

Using Brand Equity and Personality Metrics to Predict the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election

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Abstract

In this study, a multidimensional brand equity model and brand personality construct were employed to compare the brand strength of the two candidates for the U.S. presidency in 2020 (i.e., Joseph Biden and Donald Trump) among registered voters. The study was conducted to judge the predictive quality of these two metrics. Biden scored higher than Trump on brand equity and personality, but the scores were even among independent voters. Biden scored very similarly to Hillary Clinton in 2016, but Trump scored higher than his 2016 results.

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

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Brands are powerful symbols that provide meaning to consumers, which influences their purchase intentions (McCracken, 1993). In terms of political candidates and political parties, brand strength has been considered in marketing for many years (Luntz, 1988). Brand equity is the intangible value added to a product, such as Tide laundry detergent, simply by the brand name itself (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Keller, 1993). Strong brands act to increase trust and loyalty, decrease the possibility of switching to competitive brands, and make marketing efforts much more effective (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

Additionally, a brand can be a person, name, sign, symbol, or design. It is intended to identify products or services and differentiate them from competitors (Kotler, 1991). Brands provide their customers with emotional and experiential benefits (Keller, 1993), and these benefits are essential to building strong brand equity. Brand personality is a significant component of brand differentiation, which strongly influences purchase intention (Aaker, 1997). Studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between brand equity and the personality ratings of political candidates and intention to vote (Monahan, 2015, 2016). A consumer brand equity model and brand personality construct were applied to measure the brand equity and brand personality strength of the two candidates for the U.S. presidency in 2020, Joseph Biden and Donald Trump. The results will be used to evaluate the predictive properties of these two measures. This is similar to a study conducted in 2016 comparing the strength of the metrics for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

Literature Review

Brand Equity

Aaker (1991, 1996) defined brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and its symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm 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 dimensions proposed by Aaker (excluding other proprietary assets).

Brand knowledge is a vital element in consumer decision-making, and it greatly affects the success of branding efforts (Keller, 1993). Brand knowledge is composed of brand name awareness and brand associations (Aaker, 1996). Brand name awareness is the strength of a brand in the memory of the consumer, and it is a necessary condition for brand equity development in 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 to the overall management function of branding because they represent the content of brand knowledge and provide brand meaning to consumers (Keller, 1993).

Research also indicates that 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 (Aaker, 1996; Zeithaml, 1988). 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, which is considered the single most reliable assessment of brand equity (Reichheld, 2001). Loyal consumers provide a company with a competitive advantage that helps establish barriers to entry, gives the company time to respond to competitive offerings, and allows the company to demand premium prices (Aaker, 1996). Consumer loyalty ultimately results from the value and trust derived from the brand name (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Riley, 2004).

Brand Personality

Brand attitude is a consumer's positive or negative evaluation of or feelings toward a brand (Berger & Mitchell, 1989; Kotler & Armstrong, 1996). Brand attitude and brand image have been shown to have positive relationships with brand equity (Chang & 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 (Berry, 2000; Chang & Liu, 2009; Senthilnathan & Tharmi, 2012), and repurchase intention (Hellier et al., 2003). Brand personality, as a component of brand imagery, helps create brand equity (Batra et al., 1993; Biel, 1993). In two studies conducted by this author, both brand equity and brand personality demonstrated a positive correlation with voting intention (Monahan 2015, 2016).

Candidate Brands

Branding is concerned with creating a distinctive identity for a product, service, or individual (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 2000). Individuals themselves can actually be brands. For example, LeBron James and Patrick Mahomes serve as primary sources of identity. Candidate brands are similar, and political leaders and their associations define these brands. The present focus is on the brand equity derived from the candidate's name (e.g., Barack Obama), which is a part of a brand that can be verbalized and is the primary indicator of brand value (Cobb-Walgreen et al., 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, p. 180; Schneider, 2004). The act of voting is like a "consumer choice," for which 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 the use of different branding tactics developed in commercial markets (e.g., personality, trust, connectivity, and performance) can also be used in politics to compare the image or brand positions of candidates (e.g., see Draper, 2000; Parker, 2012; Westen, 2007). Although most of the research on political branding is relatively new, there have been sufficient studies to support the concept that candidate brands can be treated as units for empirical analysis and observation.

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) define brand equity as the “measurement of cognitive and behavioral brand equity at the individual consumer level through a consumer survey” (p. 2). The authors analyzed a pool of scale indicators for each dimension from a wide range of validated measures and eventually reduced the list to 10 items. These items make up the multidimensional brand equity scale (MBE; Yoo & 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 shown 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 capture the perceived strength of brand associations.

Brand Personality Scale

Brand personality is measured on five dimensions that uniquely apply to consumer brand characterization (Aaker, 1997). Aaker’s research developed a reliable scale to assess brand personality (Koebel & Ladwein, 1999). Aaker (1997) developed a theoretical framework for the brand personality construct by determining the number and nature of the dimensions of brand personality. These five brand personality dimensions, which many companies desire for their products, are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the predictive power of the MBE construct and Aaker’s brand personality scale in determining the outcome of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. The findings will be compared with the results of the 2016 elections, and parallels between the two elections will be discussed.

Methodology

The study design used survey research to assess the candidate brand equity and brand personality of the U.S. presidential candidates, that is, Joseph Biden[D] and Donald Trump [R], from a sample of registered voters. Respondents were registered voters recruited from various parts of the country. Respondents were asked a series of statements taken from the brand equity and personality scales. They were asked to indicate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale.

Candidate Brand Equity Measurement

Yoo and Donthu’s (2001) MBE served as a measure of candidate brand equity. It was necessary to modify the wording of some items to use the MBE in the context of political candidates voted for rather than brands purchased. The modified 10-item MBE measure has two items for candidate name awareness (“I am aware of candidate x” and “I can recognize candidate x among other competing candidates”), three items for brand association strength (“some characteristics of candidate x come to my mind quickly,” “I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of candidate x,” and “I have difficulty imagining candidate x in my mind”), two items for perceived candidate quality (“the likelihood that candidate x would be a quality president is extremely high” and “the likelihood that candidate x would be a functional president is extremely high”), and three items for candidate brand loyalty (“I consider myself loyal to candidate x,” “for U.S. president, candidate x would be my first choice,” and “I will not vote for another candidate if candidate x runs in the general election”).

The MBE 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 (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Respondents indicated their agreement with each statement using five-point Likert scales. Candidate total brand equity ratings and scores for each dimension were the focal points of analysis. Averaging the items for each scale dimension produced three main scores: the candidate awareness-association strength score, perceived candidate quality score, and candidate loyalty score. A candidate’s total brand equity rating is the average of the dimension scores across all scaled items.

Candidate Brand Personality Measurement

Brand personality was measured using the dimensions developed by Jennifer Aaker in 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.

Survey Instrument

Using the above methodology, a 15-question survey was composed. For each question, respondents were asked to gauge with how well each of the personality traits describes the personality of the two candidates for the 2020 U.S. presidency using a five-point Likert scale.

In addition to the questions on brand equity and personality, each respondent 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 currently faced. The choices were the economy, immigration, terrorism, race relations, and crime.

Sample

There were 650 surveys sent out, and 516 were usable for analysis. The sample was split between 244 males and 272 females. The political party affiliations were 184 Democrats, 139 Republicans, 167 Independents, and 26 represented other parties. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to over 65: 95 respondents aged 18-29, 104 aged 30 to 44, 225 aged 45 to 59, and 92 aged 60 or over. The education of the respondents ranged from high school graduates to postgraduate and higher degrees. There were 87 high school graduates, 133 respondents had some college, 189 were college graduates, 29 had some postgraduate education, and 78 had 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 44 respondents that earned less than \$20,000, 82 respondents that earned \$20,000 to \$40,000, 95 that earned \$41,000 to \$60,000, 79 that earned \$60,000 to \$80,000, 116 that earned \$80,000 to \$120,000, 73 that earned over \$120,000, and 27 preferred not to answer. There were 36 respondents from New England, 65 from Middle Atlantic States, 101 from South Atlantic States, 82 from East North Central States, 37 from West North Central States, 27 from East South Central States, 39 from West South Central States, 30 from Mountain States, and 99 from Pacific States.

In terms of the most important issue facing the United States, 224 respondents thought that the economy was the most important issue, 139 thought that race relations were the most important issue, 34 saw terrorism as the most important issue, 44 indicated crime as being the most important, and 75 saw immigration as most important.

Results

Candidate Brand Equity Scores

Table 1 displays the candidates' overall MBE scores (i.e., a composite mean of candidate awareness-association strength, perceived quality, and loyalty scale items). Biden had the highest brand equity score (3.21), with Trump somewhat lower (3.12). Biden's score is similar to Clinton's score in 2016, but Trump's score is higher than in 2016. The scores by party are listed in Table 2. The scores for Biden are 3.90, 2.33, and 3.01 among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, respectively. The respective scores for Trump are 2.54, 3.88, and 3.03. Biden's scores are similar to Clinton's in 2016, but Trump improved with all three parties. Table 3 lists the brand equity scores in terms of important issues. Those respondents who thought that the economy was the most important issue facing America scored Biden at (2.99) and Trump at (2.84). Respondents who considered immigration to be the most important issue scored Biden at (2.96) and Trump at (4.09). Biden scored higher than Clinton, and Trump also exceeded his 2016 score. Respondents who considered terrorism to be the most important issue scored Biden at (3.12) and Trump at (3.54). Biden scored slightly lower than Clinton, but Trump improved. Respondents who considered race relations to be the most pressing issue scored Biden at (3.77) and Trump at (2.52). In this group, Biden did better than Clinton, and Trump remained static. Finally, those respondents who considered crime the most important issue scored Biden at (2.45) and Trump at (3.01). With this group, Biden did worse than Clinton, and Trump improved. The brand equity scores by gender are listed in Table 4. Men scored Biden at (3.13) and Trump at (3.10). Females scored Biden at (3.27) and Trump at (3.11). Biden scored worse than Clinton with women, and Trump improved with both men and women.

Table 1

Candidate MBE Brand Equity Scores
Trump vs Clinton - 2016

Candidate	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	Brand Equity
Clinton	210	1.275	3.27
Trump	205	1.191	2.81

Trump vs Biden - 2020

Candidate	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	Brand Equity
Biden	255	1.024	3.21
Trump	261	1.120	3.12

Table 2

Candidate MBE Brand Equity Score by Party
Trump vs Clinton - 2016

Candidate	Democrat			Republican			Independent			Other Party		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Clinton	4.09	71	1.10	2.58	82	1.01	3.01	48	1.00	2.77	9	.868
Trump	2.35	79	.818	3.54	70	1.24	2.83	50	1.19	2.51	6	.998

Trump vs Biden - 2020

Candidate	Democrat			Republican			Independent			Other Party		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Biden	3.90	90	.877	2.33	65	.847	3.01	88	1.00	3.08	12	.605
Trump	2.54	94	.758	3.99	74	1.14	3.03	79	0.98	2.59	14	.862

Table 3

Candidate MBE Brand Equity Score by Issue
Trump vs Clinton - 2016

	Economy			Immigration			Terrorism			Race Relations			Crime		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Clinton	3.24	96	1.19	2.56	14	1.24	3.25	42	1.34	3.49	38	1.27	3.54	20	1.38
Trump	2.74	94	1.12	3.64	21	1.39	3.02	29	1.22	2.49	45	0.96	2.68	16	1.14

Trump vs Biden - 2020

	Economy			Immigration			Terrorism			Race Relations			Crime		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Biden	2.99	117	1.12	2.96	22	0.93	3.12	10	1.02	3.77	84	0.91	2.45	22	0.97
Trump	2.84	107	0.99	4.09	53	1.07	3.54	24	1.27	2.52	55	0.57	3.01	22	1.06

Table 4

Candidate MBE Brand Equity Score by Gender
Trump vs Clinton - 2016

	Males			Females		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Clinton	3.21	90	1.30	3.32	120	1.26
Trump	3.01	88	1.19	2.66	117	1.14

Trump vs Biden – 2020

	Males			Females		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Biden	3.13	117	1.10	3.27	139	1.11
Trump	3.10	127	1.12	3.11	133	1.11

Candidate Brand Personality Scores

Table 5 shows the candidates' overall personality scores (i.e., the composite mean of the candidate personality ratings for sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness). Biden had a higher brand personality score of 2.97, while Trump's was 2.36. These results are similar to those of Clinton vs. Trump in 2016. The scores by party are listed in Table 6. Biden scored 3.65 among Democrats, while Trump scored 1.63. Biden scored 2.04 with Republicans, while Trump scored 3.41. Biden scored 2.98 with Independents, while Trump scored 2.27. Biden scored 2.74 with members of other parties, while Trump scored 2.10. There are some slight differences between 2016 and 2020, but most results are very close in terms of the comparison between Clinton and Biden. Table 7 lists the brand personality scores in terms of important issues. Biden scored 2.73 with people who thought that the economy was the most important issue, while Trump scored 2.16 with them. On the economy, Biden scored very similarly to Clinton in 2016, but Trump's score was lower than in 2016. Biden scored 2.68 and Trump scored 3.51 among respondents who thought that immigration was the most important issue. On immigration, Biden was below Trump, as was Clinton in 2016. Biden scored 3.01 and Trump scored 3.02 with respondents who thought terrorism was the most important issue. These results were similar to those of Clinton vs. Trump in 2016. Biden scored 3.50 and Trump scored 1.41 with respondents who thought that race relations were the most important issue. On this issue, Biden was slightly better than Clinton in 2016, and Trump was far below his 2016 score. Biden scored 2.42 and Trump scored 2.18 with respondents who thought that crime was the most important issue. On this issue, both Biden and Trump scored lower than 2016. The brand personality scores by gender are listed in Table 8. Males scored Biden at 2.79 and Trump at 2.36. Females scored Biden at 3.11 and Trump at 2.36. Biden's and Clinton's scores are similar, and Trump's scores are similar to his scores in 2016.

Table 5

Candidate Brand Personality Scores
Trump vs Clinton - 2016

Candidate	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	Brand Personality
Clinton	210	1.22	2.90
Trump	205	1.28	2.30

Trump vs Biden – 2020

Candidate	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	Brand Personality
Biden	255	1.17	2.97
Trump	261	1.28	2.36

Table 6

Candidate Brand Personality Score by Party
Trump vs Clinton - 2016

	Democrat			Republican			Independent			Other		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Clinton	3.69	71	1.02	2.17	82	1.06	2.68	48	1.11	2.51	9	1.05
Trump	1.73	79	0.97	3.05	70	1.30	2.40	50	1.31	2.14	6	0.99

Trump vs Biden – 2020

	Democrat			Republican			Independent			Other		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Biden	3.65	90	0.97	2.04	65	1.01	2.98	88	1.20	2.74	12	0.92
Trump	1.63	94	0.93	3.41	74	1.14	2.27	79	1.18	2.10	14	1.00

Table 7*Candidate Brand Personality Scores by Issue*

Trump vs Clinton - 2016

	Economy			Immigration			Terrorism			Race Relations			Crime		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Clinton	2.85	96	1.15	2.21	14	1.10	2.83	42	1.31	3.19	38	1.11	3.21	20	1.46
Trump	2.74	94	1.12	3.64	21	1.39	3.02	29	1.23	2.49	45	0.97	2.68	16	1.14

Trump vs Biden – 2020

	Economy			Immigration			Terrorism			Race Relations			Crime		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Biden	2.73	117	1.24	2.68	22	1.03	3.01	10	1.36	3.50	84	0.90	2.42	22	1.04
Trump	2.16	107	1.16	3.51	53	1.09	3.02	24	1.25	1.41	55	0.65	2.18	22	1.29

Table 8*Candidate Brand Personality Scores by Gender*

Trump vs Clinton - 2016

	Males			Females		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Clinton	2.75	90	1.27	3.01	120	1.17
Trump	2.44	88	1.19	2.17	117	1.22

Trump vs Biden – 2020

	Males			Females		
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Biden	2.79	117	1.23	3.11	138	1.09
Trump	2.36	129	1.32	2.36	132	1.26

Discussion

The brand equity rating for Joseph Biden is stronger than that of Donald Trump. This would indicate that Mr. Biden should be favored to win the election. This was demonstrated in the polling data at the time of data collection. The difference in these metrics and the polls is, however, significant. In many respects, Trump scored better than he did in 2016, and Biden scores are similar to those of Clinton's 2016 results. If we are to consider past elections, we can foresee that the results of a presidential election are heavily dependent on the voting of independent voters. The results of this study indicate that Mr. Biden and Mr. Trump score equally in terms of brand equity among independent voters.

The vast majority of respondents indicated that the economy was the single most important issue facing the United States. This appears to be good news for Biden in that the brand equity scores for respondents who placed a higher importance on the economy favored Mr. Biden. The scores for the second most important issue were race relations, and these were also favorable to Mr. Biden; the scores for all other issues were in Trump's favor.

Another indicator in Mr. Biden's favor is the brand equity rating for men and women. The two scored approximately even with men, and Biden had a small edge with women.

The brand personality ratings were also in Mr. Biden's favor. In most of the major categories, Biden scored better than Trump. This is interesting in that this was also the case in 2016. Mrs. Clinton also had higher personality scores.

Conclusion

This study indicates Biden has an advantage in the upcoming presidential election. It is worth noting, however, that the scores for the former Vice President are very similar to those of Hillary Clinton in 2016. It is also worth noting that Mr. Trump's scores have improved since 2016, especially among independent voters and women. It is important to consider the current polling data, which gives Mr. Biden a four to ten-point advantage (Real Clear Politics, 8/2/20). Given the comparison between the study conducted in 2016 and the present results, there is a distinct possibility that the polls are wrong, and the 2020 presidential race will be much closer than the polls indicate.

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