

Designing a Political Marketing Management Model

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to develop a comprehensive, context-sensitive model of political marketing management grounded in the institutional, cultural, communicative, and ethical characteristics of Iran's political environment. This qualitative study was conducted within an interpretive-constructivist paradigm using an inductive approach. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 experts, including university professors, political strategists, and former members of parliament. Participants were selected purposively based on their theoretical knowledge and practical experience in political and electoral affairs. The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis method. Data management and coding were performed in MAXQDA software through open, axial, and selective coding. The analytical process included repeated familiarization with the transcripts, generation of initial codes, categorization of conceptually related codes, review and refinement of themes, definition of organizing and global themes, and development of the final conceptual model. The analysis generated 33 open codes that were integrated into six organizing themes: structural and institutional ecology, voter identity dynamics, social capital and the authority of traditional networks, localized political marketing-mix and brand architecture, organizational agility and media defense, and ethical and normative governance. These themes were subsequently organized into three overarching dimensions. The analytical-cognitive dimension comprised environmental intelligence and indigenous voter analysis; the design-strategic dimension incorporated value architecture, political branding, and strategic configuration; and the executive-normative dimension encompassed agile campaign operations, rapid media response, performance monitoring, and ethical governance. The resulting model indicated that political marketing management is shaped by reciprocal relationships among institutional constraints, identity-based voter behavior, traditional reference networks, localized communication channels, organizational responsiveness, and binding ethical principles. Effective political marketing management requires more than short-term promotional techniques. It depends on indigenous voter segmentation, credible relationships with traditional networks, verifiable political promises, agile campaign structures, rapid responses to misinformation, financial transparency, and strict adherence to ethical standards. Ethics functions as a strategic mechanism for protecting social capital and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the political brand.

Keywords: Political marketing management, thematic analysis, indigenous political marketing, political branding, ethical governance, traditional reference networks.

1. Introduction

Political marketing has evolved from a limited set of electoral advertising techniques into a multidisciplinary field concerned with the systematic management of relationships among candidates, political parties, voters, institutions, media actors, and other stakeholders. Early approaches largely equated political marketing with persuasion, publicity, campaign slogans, and the strategic presentation of candidates to voters, particularly during formally defined election periods. Such approaches treated the electorate as a political market and the candidate or party as a political product that had to be introduced, differentiated, and promoted. In this context, political marketing was understood as a set of measures designed to persuade voters and influence electoral choices (Mohammadian & Shamsi, 2009). Subsequent scholarship expanded this conception by integrating theories of voter behavior, market segmentation, political communication, branding, organizational strategy, and relationship management (Cwalina et al., 2011). Political marketing is therefore no longer limited to campaign advertising; it encompasses the identification of voter needs, environmental analysis, political-product development, candidate positioning, resource allocation, message distribution, campaign implementation, evaluation, and post-election relationship maintenance. Contemporary political organizations increasingly employ marketing logic to understand citizens, develop credible political value propositions, build emotional and cognitive associations, and establish sustained political engagement (Lees-Marshment, 2024). This transition has made political marketing management a strategic function rather than a temporary promotional activity.

A critical distinction must consequently be made between political marketing and political marketing management. Political marketing may refer to the individual techniques used to communicate with voters, including speeches, advertisements, direct contact, opinion polling, image construction, and digital outreach. Political marketing management, however, involves the coordinated planning, implementation, monitoring, and modification of these activities within a coherent strategic architecture. It connects environmental intelligence, voter segmentation, candidate branding, organizational structure, ethical governance, and performance control. Classical process models sought to operationalize this broader logic by adapting commercial marketing concepts to political competition. The political

marketing process model emphasized the adaptation of product, price, place, and promotion to electoral environments (Niffenegger, 2011), while multilevel planning frameworks highlighted constituency intelligence, competitor analysis, segmentation, positioning, targeting, and post-election evaluation (Palmer, 2014). Modern advertising models additionally emphasized political image, public relations, news management, and the professionalization of communication (Harris, 2010). These contributions provided important foundations, yet their applicability may be limited when political competition occurs in institutional and cultural environments that differ from the liberal-democratic and party-centered systems in which many of these models were developed.

The strategic value of political marketing is particularly evident in its ability to translate political programs into understandable and differentiated value propositions. Political products consist not only of manifestos and policy proposals but also of candidate personality, leadership style, ideological identity, performance record, symbolic associations, and the perceived credibility of promises. Political branding integrates these elements into a recognizable set of meanings through which citizens interpret candidates and parties. Political engagement can strengthen political brand knowledge and loyalty by increasing voters' familiarity, identification, and relational commitment (Fahad & Rashid, 2024). Similarly, the political marketing mix may affect voting intention directly and indirectly through political brand image, brand engagement, and political cynicism (Abbas et al., 2024). Iranian research has also demonstrated that political marketing-mix elements and party brand equity can contribute to voter commitment and loyalty (Asgarnejad Nouri et al., 2021). These findings indicate that electoral success is not solely determined by the quantity of communication; it depends on whether campaign activities generate coherent, credible, and emotionally meaningful brand associations. Research on brand personality, consumer-brand interaction, and parasocial relationships further suggests that relational and symbolic connections can strengthen brand equity, offering concepts that are applicable to political brands when adapted cautiously to electoral relationships (Rahimi Kalvar et al., 2020).

Authenticity has become a central requirement in this branding process. Voters are increasingly skeptical of highly scripted images, exaggerated promises, and communication that appears detached from candidates' actual conduct. The relational paradigm of political marketing therefore

emphasizes authenticity, responsiveness, interpersonal credibility, and long-term interaction rather than one-directional persuasion (Jackson & Lilleker, 2023). Nevertheless, political branding can create organizational pressures that transform candidates and elected representatives into disciplined brand ambassadors who must maintain consistency with centrally controlled messages (Marland & Wanger, 2019). This creates a persistent tension between coherence and authenticity: excessive message control can produce a recognizable political brand, but it can also make communication appear artificial and disconnected from local concerns. In Iran, this challenge is compounded by the prominence of candidate-centered politics, relatively unstable party structures, and the importance of personal reputation. A strategic political-branding model developed for Iranian political factions has accordingly emphasized the necessity of aligning political identity, communication, public expectations, and strategic positioning (Haghparast et al., 2024). Political marketing management must therefore coordinate the personal brand of the candidate with organizational identity, ideological commitments, community expectations, and demonstrable political performance.

Understanding voter behavior is another foundational component of political marketing management. Electoral decisions are influenced by political attitudes, perceived candidate competence, emotional responses, social identity, political involvement, geographical context, and evaluations of costs and benefits. Psychological models of voters' arguments suggest that the degree of political involvement affects information processing, reasoning, and susceptibility to persuasive messages (Hakimara, 2015). Voting behavior is also geographically differentiated, as patterns of political participation and electoral support may vary according to regional, cultural, ethnic, economic, and historical characteristics (Amini, 2015). Iranian studies of citizens' political behavior similarly indicate that electoral participation is shaped by heterogeneous motivations and patterns rather than a single rational-choice process (Yousefi Ramandi, 2018). Research concerning hidden motivations in voting behavior has further emphasized that citizens may not fully articulate the symbolic, psychological, or identity-based factors underlying their choices (Mohammadian & Yousefi, 2014). Consequently, conventional demographic segmentation alone cannot adequately explain electoral behavior. Political marketing management requires indigenous audience analysis that combines demographic characteristics with identity networks, political attitudes,

emotional orientations, perceived deprivation, local affiliations, and varying levels of commitment.

The importance of contextualized segmentation has been supported by studies examining the relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention across demographic groups (Khodadad Hosseini et al., 2019). Traditional political marketing tools also remain influential, particularly where interpersonal communication, local relationships, and established social institutions retain substantial authority (Kheiri et al., 2018). In many Iranian constituencies, voters' decisions are embedded within family, occupational, ethnic, religious, neighborhood, and kinship networks. Such networks influence which messages are received, which candidates are considered legitimate, and which promises are regarded as credible. Earlier Iranian models recognized that political marketing in elections must be adapted to the distinctive structure of the domestic political environment (Bagheri Dolatabadi & Hajipour, 2012), while strategic management research emphasized the need to connect electoral analysis, organizational resources, voter needs, and long-term political planning (Afjehei & Khademi Garashi, 2011). Later efforts to design political marketing planning models further demonstrated the necessity of integrating environmental assessment, strategic formulation, campaign implementation, and evaluation (Safarzadeh Parapari et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the relationships among institutional constraints, identity-based segmentation, traditional authority networks, political branding, operational agility, and ethical governance remain insufficiently integrated within a single process model.

Digital media have intensified both the opportunities and the complexity of political marketing management. Social media enable candidates and parties to communicate directly with citizens, observe public reactions, mobilize supporters, and circulate targeted content at comparatively low cost. The mediating role of social media in the relationship between political and social determinants and voting intention demonstrates that digital communication has become an integral component of electoral behavior (Bukari et al., 2023). Social media discourse also creates affiliation through linguistic patterns, shared evaluations, hashtags, humor, and collective positioning (Zappavigna, 2021). Influencers increasingly contribute to political participation by embedding political content within familiar forms of personal communication and lifestyle-oriented self-presentation (Pöyry & Reinikainen, 2024). Political talk can become part of influencers' curated identities, blurring the boundaries between commercial promotion, personal

branding, and political advocacy (Mardon et al., 2025). Emerging research conceptualizes political influencers as actors capable of connecting online visibility, political engagement, and electoral outcomes (Schwemmer & Riedl, 2025). These developments expand the campaign's communication network beyond parties, journalists, and official representatives, but they also complicate message control, transparency, and accountability.

Digital platforms also enable increasingly sophisticated forms of microtargeting. Personalized political messages can be designed according to prior attitudes, personality characteristics, behavioral data, and inferred preferences. However, the persuasive effect of political microtargeting depends on the interaction between message characteristics and pre-existing psychological dispositions (Decker & Krämer, 2023). Moreover, online campaigns are vulnerable to coordinated interference, fragmented micro-clusters, automated amplification, and networks that manipulate the visibility of political narratives. Analyses of social media mentions during elections demonstrate how apparently small clusters can intervene in campaign discourse and shape attention patterns (García-Ull et al., 2025). Digital political marketing must therefore include network analysis, source evaluation, rapid monitoring, and defensive communication capacity. Platform restrictions and unequal technological access further require contextual adaptation, especially in environments where international social networks may be filtered or unstable. A comprehensive management model should not assume unrestricted access to digital platforms; it must combine online tools with indigenous platforms, face-to-face communication, and locally trusted networks.

The emergence of synthetic media has further increased the strategic and ethical risks of digital campaigning. Deepfakes and manipulated political videos can create deception, uncertainty, and declining trust in news even when viewers do not fully believe the fabricated content (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). Political campaigns therefore require rapid-response teams capable of verifying information, identifying manipulated content, and issuing credible corrections before false narratives become established. Neuromarketing adds another layer of complexity by using neuroscientific and psychophysiological tools to examine subconscious reactions to messages, images, candidates, and political stimuli (Dergi, 2013). Recent discussions describe neuromarketing as a developing frontier capable of generating insights beyond conventional self-report measures (Boricean et al., 2023). Immersive communication

technologies such as augmented reality can also enhance engagement by creating interactive and memorable experiences (Scholz & Smith, 2019). Although such technologies may improve campaign communication, their use raises questions concerning informed consent, manipulation, privacy, psychological targeting, and the ethical limits of persuasion. Political marketing management must therefore incorporate technological innovation within an explicit normative framework rather than treating every available technique as strategically acceptable.

Low-cost and unconventional communication strategies have also become increasingly relevant, particularly for candidates and political groups with limited resources. Guerrilla marketing relies on creativity, surprise, local visibility, and nontraditional communication to achieve disproportionate attention without large advertising expenditures (Balážiová, 2020). Its political applications may involve viral content, symbolic interventions, volunteer networks, unexpected public events, and highly localized face-to-face activities. Research on guerrilla marketing in political and conflict environments shows that promotional practices can intersect with broader struggles over power, legitimacy, territory, and public perception (Fattal, 2018). Base-action political marketing similarly highlights the importance of field presence, grassroots activity, and context-specific political influence (Torabi et al., 2018). In Iran, where campaign periods are short and financial resources may be asymmetrical, such approaches may offer strategic advantages. However, unconventional tactics must be distinguished from deception, rumor production, character assassination, and covert manipulation. Creativity can increase engagement, but its legitimacy depends on whether it preserves truthfulness, social cohesion, and respect for political competitors.

The ethical dimension is especially significant in the Iranian political context, where elections are interpreted through legal, cultural, religious, and jurisprudential frameworks. Shiite political jurisprudence provides normative foundations for understanding political participation, legitimacy, electoral responsibility, and the moral limits of political conduct (Fallah & Izadi, 2019). Political marketing has also been examined in relation to the threefold pattern of Islamic political thought, demonstrating the need to reconcile strategic political communication with Islamic values and conceptions of governance (Barzegar & Raji, 2021). From this perspective, practices such as deliberate falsehood, defamation, character assassination, divisive ethnic mobilization, and opaque financial

dependency cannot be justified solely by their electoral effectiveness. The Iranian literature has introduced political marketing as a developing approach that must be adapted to domestic cultural and institutional conditions (Hosseini & Asalani, 2014; Morid Sadat & Asalani, 2014). Broader models of political and electoral competition have likewise emphasized that competition is shaped by institutional rules and normative expectations rather than unregulated market forces (Hosseini et al., 2019). Ethical governance must therefore be embedded in strategic design, resource acquisition, message production, media response, and performance evaluation.

The credibility of political promises is another important ethical and strategic issue. When political actors repeatedly present commitments concerning justice, freedom, welfare, or reform without producing visible outcomes, the gap between discourse and experience can weaken legitimacy and contribute to political disillusionment (Radmard & Haghgoo, 2020). Political products must therefore move beyond broad ideological declarations toward specific, feasible, time-bound, and verifiable commitments. Political marketing may also contribute to national soft power when it strengthens trust, participation, legitimacy, and coherent political communication (Fattahpour et al., 2022). Conversely, manipulative or inconsistent campaigns may erode social capital and deepen cynicism. The literature on political marketing in Iran has increasingly acknowledged the need for systematic planning, yet many studies remain focused on individual variables such as the marketing mix, brand equity, voter intention, persuasion, or campaign tools. Foundational texts have provided extensive descriptions of political marketing concepts and practices (Kimasi et al., 2017), while other scholarship has discussed its strategic development and contemporary significance (Bastian, 2020). However, conceptual fragmentation persists because analytical, strategic, operational, technological, social, and ethical dimensions are frequently examined separately.

International evidence further confirms that political marketing effects depend on cultural and electoral context. Research among Cypriot voters found that political marketing activities influence voting behavior but operate through context-dependent perceptions and relationships (Sophocleous et al., 2024). This reinforces the limited transferability of models developed in different political systems. A model that is effective in a stable party system with open media competition, long campaign cycles, and transparent financing may not adequately explain an environment characterized by candidate-centered

competition, institutional entry filters, short advertising periods, strong traditional networks, identity-based voting, platform restrictions, and religiously grounded ethical boundaries. Iranian research has repeatedly sought to localize political marketing, yet the field still lacks an empirically grounded model that explains how campaign managers should move from environmental diagnosis to voter analysis, value architecture, brand formation, message distribution, agile execution, media defense, and ethical control. Such a model must recognize political marketing management as an adaptive and recursive process in which implementation generates feedback, feedback modifies diagnosis, and ethical governance regulates every stage rather than appearing as a peripheral recommendation.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to design a comprehensive indigenous model of political marketing management by integrating the analytical-cognitive, design-strategic, and executive-normative requirements of Iran's political and electoral environment.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study employed a qualitative research design within the interpretive-constructivist paradigm to develop an indigenous model of political marketing management appropriate to Iran's political, institutional, cultural, and ethical context. An inductive approach was adopted because the purpose was to generate the components and relationships of the model directly from the lived experiences, professional observations, and practical knowledge of political and academic experts rather than to test or impose a previously developed Western framework. From this epistemological perspective, political marketing management was regarded as a context-dependent and socially constructed phenomenon shaped by interactions among political actors, voters, formal institutions, informal networks, cultural norms, media environments, and ethical expectations. The study was conducted in Isfahan, Iran, and the participants consisted of 10 experts with relevant theoretical or practical experience in politics, electoral campaigns, political strategy, and marketing management. The expert group included university professors, political strategists, and former members of parliament, thereby allowing the phenomenon to be examined from academic, managerial, and legislative perspectives. Participants were included because their professional backgrounds enabled them to provide detailed information about voter behavior, campaign planning, political branding, traditional reference

networks, institutional restrictions, media challenges, and ethical requirements in Iranian elections. The sample size was determined according to the principle of theoretical saturation. Accordingly, interviews and preliminary analyses proceeded concurrently until the collected data no longer generated substantially new concepts, categories, or relationships relevant to the emerging model. The final sample of 10 participants was considered sufficient to achieve saturation and provide the conceptual depth required for thematic model development. Because the study sought to understand the structures and processes of political marketing management rather than estimate the prevalence of particular views, the adequacy of the sample was assessed according to the richness, relevance, and explanatory power of the data rather than statistical representativeness.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which served as the primary research instrument. This method was selected because it provided sufficient structure to ensure that the principal dimensions of political marketing management were discussed while also allowing participants to elaborate on their personal experiences, interpretations, examples, and context-specific observations. The interview guide focused on the principal challenges of political marketing management in Iran, the differences between political marketing and the strategic management of political marketing, the influence of institutional and legal structures on electoral campaigns, the characteristics and identity dynamics of Iranian voters, the role of ethnic, occupational, religious, and kinship affiliations, the influence of mosques, religious associations, local elders, market leaders, and other traditional reference networks, and the appropriate methods of voter segmentation and targeting. Additional questions addressed the adaptation of the political marketing mix, the meaning of political products and voter costs, the distribution and communication of campaign messages, political branding, organizational agility, media crisis management, misinformation, financial transparency, and the ethical and religious boundaries of political competition. The semi-structured format allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up and probing questions whenever participants introduced significant issues requiring further clarification. Particular attention was given to concrete experiences and practical examples so that the emerging model would reflect the actual conditions of political and electoral activity rather than remain limited to abstract theoretical propositions. After data collection, the interviews were transcribed and prepared for analysis. The transcripts constituted the primary textual dataset. The

researcher read the interview texts repeatedly to become thoroughly familiar with their content, tone, contextual references, implicit meanings, and recurring patterns. Initial analytical notes and memos were recorded during this stage to document emerging interpretations and preserve potentially important relationships among institutional constraints, voter characteristics, communication practices, campaign strategies, and ethical considerations. Data collection and preliminary analysis were conducted iteratively, enabling insights from the earlier interviews to guide deeper exploration of relevant concepts in subsequent interviews.

The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework. The analysis was conducted inductively and was supported by MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software, which was used to organize, store, retrieve, compare, and visualize the codes and their relationships. In the first phase, the researcher became immersed in the data by reading the transcripts several times and reviewing the initial analytical memos. The purpose of this phase was to develop a holistic understanding of the experts' accounts and identify preliminary patterns concerning institutional conditions, voter behavior, traditional networks, political marketing strategies, organizational processes, media challenges, and ethical governance. In the second phase, open coding was performed through a detailed line-by-line examination of the transcripts. Each sentence, phrase, or paragraph containing a meaningful proposition related to political marketing management was identified as a unit of meaning and assigned a concise conceptual label. The researcher remained closely connected to the participants' accounts during this stage and avoided forcing the data into predetermined categories. In the third phase, the open codes were compared in terms of conceptual similarity, functional dependence, and causal or contextual relationships. Related codes were grouped through axial coding to form broader organizing themes that represented major areas of political marketing management. In the fourth phase, the preliminary themes were critically reviewed at two levels. First, the internal coherence of the codes within each theme was assessed to determine whether they reflected a consistent and meaningful pattern. Second, the themes were evaluated against the entire dataset to ensure that they accurately and comprehensively represented the experts' accounts. Overlapping categories were revised, conceptually weak themes were reconsidered, and the boundaries between related themes were clarified. MAXQDA visualization and

code-relation tools were used to examine associations and potential overlaps among the categories. In the fifth phase, selective coding was undertaken to connect the organizing themes and elevate them to a higher level of theoretical abstraction. During this process, the central meaning, analytical boundaries, and function of each theme were defined, and the organizing themes were integrated into broader global themes representing the principal dimensions of the final political marketing management model. The analysis ultimately moved from basic units of meaning to open codes, from open codes to organizing themes, and from organizing themes to overarching model dimensions. In the sixth phase, the thematic structure was converted into an integrated analytical narrative. The researcher interpreted the relationships among institutional forces, voter identity dynamics, social capital, traditional authority networks, localized political marketing practices, political branding, organizational agility, media defense, and ethical governance. The final model was therefore developed not merely by listing recurrent themes but by specifying how its analytical-cognitive, design-strategic, and executive-normative dimensions interact within Iran's political environment. Throughout the analytical process, repeated comparison between the raw transcripts, codes, themes, and final model was used to maintain consistency between the empirical evidence and the theoretical interpretation.

3. Findings and Results

The analysis of the 10 in-depth expert interviews produced 33 open codes. Through successive open, axial, and selective coding, these codes were condensed into six organizing themes and then integrated into three global dimensions of the political marketing management model. The open codes were distributed across three substantive areas: 12 codes concerned the political and institutional environment, eight codes addressed voter behavior and traditional reference networks, and 13 codes represented the political marketing mix, political branding, campaign execution, media defense, and ethical governance. The coding matrix was primarily grounded in the interview data and was supported, where applicable, by concepts identified in the theoretical background.

The first group of open codes described the context within which political marketing management operates. These findings showed that political campaigns in Iran cannot be treated as activities conducted in a fully open and predictable electoral market. Instead, campaign managers must operate within a regulated political environment characterized by institutional filters, personalistic political structures, unequal financial resources, short formal campaign periods, platform restrictions, hidden power relations, and the influence of national security and sanctions-related discourses. Table 1 presents the open codes extracted in relation to the political and institutional environment.

Table 1

Open Codes Related to the Political and Institutional Environment

Open code	Extracted concept
OC-001	Transition from a tactical and transaction-oriented approach to the long-term strategic and relational management of political marketing
OC-002	Dominance of candidate-centered, personalistic, and charisma-based structures over stable party-oriented structures in Iran's political environment
OC-003	Role of governmental and candidate-selection institutions, including supervisory approval mechanisms, as restrictive variables and filters within the electoral system
OC-004	Absence of systematic financial transparency and the resulting asymmetry in campaign resources and electoral competition
OC-005	Severe time limitations created by the short legally authorized period of electoral campaigning
OC-006	Strong influence of kinship, ethnic, tribal, and linguistic identity networks on political decision-making patterns
OC-007	Dominance of national security, resistance, sanctions, and geopolitical pressures over local and livelihood-related demands
OC-008	Relative unreliability of conventional telephone and online surveys because of the spiral of silence and security-related considerations
OC-009	Influence of informal power networks and hidden institutions on public opinion and electoral processes
OC-010	Prevalence of political misconduct, rumor dissemination, and systematic attacks against competitors as negative campaign tactics
OC-011	Significant differences between political marketing patterns in modern metropolitan areas and those in traditional and religious communities
OC-012	Filtering of international social media platforms and the resulting need to use domestic communication platforms

The first cluster demonstrated that institutional and environmental conditions function as external constraints that cannot be directly controlled by campaign managers.

Candidate qualification processes, financial asymmetry, formal restrictions on the campaign period, and limited access to international platforms convert the electoral field

from an unrestricted competitive market into a regulated and filtered environment. Consequently, campaigns require alternative scenarios, flexible resource allocation, and contingency planning before the official campaign period begins.

The findings also revealed that the political environment is not homogeneous. In metropolitan settings, media exposure and modern communication techniques may have greater influence, whereas in traditional, ethnic, and religious environments, political behavior is more strongly shaped by collective identity and local reference groups. The relative unreliability of conventional surveys further indicated that campaign intelligence should not depend

exclusively on self-reported quantitative data. Field observation, local informants, qualitative inquiry, and continuous monitoring of community responses were regarded as necessary complements to formal polling.

The second group of open codes concerned voter morphology, voter segmentation, identity dynamics, and the legitimizing role of traditional networks. The experts distinguished among loyal voters, undecided or gray voters, and strongly opposed voters. This classification was considered more strategically useful than relying solely on demographic variables such as age, sex, education, or income. Table 2 presents the open codes associated with voters and traditional reference networks.

Table 2

Open Codes Related to Voter Behavior and Traditional Reference Networks

Open code	Extracted concept
OC-013	Threefold classification of voters into loyal voters motivated by duty, undecided or gray voters influenced by performance, and opposition voters characterized by negative orientations
OC-014	Strategic concentration of campaign resources on undecided voters as the principal leverage point for electoral success
OC-015	Limited effectiveness of persuasive strategies among strongly opposed voters and the need for strategic silence or respectful neutralization
OC-016	Priority of ethnic, tribal, religious, and identity-related divisions over socioeconomic divisions, particularly in nonmetropolitan constituencies
OC-017	Central role of mosques, religious centers, religious associations, and similar traditional institutions as authentic channels for distributing campaign messages
OC-018	Critical influence of trusted local figures, elders, Friday prayer leaders, and traditional opinion leaders in legitimizing and socially validating candidates
OC-019	Influence of occupational and professional identities, including merchants, workers, and teachers, on political concerns and voting patterns
OC-020	Formation of protest voting as a result of perceived relative deprivation and the gap between public expectations and experienced realities

The findings indicated that the Iranian voter cannot be adequately understood as an isolated actor who makes decisions only through rational comparison of political programs. In many constituencies, voting decisions are embedded within ethnic, occupational, religious, kinship, and community networks. These affiliations may function as stronger determinants of electoral behavior than conventional demographic characteristics. The voter's decision is therefore often collective and network-based rather than entirely individual.

Traditional institutions were not identified merely as channels for transmitting campaign information. Mosques, religious associations, local markets, respected elders, religious leaders, and locally trusted figures served as mechanisms of credibility assessment. Campaign messages were more likely to be accepted when they had first been interpreted, validated, or endorsed by recognized community authorities. These networks therefore performed a function comparable to an informal political party or a two-step flow of political communication.

The threefold segmentation of voters also had direct implications for campaign resource allocation. Loyal voters primarily required mobilization and maintenance, whereas strongly opposed voters were unlikely to change their positions through extensive persuasive expenditure. Undecided or gray voters represented the principal strategic target because their decisions were more responsive to candidate performance, credible commitments, local endorsements, and face-to-face interaction. The experts therefore regarded attempts to convert firmly opposed voters as an inefficient use of limited campaign resources.

The third group of open codes addressed the operational architecture of political marketing. These codes included the localization of the political marketing mix, formation of political brand value, campaign agility, media crisis management, ethical restrictions, financial transparency, and qualitative performance indicators. Table 3 presents these findings.

Table 3

Open Codes Related to the Political Marketing Mix, Branding, Campaign Execution, and Ethics

Open code	Extracted concept
OC-021	Redefinition of the political product from broad ideological slogans to executive experience, personal integrity, and small, verifiable commitments
OC-022	Localization of the price of voting through consideration of psychological costs, social credibility, and pressures associated with publicly supporting a candidate
OC-023	Redefinition of place and distribution through presence in crisis-affected settings, mosques, factories, workplaces, and domestic communication platforms such as Eitaa and Bale
OC-024	Transition in promotion from expensive, one-way billboard advertising to face-to-face dialogue and word-of-mouth communication
OC-025	Construction of political brand value on perceived honesty and sustained practical performance rather than artificial or highly dramatized media imagery
OC-026	Need for flat, agile, and mission-oriented campaign structures based on Agile or Scrum principles to prevent decision-making paralysis
OC-027	Establishment of daily or 48-hour feedback cycles to monitor public responses and revise communication tactics during the campaign
OC-028	Formation of rapid-response media teams to neutralize rumors and misinformation within the critical period of less than 24 hours
OC-029	Dual role of digital media as both an instrument of psychological warfare and rumor dissemination and a platform for rapid communication and transparency
OC-030	Centrality of Islamic ethics as a campaign boundary, including the prohibition of character assassination and destructive attacks against competitors
OC-031	Absolute prohibition of fake news and deepfakes, even when their use could produce short-term electoral advantages
OC-032	Requirement for campaign financial transparency and avoidance of dependence on concentrated wealth to preserve political independence after electoral success
OC-033	Use of qualitative key performance indicators, including voluntary campaign participation, feedback from local elders, and reduction in electoral complaints

The findings required a contextual reinterpretation of the conventional political marketing mix. The political product was not limited to a manifesto, ideology, or general campaign slogan. Because voters had been repeatedly exposed to broad and unfulfilled promises, the experts emphasized executive experience, integrity, and small-scale commitments that could be verified within a specified period. A credible political product therefore combined the candidate's record with tangible and measurable promises.

The price of voting included more than financial or opportunity costs. Public support for a candidate could expose voters to psychological pressure, reputational risk, conflict with their social network, or perceived threats to occupational and community relationships. Campaigns could reduce these costs by strengthening candidate credibility, securing endorsement from trusted local actors, and avoiding communication strategies that forced voters into socially risky public positions.

Place and promotion were similarly localized. Effective message distribution required a presence in locations where voters experienced their everyday economic and social problems, including workplaces, factories, local markets, mosques, community institutions, and crisis-affected areas. Face-to-face communication and word-of-mouth endorsement were considered more effective for generating trust than large-scale billboard campaigns or highly

produced media content. Political brand equity was therefore grounded in perceived honesty, service, practical presence, and consistency between promises and conduct.

Organizational agility emerged as a necessary condition for campaign effectiveness. Hierarchical and bureaucratic headquarters were considered too slow for an environment in which misinformation and reputational crises could spread within hours. Flat structures, rapid decision-making, daily feedback loops, and dedicated rapid-response teams enabled campaigns to observe developments, interpret them, make decisions, and act within a period of less than 24 hours. Qualitative indicators such as voluntary participation, local elite feedback, reduced complaints, and the willingness of community members to transmit campaign messages were identified as more meaningful than merely counting posters, online views, or formal campaign events.

Ethical governance was one of the most distinctive findings. Ethics was not regarded as an ornamental value added after strategy formation. The prohibition of falsehood, character assassination, deepfakes, financial opacity, and divisive communication was understood as a strategic mechanism for protecting social capital. Unethical behavior could produce a short-term tactical advantage, but it was also likely to undermine candidate legitimacy, weaken trust, and damage the political brand over the longer term.

Following open coding, the 33 codes were compared according to their conceptual similarity, functional relationship, and role in political marketing management.

Through axial coding, they were consolidated into six organizing themes. Table 4 presents the relationship between the open codes and the resulting organizing themes.

Table 4

Axial Coding and the Six Organizing Themes

Axial code	Organizing theme	Constituent open codes	Operational meaning
AC-001	Political ecology and structural-institutional determinism	OC-003, OC-004, OC-005, OC-007, OC-009, OC-012	Represents environmental and institutional conditions outside the campaign manager's direct control, including supervisory filtering, platform restrictions, financial asymmetry, security pressures, and limited campaign time.
AC-002	Voter morphology and identity dynamics	OC-006, OC-011, OC-013, OC-014, OC-015, OC-016, OC-019, OC-020	Extends voter analysis beyond conventional demographics by emphasizing ethnic, occupational, religious, regional, and protest-related identities and the strategic importance of undecided voters.
AC-003	Social capital and the authority of traditional networks	OC-002, OC-017, OC-018	Represents the legitimizing and message-distribution power of mosques, religious associations, local elders, religious leaders, market leaders, and other trusted community actors.
AC-004	Localized political marketing-mix and brand architecture	OC-001, OC-021, OC-022, OC-023, OC-024, OC-025	Reconstructs the political marketing mix around operational promises, reduction of voting costs, field-based distribution, word-of-mouth promotion, perceived honesty, and service-oriented branding.
AC-005	Organizational agility and media defense	OC-008, OC-026, OC-027, OC-028, OC-029, OC-033	Includes flat campaign structures, rapid feedback cycles, qualitative performance indicators, domestic digital platforms, and rapid-response teams for countering rumors and misinformation.
AC-006	Ethical and normative governance	OC-010, OC-030, OC-031, OC-032	Establishes religious, cultural, and professional boundaries within the campaign, including rejection of destructive attacks, false information, division, and opaque financial relationships.

The first and second organizing themes represented the interaction between structure and agency. Political institutions, legal restrictions, and informal power relations defined the boundaries of electoral competition, while voters continued to exercise agency through protest voting, identity-based alignment, and shifts among the undecided population. The campaign manager therefore functioned not merely as a promoter but as an environmental analyst and crisis navigator.

The third organizing theme demonstrated the continuing authority of traditional social networks. Despite the expansion of digital platforms and data-based targeting, traditional institutions continued to operate as informal structures of political legitimacy. They reduced uncertainty for voters and functioned as cognitive shortcuts through which candidate credibility could be judged.

The fourth and fifth themes connected value design with operational responsiveness. A credible campaign required a localized political product, a service-oriented brand, and

communication through trusted locations and relationships. At the same time, the campaign organization had to respond rapidly to misinformation, changes in public sentiment, and emerging reputational threats.

The sixth theme showed that ethical governance was inseparable from strategic effectiveness. The experts did not describe ethics merely as a moral restriction on campaign action. Instead, ethical conduct preserved the candidate's social legitimacy and provided a defense against long-term political brand erosion. In this sense, ethics operated as a condition of political survival rather than simply a statement of virtue.

During selective coding, the six organizing themes were integrated into three global themes or principal dimensions of the model. The analytical-cognitive dimension contained 14 open codes, the design-strategic dimension incorporated nine open codes, and the executive-normative dimension comprised 10 open codes. Table 5 presents these dimensions and their functions within the final model.

Table 5

Selective Coding and the Three Global Dimensions of the Model

Selective code	Global theme	Constituent organizing themes	Function within the model
SC-001	Analytical-cognitive dimension: environmental intelligence and indigenous audience analysis	AC-001 Political ecology and structural-institutional determinism; AC-002 voter morphology and identity dynamics	Diagnosis and understanding of the electoral environment through the integration of institutional restrictions, voter identities, undecided-voter behavior, and local political conditions
SC-002	Design-strategic dimension: value architecture and strategic configuration	AC-003 social capital and traditional authority; AC-004 localized political marketing-mix and brand architecture	Design of the candidate's value proposition and connection of tangible promises and political branding to trusted traditional institutions and local networks
SC-003	Executive-normative dimension: operational dynamics and ethical governance	AC-005 organizational agility and media defense; AC-006 ethical and normative governance	Delivery, monitoring, rapid crisis response, and campaign control under binding ethical, financial, religious, and professional standards

The analytical-cognitive dimension formed the diagnostic phase of the model. Before developing slogans or communication materials, campaign managers were required to understand institutional filters, legal restrictions, financial asymmetries, regional differences, identity networks, and the composition of the electorate. This phase emphasized the strategic allocation of resources to undecided voters and discouraged excessive expenditure on voters with firmly established opposing positions.

The design-strategic dimension represented the transformation of diagnostic intelligence into a credible value proposition. The political product had to be translated into tangible commitments and linked to a brand based on honesty, service, executive competence, and practical presence. Traditional networks served as the bridge through

which this value proposition acquired legitimacy and was transmitted to local communities.

The executive-normative dimension addressed implementation and control. Campaigns required agile organizational structures, rapid feedback, media monitoring, and crisis-response capacity. However, operational speed was bounded by ethical governance. The model therefore rejected the assumption that rapid response justified misinformation, destructive attacks, or financial opacity.

The final thematic matrix integrated the three coding levels into a unified political marketing management system. Table 6 demonstrates how each global dimension was connected to its organizing themes, representative open codes, and strategic implications for campaign management.

Table 6

Final Thematic Matrix of the Political Marketing Management Model

Global dimension	Main organizing component	Representative concepts	Strategic implication for campaign management
SC-001: Environmental intelligence and indigenous audience analysis	AC-001: Political ecology and structural-institutional determinism	Supervisory and candidate-selection mechanisms; asymmetric financial competition; short campaign period	Campaign headquarters should formulate alternative scenarios and contingency plans for institutional shocks, sudden restrictions, or candidate disqualification before the formal campaign begins.
SC-001: Environmental intelligence and indigenous audience analysis	AC-002: Voter morphology and identity dynamics	Concentration on undecided voters; respectful neutralization of strong opposition; centrality of identity divisions	Campaigns should replace undifferentiated mass advertising with localized targeting based on neighborhoods, occupations, ethnic networks, religious associations, and community identities.
SC-002: Value architecture and strategic configuration	AC-003: Authority of traditional reference networks	Centrality of mosques and local markets; influence of elders and trusted local actors	Religious leaders, local elites, and trusted community figures should function as credibility filters that reduce the perceived social and psychological risks of voting.
SC-002: Value architecture and strategic configuration	AC-004: Localized marketing-mix and political brand architecture	Tangible promises as the political product; face-to-face promotion; service-based branding	Campaigns should avoid artificial image construction and employ low-cost, locally embedded, guerrilla-style communication with high interpersonal penetration in targeted communities.
SC-003: Operational dynamics and ethical governance	AC-005: Organizational agility and media defense	Flat campaign structure; 24-hour feedback cycle; rapid-response media team	Campaigns should replace bureaucratic headquarters with agile structures capable of rapidly correcting misinformation and deepfakes through appropriate communication channels and domestic platforms.
SC-003: Operational dynamics and ethical governance	AC-006: Ethical and normative governance	Prohibition of destructive attacks; rejection of false information; financial transparency	An internal campaign ethics charter should be institutionalized because unethical practices undermine trust, damage social capital, and threaten the long-term sustainability of the political brand.

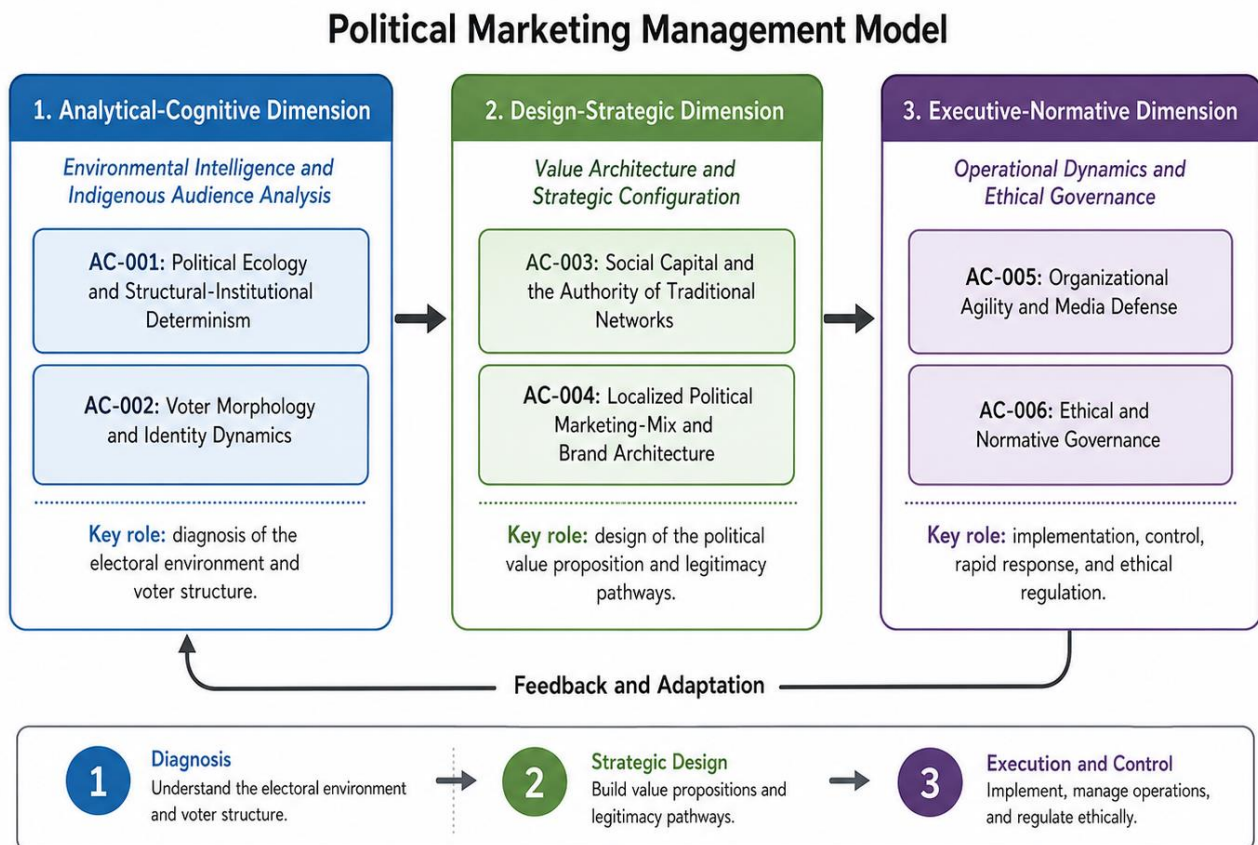
The final matrix demonstrated a sequential but interconnected process. Political marketing management begins with diagnosis, proceeds to strategic design, and culminates in implementation and control. Environmental intelligence and indigenous voter analysis provide the information required for value architecture. Value architecture then connects tangible political commitments to trusted social networks and localized communication practices. The execution phase activates this strategy through agile campaign structures, rapid-response mechanisms, and continuous feedback, while ethical governance regulates the entire process.

The relationships among the dimensions are also recursive rather than strictly linear. Feedback obtained

during implementation returns to the analytical-cognitive phase and enables campaign managers to revise voter segmentation, communication tactics, and resource allocation. Likewise, ethical governance influences not only implementation but also the selection of promises, communication channels, financial sources, and branding practices. The model therefore conceptualizes political marketing management as an integrated and adaptive system in which institutional intelligence, identity-sensitive audience analysis, traditional social authority, localized value creation, operational agility, and ethical legitimacy jointly determine campaign effectiveness.

Figure 1

Final Model of the Study



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study developed an indigenous political marketing management model grounded in the institutional, cultural, communicative, and ethical characteristics of Iran's electoral environment. The thematic analysis of the expert interviews generated 33 open codes, which were

consolidated into six organizing themes: political ecology and structural-institutional determinism, voter morphology and identity dynamics, social capital and the authority of traditional networks, localized political marketing-mix and political brand architecture, organizational agility and media defense, and ethical and normative governance. At the selective-coding level, these themes were integrated into

three global dimensions: the analytical-cognitive dimension, comprising environmental intelligence and indigenous audience analysis; the design-strategic dimension, encompassing value architecture and strategic configuration; and the executive-normative dimension, involving operational dynamics, rapid response, control, and ethical governance. The findings therefore indicate that political marketing management cannot be reduced to electoral advertising or the tactical promotion of candidates. Rather, it is a recursive management process in which contextual diagnosis informs strategic design, strategic design directs campaign execution, and implementation produces feedback that modifies subsequent analysis and decision-making. This conception is consistent with the broader view of political marketing as an integrated strategic activity that includes market intelligence, political-product development, segmentation, communication, implementation, and relationship maintenance (Cwalina et al., 2011; Lees-Marshment, 2024). It also extends earlier Iranian attempts to develop strategic and planning-oriented models by explicitly linking structural constraints, voter identities, traditional authority, operational agility, and ethical boundaries within one coherent framework (Afjehei & Khademi Garashi, 2011; Bagheri Dolatabadi & Hajipour, 2012; Safarzadeh Parapari et al., 2021).

The first major finding concerned the analytical-cognitive dimension, particularly the importance of political ecology and structural-institutional determinism. Participants emphasized that campaign management occurs within an environment shaped by candidate-selection mechanisms, institutional supervision, unequal access to financial resources, short formal campaigning periods, national-security concerns, platform restrictions, and informal networks of influence. Consequently, the electoral arena cannot be treated as a completely open market in which all candidates operate under equivalent conditions. This finding explains why models derived from stable, party-centered democracies cannot be transferred mechanically to Iran. Classical political marketing planning models emphasize constituency analysis, competitive assessment, segmentation, positioning, and post-election evaluation (Palmer, 2014), while process models adapt the commercial marketing mix to political competition (Niffenegger, 2011). However, the present findings show that environmental analysis in Iran must begin before conventional market segmentation because the institutional structure determines who may enter the competition, what communication channels are accessible, how long official campaigning can

continue, and what kinds of strategic risks may arise. This interpretation supports earlier Iranian research that described political competition as a contextually regulated process rather than a purely market-based contest (Hosseini et al., 2019). It also aligns with studies emphasizing the need to develop political marketing strategies specifically suited to Iran's institutional and managerial environment (Afjehei & Khademi Garashi, 2011; Hosseini & Asalani, 2014; Morid Sadat & Asalani, 2014).

The environmental dimension also included the limited reliability of conventional quantitative polling under conditions of political sensitivity, the spiral of silence, and concerns regarding the disclosure of political preferences. This result suggests that campaign intelligence should integrate surveys with qualitative interviews, local observation, social listening, ethnographic engagement, and reports from trusted community informants. Geographic and regional variations in Iranian voting patterns support the importance of such localized analysis, because electoral behavior differs across provinces and constituencies according to historical, cultural, ethnic, economic, and political conditions (Amini, 2015). Research on political participation has likewise demonstrated that citizens do not follow one homogeneous pattern of electoral behavior (Yousefi Ramandi, 2018). Psychological accounts of political involvement further suggest that the depth of voter engagement affects how political information is interpreted and how arguments are evaluated (Hakimara, 2015). Therefore, the analytical-cognitive dimension of the proposed model does not simply involve collecting more data; it involves determining which forms of evidence are credible in a specific constituency and interpreting those data through knowledge of local identities, social pressures, and political sensitivities.

A second component of the analytical-cognitive dimension was voter morphology and identity dynamics. The experts classified voters into loyal, undecided or gray, and firmly opposed groups and identified undecided voters as the principal leverage point for campaign resource allocation. Loyal voters require maintenance and mobilization, whereas strongly opposed voters are unlikely to be converted through repeated persuasion and may be addressed more effectively through respectful neutralization or strategic silence. This finding is compatible with political marketing principles that emphasize segmentation and differentiated communication rather than uniform mass persuasion (Cwalina et al., 2011; Mohammadian & Shamsi, 2009). It also corresponds with evidence that the effects of

the political marketing mix on voting intention vary across demographic groups (Khodadad Hosseini et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the present study extends this literature by showing that demographic segmentation alone is insufficient in Iran. Ethnic, tribal, occupational, religious, kinship, and regional identities may outweigh conventional variables such as age, education, or income. Hidden motives, symbolic attachments, perceived deprivation, and protest orientations may also influence electoral decisions even when voters do not explicitly articulate them (Mohammadian & Yousefi, 2014; Radmard & Haghgoo, 2020). The model therefore proposes an indigenous segmentation logic in which voter classification combines political commitment with identity networks, perceived costs, local affiliations, and the distance between expectations and experienced political performance.

The design-strategic dimension included social capital and the authority of traditional networks. Participants identified mosques, religious associations, local elders, Friday prayer leaders, market leaders, occupational groups, and other trusted community figures as institutions that validate candidates and mediate campaign messages. These actors do not operate merely as passive distribution channels; they reduce uncertainty and provide social proof regarding the legitimacy, integrity, and reliability of political candidates. This finding is consistent with research showing that traditional political marketing tools continue to influence voter behavior in contexts where face-to-face communication and community relationships remain strong (Kheiri et al., 2018). It also supports the broader observation that electoral behavior is socially embedded and that interpersonal networks can shape voting intentions alongside media exposure (Bukari et al., 2023). In digital environments, affiliation is similarly created through shared language, evaluations, hashtags, and networked interaction (Zappavigna, 2021). However, the present results indicate that in many Iranian constituencies, traditional authority retains a stronger legitimizing function than digital popularity alone. Accordingly, campaign managers should not treat online influence as a substitute for local social capital. Instead, digital communication and traditional networks should be coordinated so that messages circulated online are reinforced by credible offline relationships.

The prominence of traditional reference networks also helps explain why authenticity was identified as a central element of political branding. Participants rejected highly artificial image-making and emphasized perceived honesty, service, executive competence, practical presence, and

consistency between promises and behavior. This interpretation is aligned with the relational paradigm of political marketing, which argues that voters increasingly demand authenticity and responsiveness rather than highly controlled promotional performances (Jackson & Lilleker, 2023). At the same time, political parties and campaign organizations often impose message discipline that turns candidates into brand ambassadors (Marland & Wanger, 2019). The present findings suggest that such coordination is necessary but should not eliminate the candidate's local voice or create visible inconsistencies between public presentation and actual conduct. Iranian research on political branding similarly emphasizes the alignment of political identity, factional positioning, communication, and public expectations (Haghparast et al., 2024). Political engagement can strengthen political brand knowledge and loyalty (Fahad & Rashid, 2024), while brand image and engagement may mediate the relationship between the political marketing mix and voting intention (Abbas et al., 2024). Moreover, the relationship between political marketing-mix elements, party brand equity, voter commitment, and loyalty has been demonstrated in the Iranian context (Asgarnejad Nouri et al., 2021). The present study adds that local endorsement and traditional authority constitute important pathways through which political brand credibility is produced.

The findings concerning the localized political marketing mix further clarified how the political value proposition should be constructed. The political product was defined not as a general ideological manifesto alone but as a combination of executive record, personal integrity, practical competence, and limited, verifiable promises. This reflects voter fatigue with broad commitments that cannot be evaluated or implemented. When political discourse repeatedly promises justice, freedom, welfare, or reform without visible outcomes, the discrepancy between public expectations and political experience can erode legitimacy (Radmard & Haghgoo, 2020). Therefore, tangible and time-bound commitments may reduce cynicism by allowing voters to assess whether the candidate's claims are credible. The "price" of voting was also interpreted broadly to include psychological pressure, reputational risk, community conflict, and the possible consequences of openly supporting a candidate. Place was localized through candidate presence in workplaces, markets, mosques, factories, neighborhoods, and crisis-affected settings, while promotion shifted from expensive one-way advertising toward dialogue and word-of-mouth communication. This reinterpretation is consistent with earlier Iranian political marketing models that called for

contextual adaptation of marketing principles (Bagheri Dolatabadi & Hajipour, 2012; Kimasi et al., 2017). It also reflects guerrilla-marketing principles, in which creativity, localized visibility, participation, and unconventional communication compensate for limited resources (Balážiová, 2020; Fattal, 2018). Base-action political marketing similarly emphasizes field engagement and grassroots influence rather than exclusive reliance on centralized media (Torabi et al., 2018).

The executive-normative dimension demonstrated that effective strategy must be supported by organizational agility and media defense. Participants emphasized flat campaign structures, rapid feedback cycles, qualitative performance indicators, and teams capable of responding to rumors and false information within less than 24 hours. This finding reflects the transformation of political communication by digital platforms, where messages can be amplified, reframed, and contested almost immediately. Social media can mediate the relationship between political determinants and voting intention (Bukari et al., 2023), while political influencers can affect participation and electoral outcomes through personalized forms of communication (Pöyry & Reinikainen, 2024; Schwemmer & Riedl, 2025). Influencers' political talk also blurs the boundaries between personal branding, promotion, and political advocacy (Mardon et al., 2025). At the same time, microtargeting may influence voters differently according to prior attitudes and personality characteristics (Decker & Krämer, 2023), and coordinated micro-clusters can interfere with campaign discourse by manipulating visibility and attention (García-Ull et al., 2025). These developments justify the model's emphasis on continuous monitoring and rapid organizational response. Campaigns should not rely on slow hierarchical approval systems when reputational crises can develop within hours.

The need for media defense is especially important in relation to deepfakes, synthetic media, and technologically enhanced persuasion. Deepfake political videos can increase deception, uncertainty, and distrust even when audiences remain unsure whether the content is authentic (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). Neuromarketing and psychophysiological techniques can also reveal subconscious reactions that are not captured through conventional surveys (Boricean et al., 2023; Dergi, 2013), while augmented and immersive communication may increase audience engagement (Scholz & Smith, 2019). These technologies may offer strategic benefits, but they also create risks involving manipulation, privacy, informed consent, and the exploitation of

psychological vulnerabilities. The present study therefore positions media capability and ethical control within the same dimension. Technical sophistication is not sufficient unless its use is governed by explicit standards regarding truthfulness, dignity, transparency, and respect for voter autonomy.

The final and perhaps most distinctive finding was that ethical governance functions as a strategic foundation rather than an ornamental value. Participants emphasized the prohibition of false information, deepfakes, character assassination, divisive communication, and opaque financial dependence. This result is aligned with Islamic approaches to political marketing that place political competition within moral and jurisprudential boundaries (Barzegar & Raji, 2021; Fallah & Izadi, 2019). It also indicates that unethical conduct should not be evaluated only according to immediate electoral outcomes. Falsehood and destructive campaigning may generate short-term attention, but they damage social capital, weaken trust, and undermine the sustainability of the political brand. Ethical behavior can therefore operate as a form of strategic protection. Political marketing may contribute to national soft power when it strengthens participation, legitimacy, and coherent political communication (Fattahpour et al., 2022), whereas manipulative campaigns may intensify cynicism and political disengagement. The proposed model consequently treats ethical governance as a cross-cutting mechanism that regulates environmental analysis, voter targeting, promise formulation, branding, financing, media response, and performance evaluation.

Overall, the model contributes to political marketing literature by connecting three processes that have often been studied separately. First, it embeds campaign strategy within the institutional and identity-based structure of the electoral environment. Second, it links political value creation to traditional social authority and locally credible branding. Third, it combines agile execution with binding ethical governance. International studies confirm that political marketing influences voting behavior but that its effects vary according to electoral and cultural context (Sophocleous et al., 2024). The present findings therefore support the need for indigenous model development rather than the direct replication of external frameworks. The model also advances earlier Iranian studies by presenting political marketing management as a feedback-driven system: diagnosis produces strategic design, strategic design guides implementation, implementation generates new information, and ethical principles govern the complete cycle.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. The model was developed through qualitative interviews with 10 experts, and although theoretical saturation was reached, the participants' views cannot represent every political faction, electoral constituency, institutional actor, campaign organization, or voter group in Iran. The purposive sampling strategy prioritized participants with substantial knowledge and experience, but this may have produced an elite-centered interpretation of political marketing management. Some participants may also have moderated their statements because of the political sensitivity of topics such as informal power networks, campaign financing, candidate selection, misinformation, and institutional restrictions. The study relied mainly on interview data and did not triangulate the findings through direct observation of active campaigns, analysis of internal campaign documents, social-media network data, or interviews with voters. In addition, the model was developed within the Iranian political context and should not be generalized uncritically to political systems with different legal frameworks, party structures, media environments, or cultural norms.

Future studies should test and refine the proposed model through mixed-method, quantitative, comparative, and longitudinal designs. Researchers may develop measurement instruments for the three global dimensions and six organizing themes and then examine their construct validity through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Structural equation modeling could be used to evaluate the relationships among environmental intelligence, indigenous voter analysis, social capital, political brand credibility, organizational agility, ethical governance, voter trust, engagement, loyalty, and voting intention. Comparative research across metropolitan, rural, ethnic, religious, and economically diverse constituencies would clarify whether the importance of traditional networks and identity-based segmentation varies geographically. Longitudinal studies conducted before, during, and after elections could determine how the proposed dimensions affect campaign adaptability and political brand sustainability over time. Future qualitative research should also include voters, campaign volunteers, journalists, election administrators, religious leaders, local elders, digital influencers, and unsuccessful candidates to broaden the range of perspectives. Experimental research may examine the relative effectiveness of face-to-face communication, influencer messaging, microtargeting, rapid corrections, and

verifiable promises while simultaneously evaluating their ethical consequences.

Campaign managers should begin political marketing planning with a formal environmental-intelligence process that maps institutional constraints, constituency identities, communication restrictions, resource asymmetries, local grievances, trusted networks, and potential reputational risks. Voters should be segmented according to political commitment, identity affiliation, occupational position, local concerns, and perceived voting costs rather than demographics alone. Campaign resources should be concentrated on undecided voters, while loyal supporters should be mobilized and firmly opposed voters should be addressed respectfully without excessive expenditure. Candidates should formulate limited, practical, measurable, and time-bound promises supported by evidence of competence and integrity. Campaign headquarters should establish flat decision structures, daily feedback mechanisms, rapid-response media teams, misinformation-verification procedures, and qualitative indicators such as voluntary participation, trusted local endorsements, and reduced complaints. Traditional community networks and digital platforms should be integrated rather than treated as competing channels. Finally, every campaign should adopt an enforceable ethics charter covering truthful communication, financial transparency, avoidance of character assassination, responsible use of voter data, prohibition of synthetic deception, and respect for social, religious, ethnic, and political differences.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Ethics Considerations

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