Culture and political marketing: the case of female candidates in 2014 Parliamentary election in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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Abstract

This study investigates the female candidates' practices during the parliamentary election to explore their strategies in political marketing in 2014. Parliamentary election is at an infancy stage in the country. The area of the Arabian Gulf States is new to democracy and parliament election. Its culture is described as Arab-Muslim and tribalism that has its impact on the female candidates to the extent that they can be characterized as relationship-oriented candidates. The study applied Grounded Theory the appropriate strategy in data collection and analysis. Interviews were held with ten female candidates. Two daily newspapers (*Akhbar Al Khaleej* and *Al Ayam*), and social media (Instagram and Twitter), posters and advertisements were secondary sources. Data were collected in the period between 1st October and 31st December 2014. It would be better if the research covered earlier period. The findings show that the female candidates practices relationship-oriented approach of political marketing and were controlled by culture in their election campaigns. Furthermore, the female candidates relied on relationships with stakeholders to stand for election. The study contributes to the field of political marketing. The study provides more understanding of the Arab-Muslim culture which influences the parliamentary candidates in election in general and female candidates in specific.

Key Words: Political marketing, female candidates, Bahrain, relationship-oriented candidate, Arab-Muslim culture.

1.   Introduction

Candidates use political marketing strategies to win in elections (Lilleker and Lees-Marshment 2005: 6). Political marketing is the use of commercial marketing concepts and techniques in politics. Candidates, governments and political parties operate the same principles in the commercial marketplace in their election campaigns (Kotler and Kotler, 1981; Lees-Marshment, 2010; Lilleker and Lees-Marshment, 2005). Political marketing is a social exchange process (Alderson and Martin 1965; Hunt 1976; Ardnt, 1983) to establish, maintain and enhance long-term relationships at a profit for society, so that the objectives of the individual political actors and organizations involved are met (Henneberg, 2002). O'Cass (1996) noted that the exchange process is accomplished when the voters cast their votes. In return, the candidate or the political party offers better government and policies after election. Lilleker and Less-Marshment (2005), Henneberg (2002) and Ravld and Gronroos (1996) noted that it is important to use the tools of political marketing to create relationship between the candidate and voters. Relationship marketing enables political party/candidate to create long-term customer loyalty.

Organizational culture influences the individuals' thinking; attitudes and behaviour. Schein (2004, p. 1) defined culture as it is "both a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times. Being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shapes by leadership behavior, and a set of structures, routines, and norms that guide and constrain behavior". Culture involves beliefs and behaviour, exists at a various levels, and manifests itself in a wide range of features of organizational life (Hofstede, 1990). Organizational culture, in large part, comprises organizationally shared values, beliefs, and schemas (Lord and Maher, 1991) that influence the candidates' decision making and their political orientation. European countries for example, have long history in practicing democracy and election which became a culture. Voters in Europe select representatives based on individuals' decisions. Hofstede described societies in Europe

as individualistic (Hofstede, 1980). Thus, candidates and political parties need to persuade voters to select them not the others. This requires that the candidates should have more sales skills to persuade voters. German, Swedish, the USA and the UK political parties are characterized as sales-oriented parities (Maier, *et al*, 2010; Stromback, 2010; Knuckey, 2010; Lees-Marshment, 2010).

In collectivist culture such as Taiwan, political parties are increasingly aware of political marketing (Fell, and Cheng, 2010). Fell and Chang, 2010 found that the market-oriented party will generally defeat the product-oriented party and market-oriented party will generally defeat a sales-oriented party. In Malaysia, it was found that Malaysian political parties are facing with the group of voters that are very demanding and vocal in highlighting their issues and concerns (Badaruddin, *et al*., 2013). Badaruddin, et al. 2013, added that the 12th General Election, 2008 has become more unpredictable and more challenging.

The influence of culture in Arab-Muslim countries on the candidates' campaigns is clearly observed in the slogans of the candidates. Al-Azzam and Al- Azzam (2014) noted that some candidates tend to exploit the religious feeling of voters by setting slogans that show their religious interests in order persuade people. Al-Abed Al-Haq and Hussein (n.d.) found that 2.5% of Tunisians and Egyptians slogans in *Arrabea Al Arabi* in 2011 was based on the tenets of Islam ranging from Qur'an verses to Hadeth (Prophet Mohammed's saying).

2. The Kingdom of Bahrain

The Kingdom of Bahrain is located at the middle of the Arabian Gulf. The country is connected with Saudi Arabia by a 25 KM causeway. It became a constitutional hereditary monarchy in 2002. Its authority is divided into three authorities; Council of Ministers (*Majlis Al Wuzaraa'*), the Legislative Council-National Assembly (*Al Majlis Al Watani*) and the Judicial Authority (*Al Majlis Al Qadai*). *Al Majlis Al Watani* is two chambers; Consultative Chamber (*Majlis Ashshura*) which consists of 40 appointed members, and Deputy Chamber (*Majlis Annwab)* which consists of 40 elected members. By implementing the bicameral legislative, the Kingdom of Bahrain established two systems in one legislative authority; the Islamic approach which represented in *Majlis Ashshura* and the European approach which believes in people participation in making decision in *Majlis Annwab*.

Women gained the leadership trust and hence they were appointed in higher positions (Supreme Council for Women, 2013). Statistics showed that women in the Kingdom of Bahrain represent 49.10% of the people (Central Informatics Organization, 2013). Women make up 31.84% of the workforces (ibid). The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain 2002 guaranteed the political rights for both men and women to vote and stand for election. Thus, women in the Kingdom of Bahrain participated in election and enjoyed their political rights in voting and standing for election since the first parliament election in 2002.

2.1 Culture of the Kingdom of Bahrain

The culture in Kingdom of Bahrain is described as mixed of Arab traditions and Islam teachings. Although, the Kingdom of Bahrain entered industrialization era since 1932 when oil was discovered to change the social and economical status, the society of Bahrain still live in a cohort and medium tribalism and following the teachings of Islam. Although, the people of Bahrain are modern, most of them are members and loyal and believe in the tribe (*Al Qabilah*) values. These tribes (*Al Qabilah*) are extended in the other GCC (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman and Qatar). Tribal society shared collective values. In tribe, junior individuals are loyal, obey and follow the orders of seniors- Head of the tribe (*Shiekh Al Qabilah*). The GCC is influenced by three regional ideological powers; Saudi Arabia (Muslim Sunni Salafists), Iran (Shea' Welayat Al

Faqeh) and Iraq (Muslim Sunni and Shea), which influenced the individuals' attitudes and behavior. However, the people of Bahrain were influenced by other cultures; still they are controlled by Arab traditions and Islam teachings. On his website, Hofstede (2014) ranked Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries are high in masculine index (MAS), high collectivist. The GCC people are proud being live in tribal structure society.

2.3 Women and Supreme Council for Women (SCW)
The Supreme Council for Women (SCW) is the strategic partner for women in the Kingdom of Bahrain. SCW was established in 2001 with main aim of empowering women at all spheres of Bahrain society. SCW is headed by HRH Princess Sabeeka bent Ibrahim Al Khalifah, the wife of His Majesty the King of Bahrain to promote the status of women, promote better awareness of their capabilities, ensure that their rights are protected and help tackle problems in different spheres of society. SCW played important role in empowering women in all spheres including political practices (Supreme Council of Women, 2013).
In the 2014 Parliament election in the Kingdom of Bahrain, 22 female candidates stood for parliament election. Three out of 22 female candidates won the election and another three female candidates could stand for the second round of election, but could not win (Directorate of Election and Referendum, 2014). All of the female candidates used strategies and techniques of political marketing to stand for election. This study investigates the behavior of female candidates in the 2014 parliament election.
It is hard to investigate the election cycle (from the 2010 to 2014 election) because most of the candidates starts their election campaigns activities only few weeks before elections and they stop them immediately after the election results are announced until the next election.

3. Methodology

This inductive exploratory explanatory qualitative research applies Grounded Theory (GT) as it is the appropriate methodology to conduct this study. GT is a qualitative approach uses inductive reasoning depends on data in all steps of its procedures to develop theory of a phenomenon. According to Strauss and Corbin, 1990 GT is a qualitative research method that uses as systemic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived theory about a phenomenon.

Data were mainly collected from 10 semi structured in-depth interviews with 10 female candidates who stood for the 2014 parliament election in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The second source of data was documents from newspapers and social media and other documents such as posters, advertisements, announcements and brochures.

4. Findings

The findings show that there were two groups of factors played big role in the female candidates' election campaigns. Internal factors; 1) apparent in media and in public, and 2) utilization of political marketing strategies. The external factors are represented in 1) culture in terms of masculinity, tribalism, stereotype of women and the concept of *Welayat Al Maraa'* (the rule of women), 2) support, and 3) unfriendly constituencies. The paper focuses on the culture impact on the female candidates' campaigns in the election.

4.1 Masculinity

Study that masculine culture has traits such as assertive, competitive, tough, and aggressive. Data show that there were 7 of the Informants stated that masculinity was the main challenge in her campaign.

4.2 Tribalism

In tribal societies, the members of the tribe follow the Head of the tribe orders and recommendations. Although, the tribalism was not exists in all the governorates but, there were three of the Informants noted that tribalism was the cultural factor that influenced their campaigns. The Head of the tribe plays important role in convincing the members of the tribe to select a candidate not the other.

4.3 Stereotype of women

According to Aronson *et al*. 1998 "*members of stereotyped groups often extra pressure in situations where their behaviour can confirm the negative reputation that group lacks a valued ability*". Aronson *et al*. 1998 called this pressure "stereotype threats". Female candidates faced such stereotype threats in their election campaigns. Most of the informants indicted that they faced some selected issues from Arab traditions and Islam issues such as "*Al Nessa' Naqesat Aqil w Deen*" which means (women are incomplete mind and religion), and *Hadeeth* of Prophet Mohammed (PUH) "*Ma Aflah Qumon walau Amruhum Imraa*'" which means (people who are led by a woman would not success). However, most of Muslim scholars agree that the Prophet Mohammed said this Hadeeth (people led by a woman would not success) in certain occasion. The political societies (parties) used these issues as stereotype threat against the female candidates and led them to lose their balance on their campaigns.

4.4 Welayat Al Maraa'.

"*Al Welayeh*" means (to rule). Al Mansori, 2011, mentioned that there are two levels of *Welayeh*; *Welayeh Khasah* (private sphere) such as marriage and finance. The second level is the *Welayeh Ameh* (Public sphere) the holding offices. Al Mansori, 2011 stated that most of the modern Muslim scholars agree that Islam encouraged women and has no objection that women hold both private and public spheres including PM, but not the presidential position.

Islamic political societies (parties) used the issue of *Welayat Al Maraa'*. The informants indicated in their interviews that they faced the issue of *Welayat Al Maraa'* to extent that many of them that their objectives in their campaigns were shifted from convincing voters to vote for her to convincing them to vote for women.

4.5 Were the female candidates a good political product?

A candidate is a political product has attributes that attract the voters to select him or her not the other. Age, qualifications, appearance, personality and work experience are attributes that attract the voters.

Data show that 6 of the Informants' ages fall between 30-40 years old, 1 of them fall in the age 41-50 and 3 of them fall in the age between 51-60 years old. All of the Informants have work experience. Six informants hold higher qualification (PhD and Master), and three of them hold Bs degree.

Nine of the Informants stood for election as independents, and one of them represents her political society (party). Three of the Informants have experience in elections. They stood for parliament election in the past. Seven of them stood for election for the first time. The Informants faced tough competition from ideological societies (parties). Nine of the Informants stood against

4 to 7 men competitors, and one of them stood against 12 male competitors. Two of the Informants stood against other female candidates.

To investigate the female candidates' awareness of political marketing, the informants were asked to define political marketing. An informant believes that political marketing is sales process. Another Informant believes that a candidate is product that should be sold. Another Informant mentioned that it is the ability and skills of sales.

On the other hand, an informant said that political marketing is all about media campaign. She stated;

> *"Frankly I do not know what political marketing is. But for me I conducted a media campaign. I had to do all activities of the media campaign. ……Political marketing is not a primary part but it was media campaign. Political marketing was a part of media campaign; it was the whole process of the election".*

The informants responses show that most of them believe that political marketing is about selling the political product (the candidates) which needs sales skills and strategies to do so.

4.6 Unfriendly and friendly Constituencies

Data show that there were some governorates and consistencies can be called "*unfriendly constituencies*". In these constituencies, female candidates could not collect votes that qualify them to win. On the other hand, there were some constituencies can be called "*friendly constituencies*". In these constituencies, female candidates were supported by voters and other institutions and enabled them to win or could stand for the second round and collected good votes share in election.

4.7 Supporters

There were some civil institutions that support the female candidates. SCW was the strategic partner of the female candidates. SCW provided logistic support presented in workshops and courses to enable and empower the female candidates in their election campaigns.

4.8 The Power of Relationship

The culture of Bahrain as it is described earlier controlled the female candidates to extent that they selected to create relation networks. The Kingdom of Bahrain is small country and people almost know each other. In such a culture, people have relations in the societies. The Informants heavily relied on their relationship in conducting their election campaigns.

All of the Informants relied on their relations to conduct their campaigns. Relations refer to close families (brothers, sisters, father and mother), their relatives (members from same family such as cousins, uncles ...etc.), friends, social characters, and the people who work in media (newspapers, social media admins).

5. Conclusion

This paper discussed the cultural factor as one of the external factors that influenced the female candidates' election campaigns. The female candidates were relationship-oriented. The Informants were controlled by the Arab-Muslim culture.

The study contributes theoretically. The study focused on culture factor as it plays big role in candidates' strategies. The study contributes methodologically. Implementing GT enables the researcher to analyses data to reflect the reality of the scene. Moreover, the study suggested some recommendations to improve the female candidates to face the cultural factor.

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