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THESIS REPORT:**

CANDIDATE PERSONAL BRANDS:

**A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND PATHS FOR FUTURE
INQUIRY**

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CANDIDATE PERSONAL BRANDS:

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND PATHS FOR FUTURE INQUIRY

by

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2016

Abstract

CANDIDATE PERSONAL BRANDS:

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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The 2016 presidential primaries went exactly, and not at all, as expected. On the Democratic side, frontrunner and partisan-insider, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appears to be the nominee. Many political scholars in 2015 would have predicted this result and yet few of them would have anticipated the successes of her Democratic Party challenger Senator Bernie Sanders. On the Republican side, businessman Donald Trump appears to be the nominee. Very few political scientists in 2015 would have predicted this result and yet scholarship on branding, personal brands, and political marketing offer explanations for how it could be a possibility. To advance what is known about the surfacing, pre-primary, and primary phase of political campaigns, this report offers a literature review of political brands and candidate personal brands. The goal is to offer a roadmap of prior scholarship and advance a few fruitful paths for future inquiry.

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INTRODUCTION

On March 3rd 2016, a frustrated Mitt Romney took the stage at the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah. He was in a much different place than he was four years ago. He looked a little older and a little wiser. And he wasn't there to announce another presidential run, but rather to make his strong case against another particular presidential candidate. A candidate whose endorsement he had sought just four years prior. This wasn't the polite Romney persona we were used to either. His bluntness shocked everyone when he began by saying "Here's what I know: Donald Trump is a phony, a fraud. His promises are as worthless as a degree from Trump University. He's playing members of the American public for suckers: He gets a free ride to the White House, and all we get is a lousy hat" ("Transcript of Mitt Romney's speech on Donald Trump," 2016).

America seemed stunned. Former presidential candidates never typically speak out against members of their own party. Especially on a live national stage so dramatically as this one. And notably, the speech came from a candidate known for his well-mannered and deferential nature. Romney seemed madder than he had ever been, more frustrated than when he himself lost the presidency in 2012. The act itself provided an interesting contrast to the Donald Trump rally that happened a couple of hours later. A rally in which Trump mocked Romney while the crowd cheered him on. Much to Romney's dismay, his speech only helped boost Trump's popularity that week.

The traditional and well-behaved 2012 Romney campaign seems like a far cry from the unexpected and chaotic 2016 general election. After all, Romney was the perfect presidential candidate on paper: Experienced, attractive, well-educated, able to gain respect from a solid combination of both business and political experience. He looked presidential. He sounded presidential. He was presidential. And then he lost. And when he took the stage

in Utah this past March to convince the voters to oppose Trump, he lost that day too. Two months after Romney's "Anti Trump speech" Donald Trump won the Republican nomination in a landslide. Romney himself never could have predicted what a spectacle the 2016 election cycle would be. And he especially would *never* have predicted a Donald Trump nomination from a party that nominated him four years earlier. In terms of personality and candidate behavior Mitt Romney and Donald Trump are clear opposites. So opposite in fact that media continually refer to Trump as the "Anti-Romney."

How could Romney (who appeared perfect for the presidency) be such a failed candidate? Going into the 2012 election he had a solid chance of winning based on polling data. He seemed to check all the right "presidential boxes." In 2011, Markowicz commented, "The first time I saw Mitt Romney on the national stage I thought what everyone invariably thinks: He's straight out of central casting to play the role of president."

And perhaps this was his very problem. America didn't feel like they knew the candidate Romney. They didn't understand him. His good manners and scripted nature prevented the connection that voters so desperately craved. He didn't know how to relate. He didn't feel authentic. And worst of all, he didn't pass the "beer test." Americans didn't want to have a beer with him. They couldn't even have a beer with him. Romney doesn't even drink alcohol. It was an election lost solely based on personality (Or lack thereof). And now in hindsight it helps to compare how voters responded differently to Romney and Trump's personalities. As Bill Maher reflected,

> Even though I don't agree with everything Donald Trump says by far, it is sort of refreshing to have a politician who isn't always walking everything back and who isn't completely pre-programmed...That's his genius, he doesn't apologize for anything. He's the king of brushing things off his shoulder. And this is what's attractive about him, I have to say, as somebody who did a show called Politically

Incorrect, who was always being criticized for speaking too honestly … He's sort of the anti-Mitt Romney. Mitt Romney, people hated him because he was so robotic. Well, you don't like robotic, Trump is your guy. (Hensch, 2015)

It isn't easy being a voter in 2016. It isn't easy being an informed citizen either. The constant barrage of information makes the landscape difficult to navigate even for the most educated and adept political junkies. Campaigns are never-ending. Media coverage is never-ending. The negativity and cynicism are always present. And as American culture has grown to continually rely on a mediated environment for information, the roles of citizen, candidate, campaign and media have grown fuzzier. We all have more access to each other, and yet are still craving more access. We are craving more connections. Being a candidate nowadays is not just about being good at the job you are running for; but about being good at the job of candidate. And this mediated environment places somewhat unrealistic demands on candidates. Candidates are now required to possess both "insider" and "outsider" skills. Traditionally the "insider" skills were always more important for American political success. But an increasingly 24-hour media environment demands "outsider" skills that certain candidates struggle with. As Klein (2015) asserted,

The kind of campaigning that happens on television and before crowds is a small fraction of what's necessary to win a nomination, or lead a congressional delegation. The inside game — courting donors, winning endorsements, influencing the primary calendar, securing key committee assignments, luring top staffers, working with interest groups —makes up the bulk of politics...Mastery of the inside game is hard to assess and so is frequently undervalued, but it's also determinative — it's why wooden campaigners like Mitt Romney and Al Gore win primaries, and why no current leader of either party's congressional wing can deliver an exciting speech. The media often scratches its head over how such weak politicians prove

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so successful at politics, but the answer is they're not weak politicians — they're excellent politicians, but the part of politics they excel at is largely hidden.

And yet here we are in 2016. An anomaly election cycle that punishes what is hidden. Jeb Bush was the ultimate definition of a "wooden campaigner" with excellent "insider" skills. And instead of being the GOP nominee poor Jeb is busy snap chatting pictures of himself making guacamole at his home in Florida. Tim Miller, one of Jeb Bush's close advisors explained, "Presidential campaigns are becoming staging grounds for only two types of politicians: those who eclipse everyone else with showmanship and those who are so scripted you can't discern if any humanity remains" (Stein, 2016). Jeb Bush (as well as the 15 other GOP candidates) were all eclipsed by Trump in embarrassing fashion. Perhaps Trump's nomination is the final end point of what Neil Postman warned us about decades ago. We have in fact "amused ourselves to death" through a 24-hour visual media culture of "disinformation" that views the world through a lens of entertainment. And once we get so used to being amused and entertained it becomes harder and harder to get our attention. (Postman & Postman, 2005)

So we have a puzzle: our over mediated environment puts pressure on the media to get ratings and to entertain, it puts pressure on citizens and consumers to consume and pay attention to a never-ending and exhausting barrage of content. And it requires candidates (and their respective campaigns) to somehow find a message that resonates with both media and voters. It is important to first look at relevant research and literature before diving into some prescriptive case studies.

THE OVER-COMMUNICATED ENVIRONMENT AND THE CONSTANT CAMPAIGN

It doesn't take much to observe the constant and never-ending political conversations in 2016. Even citizens and voters trying to hide from it find it impossible. The toxic political environment permeates our lives every day to the point of exhaustion. The ubiquitous nature of the campaign never ends. Before this world of 24-hour media coverage and social media influence there were clear starts and stops to campaign actions and media reactions. Back before everyone had a smartphone, a candidate would hold a press conference… and then press would attend and either write or report about that event. And voters and citizens would hear about it through consuming print or TV media usually hours or days later. But our "over-communicated" and saturated media environment has changed how voters come to know candidates and campaigns. This phenomenon has influenced behaviors and feelings of voters/citizens, media and candidates/campaigns. All of these players have been forced to change up their strategies as a result of this never ending and over-communicated environment.

Over-Communicated Voters/Citizens

Most voters get to know candidates through media. Unless someone is an activist or lives in Iowa or New Hampshire, the average American doesn't meet candidates in person. We meet them through language shaped by media and campaigns and consultants. And the overall construction of a candidate's image is shaped by forces besides the candidate. As a result, it has gotten difficult and more complicated at times to know the person behind the candidate. This is after a voter weeds through the messages sent by

campaigns, opposition, social media audiences, special interest groups, donors, surrogates, biased media coverage, etc. As Garber (2015) noted, "The public citizen has access to our leaders and politicians and celebrities more than ever as well as their public personas….and we struggle to know the difference." Because the constant barrage of information is so overwhelming citizens and voters they are often forced to deal with a '"traffic jam" of info at all times and have to find a way to break through the overwhelming amount of information (Ries & Trout, 1985). As Jarvis (2004) asserted, citizens respond to the pressures of an over-communicated society (and their relative independence from elites and parties) by keeping their eyes on the issue environment rather than by mastering the nuances of topics in gross detail" (p. 49). Even the most thoughtful and informed voters struggle to understand what is going on. According to Lees-Marshment (2009) "Voters are now exposed to significantly more sources of information about politics, including more critical and independent reporting. Continual media coverage also provides an uncomfortable, unrelenting environment for political parties and politicians, especially in government" (p. 5). But and perhaps most importantly, "new media outlets such as online discussions enable the voter to be part of the broadcast and make the news, not just watch it" (p. 6).

Social media has changed the game in that the hierarchy is flattened and citizens have as much power to react and respond and create messages as all the elites. According to Jones (2014) "In a digital world the ability for citizens to engage phenomena across platforms- watch a debate on television, post twitter responses as it happens, create satirical photo shopped memes, and read live updated blogs about it as the debate is occurring- demonstrates a convergence of once distinct or segregated participatory behaviors" (p. 115).

Over-Communicated Candidates (and Their Campaigns)

It isn't just the citizens who have had to adjust and change to this over-communicated environment. Candidates themselves have quickly realized how important it is to capture and keep the attention of voters. And doing that is difficult. Fighting for attention from both the media and the people is now a grueling, full time job for campaigns. In order to have a chance as a candidate, you must be given media attention. And once you get media attention your "show" has to be good enough for the voters to pay attention. Back in 1997, Goldhaber predicted that as a result of the media (and especially internet) taking charge of our everyday lives, attention would now be our most valuable (and scarce) commodity. And because we live in an "attention economy," those who figure out how to capture our attention will prevail. He explained,

> The attention economy is a star system, where Elvis has an advantage. The relationship between stars and fans is central. Even without cyberspace, celebrities in show business, politics, and every other discipline accumulate huge amounts of notice. Cyberspace affords new opportunities for capturing attention that might otherwise dissipate. It promises nearly everyone a chance at attention from millions, the potential to be noticed by the largest possible audience – or by an audience of peers whose attention we value most. But the Net also ups the ante, increasing the relentless pressure to get some fraction of this limited resource. (Goldhaber, 1997)

Daniel Boorstin (in his seminal 1961 book "The Image") foreshadowed how this coming mediated environment would alter our perception of everything simply based on the "graphic" revolution. Images were now going to be more powerful than words. And the power of image would lead to people and events needing to be more highly scripted

and choreographed and orchestrated. And this would reward those who were able to master the art of celebrity. He argued, "The machinery of information has brought into being a new substitute for the hero, who is the celebrity, and whose main characteristic is his well-knownness. In the democracy of pseudo-events anyone can become a celebrity, if only he can get in the news and stay there." (p. 60). Commanding attention has led candidates and campaigns to focus much more on strategic messages and images that provide both substance and entertainment in a way that keeps them in the news cycle. And sadly for candidates (especially in legislative offices) they can never not be in the news cycle. It's easy to complain about "constant-campaigning" but that nature of getting elected now means that many candidates have to remain in campaign mode at all times. Losing media attention can be a death sentence for most candidates. So in addition to constant fundraising a constant media presence is crucial for a candidate's success. Elected officials are taught never to relax and always need to remain "on edge" about the next campaign. As Steger (1999) noted, "The desire for reelection, combined with uncertainty about their reelection chances, motivates members of congress to campaign incessantly. This is why political observers frequently talk about the permanent campaign in congress. Members of congress run scared." (p. 663)

We all know that the primary process matters for candidates but the "pre-primary" process also is critical. This time period is referred to as "surfacing" where a candidate is first coming to the surface of the public eye. Sometimes these first impressions and initial decisions made while surfacing can make or break the trajectory of a campaign. As Trent and Friedenberg (2000) explain, "The modern campaign has four stages: pre primary, primary, convention and general election. The first pre-primary stage known as "surfacing" "begins with candidates' initial efforts to create an interest and image of themselves as

candidates and extends through a variety of public rhetorical transactions prior to the first primary election" (p. 21).

This surfacing stage is essential for how a candidate begins to introduce herself to the electorate, to the media and to the political arena as a whole. Candidates who do not have success in primaries often fail due to a result of a poor pre-primary strategy. A candidate must surface in a way that wins over the voters and the media.

Over-Communicated Media

Much has been written about the overwhelming power of media on framing candidates and campaigns and the media are commonly despised as much as politicians. But fighting for readership and viewership and attention amongst such a big information playing field has not been easy. Sadly there aren't many traditional and objective journalists left on this playing field. Just like candidates, media have had to figure out how to package and deliver information in a way that makes money. And making money requires entertainment. You can't just "report the news." You have to do so in a way that captures attention when a person is scrolling through twitter or flipping through channels.

This is also why there is such a blurring of lines between politics and celebrity and pop culture and entertainment. Henry Jenkins (2014) argued that this type of digital "convergence culture" is what collapses and blends both pop culture and politics and makes the two hard to differentiate. Jones (2014) explains that presidential campaigns in digital eras have become a "cultural" event" that performs every hour of every day. He says, "In a 24/7 media saturated world, there is little separation between action and reaction, whether by candidates, campaigns, media creators or citizens" (p. 116). Jones goes as far to say that digital programming surrounding primary campaigns has taken on the same characteristics

of reality shows where it feels to citizens that there are multiple episodes each week where we choose our favorite "characters."

Even cable networks have gone as far to mimic reality show programming with their own giant production teams and visual aesthetics that contain pre-packaged music and new technology to make events entertaining and increase viewership. When a debate may play on 9 different channels how is a person supposed to choose which one to watch? Which is why networks and network personalities try to differentiate and brand themselves in ways to gain a fan base much like politicians and celebrities need to. According to Jarvis (2005) "a society with twenty-four-hour news, a proliferation of cable news channels, constantly updated Internet sites, and insurgent blogs, political observers and pundits are constantly searching for topics to fill their airtime and columns. The "strategy" of the candidates and campaigns, of course, becomes safe fodder for discussion and lends itself to incessant chatter." (p. 15). All of this pressure on everyone only increases the need for marketing and branding surrounding all of the players.

POLITICAL MARKETING & BRANDING

As media influence continues to grow, so too has the importance of campaigns and candidates requiring marketing expertise to effectively communicate messages. Political marketing has grown on all levels ranging from party organizations trying to figure out how to market and brand themselves to campaigns attempting to turn their candidates and movements into products much like organizational brands have done for years. According to Perloff (1999)

> For better or worse, campaigns have always been shaped to a considerable degree by elites-political elites in the late 18th century, party leaders in the 19th century, and marketing gurus in the late 20th century. And although campaigns have touched on pressing issues in some elections (e.g, 1986) more than others, they never have been primarily about issues… The marketing campaign did not develop out of thin air; instead, it evolved over time and as a response to the inequities and dysfunctional aspects of the popular party-based campaign, in much the same way as popular politics emerged when elite politics no longer could serve the complex needs of the burgeoning culture (pp. 37-39).

It used to be easier for the parties back when all decisions were made by a small amount of elites in smoke-filled rooms. But as parties have fought to gain membership and stay alive they have had to respond in ways that resemble the ways in which businesses market products. According to Perdigao (2013), "Modern political marketing brought technological innovations into the political arena with the aim of helping governments and politicians to be more responsive to people's needs and wants (hence its use has changed the relationships between leaders, parties and citizens." (p. 45). Parties soon realized that surviving this new mediated world would require bypassing traditional politics and using

marketing to their advantage when responding to concerns of media and citizens (Lees-Marshment, 2009 p. 7). The parties soon saw that hiring marketing experts to help market their own brands was a great way to not only keep supporters but also (and more importantly) an efficient money-making tool. After all, the antecedents of marketing theory go back to the bottom line. According to Scammell (2015),

> There is broad agreement that brands are assets that in the business world can translate into colossal financial value. Brands are often defined as the psychological representation of a product or service or organization, providing symbolic, rather than tangible use-value to consumers. Successful brands add a layer of emotional connection with consumers above and beyond functionality (p. 12).

> Marketing scholar Philip Kotler has contended that "a brand is a complex symbol that can convey up to six levels of meaning: attributes, benefits (functional and emotional), values, culture, personality, and user (brands carry with them a picture of their intended audience (1999, p. 55). Audiences want what looks good. Voters want candidates who are bright and shiny. According to O'Shaughnessy (1990). "American politics has gained in glamour what it has lost in credibility. And the sleek shall inherit the earth" (p. 256). Interesting though the campaign and the candidate "handlers" no longer completely control the marketed image of a person running for office. Back when political marketing started to matter the campaigns had a lot of power of the images. And now, marketing any type of candidate (by any party or campaign) on a large scale is incredibly difficult and complicated. Speed et al (2015) explain,

> The challenge of marketing a well-known personality is obvious. They are not inert, abstract constructs. They are real individuals, who can be interviewed, photographed, and challenged. They may be the subject of a marketing communication effort but that is not necessarily the only source of information

about them available to the public. Because of the risk this carries, most business has chosen not to incorporate human brands into their activities. Political parties, because of the nature of the offer, have no choice. (p. 138)

The ways in which political marketing has taken over party organizations is clear. But more importantly, the personal branding aspects of candidates have recently taken over as being even more powerful.

PERSONAL BRANDING

Perhaps the most pervasive change in modern day candidates and campaigning is the crucial aspect of personal branding. Candidates are now products of our over-communicated and overly-marketed political environment which means they have become brands and products themselves. These overall trends of political marketing have led candidates and campaigns to not only acknowledge the importance of personality when it comes to getting voters to like a candidate but also what particular personality traits voters even want. If a personality (and candidate's brand) isn't resonating it doesn't matter how smart and competent a candidate may be on the issues. The personal brand matters especially during a 2016 election cycle that shows frustrations with party establishments and a decrease in party loyalty. The surprising success of the brands of both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders has regenerated a discussion about how much the relationship matters between party and candidate. Regardless though, presidential candidates are typically public figures who are in the public eye before their presidential run. Elections are much more voter centered and candidate centered (rather than party centered) though and this type of branding becomes a lens for understanding the conversation surrounding presidential nominees in the general election. Scholars have looked at the notion of brands as parties but not at the candidates as their own brands. But the branding starts long before a candidate even makes it to the general election. Which makes us wonder: Which brands win? Which brands lose? What are the implications for some of these patterns?

According to Kotler and Kotler (1999) "The political arena usually is highly charged with beliefs and emotions, as well as conflict and partisanship that rarely characterize the consumer's choice of commercial products" (p. 6). They explain that candidates usually have to deal with a large amount of voters and citizens who have been

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burned by the cynicism of politics and who choose to stay away and not pay attention. As well as intense political and party activists who have made politics a large part of their live. Appealing to both those types of people is not easy. Getting typical citizens with low levels of engagement and knowledge to become active takes a special candidate that resonates in a special way for a special time. Because many voters rarely take a lot of time to get to know candidates, "they generally vote on the basis of the candidate's images as shaped by the media or previous identifications" (p. 14). "The candidate who wishes to succeed cannot leave his or her image making to chance. Clothes, manner, statements, and actions shape the impressions made on people. The term used in marketing to orient image planning for a product is product concept. It is the major theme around which buyer interest is built, the "unique selling proposition" or "promised benefit" of the product. The candidate must choose a product concept for marketing." (p. 14)

In 1997, Jennifer Aaker proposed the dimensions of brand personality arguing that the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" is what will make that brand successful or not. The five characteristics include: Sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. See chart below.
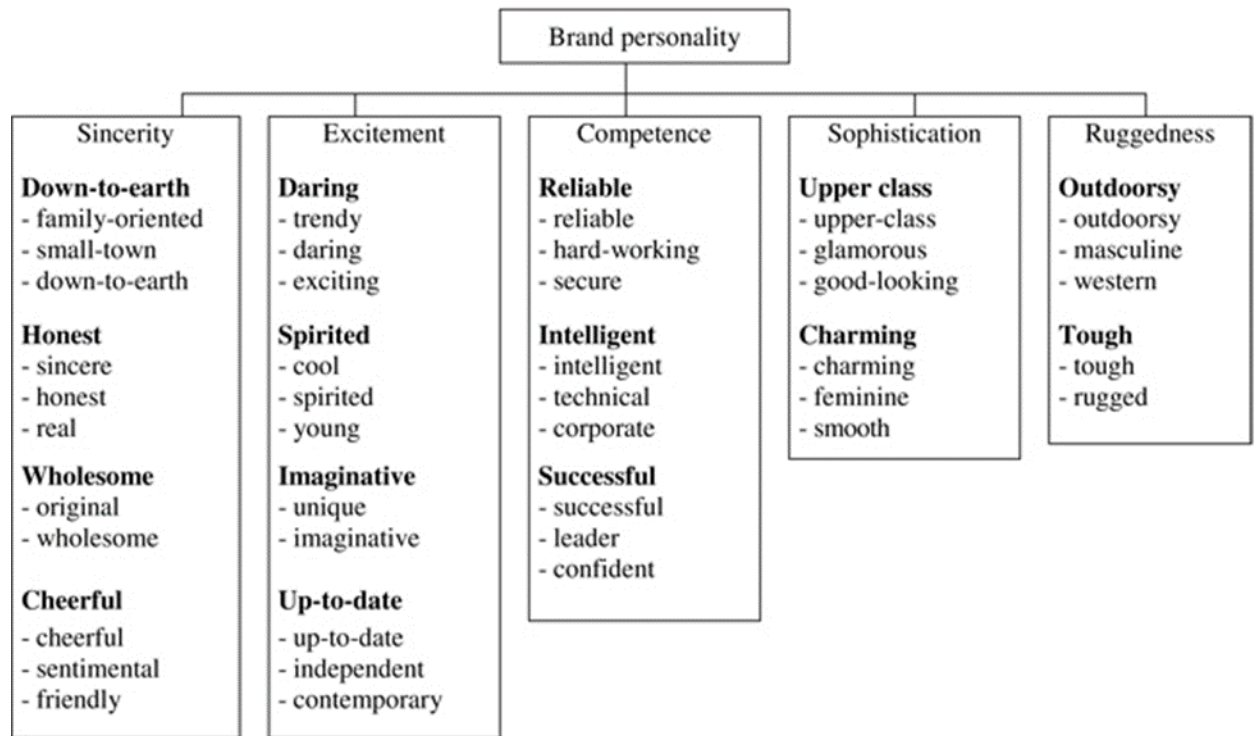
Figure 1. Brand Personality Scale.
Source: Aaker, J. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality (p. 352). *Journal of Marketing Research, 34*(3), 347-356. doi: 10.2307/3151897

(Image 1)

Arguably, politics and especially candidates and campaigns are moving in the direction of branding models and Aaker's model complements this trend well. Social psychologists insist that traits matter. They matter in the classroom, they matter in the workplace and they matter on the campaign trail. Even early trait studies utilizing undergraduate students showed clear evidence that traits give off strong impressions of people. And there are clear "warm" and "cold" traits that make people give off either positive or negative impressions (Asch, 1946; Rosenberg et al, 1968). These dimensions cross over from individuals to the business world as well. Malone and Fiske (2013) insist that branding and image are invaluable to corporate culture and keeping customers happy.

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Organizations that have established an image of both warmth and competence rebound more quickly from setbacks and have more success in the long run versus companies lacking in warmth and competence. They explain, "The companies that are succeeding these days are those who have already stopped trying to manipulate us according to the old middle ages of marketing rules. Instead, they are creating shared value with us through the new rules of the relationship renaissance. These are the companies that present themselves as human" (p. 16).

This theory absolutely carries over to political campaigns and candidates. The variables of "strength" and "warmth" remain consistent in many of these studies and the various adjectives used keep coming back to warmth and competence (Asch, 1946; Rosenberg et al, 1968; Abelson et al, 1982; Kinder et al, 1980; Wojciszke and Klusek, 1996; Wojciszke, 1998, Cuddy et al, 2008). According to Fiske (2006), "The warmth dimension captures traits that are related to perceived intent...whereas the competence dimension reflects traits that are related to perceived ability...In sum, when people spontaneously interpret behavior or form impressions of others, warmth and competence form basic dimensions that, together, account almost entirely for how people characterize others" (p. 77). It is also important to note that people typically try to determine intent before determining a person's competence. In other words, the warmth comes first for people. Cuddy et al. (2013) termed this combination of qualities as the "happy warrior." They explain, "Feeling a sense of personal strength helps us to be more open, less threatened and less threatening in social situations. When we feel confident and calm, we project authenticity and warmth" (p. 6). For a person to be compelling they often give off a rare combination of that encompass both these traits.

There are dozens of personality traits that voters like when it comes to candidate brands. Being able to see a candidate's authentic self is at the top of a voter's list. Although

it is often hard to distinguish the difference between perception and reality when it comes to qualities like authenticity citizens instinctively know that it matters. Voters are tired of the scripted manipulation coming out of media and campaigns that they crave what seems real. According to Van Leeuwen (2001) "What is authenticity? We might for instance call something 'authentic' because it is 'genuine', because its origin or authorship are not in question, and it is not an imitation or a copy." (p. 392). Speed et al (2015) agree that the game changes when it comes to dealing with brands that are human. Inanimate brands and products are different when we aren't talking about a person. They explain,

> For human brands, while the concept of the persona recognizes that there is scope for the presentation of an image that is not necessarily a complete representation of the individual's actual character, the persona presented must be one that the individual concerned can support and reinforce in their day-to-day actions. The extent of scrutiny on both the political and personal lives of political leaders is sufficient to highlight areas where the persona presented does not ring true. We term this fit between persona and underlying personality ''authenticity.'' (p. 142)

Somewhere along the line have begun to distrust events and statements that seem too prepared or overly-managed or scripted in advance. And this is despite the fact that all good campaign teams have advance teams and communication staff that does everything in their power to make sure political events appear flawless. But striving for flawless has in turn made voters crave what doesn't seem flawless. We think that is more trustworthy and more coming from the candidate rather than coming from a consultant or some other puppet master behind the scenes. Van Leeuwen (2001) explains,

> The media and the social sciences often privilege certain people and certain kinds of talk as more authentic than others, and hence as a potential source of truth on which to base judgements and actions. Practices of media and research interviewing

are based on the romantic belief that what people say spontaneously is more truthful than what they say after preparation and planning. Psychoanalysis has identified the truth with the irrational, the emotional and the immediate association. In questionnaires the impulsive immediate answer is seen as more valuable and truthful than the carefully thought-out answer and media interviewers refuse to give their interviewees the questions in advance for the same reason (pp. 393-394)

But is it possible to really distinguish what is authentic and what is a scripted performance that just seems authentic? According to Goffman (1959) "Almost anyone can learn a script well enough to give a charitable audience some sense of the realness in what is being contrived before them. Scripts, even in the hands of players, can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to identify." (p. 32). Although different forms of media (especially social media) have allowed citizens to think they are seeing more backstage behind the scene moments, rather than front stage scripted moments that aren't real. But is there even such thing as a back stage in politics? Doesn't a politician in 2016 always have to be "on" at all times….except when they are sleeping? According to Tolson (2001), "This must be understood as a type of public performance-, but a performance which, crucially, is not perceived as 'acting'. For this to be brought off successfully, the public persona of the celebrity needs to project an aura of 'authenticity'... individuals are said to possess an inner, irreducible essence, a 'real self' behind whatever public face, or mask, they might project." (p. 445). Van Leeuwen (2001) echoes this in saying, "Equally interesting is the question of whether a performance comes across as authentic, sincere, or not - regardless of whether it is a spontaneous performance or. For instance, a performance by an actor. This relates to the social norms which govern the expression or restraining of emotion" (p. 394). 2016 has proven that displays of emotion resonate with voters. Candidates who don't

show enough of themselves often find themselves on the losing side of history. Few politicians know this more than Governor Michael Dukakis who struggled with branding and personality to the point of losing. As O'Shaughnessy (1990) described,

> Dukakis, as all the world knows, had a fundamental problem. He bored people...the major deficiency with Dukakis as a 'product' was his detachment. Americans are passionate people. They show their emotions. They discuss them. Dukakis violated a cultural norm: in doing so he neglected the first principle of attractiveness, which is similarity. He was not 'similar' because he could not communicate outrage; Bush dissimilar in background and united himself to people by affecting to share their emotions. That is why he came to be perceived as 'likeable." (p. 230).

The personality popularity contest requires a grasp of everyday life and pop culture values that the majority of Americans relate to. According to Scammell (2015)

> Democratic politicians must court popularity, and in doing so they become enmeshed in popular culture. They may be more or less successful, but their attempts at connection will certainly be judged by the standards of popular celebrity-infused culture. Hence, we witness politicians (think Blair, Clinton, Obama, or Cameron) cultivating cool images, 'being the ultimate accolade of popular culture, signifying authenticity, ''being in charge and in touch.'' Thus, Street says, the appropriate analogy is ''not commerce but celebrity, not business but show-business.'' (p. 10)

All of these ways of connecting and showing personal branding can be seen through the group of following case studies looking at how candidates try to convey their brands to both the media and the public as a whole.

CASE STUDIES

Authenticity and Authorship: Choosing the Unscripted Over the Robotic

We live in a time in which almost every political moment is highly staged and scripted. And the seemingly disingenuous trends of political spectacle in recent years has led to voters constantly searching for signs of a real person behind the controlled images of candidates. Sometimes these valuable moments come out at events when a candidate appears to go "off script." A seemingly unscripted moment of communication can be refreshing to an electorate that constantly feels pandered to. Voters understand that candidates and campaigns need consistency with messaging and branding, but these modern demands have led to an over reliance on prepared soundbites, teleprompters, and highly choreographed political events. There's something very "American" about craving authenticity. As President Obama's former videographer Arun Chaudhary (2013) noted:

> Americans detest inauthenticity above all things, especially in our politicians. Our electoral history is littered with losing candidates the nation deemed "inauthentic"– John Kerry and Mitt Romney being just two of the latest….Our leaders need to keep up an authentic core…..Americans seem to, again and again, send individuals to the White House who are capable of projecting authentic personalities.

> And regardless of the 2016 election outcome, the glaring reality is that two unexpected candidates with very "authentic styles" resonated well with voters. Many Americans found the style of both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders rather refreshing. Attendance at their rallies was higher than other candidates combined and both candidates seemed capable of channeling their angers and frustrations into stem-winding speeches that

played well both in person and on TV. It is notable however that both of these candidate made efforts to show that they were in charge of the "authorship" aspect of many of their speeches and events. This is an especially difficult challenge for candidates dealing with modern day optics. Montgomery (2001) argued that there are three types of authenticity. He explained,

> First there is talk that is deemed authentic because it does not sound contrived, simulated or performed but rather sounds natural, 'fresh', spontaneous. Second there is talk that is deemed authentic because it seems truly to capture or present the experience of the speaker. Third, there is authentic talk that seems truly to project the core self of the speaker - talk that is true to the self of the speaker in an existential fashion." (pp. 403-404)

This definition is most likely why both Trump and Sanders were continually described as being authentic. For Bernie, many noticed that he carried his own speaking notes up to the podium on scribbled lined paper in his own handwriting. This phenomenon fit well with the old Vermont folklore of how every time Vermonters saw Bernie out and about around his home he always had piles of papers in his hands and falling out of his briefcase. People at his 2016 rallies would often notice that he carried his own lined paper up to the podium (which is virtually unheard of for modern day presidential candidates). If a teleprompter isn't set up for a candidate then an advance team typically has the typed speech already up at the podium for the candidate. It was somewhat jarring and archaic to see Bernie walking around with papers in his handwriting. But it also appealed to the greater message that these were his authentic words he had written himself.

Pictured below: Bernie before a rally with his handwritten notes.

(Image 2)

Many Bernie campaign rally attendees often would comment on how his speeches felt like overly-substantive college lectures that were filled with so much data and analysis that they did not follow the usual poetry of most stump speech events. But the media seemed to be fascinated with taking pictures of Bernie and his handwritten notes because it's a visual we rarely see anymore. Media and supporters alike were so into the actual handwriting aspect that the campaign team had Bernie handwrite a fundraising email to send out to all potential donors. The email showing handwriting (rather than typed words) was one of the most successful of the entire campaign. This donation evidence supports the power of authenticity in winning over support and excitement.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump used a speaking strategy somewhat opposite of Bernie's substantive academic type lecture notes. He refused speaking notes and Teleprompters through almost all of the primary campaign and proudly and constantly bragged about "winging it." As Trump himself had said many times during the campaign, "We should outlaw Teleprompters for anybody running for president." He hated them. Because in Trump's eyes, any type of existing speech script makes a candidate less trustworthy and authentic. As unorganized and unorthodox as his speeches were, a surprising amount of voters gravitated to his message because they appeared "fresh" and real. Amusingly, teleprompter usage is now something that Trump has been forced to adopt as the GOP works hard to make him appear more serious and presidential. But this is not something Trump himself is happy about. The very thing that made his candidacy so popular this year (his unscripted and wild communication style) is also the main thing that could help him meet his eventual demise. This is especially true being up against a candidate so carefully controlled and disciplined and scripted as Hillary Clinton. It isn't that voters dislike the eloquence and organization and structure that a teleprompter often brings to a moment. Rather, somehow along the line we have gotten to a place where too many candidates are speaking words and ideas that are not their own. This trend is especially powerful in a year that rewards candidates going against the establishment. As Aleem (2016) explained,

> This cycle, both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders — both of whom possess values, experiences and styles that break dramatically from Republican and Democratic norms — ran what were effectively third-party bids for the White House within the two-party system. Instead of transforming themselves in order to match the GOP and Democratic Party lines, Trump and Sanders engineered campaigns that spoke to their own personalities and commitments.

Trump and Sanders have both figured out how to break through this common struggle. The one who suffered most from this struggle was Marco Rubio.

GOP insiders placing bets at the beginning of the 2016 Republican primary placed a lot of money on Marco Rubio. He seemed like the perfect antidote to a party that desperately needed energy and excitement. Party elites never considered taking Trump seriously. And the "establishment" candidates like Jeb Bush were too symbolic of the party's more recent mistakes. Rubio, on the other hand, was a young handsome Latino who gave compelling and engaging stump speeches about a hopeful future. But after the first few primaries and debates, the media and the voters couldn't seem to get past one thing about Rubio: he was too scripted. As Zengerle (2016) plainly put it: "In a political moment that supposedly rewards improvisation and authenticity, Rubio is the most scripted and least authentic candidate left in the race. And now it's not just reporters, but voters as well, who know that."

To appear "presidential" a candidate must prove to voters that they are their own person. Coming across as a Robot (especially a short-circuiting, malfunctioning robot) is catastrophic to the presidential persona. Rubio's staffers still thought that their candidate would rebound once everyone came to their senses and realized that he was the best choice to run in a general election. But the voters and media couldn't get past it. Washington Post columnist Eugene Robinson (2016) admitted after Rubio's worst debate showing, "I dwell on this weirdly robotic performance because it was so revealing. Rubio became the darling of the Republican establishment because of his youth, his looks, his inspiring life story, his adherence to GOP orthodoxy and, perhaps above all, his compelling way with words." But why was this Rubio's fatal flaw in the end? Why couldn't the voters get past this flaw in a field of incredibly weak candidates? Political candidates are often expected to be able to appear unscripted and also enough "on message" with speeches and talking points that their

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branding is on point. Voters for the most part understand the nature of talking points. They get that candidates need to repeat the same messages for different groups of people to be able to hear. But there is a breaking point where staying on message becomes almost creepy. According to Zengerle (2016),

> Occasionally, though, the rare politician comes along who's so repetitive, so on-message, so married to his talking points that he's not human. In fact, he calls to mind nothing so much as a robot….And yet Rubio has been, as Christie has charged, a bubble boy for much of this presidential campaign. For whatever reason, Rubio's advisers—and Rubio himself—have decided to keep the more impromptu (and potentially more appealing) side of him under wraps.

The GOP voters may be regretting their choice of choosing the unscripted over the establishment Robot as their nominee at this point. But the fact remains clear that we are living in a time that rewards the authentic over the robotic.

Personal Agency and Social Media Savvy

When President Obama was first elected in 2008 one of the first things the secret service did was take away his Blackberry. And then the president joked that his security team gave him back a phone to use that had no functions. The president joked with Jimmy Fallon on a Tonight Show appearance that his phone is similar to an "infant's toy," meaning it looks real but has no functionality (Farrell, 2016). But Obama behaved and allowed this to happen even after he got used to having a personal cell phone on the campaign trail. It's fair to assume that presidents in the future are going to fight this phenomenon. It won't be a pretty sight for the secret service when they try to confiscate the iPhone of this country's first "millennial president."

Americans are on a cusp in 2016 of seeing most candidates trying to embrace a greater authentic media presence. But for the most part, staffers are in charge of both phones and social media accounts. As platforms like Facebook become less popular with younger voters and things like snap chat and Instagram increase in popularity, it's only going to get more difficult for candidates to navigate the complexities of the desirable social media behaviors wanted by their constituents.

In an April 2016 interview with Anderson Cooper, Donald Trump's son was asked about how he feels regarding his father's use of social media. He reflected by saying, "It kind of makes him the person he is, honestly. It's so great to not see the sound bites, the traditional politician sound bites that you read too often. I mean, he's so authentic. He writes the tweets himself. He doesn't have a team of hundreds and hundreds of people behind him. And I think that's actually what makes him the great candidate that he is" (Johnson, 2016). Despite all of the criticism and drama of Trump's twitter behavior the people seem to appreciate his effort to take his thoughts and views straight to the people. When asked

about his followers in a personal interview by Anderson Cooper, Trump explained, "You know, I have millions. And it's really an asset. I really enjoy doing it, but it's really an asset. You see what's going on. And there is some genius there. I mean, you will get—you will read some of the stuff, there is genius there. You have to find the right genius. But it is a powerful thing." Granted, it has now been admitted by both Trump himself (and his campaign) that he doesn't post all of his own tweets. Although he does try to make time to do as many as he can. Many Americans have been stunned by some of the stuff that actually appears on Trump's verified twitter account. As Dreyfuss (2015) admitted, "I've always assumed that Trump sends his own tweets. This is not because Twitter is a holy place and everyone sends their own tweets, but his account tweets so many weird things that I figured he couldn't have a professional ghost tweeter at the helm. That person would never let him send half the things he sends." Usually candidate social media accounts are managed by multiple people and use sponsored posts and time-set posts to keep a campaign on-brand with its marketing. Candidates arguably don't have time to be managing multiple social media accounts on multiple platforms. There is something very appealing about this authorship factor, however. Voters are attracted to candidates doing their own social media posts. Campaign staffers on all levels of government always prefer to be in charge of their candidate's posts in order to monitor a candidate's behavior. It is common practice to try and prevent one's candidate from "going rogue" and posting something potentially controversial or offensive or damaging to the campaign. But in 2016, voters like to see candidates taking this risk. However, with Trump as the official GOP nominee it remains to be seen if his rogue tweeting will backfire. Many of his recent tweets have caused so much controversy that it has made lots of people question not only his sanity but also his competence and judgment to even hold the office of the presidency.

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Social media authorship is not just for presidential candidates though. Perhaps the most famous politician on twitter (besides Trump) is New Jersey Senator Cory Booker. He has amassed quite the following on both twitter and snap chat in the past several years. And although both colleagues and media bristled with his overt smart phone usage at first, they soon realized that his platform was powerful mainly because he was authoring it. When Booker was first starting to make a name for himself several years ago, the media and voters quickly caught on to his genuine interest in doing his own social media. One of the most famous instances that got him viral attention was when Conan O'Brien made a joke about him on his show back when he was still mayor of Newark. The joke made fun of Newark saying, "The Mayor of Newark, NJ wants to set up a city wide program to improve residents' health. The health care program would consist of a bus ticket out of Newark." In a brilliant and savvy move, Booker then made a video telling Conan he was banned from Newark airport entitled "Coco can't GoGo" and the humorous fight went viral getting positive attention for both O'Brien and Booker. Conan then invited Cory on the show and donated $100,000 to Newark charities. (Yakowicz, 2014).

Not everyone was confident that Cory Booker could maintain proper behavior on social media and initially received many comparisons to Anthony Weiner in terms of how dangerous it is for well-known politicians to get caught doing anything risky on smart phones! Barbaro (2013) said,

> Mayor Cory A. Booker has a high schooler's affinity for Twitter, reveling in its ceaseless flow of affirmation and infinite space for self-promotion.... Even as many politicians have adopted a hyper disciplined approach to social media, or handed over their official Twitter accounts to image-conscious aides in the wake of online scandals involving the likes of Anthony D. Weiner, a former Democratic congressman, Mr. Booker's fingers seem to rarely stray from the keyboard.

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However, as Booker has become more respected and established as a senator his savvy use of Twitter and Snapchat has given him a certain type of credibility and gravitas that few other elected officials have. The personal way of communicating with media and fans and constituents through his own smartphone has allowed him to have a unique platform of communication without much other political competition.

Being savvy at social media is going to be more important for candidates as they run for office in the future. Most candidates in 2016 dabble a little on social media through their staffers but very few politicians are truly authoring their own. A campaign typically has communication staffers or interns assigned to the social media aspect of a campaign where they post regular photos and new updates, etc. The groundbreaking candidates of the future will be required to navigate their own social media as much as possible. And this means being the author. Part of this is a generational difference right now….most of our elected officials are over the age of 40 and therefore don't get it. But as we see millennials start to run for office themselves we will be looking at candidates that have always had social media accounts and most likely won't give those up once they get into power. It's funny to think back on President Obama trying to hold onto his Blackberry phone once he was elected President. He was the first president to be used to having a cell phone. And for the first time the secret service had to deal with the security issues this presented. It is going to be harder and harder for elected officials to give up their authorship and their phones.

The newest social media platform that has exploded onto the political scene is Snapchat. In early 2016 the White House gave in and made an official snap chat account. Twitter and Facebook and Instagram will all continue to be important but seeing how snap chat is the most popular platform for people under 30 this is the one likely to grow the most. It started off as a silly app that wasn't taken seriously as a platform but has now turned into something much more substantive and lasting. According to Bereznak (2016)

Ultimately, the "White House" on Snapchat is about securing the Obama brand. For a generation of people who stare at their phones for entertainment, the series of 10-second of clips and photos will likely be more memorable than Obama's 58-minute speech. It might not be the best way to inform the public, but it's a genius way to stay present in the mind of millennials long after you're out of office.

(Images 3 & 4)

The above pictures of Sunny and Bo show how the white house staff used their first official day of "snapping" to make the 2016 State of the Union address fun and accessible for snap chat users. It was a way to bring a different perspective into the minds of mostly younger viewers. The trends of campaigns and candidates using apps like this are going to be very intriguing to watch during the next several election cycles.

Showing Humor, Warmth, and Vulnerability

Candidates with the best political resumes do not always resonate with voters. And this is usually due to an inability to reveal certain personality traits to the electorate. Many times it seems that in trying to portray competence and strength, a candidate then struggles to show a softer, warmer and more relatable side. The personality branding of both a candidate and a campaign is critical in today's modern climate. According to Scammell (2015) "Brands are often defined as the psychological representation of a product or service or organization, providing symbolic, rather than tangible use-value to consumers. Successful brands add a layer of emotional connection with consumers above and beyond functionality." (p. 12). This "emotional layer" is something that Hillary Clinton herself admits she has struggled with. And it probably has a lot to do with her constantly being told to hide her emotions as a woman trying to succeed in a very male-dominated profession. As Amy Cuddy (2012) argued, "Politicians are very experienced — maybe too experienced — at using body language to signal power and competence. But what these politicians are much more likely to struggle with, or just neglect to do altogether, is communicate warmth and trustworthiness." This has especially been the case for her as she has continually been held to much higher standards and higher levels of scrutiny during her career. As Cuddy continued to say, "It's not uncommon for people to overvalue the importance of demonstrating their competence and power, often at the expense of demonstrating their warmth." This sentiment of a candidate having a hidden authentic side are also constantly discussed about Hillary Clinton. Many of her closest friends and supporters cannot understand why she is so hated by so many people. They can't understand because the Hillary that they see behind closed doors appears genuine and warm and authentic. And yet, her unfavorables as a candidate continually stress that she seems

too "packaged." As O'Shaughnessy (1990) noted, "Packaging candidates for the media can inhibit genuine creativity, for when every motion is calculated the candidate becomes a lifeless mannequin with a plaster smile. American politicians are cloned- bland, packaged, antiseptic." (p. 255)

Hillary openly admits that she struggles with being the natural politician. She maintains that her real strengths are in doing the work of governing rather than campaigning. This perceived weakness has especially been hard to overcome being married to a man who was born with rare and exceptional charismatic gifts. The problem remains an issue on the campaign trail even after she accepted her historic presidential nomination. According to Goman (2015) "Former Secretary of State Clinton has an advantage because she doesn't have to prove that she's tough and seasoned. No one's questioned her strength or experience. But in the past, her body language has worked against her appearing warm or engaging. Her tendency to smirk, eye roll, or mug while others were talking added to an impression that she was smug and dismissive."

Regardless of personal feelings about Hillary it is impossible to ignore that she has faced more difficulty and scrutiny than any candidate in the history of presidential politics. Being a strong and accomplished woman has still not won over many American voters who are convinced that she is unlikeable. As Ezra Klein (2016) reflected,

> Let's stop and state the obvious: There are gender dynamics at play here. We ran a lot of elections in the United States before we let women vote in them. You do not need to assert any grand patriarchal conspiracy to suggest that a process developed by men, dominated by men, and, until relatively late in American life, limited to men might subtly favor traits that are particularly prevalent in men. Talking over listening, perhaps.

Piggybacking off the many ways that a candidate can show different personality sides the Hillary campaign has also taken a hint from people like Trump and Booker and also tried to start showing a warmer, more fun side of Hillary on the campaign trail through social media accounts. They debuted her first "snap story" at a rally with her speaking in her classic blue pantsuit and the world immediately fell in love with this side of Hillary.

(Images 4 & 5)

Conclusion

The 2016 presidential nominees are the most unpopular people to be run for the Oval Office. The political climate prevents many competent people from running for public office all together. We live in an age where "toe fungus" has a higher approval rating than Congress (Jensen, 2013). More and more American voters seem consistently annoyed with candidates in both parties. And the American electorate is burnt out on the entire election process. Some even feel that the office of the presidency has lost its power and cache. Political scientists and media scholars and journalists and campaign consultants have been arguing with each other for years over what makes a "perfect candidate." No one seems able to agree on any trait or quality in particular. But many agree that there is an X factor. There is something that makes one particular candidate "pop" over others. This is true at all levels of political office ranging from local races all the way up to the highest office in the land. The broad argument here is that personality matters. It matters. The person still matters. The candidate behind the marketing and staging and campaigning matters to people.

Granted, most of how people get to know candidates is based on perceptions, ones that are carefully crafted by the campaigns and the media. Unless you are one of those lucky Iowans of New Hampshire folks who get to meet the candidates up close at your local diner. There are some overpaid consultants out there who claim that they can get anyone elected to anything. And there are many failed candidates out there who look perfect on paper before losing. If presidential elections were based on resumes and qualifications then our past few decades of presidential election results would have turned out very differently. A presidential candidate's personality matters.

This report has fleshed out the importance of authenticity/authorship, personal agency and showing traits such as humor/warmth/vulnerability for candidates and their campaigns. Arguably, these three case study areas will not be going away anytime soon and candidates making the leap into politics need to be aware that this matters in 2016. Not every person running for office finds that these types of personal traits come naturally out on the campaign trail. It is harder for some candidates to project an authentic and warm and vulnerable brand without feeling uncomfortable. A candidate may be talented even if they find these things to be challenging. And finding ways to help candidates project real personality should be a future focus of consultants and staffers and campaign teams. Not every person needs to have the authenticity of Barack Obama or the charisma of Bill Clinton or the charm of Ronald Reagan. Candidates just need to become more comfortable being themselves out on the campaign trail. They need to realize the importance of breaking the mold of the commonly seen overly scripted, robotic and packaged candidates that struggle to connect with voters.

As much as cable news would like to have us believe, most Americans are sane and rational people. Most registered voters are surprisingly sane and logical people. Most Democrats and Republicans are decent people. If you walk into most coffee shops around the US and look people in the eye the majority of them are going to be civil and gracious. The majority hate the vitriol and extremist partisanship coming from the media talking heads and from the far right and far left.

And yet, despite these cynical feelings, voters still appear to get excited about certain candidates. It seems that there is still something about these specific figures that invites citizens to listen, to care about the political process, and to participate to preserve it. The country deserves leaders with backbone and courage. Public servants who are inspiring and productive and care about making a difference more than they care about

getting elected. And this is why some candidates gain traction over others because they seem to offer at least some type of combination of the qualities the voters want to see in elected leaders. The future of American politics is bound to be filled with future candidates who have successfully figured out how to authentically brand themselves to the liking of the electorate.

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