu Queen Mlozi has received 70 modern sewing machines worth over 100 million Tanzania shillings on behalf of Ihemi vocational college, in Iringa region, which have been granted by Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) as part of the strategy to build capacity of the college in its quest to produce masks and other products).

The aid by the CCM women wing is signal to the public that CCM cares for the citizen, and prioritizes their health safety. Such a move would most likely mean securing the relationship with the voters, one that could render CCM more relevant than other parties. Success in this form of advertising would in turn influence voters' rationality in decision making, as the rational choice theory states.

In similar branding situations, a day earlier (25/04/2020), a post on the same matter by a CCM affiliate on Facebook, '*Chama Bora*,' reported the launch of the machines by Ms. Queen Mlozi, with the title "CCM YARAHISISHA UPATIKANAJI WA BARAKOA/CCM *simplifies access for masks.*" The post further quotes Ms. Mlozi, women union Secretary insisting on the magnitude of the party's mercy. It is noted:

*CCM imeamua kutengeneza barakoa kwa bei nafuu, kulinganisha na bei za maeneo mengine ili kutoa huduma na kuwasaidia wananchi kujikinga na maambukizi ya virusi vya Korona, ikiwa ni jitihada za kuunga mkono mapambano ya kutokomeza ugonjwa huo.*

(CCM has decided to produce cheap masks compared to prices in other areas, in order to serve and help citizens to protect themselves against the spread of coronavirus, as part of efforts to support the fight against the disease).

In the above post, the source commends the initiative taken by CCM to help the needy people. The party is labelled as the producer of the masks, and the intention stated is to simplify the accessibility of the much-needed masks for the financially-limited public. The strategy serves to show that the party is a saviour of the people, and it feels the financial difficulty ordinary people feel in hard pandemic times. By such a strategy, the party draws itself closer to the voters, and creates more relevance which might in turn affect the voters' rationality in decision making.

### **A pictorial representation of CCM's branding initiatives through covid-19 aid**

*Part of social media posts on the party's initiatives*

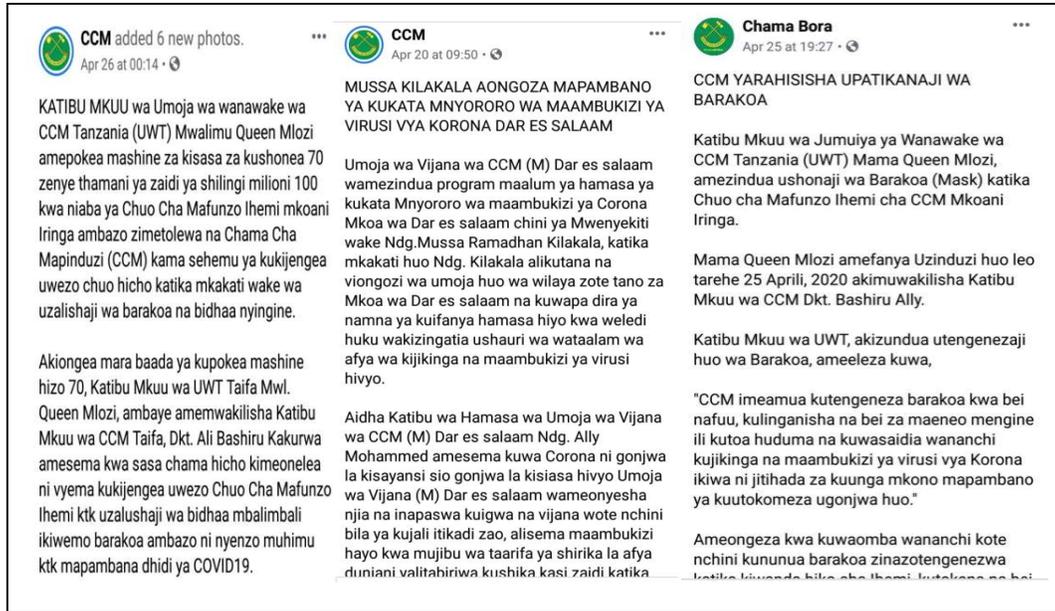


Figure 1: Part of CCM online branding initiatives through covid-19 aid

Protective utilities and machines offered



Figure 2: Branded water tanks and hand sanitizer donated by CCM Youth Union (CCM Official Facebook Page)



Figure 3: Ms Queen Mlozi (Women Union Secretary) Launching CCM-donated sewing machines

### Chama Cha Demokrasia Na Maendeleo (CHADEMA)

Founded in 1992, CHADEMA has consistently posed significant opposition to the ruling CCM for decades, with a runner up status in the past two presidential elections (2010, 2015) to its name. As of 2005, the party was said to have 850000 registered members (Shayo, 2005). Actual numbers are, however, hard to determine since parties rarely disclose what is on their books.

In order to increase popularity, the party has been investing in branding activities. CHADEMA embarked on branding strategies through initiatives to fight the covid-19 pandemic by mostly distributing masks branded with party logo and colours, and at some point, names of individual party leaders.

On April 20, 2020, the CHADEMA Youth Assembly (BAVICHA) posted a message on Facebook (see Figure 4) with a covid-19 message to the government and the public.



Figure 4: the CHADEMA Youth Assembly (BAVICHA) covid-19 alert

The post had a picture of a face mask branded with the CHADEMA logo and colours (blue, red, and white), followed by a caption. The post was part of a series of hashtags by the assembly '#JikingeNaCorona,' for instance:

Our health experts should explain the appropriate raw material for the production of face masks, and local textile industries be used to produce those masks. Also, the government should grant tax exemption to those industries to simplify mask accessibility on a cheap and increase production to match current demand.

The post lifts the party's visibility through involvement in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. It offers advice to the government and health experts while giving a visual impression of CHADEMA as a key partner in saving lives. By accompanying a public interest message with party logo and colours, CHADEMA aims at keeping party memory alive among electorates, which is crucial in maintaining a positive identity of a brand.

The role of partisans cannot be left behind when discussing political branding. Individual party followers are vital in lifting expectations of their specific parties among the public. In the era of social media, where information sharing is privatized, key partisans have taken the advertising role to lift their parties' fortunes. CHADEMA followers took part in advertising party status in the COVID-19 pandemic, insisting that people wear CHADEMA masks. On May 5 2020, an individual post accompanied by a photo of CHADEMA-branded face masks read:

Wear a mask, corona is real, and it kills!! But remember, a mask is worn on the head, the organ which is the engine of your life decisions. So do not agree to wear a mask whose ideology you do not subscribe to! I advise you, for better mask-wearing results, try and get CHADEMA masks



Figure 5: Face masks branded with CHADEMA colours

The post begins with an honest warning that corona exists and urges people to wear face masks. However, the individual turns more political into the caption, indicating that since mask-wearing involves the head, it affects one's decision-making, which is why they think people should match masks with ideologies. Lastly, the post commends people to wear CHADEMA masks as the only way to fight coronavirus, figuratively implying it is the best party and the best choice one's head can make. The masks in the photo are branded in CHADEMA colours, much to the support of the content in the post.

Since the interest in political branding is in the way candidates influence electoral

prospects (Thompson, 2006), sometimes brand advertising is done on individual leaders. Leaders in CHADEMA used the covid-19 opportunity to raise their brand bar high, which may most likely affect decisions in the 2020 elections.

A post on April 24, 2020, by *Chadema Kanda Ya Kati* (Chadema - Central Zone) shows an incumbent member of parliament taking a personal initiative to distribute face masks branded with her name. The distribution is made to the disadvantaged community, including small scale retailers, *boda-boda*, and hawkers. It was reported that:

Hon Devota Minja, (Member of Parliament, special seats Morogoro Region) has today, offered 5000 face masks to various groups including *boda-boda*, *mama lishe* (female food hawkers, also *mama ntilie*), fish sellers, coffee centres, hawkers, rice and shoes traders and other groups of traders in 15 wards of Morogoro municipal in order to help protect them from covid-19.

The donation by Minja targeted low-income people, who at the same time, happen to be the majority of the voters. Politically, the act keeps her in the picture for upcoming elections, and keeps her party brand relevant as voters are likely to associate the charity act with the party Minja represents. She is a human brand that seeks personal and organizational relevance. Human brands, as put by Speed, Butler and Collins (2015), are as important as the organisation they represent. A robust human brand is, therefore, vital in strengthening party brand.

## 5. Conclusion

There is no denying that branding is already a key aspect of the survival of political parties, and associated leaders. Political communication researchers who have focused on branding prove that it is as key in politics as it is in other businesses since the status of a brand affects consumer(voter) decisions (Thompson, 2006; Speed, Butler & Collins 2006; Smith & French, 2009; O'shaughnessy, 2017). Parties and their leaders depend on the strength of their brands to remain relevant in the minds of voters (consumers).

For a brand to maintain the desirable image, it requires constant advertising. Political advertising plays a key role in establishing brands that appeal to followers and other potential voters since its main intention is persuasion: influence people's political beliefs, attitudes, and values (Franz & Ridout, 2007). Like other politicians in the world, Tanzanian politicians took the same initiative to strengthen their party and individual brands to maintain a straight image with the 2020 general elections around the corner.

The data presented show how Tanzania's two major parties Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), invested in party and individual branding amid the covid-19 pandemic. With the government insisting the 2020 general elections would not be postponed due to the global pandemic, political initiatives for visibility had to go on. The pandemic was used as an umbrella to push the political agenda and establish a stable position among the public.

The establishment in the rational choice theory that voters make choices rationally motivated by self-interest explains why politicians insisted on publicizing their aid to the disadvantaged population. Under this argument, voters' choices are moved by their interests, and it is up to politicians to attract their consumers to their brands. One of the ways is offering a helping hand when it is needed.

Remembering party names and symbols is key in the stability of the particular brand. To make sure that remains the case, both CCM and CHADEMA branded their aids (face masks, water tanks, sanitizers) with party symbols such as logos and colours. By so doing, parties make sure beneficiaries can hardly forget the 'goodwill' of the party in

difficult times, which makes it the right choice when it comes to voting decisions. In the case of CHADEMA, an individual member of parliament took a personal initiative to brand face masks with her name to strengthen her personal brand. Human brands in politics are as important as party brands; they complement each other.

This study is proof that political branding has no low season. Politicians look to strengthen their positions at all times irrespective of situations such as pandemics other human disasters. Advertising only changes shape and tone, carrying considerate and caring messages as party logos, names, slogans, and symbols hover on each aid donated to the affected communities. Politicians in Tanzania took the opportunity to appear more human and helpful to people in the covid-19 pandemic. It, however, remains difficult to measure the level to which their branding manoeuvre succeeded in turning voters' heads.

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