

Research Article

Political Leader Image and its Role in Shaping India's Global Country Image During Periods of Geopolitical Uncertainty

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Abstract: A nation is represented by its leading political figures. The nation is affected by every move made by the political figurehead. Research on how the perceptions of political leaders affect those of their home nations is lacking. Our study examines for the first time how a political leader's image affects the image of their home country, even though prior research suggests that a political leader may have significant influence in bringing benefits to their nation. Initially, a qualitative study is done using focus groups. Then, 322 respondents from various Indian cities are given a questionnaire as part of a quantitative study. Three crucial leader traits—leadership, competence, and integrity—are defined by factor analysis. Four characteristics are also used to categorize a nation's image: values and ethics, the socioeconomic-political system, aesthetics, and belongingness. The findings indicate that the perception of a nation is significantly influenced by the image of its political leaders. Additionally, different aspects of a political leader's image have different levels of influence on the image of the nation; competence has the biggest effect on the country image, followed by leadership and integrity.

Keywords: political leader image, country image, competence, integrity, leadership, belongingness, aesthetics.

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INTRODUCTION

Having a good reputation is crucial for a nation to draw in tourists, international workers, students, and investment. Nation image is a crucial idea in current globalized society because it gives the countries soft power, which allows them to accomplish favorable results through attraction as opposed to the conventional coercion of military force (Nye, 2008). States must strengthen their soft power by projecting an appealing image of their nation in order to cultivate a favorable position in the world (Van Ham, 2008).

Research on the elements that affect a nation's image is extensive, but less is known about the possible transfer effects of political leaders' perceptions on those of their home nations. This is true even though other studies have shown that a political figure may have a significant impact on whether or not their nation benefits from these initiatives (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2013; Yoo & Jin, 2015). Due to a rise in individualized international media coverage, the country's political leader's image has become increasingly significant in the global arena in addition to the country's image (Balmas, 2017; Balmas & Sheaffer, 2014; Lass, 1995).

The purpose of this study is to investigate and make the hypothesis that a leader's image affects the image of their nation, which may have significant ramifications for public diplomacy and image management in that nation. Our goal is also to determine which aspects of a political leader's image have the most impact on the perception of the nation.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

According to Casper (2002), political leaders need to possess the following three qualities of successful politicians:

- a. Since people are being themselves at a high level and can lead themselves to varying degrees in the modern day, good political leaders must uphold honor and honesty. Consequently, political leaders need to become "leaders of the leaders" themselves.
- b. Vision is essential for political leaders. They must be able to meet the organization's potential and circumstances and be trustworthy towards the citizens.

Furthermore, those goals must be compelling and difficult enough for people to desire to successfully realize them, which will raise the bar for work. The organization itself must enforce a long-term vision that is clear and encompasses a wide range of viewpoints. Effective leaders must think about how to use organizational resources, particularly human resources, to their fullest potential. In order to do this, leaders must play a part in motivating staff members to give their jobs their hundred percent.

- c. Effective political leaders must be upbeat, optimistic, and make decisions based only on their own principles rather than their personal interests. In addition, leaders need to be eager to learn new things in order to better themselves, learn from their failures, and provide others the opportunity to gain new experiences by persevering in problem-solving.

The three key traits of political leadership for national development in the period of globalization are competence, leadership, and integrity, according to this study's conceptualization of the subject based on the previously stated literature.

The idea of "country image" describes how its citizens view their own nation. It is essentially non-rational and depicts the essential and distinctive features of that nation that have not changed throughout time (Fan, 2010). Additionally, it represents the nation's and its citizens' self-perception (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). The term "nation image" refers to a unique type of image, specifically the image of the entire nation. According to Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002), these images are unique since they exist in every nation or country, even if they are not intentionally created.

Numerous disciplines have conducted research on country images, which has resulted in a wide range of pertinent terminology and, consequently, conceptualization and operationalization issues (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). According to Ingenhoff and Buhmann (2018), business studies, social psychology, political science, and communication sciences are the four scientific fields that take into account and conceptualize national image. Accordingly, the authors contend that country images might be interpreted as brand associations, cognitive and/or affective attitudes, stereotypes, self-perceptions (i.e., identity), mass-mediated information, or social reputation, depending on the particular scientific discipline and the goals of the study.

Thus, we suggest that perceived associations between a political leader's image and that of their home country can be explained by a "spill-over effect," which is the term used to describe the transfer of images between images of countries and images of sub-country entities, including politicians, domestic organizations, products, and brands (Ingenhoff, Buhmann, White, Zhang, & Kioussis, 2018).

These transfer effects happen when political leader and home country are considered to have similar characteristics (Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002; Pickett, 2001; Pickett & Perrott, 2004).

This leads us to our first hypothesis

- **H1:** The political leader's image has an impact on the home country's image.

In addition to demonstrating the impact a politician's image has on the party they head, Davies and Mian (2010) hypothesized that the various aspects of a leader's image may have varying effects on the item to which the image is applied. Another study showed that the citizens of a country are affected differently by the image features of its political leaders (Balmas, 2018). Therefore, we presume that the various aspects of a political leader's image differ in the extent to which they impact the nation's image:

- **H2:** The dimensions of the political leader's image have varying degrees of influence on the country image.

Theoretical framework Leader Image

| City of residence | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Mumbai/Navi Mumbai | 88 | 27.3 | 27.3 | 27.3 |
| | Pune | 63 | 19.6 | 19.6 | 46.9 |
| | Delhi | 56 | 17.4 | 17.4 | 64.3 |
| | Kolkata | 46 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 78.6 |
| | Chennai | 33 | 10.2 | 10.2 | 88.8 |
| | Bengaluru | 36 | 11.2 | 11.2 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 322 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Comment: The sample comprises of people from different cities of India namely Mumbai/Navi Mumbai (27.3%), Pune (19.6%), Delhi (17.4%), Kolkata (14.3%), Chennai (10.2%) and Bengaluru (11.2%).

(3) Reliability of different constructs

(i) Political leader image

(a) Leadership

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .994 | 17 |

(b) Integrity

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .996 | 9 |

Comment: Since the value of Cronbach alpha > 0.7, the construct has high reliability.

(c) Competence

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .994 | 9 |

Comment: Since the value of Cronbach alpha > 0.7, the construct has high reliability.

(ii) Country image

(a) Values and ethics

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .984 | 8 |

Comment: Since the value of Cronbach alpha > 0.7, the construct has high reliability.

(b) Socio-economic-political system

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .989 | 18 |

Comment: Since the value of Cronbach alpha > 0.7, the construct has high reliability.

(c) Aesthetics

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|--|
|------------------------|--|

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| .964 | 6 |

Comment: Since the value of Cronbach alpha > 0.7, the construct has high reliability.

(d) Belongingness

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .936 | 4 |

Comment: Since the value of Cronbach alpha > 0.7, the construct has high reliability.

(4) Factor analysis

It was done on leader image and country image.

We have 3 factors under 'Leader image' namely (i) Integrity (ii) Leadership and (iii) Competence.

(b) Country image

We have 4 factors under 'Country image' namely (i) Socio-economic political system (ii) Aesthetics (iii) Belongingness (iv) Values and ethics.

(5) Testing of hypothesis

To find out whether the political leader's image has any significant impact on the home country's image, we have the following set of hypotheses:

- **H0:** The political leader's image has no significant impact on the home country's image.
- **H1:** The political leader's image has a significant impact on the home country's image.

Regression is used to test the above hypothesis.

| ANOVAa | | | | | | |
|---|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------|
| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | .864 | 1 | .864 | 6.145 | .014b |
| | Residual | 44.988 | 320 | .141 | | |
| | Total | 45.852 | 321 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: Country image | | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Leader image | | | | | | |

Comment: Since the significance value is 0.014 < 0.05, we reject H0 and conclude that the political leader's image has a significant impact on the home country's image.

2. To find out whether the dimensions of the political leader's image have significantly varying degrees of influence on the country image, we have the following set of hypothesis:

- **H0:** The dimensions of the political leader's image do not have significantly varying degrees of influence on the country image.
- **H1:** The dimensions of the political leader's image have significantly varying degrees of influence on the country image.

Regression is used to test the above hypothesis.

| ANOVAa | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------|
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 3.848 | 3 | 1.283 | 9.712 | .000b |
| | Residual | 42.003 | 318 | .132 | | |
| | Total | 45.852 | 321 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: Country image | | | | | | |

b. Predictors: (Constant), Competence, Integrity, Leadership

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 4.421 | .210 | | 21.046 | .000 |
| | Integrity | -.069 | .031 | -.118 | -2.182 | .030 |
| | Leadership | .065 | .029 | .124 | 2.289 | .023 |
| | Competence | -.107 | .030 | -.199 | -3.630 | .000 |

Dependent Variable: Country image

Comment: Looking at the Sig. value column, we see that the significance value for Competence is the lowest (0.000), followed by leadership (0.023) and integrity (0.030). This shows that competence of the political leader has the maximum impact on country image followed by leadership and integrity.

Summary of testing of hypothesis

| Sr. No. | Null Hypothesis | Test used | Significance value | Decision | Conclusion |
|---------|---|------------|---|-----------|--|
| 1. | The political leader's image has no significant impact on the home country's image. | Regression | 0.014 < 0.05 | Reject H0 | The political leader's image has a significant impact on the home country's image. |
| 2. | The dimensions of the political leader's image do not have significantly varying degrees of influence on the country image. | Regression | 0.03 < 0.05 for Integrity 0.023 < 0.05 for Leadership 0.000 < 0.05 for Competence | Reject Ho | The dimensions of the political leader's image have significantly varying degrees of influence on the country image. The leader's competence has the maximum impact on country image followed by leadership and Integrity. |

(6) Use of Structural Equation modelling
Overall Tests

| Model tests | | | | | | | |
|----------------|--|----------------|--|-----|--|--------|--|
| Label | | X ² | | df | | p | |
| User Model | | 2528 | | 685 | | < .001 | |
| Baseline Model | | 32408 | | 741 | | < .001 | |

| Fit indices | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|-------|--|--------------------------|--|--------|--|
| | | | | 95% Confidence Intervals | | | |
| SRMR | | RMSEA | | Lower | | Upper | |
| RMSEA p | | | | | | | |
| 0.017 | | 0.091 | | 0.088 | | 0.095 | |
| | | | | | | < .001 | |

| User model versus baseline model | | | |
|--|--|--|-------|
| | | | Model |
| Comparative Fit Index (CFI) | | | 0.942 |
| Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) | | | 0.937 |
| Bentler-Bonett Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI) | | | 0.937 |
| Relative Noncentrality Index (RNI) | | | 0.942 |
| Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index (NFI) | | | 0.922 |
| Bollen's Relative Fit Index (RFI) | | | 0.916 |
| Bollen's Incremental Fit Index (IFI) | | | 0.942 |
| Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI) | | | 0.852 |

Estimates

| Parameters estimates | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--------|--|--|--|---------|-------|--|
| Dep | Pred | | | | β | p | |
| Soc_Eco_Pol_system | Compet | | | | 1.5031 | 0.031 | |
| Soc_Eco_Pol_system | Leader | | | | 1.7478 | 0.005 | |
| Soc_Eco_Pol_system | Integ | | | | 1.2324 | 0.013 | |
| Aesth | Compet | | | | 2.5641 | 0.021 | |
| Aesth | Leader | | | | 0.8967 | 0.043 | |
| Aesth | Integ | | | | 0.7850 | 0.024 | |

| Parameters estimates | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--------|--|--|--|---------|--|-------|--|
| Dep | | Pred | | | | β | | p | |
| Val_and_ethics | | Compet | | | | 1.5641 | | 0.036 | |
| Val_and_ethics | | Leader | | | | 1.9876 | | 0.045 | |
| Val_and_ethics | | Integ | | | | 1.5643 | | 0.016 | |
| Belong | | Compet | | | | 2.4317 | | 0.043 | |
| Belong | | Leader | | | | 1.6754 | | 0.032 | |
| Belong | | Integ | | | | 1.6543 | | 0.021 | |

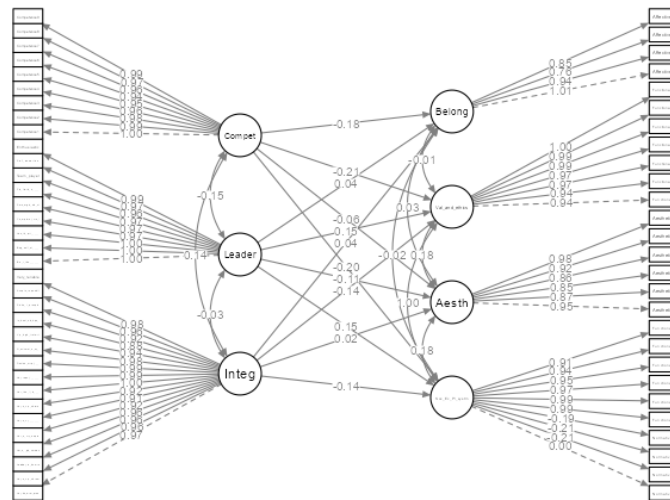
**Estimates
Additional outputs**

| Reliability indices | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|--|----------|--|------------|--|------------|--|------------|--|-------|--|
| Variable | | α | | ω_1 | | ω_2 | | ω_3 | | AVE | |
| Integrity | | 0.964 | | 0.967 | | 0.971 | | 0.973 | | 0.706 | |
| Leadership | | 0.956 | | 0.946 | | 0.936 | | 0.935 | | 0.786 | |
| Competence | | 0.903 | | 0.914 | | 0.924 | | 0.914 | | 0.765 | |
| SEP | | 0.954 | | 0.944 | | 0.932 | | 0.941 | | 0.765 | |
| Values | | 0.921 | | 0.916 | | 0.926 | | 0.915 | | 0.786 | |
| Aesth | | 0.914 | | 0.924 | | 0.924 | | 0.914 | | 0.564 | |
| Belonging | | 0.894 | | 0.894 | | 0.932 | | 0.932 | | 0.675 | |

| Mardia's coefficients | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|-------------|--|-----|--|----------|--|-------|--|--------|--|
| | | Coefficient | | z | | χ^2 | | df | | p | |
| Skewness | | 1862 | | | | 99927 | | 10660 | | < .001 | |
| Kurtosis | | 3419 | | 289 | | | | | | < .001 | |



Path Diagram



The model fit indices (CFI, TLI, NNFI > 0.9, RMSEA < 0.1) show that the model is a good fit. The p values of all the statements in the constructs are less than 0.01 which shows that the statements on leader image have a significant impact on country image.

The Cronbach alpha values and AVE (Average variance extracted) for all the constructs are all greater than 0.7. This shows that all these constructs have high reliability and validity.

Results and findings:

The study is intended to find out whether political leader image significantly impacts country image. Also, we intend to find out whether different leader characteristics have varying impacts on country image.

Using factor analysis, we have 3 factors under ‘Leader image’ namely (i) Integrity (ii) Leadership and (iii) Competence. Also, we get 4 factors under ‘Country image’ namely (i) Socio-economic-political system (ii) Values and ethics (iii) Aesthetics and (iv) belongingness.

Using regression, we conclude that the political leader’s image has a significant impact on the home country’s image. Also, the dimensions of the political leader’s image have significantly varying degrees of influence on the country image. The leader’s competence has the maximum impact on country image followed by leadership and Integrity.

The model fit indices (CFI, TLI, NNFI > 0.9, RMSEA < 0.1) show that the model is a good fit. The p values of all the statements in the constructs are less than 0.01 which shows that the statements on leader image have a significant impact on country image.

The Cronbach alpha values and AVE (Average variance extracted) for the three exogenous variables i.e. integrity, leadership and competence are all greater than 0.7. This shows that all these constructs have high reliability and validity. Hence we have successfully validated our model.

DISCUSSION:

Based on the study, we were able to show that a political leader’s image has a significant influence on country image. A country’s image is influenced by a multitude of factors and, according to our results, its political leader is one of them. Our results show that there is a significant spill-over effect of a political leader’s image onto that of their home country. The competence dimension was the most influential attribute, suggesting that the more capable and efficient a political leader was regarded to be, the better the perception of their home country’s image. This dimension was followed by leadership and integrity. This shows that a political leader should be able to lead his party and the country effectively and should also be a person of honesty and integrity.

In a political context, the order of these effects is interesting as it suggests that displays of competence by a political leader (e.g., eagerness to learn, ability to solve problems, being well-informed about global issues) might have a stronger impact on their country's image than their leadership and integrity.

Managerial implications: In conclusion, this research contributes important insights to the literature on country images as it shows that an effect from the political leader's image on the country image exists. The results of this study imply that the political leader and his or her politically relevant character traits need to be taken into account when employing public diplomacy and strategic country communication campaigns, as the political leader will influence the country image. As countries aim to create and project a favourable image of themselves to gain such benefits as investment and tourism, the international PR of states is an important asset in furthering this goal.

Limitations and scope for further research:

1. The sample size is limited to 322 respondents taken from different cities of India. In future, the scope of the study can be extended to people from rural areas also.
2. The study has been used for India which is a democracy. In future, this study can be extended to other democracies like USA.
3. The impact of political leader image on country image can be studied for presidential systems in comparison with parliamentary systems.

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