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## AMMA brand: Is the political brand name still relevant?

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### ABSTRACT

A leader who has humungous followers with a cult image did realize the power of personal branding at an apt time when needed. The creation of AMMA brand was well crafted and seen as a great move by many political pundits and brand gurus. The personal branding strategy was not only well planned but very well executed. The strategy connected with the masses and the needy in the right means to reverberate as a great brand. The brand equity grew stronger with time and its variety of essential products launched. Needless to say how Dr. J. Jayalalitha leveraged her personal brand and enched the benefits to her political career. This research is a conceptual paper based on secondary information spanning across the developments in Tamil Nadu during 2016-17.

### Introduction

The past chief minister of Tamil Nadu was a living example of the genesis of a political brand, initially was called Selvi and Puratchi Thalaivi and thereafter been called Amma. It was during her first tenure in 1991-96 she did realize the need for being different than her counter parts. She felt the concept of mother (Amma) would go well and she was able to taste her first success in introducing the cradle system for the first time to curtail female foeticide or abandoning the girl child. Though today the connotation of AMMA scheme - Assured Maximum Service to Marginal People in All Villages formally by the Tamil Nadu Government, informally the motherly affection and care is what people see in brand Amma.

Her brand stature grew during the second tenure (2001-2006); she was truly an Amma to her party men and supporters. With the help of her personal branding strategies, her popularity index has grown over the years. Brand Amma is a formidable one and challenges national and MNC counterparts.

### Literature on Political and Personal Branding

Smitha T, a market researcher from Coimbatore says "The brand is clearly built on emotional as well as monetary value. It may have begun in an unorganised fashion, but once the government realised the value it was building, it has focused on essential products and services that directly impact the poor".

Omojola (2008), in his words indicate personal branding is a promise of value. It separates you from your peers, your colleagues and your competitors. Personal branding is not about creating a larger than life image for the outside world, it is about understanding your unique combination of rational and emotional attributes such as skill, values and passions and using these attributes to differentiate yourself and guide your career decisions in your service to the citizenry. It is about knowing how to powerfully leverage what is unique about you that differentiate you from others. Personal branding strategy is absolutely critical to long-lasting success in politics".

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Political branding is seen as personalization of politics or arguments surrounding its emotionalization and surrounding popular culture says Adolphsen (2010). For Political brand to be successful the politician image is very crucial to which followers will link a lot of associations which can be positive, negative and neutral specifies Cwalina, & Falkowski, (2015). According to Garzia, (2013), personality profiles and personal characteristics influence individuals and their voting pattern.

Personal values have the ability to enhance brand equity says Atay (2009). Personal brand equity planning should be a part of every firm's succession plan to protect its future growth and viability indicates Vitberg (2010). Carefully building personal branding statements will help marketing opine Stanton & Stanton (2013). Personal value fit will help creating brand meaning according to Beverland, Farrelly, & Quester, P.

(2006). The author felt the various literatures is of great support to the work and portrays the brand taken for the study.

**The Growth Story of Amma Brands**

During her third tenure (2011-16) is when she unleashed certain popular schemes under the brand name of Amma. Table-1 summarizes the successful products under the umbrella of brand Amma. It immediately connected with the citizens of Tamil Nadu and she garnered the overwhelming support of the masses as the schemes were useful and utilized by the general public. Many neighbouring states were planning to emulate the successful business model created by Amma in Tamil Nadu. Most of the schemes were a runaway success and not only been explored by the neighbouring states but also by the other countries. A team from Egypt visited the Amma canteens and understood the operational viabilities of the same.

**Table-1: Summary of Amma Brands**

| S. No | Amma branded subsidized products  | Launch year | Pricing                       | Pricing of Competitor              |
|-------|---|-------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1     | Amma Budget Canteen   | 2013        | Re. 1- Rs. 5                  | 3- 5 times more                    |
| 2     | Amma Water  | 2013        | Rs. 10/litre                  | Twice the price                    |
| 3     | Amma Salt<br>Double Fortified Salt<br>Refined Free Flow Iodised Salt<br>Low Sodium Salt | 2014        | Rs. 14<br>Rs. 10<br>Rs. 21    | Rs. 21<br>Rs. 14- 20<br>Rs. 25     |
| 4     | Amma Medicine   | 2014        | 10%-15% discount              | Private players are following suit |
| 5     | Amma Cement   | 2014        | 190/50 kg bag                 | 370/50 kg bag onwards              |
| 6     | Amma Amudham Outlets  | 2014        | Cheaper than other outlets    | Comparably higher                  |
| 7     | Amma Marriage Halls   | 2016*       | Cheaper than other outlets    | Comparably higher                  |
| 8     | Amma Seeds  | 2016        | Reasonable price with DIY kit | Comparably higher                  |

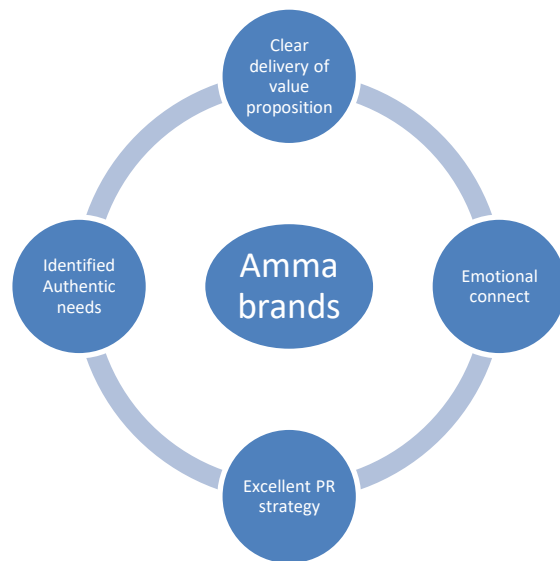
Source: Authors compiled from various sources

\*was announced on September 2016 with allocation of funds

All the branded products were trying to create price leadership in its respective categories. Prof. Amartya Sen in his recent book “The uncertain Glory- India and its contradictions” has clearly written about the success of the Tamil Nadu government’s efficient delivery of public services.

**The Success Mantra of Amma Brands**

The brand could witness an instantaneous connect based on a few clearly planned constituents as suggested in Fig-1. It portrays how the brand identifies the authentic needs of the masses and combines it with a clear delivery of value proposition which focuses on the pricing factor. The pricing is done based on understanding the affordability of the middle and lower middle class and a large chunk of fund comes from the state government budget which makes it possible. The emotional connect of the personal brand is a key factor which is also been utilized by the person and the political party as a public relations (PR) strategy.



**Fig-1: Amma Brand Constituents**

### **The Popular Mandate**

The 2016 assembly elections witnessed the power of brand Amma. The decision to stay alone without much of allies was criticised by political gurus and media. There was hype about anti-incumbency by the rival parties. The Chennai floods were seen as a major set-back to Amma and many predicted she may lose the confidence of people. There were many speculations around Amma which was not in her favour.

Amidst all these speculations she clearly identified her strategies to face the assembly elections largely by showcasing the benefits provided by her during the entire regime. She focused on connecting with large sections of women. The Hindu quotes "Tamil Nadu recorded an overall voter turnout of 74.26 per cent in elections held for 232 Assembly constituencies with more women voting than men". She was realistic in talking about the ban on alcohol (TASMAC), where people also know that it is the major source of revenue to the state government. She was also strategic on releasing the manifesto finally after all the parties have done it, which gave her the edge to announce certain catchy freebies which was a key issue in the Tamil Nadu elections. Nowadays in Tamil Nadu, people have started expecting what they will get as freebies if a particular party comes to power.

### **The Magic Manifesto**

The manifesto had a few key issues namely waiver of farm loans from cooperative societies, 50% subsidy for working women to buy scooters, 100 units free power to every household, gold for mangalsutra with a fixed money and reduction of retail outlets of TASMAC and reduce operation time of the outlets which were appropriately highlighted and implemented across the state.

### **More than mere Advertising**

Among the TV ads by various political parties we could see a lot of positive reinforcement ads released by AIADMK to remind the public about the welfare schemes provided by Amma. Though different parties owned media channels of their own, we could see AIADMK using STAR VIJAY channel which does not have any political affiliations to showcase the positive reinforcement ads during the soap operas which has high viewership combining classes and masses. The 134 seats won by Amma with a whopping 40.8% vote share which is 2.8% more than DMK and Congress Alliance which in combination could garner 38% goes on to reiterate the brand equity of Amma in a decisive way.

### **Way Forward for Brand Amma**

Managing the personal brand over a period is a challenging task. As brand Amma becomes more relevant, its household penetration will be high. This is what she was able to do via the Amma brands which are in terms of superior quality and reasonable price. The Amma brand has been crafted carefully in such a way that it tries to be a main part of the Vision Tamil Nadu 2023 document which in turn aims at three major

outcomes focusing on increasing the per capita income to \$1,00001 per annum, attain high standard of social development and provide best in the world infrastructure to the state.

Now given the scenario of her sudden demise, infighting within the party for the key positions, the sudden rise of other leaders leave the carders and the community at crossroads. Also the courts verdict clearly against the Late Chief Minister will dent the brand image to some extent. The present and future chief ministers may follow the footsteps and legacy of the late leader. Will brand Amma continue to evoke and strike the chord as it could have done with her presence is an unanswered question to be carefully observed in the future. Though it is a great asset to the respective political party, are there enough visionaries who are capable of realizing its value and importance and are there enough efforts put forth to sustain brand Amma.

### **Conclusion**

It is very challenging to create and nurture a personal brand. It is even more challenging to sustain the brand in the long run. The Amma brand was built around the personality of the individual Dr. J. Jayalalitha, one of the tallest leaders Tamil Nadu has witnessed. In a time when the person is no more and circumstances are not in favour of the brand despite the immense benefits the brand has provided to the masses is disheartening. Time has to answer the future of Amma brand which was clearly a celebrated brand and adored by the people of the State.

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