

A Longitudinal Study of the Brand Equity and Personality Metrics of President Donald Trump

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Abstract

In this study, a multidimensional brand equity construct and a brand personality construct were employed to compare the brand strength of Candidate Donald Trump and President Donald Trump among registered voters. The study was conducted as a continuation of prior research to determine if there was a change in any of these metrics after Trump had been president for over three years. The result was a significant increase in brand equity and little or no change in brand personality.

Keywords: Brand equity, brand personality, candidate brands, political marketing, candidate valuation, and political branding.

Introduction

Brands are useful symbols that provide meaning and influence consumers' purchase intentions (McCracken 1993). Brand equity is the intangible value added to a product, such as Coca-Cola soda, from the name of the brand (D. A. Aaker 1991, 1996; Keller 1993). Brands with strong names have higher levels of trust and loyalty, lowering the possibility of consumers purchasing competitive brands, and increasing the effectiveness of marketing efforts (D. A. Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Yoo and Donthu 2001).

In marketing, brand strength has been associated with political candidates and political parties for many years (Luntz 1988). Additionally, a brand can be a person, name, sign, symbol, or design used to identify products or services and differentiate them from competitors (Kotler 1991). Brands create experiential and emotional benefits for their customers (Keller 1993) that are essential for creating a strong brand equity. Brand personality is also a significant component of brand differentiation, which strongly influences purchase intention (J. L. Aaker 1997). Researchers have also demonstrated a positive correlation between the brand equity and personality ratings of political candidates and intention to vote (Monahan 2015, 2016). In 2016, the author conducted a study of the brand equity and personality metrics of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, before the U.S. presidential election. Since Trump won the election, subsequent studies have been conducted to determine if there was any change in Trump's metrics.

Literature Review

Brand Equity

D. A. Aaker (1991, 1996) defined brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and or to that firm's customers." He further proposed a five-dimensional model of brand equity that includes name awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other key assets. This study used Yoo and Donthu's (2001) customer-based brand equity scales, developed to gauge four of the five (i.e., excluding other proprietary assets, patents, trademarks, and channel relationships) dimensions proposed by D. A. Aaker.

Brand knowledge is a vital element in consumer decision making and greatly affects the success of branding efforts (Keller 1993). Brand knowledge is composed of brand name awareness and brand associations (D. A. Aaker 1996). Brand name awareness is the strength of a brand in the memory of the consumer, a necessary condition for brand equity development on the other three dimensions (Keller 1993). Brand associations are pieces of positive and negative information related to a brand in consumer memory. Brand associations are critical in the overall management function of branding because they represent the content of brand knowledge and provide brand meaning to consumers (Keller 1993).

Research also supports the theory that both perceived brand quality and brand loyalty are strongly related to brand equity. Perceived brand quality is the consumer's judgment about a brand's overall excellence (D. A. Aaker 1996; Zeithaml 1988). D. A. Aaker (1996) also pointed out that perceived brand quality is an important point of differentiation. Brand loyalty is the level of attachment that a customer has to a brand, considered the single most reliable assessment of brand equity (Reichheld 2001). Loyal consumers provide a company with a competitive advantage that helps establish barriers of entry, gives the company time to respond to competitive offerings and allows the company to demand premium prices (D. A. Aaker 1996). Consumer loyalty ultimately results from value and trust derived from the brand name (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Riley 2004).

Brand Personality

Brand attitude is defined as the expression of a consumer's positive or negative evaluation or feelings toward a brand (Berger and Mitchell 1989; Kotler and Armstrong 1996). Brand attitude and brand image have been demonstrated to have positive relationships with brand equity (Chang and Liu 2009; Faircloth et al. 2001). Brand equity is essential because brands with higher levels of brand equity generate higher levels of customer brand preference, purchase intentions (Chang and Liu 2009; Senthilnathan and Tharmi 2012), and repurchase intention (Hellier et al. 2003). Brand personality as a component of brand imagery helps to create brand equity (Batra, Lehman, and Singh 1993; Biel 1993).

Candidate Brands

Branding is concerned with creating a distinctive identity for a product, service, or individual (J. L. Aaker 1997; Plummer 2000). Individuals themselves can be brands. For example, LeBron James and Eli Manning serve as primary sources of identity. Candidate brands are similar to the latter, where political leaders and their associations define the brand. The present focus is on brand equity derived from the candidate's name (e.g., Barack Obama), which is the part of a brand that can be verbalized and is the primary indicator of brand value (Cobb-Walgreen, Ruble, and Donthu 1995; Keller 1993). The name of the candidate, like product brand names, provides the voter with an experience-based technique for quick problem-solving that provides voter orientation and influences voter choice (Needham 2006; Schneider 2004). The act of voting is like a "consumer choice"; voters use small amounts of information received during the campaign to facilitate their choice between candidates (Parker 2012; Popkin 1994). A great deal of research has examined different aspects of political branding (Lauro 2000; Needham 2005, 2006; Reeves 2006; Westen 2007). Industry strategists suggest that different branding tactics developed in commercial markets (e.g., personality, trust, connectivity, and performance) can also be used in politics for comparing the image and brand positions of candidates (Draper 2000; Parker 2012; Westen 2007).

Although research on political branding is relatively new, studies have supported the concept that candidate brands can be treated as units of empirical analysis and observation. Candidate traits taken from D. A. Aaker's brand equity scale were used to analyze the results of the 2006 Presidential election in Mexico (Guzman and Sierra 2009). A recent outgrowth of the study of the human brand is political marketing. The role of the political leader is considered part of the marketing offer (Speed, Butler, and Collins 2014). It also seems that the U.S. news media has long recognized the existence of political branding (Milewicz and Milewicz 2014).

Previous research was conducted among registered voters in 2016 before the U.S. presidential election (Monahan 2017). Brand equity and personality metrics were computed for both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. The results of this study demonstrated Clinton's rating to be higher among Democratic voters and Mr. Trump's to be higher among Republicans. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the two candidates among independent voters. Since Trump won the election, this study was conducted to determine if there were any changes in his metrics after being President for one, two, and three years.

Multidimensional Brand Equity Scale

Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed a series of validated psychometric scales that measure aspects of customer-based brand equity. Yoo and Donthu (2001) defined brand equity as the “measurement of cognitive and behavioral brand equity at the individual consumer level through a consumer survey.” The scale indicators were drawn from an original pool of scale items covering a wide range of validated measures of each dimension; these were eventually reduced to 10 items that make up the multidimensional brand equity scale (MBE; Yoo and Donthu 2001). The four-dimensional scale items capture attitudinal loyalty, brand recognition awareness, perceived quality, and the “perceptual strength” of brand associations. The MBE has been demonstrated to be parsimonious in brand survey research, highly reliable across product categories and brands, and free of cultural bias. However, it is important to note that the MBE measure only captures the perceptual strength of brand associations.

Brand Personality Scale

Brand personality is measured by five dimensions that uniquely apply to consumer brand characterization (J. L. Aaker 1997). J. L. Aaker (1997) developed a theoretical framework of the brand personality construct by determining the number and nature of dimensions of brand personality traits. The resulting scale has been demonstrated to be reliable (Koebel and Ladwein 1999); it consists of five brand personality dimensions, which companies desire for their products: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness.

Brand equity and personality and purchase intention

Brand attitude is defined as the expression of a consumer’s positive or negative evaluation or feelings toward a brand (Berger and Mitchell 1989; Kotler and Armstrong 1996). Brand attitude and brand image have been demonstrated to have positive relationships with brand equity (Chang and Liu 2009; Faircloth et al. 2001). Brand equity is essential because it generates higher levels of customer brand preference, purchase intentions (Berry 2000; Chang and Liu 2009; Senthilnathan and Tharmi 2012), and repurchase intention (Hellier et al. 2003).

As a component of brand imagery, brand personality helps to create brand equity (Batra et al. 1993; Biel 1993). Both brand equity and brand personality have been demonstrated to have a positive correlation with voting intention (Monahan 2015, 2016).

Method

This study used survey results from a sample of registered voters to assess candidate brand equity and brand personality of President Donald Trump. The respondents were registered voters recruited from various parts of the country, and they were given a series of statements taken from the brand equity and personality scales and asked to indicate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale.

Brand Equity Measurement

Yoo and Donthu’s (2001) MBE served as the measure of candidate brand equity. It was necessary to modify the wording of some items to use the MBE to evaluate political candidates rather than the brands of items purchased. The modified 10-item MBE measure has two items for candidate name awareness (“I am aware of President Trump” and “I can recognize President Trump among other competing candidates”), three items for brand association strength (“some characteristics of President Trump come to my mind quickly,” “I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of President Trump,” and “I have no difficulty imagining President Trump in my mind”), two items for perceived candidate quality (“the likelihood that President Trump would be a quality president is extremely high” and “the likelihood that President Trump would be a functional president is extremely high”), and three items for brand loyalty (“I consider myself loyal to President Trump,” “for President, Donald Trump would be my first choice,” and “I will not vote for another candidate if President Trump runs in the general election”).

The MBE (Yoo and Donthu 2001) is a three-factor model that combines recognition awareness and perceptual strength of associations into one memory-based factor while treating perceived quality and brand loyalty as independent factors. Respondents indicated their agreement to each item statement using five-point Likert scales. Candidate total brand equity ratings and scores for each dimension were the focal point of analysis. The items for each dimension of the scale were averaged for each candidate to produce an awareness-association strength score, perceived candidate quality score, and candidate loyalty score. A candidate’s total brand equity rating consisted of an average of the dimension scores across all scaled items.

Candidate Brand Personality Measurement

Brand personality was measured using the dimensions developed by J.L. Aaker (1997). In this study, she identified 15 aspects of brand personality: down to earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful, daring, spirited, imaginative, up to date, reliable, intelligent, successful, upper class, charming, outdoorsy, and tough. These were then combined into five major components of brand personality: honest, wholesome, and cheerful came under the category of sincerity; daring, spirited, imaginative, and up to date came under the category of excitement; reliable, intelligent, and successful came under the category of competence; upper class and charming came under the category of sophistication; and outdoorsy and tough came under the category of ruggedness.

Using the above method, survey respondents were given 15 statements about the personality traits of the President and asked to describe their agreement on a five-point Likert scale. In addition to the questions on brand equity and personality, each of the respondents was asked a series of demographic questions: age, gender, political party affiliation, household income, location in the United States, and what they considered the biggest problem that America was currently facing. The choices were the economy, immigration, terrorism, race relations, and crime.

Sample

Of the 420 surveys sent out, there were 261 valid responses. The sample was split between 129 males and 132 females. The sample included 94 Democrats, 72 Republicans, 79 independents, and 16 members of other parties. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to over 65; there were 49 respondents aged 18–30, 113 aged 31 to 50, 79 aged 51 to 65, and 20 aged over 65.

The education of the respondents ranged from high school graduate to postgraduate and higher degrees. There were 41 high school graduates, 73 respondents with some college, 93 college graduates, 13 with some postgraduate education, and 41 with postgraduate or higher degrees.

The annual family income of the sample ranged from less than \$20,000 to over \$120,000 per annum. There were 21 respondents that earned less than \$20,000; 35 respondents earned between \$21,000 and \$40,000; 48 respondents earned between \$41,000 and \$60,000; 42 respondents earned between \$61,000 and \$80,000; 64 respondents earned between \$81,000 and \$120,000; 36 respondents earned over \$120,000; and 15 respondents preferred not to answer.

There were 22 respondents from New England; 35 were from the Middle Atlantic States; 55 were from the South Atlantic States; 42 were from East North Central States; 15 were from West North Central States; 15 were from East South Central States; 21 were from West South Central States; 14 were from the Mountain States; and 42 were from the Pacific States.

In terms of the most important issue facing the United States, 107 respondents thought that the economy was the most important issue; 53 saw immigration as most important; 55 thought that race relations were the most important issue; 24 saw terrorism as the most important issue; and 22 indicated crime as being the most important.

As the next election is quite soon, a question was asked about which Democrat would be able to defeat President Trump in 2020. There were 73 respondents who thought that Bernie Sanders could beat Trump; 27 thought that Pete Buttigieg was a good choice; 26 preferred Joe Biden; 11 preferred Elizabeth Warren; 16 preferred Amy Klobuchar; and 107 respondents did not think anyone mentioned could defeat Trump in the 2020 election.

Results

Brand Equity Scores

Table 1 illustrates the president's overall MBE scores for 2016, 2018, 2019, and 2020 (i.e., a composite mean of candidate awareness-association strength, perceived quality, and loyalty scale items). The Total Brand Equity scores were as follows: 2.80 in 2016, 2.95 in 2018, 3.28 in 2019, and 3.12 in 2020. An independent t-test was computed on the difference of means between the 2016 metric and the 2020 metric. There was a statistically significant difference between the total brand equity score for 2016 when Trump was a candidate, and 2020 after Trump had completed three years in office. The scores by party are listed in Table 2

Table 1. President Trump's MBE Brand Equity Scores

Year	N	Brand Equity Average	SD
2016	210	2.80	0.966
2018	201	2.95	0.981
2019	140	3.28	0.914
2020	261	3.12	1.120

Table 2. President Trump's MBE Brand Equity Score by Respondent's Party

Year	Democrat			Republican			Independent			Other Party		
	MBE	N	SD	MBE	N	SD	MBE	N	SD	MBE	N	SD
2016	2.35	79	.818	3.54	50	1.24	2.83	70	1.19	2.51	6	.998
2018	2.36	48	.498	3.73	52	1.01	2.84	89	.914	2.74	12	.701
2019	2.82	36	.595	4.04	42	0.94	3.07	54	.745	2.82	8	.551
2020	2.54	94	.758	3.99	73	1.14	3.03	79	.984	2.59	16	.862

Table 3 illustrates the average brand equity scores for respondents grouped by the issue they identified as most important and demonstrates that Trump's 2020 scores are higher than his 2016 scores in each issue category.

Table 3. President Trump's MBE Brand Equity Score by Issue

Year	Economy		Immigration		Terrorism		Race Relations		Crime	
	MBE (SD)	N	MBE (SD)	N	MBE (SD)	N	MBE (SD)	N	MBE (SD)	N
2016	2.74 (1.12)	94	3.63 (1.39)	21	3.02 (1.22)	29	2.49 (0.96)	45	2.68 (1.14)	16
2018	2.84 (.926)	64	3.93 (.927)	33	3.17 (1.03)	25	2.53 (0.63)	55	2.61 (.883)	24
2019	3.04 (.714)	60	4.14 (.976)	22	3.44 (0.97)	22	2.74 (0.46)	22	3.46 (.972)	12
2020	2.84 (.989)	107	4.09 (1.07)	53	3.54 (1.27)	24	2.52 (0.57)	55	3.01 (1.06)	22

The brand equity scores by gender are listed in Table 4 and demonstrate that Trump scored higher with males in 2020 than he did in 2016 and significantly higher with females.

Table 4. President Trump's MBE Brand Equity Score by Gender

Year	Males			Females		
	MBE	N	SD	MDE	N	SD
2016	3.01	88	1.19	2.66	117	1.14
2018	3.08	94	.979	2.83	107	.972
2019	3.38	60	.918	3.28	80	.914
2020	3.10	129	1.12	3.11	132	1.113

Candidate Brand Personality Scores

Table 5 illustrates the president's overall personality score (i.e., the composite mean of candidate personality ratings for sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness), and demonstrate that Trump's brand personality scores have remained low and stable since 2016.

Table 5. President Trump's Brand Personality Scores

Year	N	Brand Personality Average	SD
2016	205	2.30	1.28
2018	201	2.37	1.26
2019	140	2.29	1.29
2020	261	2.36	1.29

The scores by party are listed in Table 6. Trump's scores are consistently low and stable with democrats, and independents, and other party voters. The Republican voters have consistently scored the president higher since 2016.

Table 6. President's Brand Personality Score by Party

Year	Democrat			Republican			Independent			Other Party		
	Score	N	SD	Score	N	SD	Score	N	SD	Score	N	SD
2016	1.73	79	0.97	3.05	50	1.30	2.40	70	1.31	2.14	6	0.99
2018	1.49	48	0.79	3.45	52	1.05	2.22	89	1.19	2.36	12	0.93
2019	1.65	36	1.02	3.33	42	0.90	1.94	54	1.05	1.92	8	0.90
2020	1.63	94	0.93	3.41	75	1.14	2.27	79	1.18	2.10	16	1.00

Table 7 lists the average brand personality scores for respondents grouped by the issue they identified as most important. Trump's scores were consistently low among respondents who thought that the economy was the most important issue, and among those who thought that race relations and crime were the most important issues. His scores were consistently high among voters who thought that the most important issues were immigration and terrorism.

Table 7. President Trump's Brand Personality Scores by Issue

Year	Economy		Immigration		Terrorism		Race Relations		Crime	
	Score (SD)	N	Score (SD)	N	Score (SD)	N	Score (SD)	N	Score (SD)	N
2016	2.74 (1.12)	94	3.64 (1.39)	21	3.02 (1.23)	29	2.49 (0.97)	45	2.68 (1.14)	16
2018	2.27 (1.19)	64	3.62 (1.06)	33	2.75 (1.32)	25	1.62 (0.83)	55	2.25 (1.09)	24
2019	1.93 (1.06)	60	3.30 (1.17)	24	2.77 (1.11)	22	1.50 (0.73)	22	2.57 (1.13)	12
2020	2.16 (1.16)	107	3.51 (1.09)	53	3.02 (1.25)	24	1.41 (0.65)	55	2.18 (1.29)	22

Table 8 lists the brand personality scores by gender. The brand personality scores have been consistently stable and low among both males and females since 2016.

Table 8. President's Brand Personality Scores by Gender

Year	Males			Females		
	MBE	N	SD	MDE	N	SD
2016	2.44	88	1.19	2.17	117	1.22
2018	2.56	94	1.28	2.20	107	1.23
2019	2.34	60	1.18	2.28	80	1.23
2020	2.36	129	1.32	2.36	132	1.26

Discussion

The brand equity rating for Donald Trump was higher in 2020 than it was in 2016, and the difference is statistically significant. Trump had a higher brand equity rating with all political parties, especially among independent voters. This indicates a positive perception of the competency of the Trump Presidency. The President also had average higher ratings among the groups of respondents who felt that immigration, terrorism, or crime were the most important issues. The respondents who thought that the economy and race relations were the most important issues remained relatively unchanged between 2016 and 2020. One very interesting result was the brand equity scores for President Trump among women voters. They were relatively low in 2016 and have moved higher in current years. This is interesting because Trump has been labeled an anti-feminist candidate.

The overall brand personality ratings for the President were stable and low for all four metrics, including for all political parties, except for the Republican Party and for respondents who thought the economy, race relations, and crime were the most important issues. They were steady and relatively high for respondents who thought that immigration and race relations were the most important issues from 2016 to 2020 and remained stable and low for both males and females throughout the testing periods.

As illustrated in Table 9, the percentage of people describing the most important issues resulted in little or no change, except for an increase in respondents who thought that immigration was the most important issue and a decrease in respondents who thought that terrorism was the most important issue.

Table 9. Respondents' perceptions of the most critical issue facing the United States.

Issue	2016	2018	2019	2020
The Economy	45.7%	38.7%	43.8%	41.2%
Terrorism	20.0%	13.6%	14.6%	8.8%
Immigration	6.7%	13.2%	16.8%	20.4%
Race Relations	18.1%	24.6%	16.1%	21.1%
Crime	9.5%	9.9%	8.7%	8.5%

Future Research

Future research could continue to track Trump's metrics for each year of his presidency and compare Trump's numbers with those of the Democratic nominee. In studies such as this, Republicans evaluate Republican candidates favorably, and Democrats do the same. For this reason, future studies should focus on changes in the evaluation of the candidates by the very important independent voters.

Conclusion

This study reveals that Trump's brand equity metrics have changed between 2016 and 2020, but the brand personality metrics have remained stable and relatively low. This appears to indicate that there is a favorable perception of the competence of the Trump presidency, but his personality traits seem to be a problem.

I also think that there is a positive aspect of this evaluation. According to Pew Research, the press in the United States has been extremely negative toward the Trump presidency (Mitchell et al. 2017). After three consecutive years of negative press, one would expect that all metrics would be considerably lower, yet some have improved. This would indicate that the president's communication ability has, in some instances, overcome the bad press.

In the evaluation of the results of this survey, it is interesting to note the differences in the percentages of the voter's opinion on the most significant problem impacting the U.S. In 2016, 6.7% of respondents felt that the immigration was the biggest problem facing the U.S. In 2020, this number has increased to 20%. This could be viewed as a positive for the Trump administration as it has made solving the immigration problem an important goal.

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