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# POLITICAL MARKETING IN THE 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Edited by
Jamie Gillies

Palgrave Studies in Political Marketing and Management

Series Editor
Jennifer Lees-Marshment
Faculty of Arts, Political Studies
University of Auckland
Auckland, New Zealand

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Jamie Gillies
Editor

# Political Marketing in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

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*Editor*
Jamie Gillies
St. Thomas University
Fredericton
NB, Canada

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# Contributors

**Neil Bendle** is Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Ivey Business School, Western University, London, ON, Canada.

**Brian Conley** is Associate Professor and Director of the Graduate Program in the Government Department, Suffolk University, Boston, MA, USA.

**Ken Cosgrove** is Associate Professor in the Government Department, Suffolk University, Boston, MA, USA.

**Edward Elder** is a Ph.D. graduate from the University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.

**Jamie Gillies** is Associate Professor of Communications and Public Policy and Executive Director of the Frank McKenna Centre for Communications and Public Policy, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB, Canada.

**Alina Nastasoiu** is Assistant Professor of Marketing at the DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada.

**Vincent Raynauld** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, Emerson College, Boston, MA, USA.

**Joseph Ryoo** is a Ph.D. student at the Ivey Business School, Western University, London, ON, Canada.

**André Turcotte** is Associate Professor in the School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON, Canada.

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: The 2016 US Presidential Election

*Jamie Gillies*

**Abstract** The introduction to this edited collection breaks down the focus of this book and considers the distinctive political marketing and branding strategies utilized by the candidates and their parties in one of the most gripping elections in US history. The book will focus on why this election is so unusual from a political marketing perspective, calling for new explanations and discussions about its implications for mainstream political marketing theory and practice. At a time of national economic and cultural crisis, candidates from both parties—Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in particular—have appeared to overturn the conventional wisdom that has hitherto dominated US politics: That candidates should appear 'presidential,' be politically experienced and qualified to run for office, and avoid controversial and politically incorrect positions. This book presents scholarly perspectives and research with practitioner-relatable content on practices and discourses that look specifically at the Trump, Clinton, and Sanders campaigns and how they took current understandings of political marketing and branding in new directions.

**Keywords** Marketing · Branding · Elections · Presidency · Political

J. Gillies (✉)
St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB, Canada
e-mail: jgillies@stu.ca



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The 2016 American presidential election was a cataclysmic event, not just in terms of the surprise of Donald Trump's victory and the nationalism and populism at play in American politics, but also in how the election campaigns challenged conventional political marketing paradigms, theories, and frameworks to the party–voter relationship, personal legitimacy, and political credibility, the brand 'promise' of candidates and the phenomenon of political outsider challenging the status quo. The election's legacy likely will have far-reaching effects within the political marketing and branding industries in that social media and voter targeting techniques were fully integrated into both the national campaign strategies of Republicans and Democrats. But it also exposed the real concerns with utilizing and harnessing nationalist and populist themes as tools to recruit voters. How that squares with the complexities of American democracy is going to be a key part of the American experiment under the leadership of President Donald Trump.

One of the challenges with analyzing the 2016 election is that the emotionality it set off around the world makes it difficult to consider the campaign objectively, and to focus on the advances in the political communication toolkit that many of the campaigns employed. Those advances are an important part of the narrative in this election in that they may have more far-reaching effects than Trump's win and Clinton's loss. New dialogues for political marketing and branding were established. Long-standing political communication theories were challenged and altered. Part of this has to do with the steady development and integration of new technologies into how politicians and political parties communicate. In some respects, we were leading to an election like this given how social media and the personalization of politics have pervaded political cultures across the globe (Gillies 2015). The American case, of course, is an important focal point because of the shear magnitude and international attention paid to American leadership and power. Part of this also has to do with the rise of Donald Trump, and to a lesser extent, of Bernie Sanders, as outsider politicians who shook up two entrenched and powerful political parties, and found ways to appeal directly to primary voters, without the party apparatus. This is an important moment for party brands in politics as well because 2016 represents a fundamental shift toward personalized branding, especially in national leadership contests like presidential elections.

While the 2016 contest will inextricably be linked to the rise of right-of-center nationalist forces in advanced industrial societies, especially in

western Europe, and be seen as part of larger trends in the world with respect to anti-globalization, ethnic nationalism, and larger concerns about the fabric and identity of societies, the purpose of this volume is to shed light more on the tactics, strategies, and technologies utilized not just by the Trump and Clinton campaigns but by insurgent candidates like Sanders and Ted Cruz who employed a wealth of similar tactics to target voters. In many ways, 2016 is a tale of two separate elections. Acrimonious primary contests in both parties exposed deep fissures not just in terms of personality conflicts among the candidates and increasingly negative campaigning, but rifts within the party coalitions themselves. The follow-on general election was on the one hand a battle fought on traditional Republican and Democratic Party identity politics grounds with party and cultural identification playing a significant role as it traditionally does. But on the other hand, it also unfolded like a reality show carnival, with social media and pseudo-events grabbing media attention and taking away almost all of the substantive discussions that one would witness in a US presidential contest. And in the largest popularity contest in the world, Hillary Clinton may have won the popular vote but ultimately lost the war to Donald Trump, whose campaign efficiently campaigned to over 270 electoral votes.

This is not the first American election in which populist forces were marshaled in marketing and branding. The 1968 campaign of Richard Nixon, the 1932 campaign of Franklin Roosevelt, and the populist presidency of Andrew Jackson all used techniques and ideas similar to Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump. But 2016 is notable for its political incorrectness, and in an era of professional politicians acting in professional politically correct ways using coded language that fit within the confines of each party's ideology, to have outsiders who simply bucked the trend and refused to comport to the established decorum of campaigning and speechmaking, is something new.

Like the rise of recent ethno-nationalistic rhetoric in Europe, especially in the Brexit referendum campaign of 2016, the Trump campaign recognized that connective emotional themes could appeal to a segment of voters that would provide a path to victory. What is interesting is that the rhetorical and symbolic messaging by Trump, especially through social media, that appeared to be on-the-fly and instantaneous, was part of a careful data-driven, market- and brand-focused strategy years in the making. While the Hillary Clinton campaign was criticized for its cold, obvious and sometimes cynical calculations in appeals to targeted groups,

and in marketing to groups within the Democratic Party coalition, the Trump campaign was applauded for bringing a freshness to the political dialogue and debate. The blunt speeches, with Trump's rhetorical flourishes of attempting to speak truth to power, were his most effective marketing tool. The narrative the Trump team developed, as a billionaire self-funding his campaign, and a man who could not be bought by special interests, became an organizational tool around which the Trump brand could instill loyalty and enthusiasm among his supporters.

In this book, we focus on the distinctive characteristics of the election campaign and analyze both the marketing and branding tactics used in the primaries but also consider the successes and failures of the parties and nominees in the general election. The individual research in each chapter revolves around the fundamental themes as to why this election was so unusual from a political marketing perspective, and why it calls for new explanations and discussions about its implications for mainstream political marketing theory and practice. At a time of perceived political upheaval, candidates from both parties have appeared to overturn the conventional wisdom that has hitherto dominated US politics: That candidates should use politically correct language, be 'presidential' and 'look the part,' and be experienced and qualified to run for office.

This book presents academic research and perspectives of the 2016 presidential election with practitioner-relatable content on practices and discourses that focus on shifting current understandings of political marketing theories in new directions. Additionally, the campaign has been widely described by political observers and pundits as 'theater' or 'reality television,' with increasingly controversial statements made by candidates on complex issues that mainstream politicians have tended to ignore or marginalize. While the chapters are ostensibly not about the social and political effects of the use of language that is considered racist, xenophobic, sexist, demeaning, and politically incorrect, it is impossible to ignore the implications of the alteration of the media and discourse landscape as a result of unfiltered political dialogue.

While no doubt much will be written about this election from a variety of perspectives, one theme that should be considered is that the unusual nature of the campaign follows a larger trend in the USA of unconventional politics and the ascendancy of leaders that have not fit the American presidential leadership narrative. Recall that the 2008 election saw an African-American candidate do battle with a female candidate. In 2016, the unconventional political trend took on new forms,

through a diverse and interesting cast of characters: the same female candidate but now fighting against a democratic socialist, and a reality television star and business mogul fighting against two Hispanic-American Republicans. This phenomenon holds new meaning and significance for the study of the personal branding of candidates for national office.

The rise of Trump and Sanders is perhaps indicative of a malaise among voters with the political establishment. Certainly, the micro-targeting of voters suggests and some of the data shows that there were a group of voters who simply were tired of and no longer trusted establishment politicians. But it is also a continuation of the Obama model, of building a personality-driven mass movement where party brand is secondary. While we should not overemphasize this in regard to parliamentary and legislative elections, as American voters are casting votes for an individual office when voting for president, it certainly fits within a larger trend of brand personalization among charismatic candidates.

It should also be noted that particular branding and marketing techniques did not work with every candidate. Many campaigns tried to use the strategies that Obama, Clinton, and Trump employed over the last couple of election cycles and their message or the candidate did not resonate enough to win the nomination.

The second chapter in this volume, by Vincent Raynauld and André Turcotte, considers the rise of Donald Trump through the Republican primary elections. This is an important starting point in the narrative because it highlights the way in which the Trump campaign differentiated itself from the other candidates. Despite the 2016 US Republican primary contest being considered by many as 'one unlike no others,' this chapter posits that its outcome can be attributed, at least partly, to dynamics that had affected the unfolding of previous American electoral contests. They explore contemporary political messaging and marketing tactics deployed by candidates running for the presidential nomination. As the Republican electorate was fragmented due to different factors, candidates engaged in hyper narrowcasting in order to reach out and mobilize specific groups of voters. Through the statistical analysis of polling data from key primary states, Raynauld and Turcotte conclude that by occupying narrow political 'lanes,' Republican contenders collectively weakened their chances of winning, thus allowing Donald Trump to secure the nomination.

The third chapter, by Brian Conley, analyzes the Trump campaign's market research efforts largely prior to the primary campaign even

began. From his willingness to indulge in the politics of defamation and personal attack, to his near total reliance on earned media and massive rallies, much has been made about the unconventional nature of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. But there is an element of his campaign that fit squarely into the conventional and one that all viable presidential candidates in the USA now try to do: Trump based his message and market positioning on a detailed, research-driven understanding of the thinking and political instincts of the voter segments targeted by his campaign. Conley's chapter analyzes the systematic market research done by Trump to identify, target, and position himself with specific voter segments even prior to the election. This foreshadowed the broad-based appeal his messaging would have on the general election audience.

The fourth chapter looks at the Republican Party brand refresh and its integration with the Trump brand in the 2016 election. Ken Cosgrove considers the Republican Party brand heritage historically and sees linkages with Trump's update and refresh. He shows how Trump presented himself using Reagan's branding and then developed a product that was more populist and harkened back to the kind of anger that Richard Nixon and George Wallace harnessed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Cosgrove then considers the ways in which Trump used branding as the restoration to a past, glorious America in which the rules were followed, the borders were secure, the values of the majority were valued most, both in racial and in cultural terms, there was no threat of terrorist violence, the economy worked for all. He links this also to brand refreshes in the private sector and considers examples of sports organizations that were able to successfully re-brand.

The second half of the book pivots from Trump and the Republican primary campaigns to Hillary Clinton and the Democratic primary campaigns. Chapter five, by Neil Bendle, Joseph Ryoo, and Alina Nastasoiu, addresses the technological side of campaigning and the increasing integration of social media into the political marketing landscape. Their research considers what such changes, including the increased availability of data, mean for our understanding of political marketing and primary elections. They suggest and discuss the implications that these changes may wrench control of brands away from parties toward candidates with identities independent of their party. This is particularly true with respect to Trump's and Sanders's early campaign themes. One of their key premises is that there are specific decision-making challenges for voters in primaries, and problems for candidates in being market oriented in a world

of sequential elections. They posit and then show that if voters forecast their own choices effectively and, despite the strong feelings generated in primaries, the contests in the primaries may poorly predict general election performance.

The sixth chapter, by Edward Elder, looks specifically at the Hillary Clinton campaign, by analyzing Clinton's verbal communication during the election. It focuses on Clinton's appeals to moderate swing voters through anti-Trump targeted communication. Using analysis of speeches and debate performances, the chapter looks closely at prominent and important themes and issues Clinton highlighted during the campaign that could have appealed to moderate swing voters who did not have a positive opinion of her Republican opponent, Donald Trump. The chapter also examines Clinton's verbal communication from a broader perspective to better understand how her overall messaging may have been received by this less politically engaged demographic. Elder concludes by highlighting what impact Clinton's communication may have had on her evidential election defeat, and what lessons this teaches us about contemporary thinking around targeted communication.

The seventh chapter, by Jamie Gillies, considers what might have been in analyzing the primary challenge of Bernie Sanders through the marketing and branding lens. While many argue that Sanders's feisty challenge to Hillary Clinton was as much about Clinton's weakness as a candidate, this chapter considers how the Sanders campaign was able to take an avuncular, unpresidential curmudgeon and market and brand democratic socialism both to a deeply committed left-of-center base and to many voters who were not ideologically committed but who wanted change. It underscores how Sanders's messaging became more important than the candidate himself and why so many people supported Sanders instead of the presumptive Democratic nominee. Sanders, like Trump, used populist themes and simple messaging that were outside the Democratic Party establishment. Far from being a one-trick pony, Sanders tapped into a strain of populism that Clinton's campaign either missed or did not fully consider. Gillies draws upon the marketing and branding techniques of Revolution Messaging, the digital strategy team Sanders employed, to help explain the rise of such an outsider candidate. He shows that Sanders is perhaps far closer in spirit to Trump than what many commentators might have expected or, indeed, noticed: They both blame the media and the party for the perceived unfairness and rigging of the entire system. They just went about it in remarkably different ways.

The election of Donald Trump is the biggest wild card result in an American election in the contemporary era. It is presenting the United States government, particularly the establishment elements of both parties, with challenges in adapting to a leadership style that is considerably less smooth than previous incoming administrations. That adjustment to the Trump administration had its origins in the political marketing and branding the Trump campaign utilized when he began his improbable run for the presidency. Since most of the other candidates, the parties themselves, much of the media, and much of the public did not take Donald Trump at his word, with an agenda that lacked substance and actual plans, the major adjustment in 2017 is that the president seems to be following through on campaign promises that were part of a much larger data-driven, market- and brand-focused strategy years in the making.

## Editor's Note

The Palgrave Pivot series is an ideal home for this early published collection on the 2016 election. Inspired by recent rapidly assembled academic collections, especially those on the Canadian (Marland and Giasson 2015) and British (Jackson and Thorsen 2015; Lilleker and Pack 2016) elections of 2015, the increasing importance and impact of early research on elections matters greatly. While later volumes and more extensive research on the 2016 presidential election will root down further in analyzing aspects of this event, each contributor in this book worked tirelessly to complete chapters in less than two months following the election. The research was then book edited, series edited, peer edited, and publisher edited in a compressed timeframe in order to produce this book and get it to market for early impact. I am extremely grateful, first and foremost, to Palgrave Studies in Political Marketing and Management Series Editor Jennifer Lees-Marshment for her support and dedication to this project from the beginning. All at Palgrave, Liz Barlow, Imogen Gordon-Clark, and Ambra Finotello, were so supportive and helpful to a first-time editor. I am also very thankful to Ming Lim and Mona Moufahim for their early contributions in developing the book proposal. I appreciated the guidance and suggestions from colleagues Tom Bateman, Brad Cross, Philip Lee, Patrick Malcolmson, Alex Marland, and Shaun Narine. I am grateful for the administrative support of Danielle Connell and Lehanne Knowlton and the editorial assistance of Danielle Brewer and Cody Peters. And lastly I am very thankful for

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CHAPTER 2

# "Different Strokes for Different Folks": Implications of Voter Micro-Targeting and Appeal in the Age of Donald Trump

*Vincent Raynauld and André Turcotte*

**Abstract** Despite the 2016 US Republican presidential contest being considered by many as "one unlike no others", this chapter posits that its outcome can be attributed, at least partly, to dynamics that had affected the unfolding of previous American electoral contests. In their chapter, Raynauld and Turcotte explore contemporary political messaging and marketing tactics deployed by candidates running for the presidential nomination. As the Republican electorate was fragmented due to different factors, candidates engaged in hyper narrowcasting in order to reach out and mobilize specific groups of voters. Through the statistical analysis of polling data from key primary states, Raynauld and Turcotte conclude that by occupying narrow political "lanes", Republican contenders

V. Raynauld (✉)
Department of Communication Studies, Emerson College,
Boston, MA, USA
e-mail: vincent_raynauld@emerson.edu

A. Turcotte
School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University,
Ottawa, ON, Canada
e-mail: andre.turcotte@carleton.ca



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collectively weakened their chances of winning, thus allowing Donald Trump to secure the nomination.

**Keywords** Narrowcasting · Primaries · Vote targeting · Nomination · Political messaging

## Overview

Despite a majority of US polling organizations repeatedly forecasting that Democratic contender Hillary Rodham Clinton would win the US presidency, it was her Republican rival Donald J. Trump who ultimately prevailed on Election Day. At 2h47 am EST on 9 November 2016, CNN projected that the businessman and former reality television star had secured enough electoral college votes to ensure his path to the White House (Vales 2016). While plagued by controversies often fuelled by "provocative pronouncements, attributed comments, distorted facts, and an off-the-cuff […] speaking style" on and offline (Wells et al. 2016, p. 2) as well as straying off message on several occasions, his atypical approach to electioneering proved successful in a presidential election cycle that was shaped by different contextual factors. Chief among them were high levels of public dissatisfaction and, to some extent, distrust with as well as hostility towards traditional media and political elites (Azari 2016; Gallup 2016), heavy political polarization between and within major political parties (Iyengar 2016; Jacobson 2016), and the role played by social media in different aspects of the campaign. Indeed, several candidates turned heavily to these media channels for voter outreach and engagement as well as for seeking to influence—often successfully in the case of Trump—legacy media's election coverage (Wells et al. 2016; Chadwick and Stromer-Galley 2016).

In part because of the unusual nature of Trump's candidacy and his distinct path to victory, it became almost an instant cliché that the 2016 US presidential contest was "one unlike no others". In this chapter, we suggest that the outcome of this presidential contest can be attributed, at least partly, to a series of interconnected dynamics that have affected the unfolding of previous American electoral contests. Specifically, this chapter explores the 2016 Republican nomination race as a way to shed light upon different forces that contributed to the emergence of Donald Trump among a crowded field of candidates and that led him to win the

Republican presidential nomination. This examination leads us to a questioning of the relevance of recent assumptions guiding contemporary principles of electioneering and political marketing.

That Trump would emerge triumphant out of a presidential nomination campaign so hotly contested was far from a foregone conclusion. Many of the seventeen Republican candidates achieved relative electoral success during the nomination race. They did so through a strategic approach that had proven successful in recent years, especially in a highly competitive field of candidates. They turned to highly professionalized modes of political communication, mobilization, and organizing that emphasized voter segmentation. Their messaging aimed at specific slices of the electorate whose members had a distinct socio-demographic profile as well as frequently narrow interests and objectives. Such an approach relies on dynamics referred to by several authors as "factional politics" (e.g. Cohen et al. 2016; Grossman and Hopkins 2016). Based on work by Polsby (1983), Cohen et al. (2016, p. 701) point out that due to a variety of reasons, "competition in multicandidate fields would incentivize ambitious politicians to mobilize narrow followings, which would then make it difficult for consensus politicians to attract support".

Building and expanding on this hypothesis, this chapter examines the narrow electoral appeal of Republican candidates during the nomination race through a statistical analysis of polling data from key states. We make the argument that by occupying specific lanes in a crowded electoral field and by targeting micro-segments of the voting public, many Republican hopefuls achieved relative electoral success. However, doing so weakened their chances of winning and paved the way for Donald Trump, who adopted a broader populist messaging and mobilizing strategy that was still somewhat factional in nature (Cohen et al. 2016), to secure the Republican presidential nomination and go on to win the presidency. In this sense, Trump's victory in the Republican nomination contest raises fundamental questions regarding the relevance of the factional electoral appeal argument in its current form.

## Fertile Grounds for Political Narrowcasting

Recent developments in the US political landscape have led to changes in varying depth and scope in dynamics of public political communication and marketing. Of interest for this chapter are transformations in the structure and composition of the mass mediascape, namely the diversification

and hyper-fragmentation of the political information offered. They have affected how and to what degree individuals and organizations are exposed to, seek out and share information about, perceive, understand, and take part in US politics. During the broadcast era of politics, the presence of a limited number of mass media channels providing largely politically homogenous content had "levelling effects" on the public's political knowledge and engagement (Bennett and Iyengar 2008, p. 718; see also Chaffee and Kanihan 1997). The "seemingly unlimited political media" environment of the post-broadcast era (McKinney 2013, p. 469)—especially with the growth, development, and popularization of social media—has contributed to the hyper-fragmentation, or compartmentalization, of political audiences. In other words, it has enabled members of the public to independently tailor their political information intake by having access to a diversity of information sources catering to their personal wants and needs (e.g. ideology, partisanship, issues, tone, sources) as well as to increasingly rich, personalized, and interactive media experiences (Chadwick et al. 2016; Blumler and Coleman 2015; Webster and Ksiazek 2012). For example, social media have provided them with outlets to be active politically on their own terms, such as by acquiring, producing, and sharing information as well as connecting and interacting with their peers in highly decentralized and selective ways (Bennett 2015; Boulianne 2015). As noted by Blumler and Coleman (2015, p. 120), this "political communication environment is […] more porous, fragmented and antithetical to the final word on any subject".

In this context, political fragmentation can be viewed as the progressive breakdown of broadly shared awareness, perception, and understanding of politics, which is acquired through common political knowledge, concerns, and goals, as well as the emergence of individual-based and ever-evolving micro-political realities—or enclaves—shaped by highly specific and wide-ranging interests and objectives (Bimber 2008, 2012; Bennett 1998). According to Bimber (2008, p. 156), this fragmentation manifests itself in three main ways: (1) "the division of the public's political action across more 'channels' and consequent reduction of exposure to common political messages"; (2) the ability of individuals to self-select and "segregate themselves communicatively into myriad, homogenous in-groups"; (3) decreased capacity of political insiders to design and dictate a broadly accepted agenda to the general public. Other factors unrelated to transformations in the mass mediascape have also helped foster political fragmentation in the USA. Those include the

"breakdown of broad social membership" and allegiances to the traditional political establishment and the growingly central role of communication as "organizational process" (Bennett 2015, p. 152).

The effects of political fragmentation on patterns of political awareness and engagement among the US public, especially younger adults, are many and well documented in the scholarly literature (e.g. Wojcieszak et al. 2016; Turcotte and Raynauld 2014; Bennett 2015). This chapter focuses on how this situation impacts the structure and operationalization of political elites' voter targeting, outreach, and mobilization in an electoral context. As mentioned previously, it has become almost conventional wisdom among academics and practitioners that the current political environment makes it increasingly difficult for candidates and political parties to shape a coherent, society-wide political agenda with the growing presence of small niches of voters that are constantly being reshaped by the fluidity and ever-evolving nature of the media environment (e.g. Bimber 2008; Serazio 2014). However, it offers them opportunities to develop and utilize political messaging and marketing tactics tailored for "smaller and more homogeneous audiences" that can be reached through specific media channels (Berry and Sobieraj 2013, p. 17), especially with the emergence and sophistication of voter identification and targeting techniques (Strömbäck and Kiousis 2014; Burton and Miracle 2014). Voter targeting can be defined as the "process of subsetting an electorate according to politically salient characteristics and reaching out to groups that comprise high concentrations of receptive voters"[1] (Burton and Miracle 2014, p. 26). Specifically, it allows for the pinpointing of individual voters or groups of voters more like to be receptive to a political message and reaching out to them in order to secure their support (Burton and Miracle 2014). While these narrower forms of electoral appeals, known as narrowcasting or "niche communications" (Frankel and Hillygus 2014), can have positive mobilization and persuasion effects on intended targets, they can have limited or, in some cases, adverse effects on unintended audiences as these messages might be incompatible with or contradictory to their political beliefs or objectives (Hersh and Schaffner 2013).

Building on Hersh and Schaffner's work (2013), it is possible to identify several complementary factors leading candidates to engage in voter micro-targeting, contact and, to a lesser extent, engagement during electoral campaigns. For example, targeted forms of political communication, mobilization, and organizing tend to be more effective than broad-based messages with generally wide appeal, as demonstrated by

many authors who have explored different dimensions of this dynamic in recent years (e.g. Frankel and Hillygus 2014; Strömbäck and Kiousis 2014). From a broader perspective, several studies have shown increased levels of personalization in campaign messaging internationally, which represents a shift away from the more conventional top-down, "catch-all" approach to electioneering (van Erkel and Thijssen 2016; Gibson 2015; Serazio 2014). Second, narrowcasting tends to be geared more towards mobilizing core groups of supporters with compatible interests and objectives than identifying, reaching out to, and convincing undecided voters to behave in certain ways politically (e.g. donations, vote) (Hersh and Schaffner 2013, p. 532). This chapter takes interest in the latter factor in the context of the study of the 2016 Republication nomination race. It examines how many candidates mobilized smaller homogenous pockets of voters, which helped them attain some levels of electoral success, but failed to garner wider support.

## The 2016 Republican Nomination Race

Following the previously defined factional electoral appeal argument, we argue that instead of opting for a "catch-all" approach to electioneering, many contenders in the 2016 Republican presidential nomination race exploited the highly fragmented nature of the electorate and mobilized clusters—or factions—of voters with narrow preferences and goals through highly crafted voter targeting and messaging (see Cohen et al. 2016). This chapter makes the case that while the adoption of this strategy yielded relative electoral success for many, it paved the way for Donald Trump who purposely or not, decided to follow what turned out to be a modified catch-all approach—which was still somewhat factional in nature (Cohen et al. 2016)—to win the nomination. Despite its clear factional appeal (Cohen et al. 2016), his online and offline populist messaging was marked by "grandiosity, informality, and dynamism" (Ahmadian et al. 2017, p. 49), which could have helped him widen his base of support.

Several scholars have examined patterns of electoral support during the 2016 Republican nomination race, including from the political subcultures perspective (Fisher 2016), the political branding perspective (Oates and Moe 2016), the communication style perspective (Ahmadian et al. 2017; Enli 2017), or the political narrative perspective (Sides et al. 2016). While approaching this phenomenon from different angles, their

work points for the most part towards highly specialized messaging tailored to reach, appeal to, and mobilize niches of voters. This fits recent trends in political campaigning. Candidates are exploiting the structure of the "contemporary electorate", which is marked by increasingly deep divides along ideological, policy position, and identity lines (Jacobson 2016). More specifically to nomination races, political parties in the USA have been defined as constantly shifting "coalitions of interest groups and activists seeking to capture and use government for their particular goals, which range from material self-interest to high-minded idealism" (Bawn et al. 2012, p. 571). In other words, they are increasingly less governed by a hierarchical internal structure reinforcing cohesion and conformity (Burton and Miracle 2014). It should be noted that the level of division between political parties is even greater than the one within parties (Jacobson 2016).

Several quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches could have been used, including a content analysis of candidates' messaging online or offline, to characterize dynamics of political narrowcasting described in this chapter. In order to conduct our analysis, we decided to focus on the public's patterns of candidate support, which are likely to be shaped in part by contenders' profile as well as appeals and mobilization operations. We rely on a series of primary and caucus polls conducted by the Emerson College Polling Society[2]—based at Emerson College in Boston, MA—to identify groups of voters more likely to be mobilized and to support specific candidates during key Republican caucuses and primaries. We looked at contests in five states: Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Texas, and New York. The choice of these contests was partly opportunistic, as the Emerson College Polling Society chose to focus on specific contests and we chose the most statistically robust samples. Those five nomination races also provide a broad look at the Republican nomination race at different points in time and stages of the nomination race, including the crucial first two contests. More methodological and analytical details are provided in the next section of this chapter as we turn our attention to our findings.

## Setting the Stage: Iowa and New Hampshire

The 2016 Republican primary season began in Iowa. The Hawkeye State held its caucus on February 1, 2016, and the Republican Party entered a crowded field with seventeen candidates competing for the presidential

nomination. Ted Cruz narrowly won with 27.6% of the votes, ahead of Donald Trump (24.3%) and Marco Rubio (23.1%). No other candidate garnered more than 10% of the votes, which is indicative of high levels of division among the Republican electorate.[3] Looking at findings from a survey in the period leading up to the Iowa caucus, it is possible to discern early bases of support for some of the candidates that would prove pivotal in the outcome of the Republican primaries. The findings also point to different approaches taken by the candidates, specifically between Trump and the rest of the field.

Table 2.1 shows that it was already discernible that some of the candidates had little chance of surviving the crowded field. It should be noted that grey cells in all tables indicate that a candidate did not receive support from individuals linked to that category that was significantly higher than for the other candidates. Right from the start, Jeb Bush, Ben Carson, and Marco Rubio had difficulties finding reliable bases of support from which to build their presidential nomination bid. In particular,

**Table 2.1** Bases of support for Republican candidates in Iowa Caucus

| *Candidate* | *Age* | *Gender* | *Household income* | *Religion* | *Main source of info* | *Social media use* | *Level of social media activity* | *Personal communication* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cruz | 65+ | Men | | Lutheran | Social media | Yes | | Land line/cell |
| Trump | 25–34 | Men | 25–75K | Atheist | Internet | Yes | 2–5 times per day | Cell phone only |
| Rubio | | Women | | | | | | |
| Carson | | | | | | | | |
| Paul | 18–24 | Women | 25K or less | Baptist | | | | |
| Bush | | | | | | | | |
| Fiorina | 25–34 | Men | 75K+ | | | | | |

*Source* The Emerson College Study was conducted with a total of 300 adults registered likely GOP caucus voters in Iowa between January 29 and 31, 2016. Methodological details for the Emerson College Study can be reviewed at www.theecps.org. Analysis is restricted to main candidates and identify statistically significant levels ($p < 0.05$) of group support for individual candidates

Bush's appeal as the old establishment candidate (Azari 2016) and Carson's outreach to the Evangelical crowd failed to resonate out of the gate. In contrast, Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, Donald Trump, and to some extent Carly Fiorina, the only female candidate, appealed to very specific, yet large groups of voters. Ted Cruz had a lead on other hopefuls among older voters—a group historically more likely to be conservative and to vote (Leighley and Nagler 2013)—and was engaged in a three-way battle for the support of males alongside Trump and Fiorina. Cruz also led among those who identified as Lutheran and among those who claimed social media as their main source of news information.

Early in the campaign, Trump was particularly popular among young voters (25–34 years of age) as well as middle-income earners (25–75K per year). He also led among self-identified atheists. He had broad appeal among frequent social media users and those reporting the Internet as their primary source of information. Also noteworthy was Rand Paul's early popularity among younger voters (18–24 years of age), much like his father Ron Paul who competed in previous Republican nomination races, as well as low-income earners (25K or less). Fiorina's candidacy was particularly appealing to high-income earners (75K and more).

On February 9, 2016, Trump won the New Hampshire primary with 35% of the votes, well ahead of John Kasich (16%) and other Republican hopefuls (16%) and other Republican hopefuls.[4] Trump's decisive victory was to some extent startling but even more surprising is the fact that the building blocks of the Trump winning coalition were already in place at those early days of the primary season. In New Hampshire, white males were largely responsible for Trump's victory. More importantly, he managed to put in place a coalition of Independent voters aged between 35 and 54 who described themselves as moderate and/or somewhat conservative. As shown later in the chapter, Trump managed to keep that coalition together throughout the nomination contest and those voters largely contributed to his victory on 8 November 2016 (Table 2.2).

Despite his second-place finish, Kasich did not have a reliable group of voters, while Cruz, who finished third, became increasingly dependent on "very conservative" elements of the Republican Party. Rubio did well among women voters, while Bush positioned himself as the clear establishment candidate at that point in the race. Unfortunately, too few of those voters participated in the 2016 primary cycle.

**Table 2.2** Bases of support for Republican candidates in New Hampshire Republican primary

| *Candidate* | *Party affiliation* | *Age* | *Gender* | *Political ideology* | *Ancestry* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cruz | | | | Very conservative | |
| Trump | Independent | 35–54 | Men | Moderate/somewhat conservative | White/caucasian |
| Rubio | Democrat | | Women | | |
| Carson | | | | | |
| Paul | | | | Somewhat conservative | |
| Kasich | | | | | |
| Bush | Republican | | | | |
| Fiorina | | | | | |

*Source* The Emerson College Study was conducted with a total of 289 adults registered likely GOP primary voters in New Hampshire between February 19 and 21, 2016. Methodological details for the Emerson College Study can be reviewed at www.theecps.org. Analysis restricted to main candidates and identify significant levels of support

## Winning and Losing the Republican Primaries

To trace the evolution of the Republican nomination race and better understand the conclusion, we examine support for the candidates in three other primaries: South Carolina, Texas, and New York. These primaries are geographically and politically diverse and span across the primary season until the end of April when there were little to no doubts about the outcome.

The South Carolina Republican contest was held on 20 February 2016. Trump won with 33% of the votes ahead of a much narrower field of candidates. Marco Rubio came in second with 23% of the votes barely ahead of Cruz at 22%. Bush (8%), Kasich (8%), and Carson (7%) trailed far behind.[5] As Table 2.3 shows, some of Trump's coalition remained largely intact in South Carolina (Caucasians and men), but his support was somewhat older than in previous contests. Trump did best among voters who were primarily concerned about defeating ISIS. Trump and Cruz divided the Evangelical vote, while Cruz and Rubio fought over the support of those between the ages of 35 and 54 and voters most concerned about economic issues, specifically the deficit for Cruz voters and the job market for Rubio's backers. Rubio edged out Cruz for second place as a result of his strength among black voters in that state as well as non-evangelical voters. However, the point remains that while

**Table 2.3** Bases of support for Republican candidates in South Carolina primary

| *Candidate* | *Issues* | *Age* | *Race* | *Religion* | *Gender* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trump | Defeat ISIS | 55–74 | Caucasian | Evangelicals | Men |
| Rubio | Jobs | 35–54 | Black | Non-Evangelicals | |
| Cruz | Deficit | 35–54 | | Evangelicals | |
| Bush | | | | | |
| Kasich | | | | | |
| Carson | | | | | |

*Source* The Emerson College Study was conducted with a total of 374 adults registered likely GOP primary voters in South Carolina between February 15 and 17, 2016. Methodological details for the Emerson College Study can be reviewed at www.theecps.org. Analysis restricted to main candidates and identify significant levels of support

Trump was appealing to a comparatively wide range of voters, his opponents were narrowcasting their appeal as a way to position themselves as an alternative to Trump and as a way to secure their electoral base.

Donald Trump's march towards the Republican nomination hit a roadblock in Texas on 1 March 2016. Ted Cruz handily won his state with 43.8% of the votes, ahead of Trump (26.7%) and Rubio (17.7%). None of the other 10 candidates still in the race garnered more than 5% of the votes.[6] As a native son, Cruz's victory was expected, but findings from Table 2.4 yield insights as to the reasons behind his victory. They also shed light on the dynamics behind Trump's continued success.

Unlike previous primary contests examined in this chapter, Cruz drew support from a broader spectrum of supporters. His candidacy resonated with men, those aged between 35 and 54, as well as older voters (75+). He was the candidate most likely to get the support of the Republican establishment and Hispanics. Notably, he was competing with Trump for support among Caucasians. His success revealed his inability to build a broad appeal beyond his native Texas, most likely due to his messaging tailored to appeal to narrow segments of the public. While targeted electioneering may have proven successful in previous years, such an approach proved inadequate in 2016. For his part, Trump finished second as a result of his steady support among his core supporters: men, Caucasians, voters aged between 55 and 74, and voters identifying as Independent as well as Democrats. Those voters had been with him since Iowa and while Trump may have labelled them as the "forgotten voters", they represented a majority of the available electorate.

**Table 2.4** Bases of support for Republican candidates in Texas primary

| *Candidate* | *Gender* | *Language* | *Party identification* | *Issues* | *Race* | *Age* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trump | Men | | Non-Republican | Race relations/gun control | Caucasian | 55–74 |
| Rubio | | Spanish | | | | |
| Cruz | Men | Spanish | Republican | Deficit | Caucasian/hispanics | 35–54/75+ |
| Bush | | | | | | |
| Kasich | | | | | | |
| Carson | | | | | | |

*Source* The Emerson College Study was conducted with a total of 449 adults registered likely GOP primary voters in Texas between February 26 and 28, 2016. Methodological details for the Emerson College Study can be reviewed at www.theecps.org. Analysis restricted to main candidates and identify significant levels of support

**Table 2.5** Bases of support for Republican candidates in New York primary

| *Candidate* | *Gender* | *Issues* | *Age* | *Race* | *Personal communication* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trump | Men | Defeating ISIS | 35–74 | Caucasian | Cell phone only |
| Rubio | | | | Black | |
| Cruz | | Deficit/Supreme Court nominees | 75+ | | |
| Bush | | | | | |
| Kasich | | | | | |
| Carson | | | | | |

*Source* The Emerson College Study was conducted with a total of 298 adults registered likely GOP primary voters in New York between March 14 and 16, 2016 Methodological details for the Emerson College Study can be reviewed at www.theecps.org. Analysis here restricted to main candidates and identify significant levels of support

Trump's coalition of voters was also present in his decisive win in New York. As listed in Table 2.5, he was the only candidate with a broad range of supporters while his opponents were trying to stop Trump with either very narrow or no tangible groups to rely on. Specifically, Trump could once again rely on the support of men, Caucasians and those between the ages of 35 and 74 who were concerned about defeating

ISIS while Rubio's support was by then limited to Black voters and Cruz's support to older voters and those concerned with the deficit and Supreme Court nominations. Clearly, Trump was on his way to clinching the Republican nomination and, unbeknownst to most at that time, becoming the 45th President of the USA.

## A Fresh Look at Contemporary Electioneering

The statistical analysis of the Emerson College Polling Society for five primaries spread throughout the Republican presidential nomination race reveals that most candidates turned to an electioneering approach that was highly factional in nature. It demonstrates quantitatively that they, for the most part, mobilized small and politically homogenous pockets of Republican support, which helped them achieve some levels of electoral success. In particular, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio were able to rally specific groups of voters around their candidacy based on matters relating to religion, media preferences, and political dispositions. However, it prevented them from securing wider support in order to win the nomination. Jeb Bush's appeal as the old establishment candidate, which was more broad-based in nature than his opponents' outreach, did not resonate among Republican voters despite his ability to raise and spend large sums of money on his campaign.[7] His failed run for the nomination seems to be in line with Bimber's (2008) argument discussed previously in this chapter. It shows the growing importance for candidates to shy away from the consensual approach and carves a political niche in order to position themselves and target, reach out to, and mobilize specific slices of the voting public in a context of hyper political fragmentation and high electoral competition.

Interestingly in the context of this chapter, Trump's ability to build and maintain a coalition of supporters throughout the nomination race, which began in Iowa in February 2016 and ended with the last nomination contests in June 2016, showed that his messaging, mobilizing, and organizing strategy with a populist bent resonated among Republican voters. More importantly, he built this base of support despite his inability to secure traditional Republican political establishment support as well as without raising more funds than many of his opponents[8] (Cohen et al. 2016). Cohen et al. (2016) point out that his electoral appeal was still highly factional in nature. They argue that his success rested in part on his ability to "parlay an intense but narrow following into a delegate

majority by playing on the penchants of journalists and the dynamics of a sequence of contests" (Cohen et al. 2016, p. 705). We suggest in this analysis that Trump's successful run was more broad-based than others may have suggested. In other words, he leveraged a modified catch-all electioneering strategy targeting specific factions of the Republican electorate, but also reaching a wider public due to its populist bent. Also of importance was Trump's active presence on social media that enabled him to bypass traditional legacy media filters and narrowcast his message and mobilization appeals to his followers on his own terms (e.g. Ahmadian et al. 2017; Wells et al. 2016). More research is required and will be conducted on the structure and operationalization of Trump's messaging and mobilization tactics, both online and offline, as well as his use of data in order to do so.

The growingly fragmented—and polarized—nature of the American political environment is leading candidates to narrowcast to and mobilize narrow factions of voters with distinct interests, preferences, and objectives. While most contenders did so successfully throughout the 2016 Republican presidential nomination contest, Trump distinguished himself from his competition by the populist tone of his messaging, which might have played a central role in helping him garner support across slices of the electorate or appeal to larger groups of voters. Despite being factional in nature, his campaign adopted a modified catch-all approach with a strong populist bent, which proved successful during the Republican primaries and the general election.

This chapter shows that Trump introduced a new dimension to campaigning that needs to be further studied and incorporated into visions and understandings of contemporary approaches to electioneering. The way in which he secured the Republican presidential nomination is not entirely unprecedented. While relying on an atypical populist approach to political campaigning, he still capitalized on dynamics of electoral support that have shaped previous presidential electoral contests in the USA, hence the need to revisit and adapt the factional politics argument. The hostility towards traditional media and political elites among some segments of the public coupled with the "breakdown of broad social membership" (Bennett 2015, p. 152), which has led to diminished political cohesion among the public, has also proven pivotal in his ability to secure the nomination through a highly factional message approach. This political environment, which has extended beyond election cycles in recent years in the USA, might shape Trump's approach to governing in an era of permanent campaigning. As of early 2017, his tenure

as President of the USA has been marked by dynamics of populist messaging and decision-making tailored to rally his base of support that was outlined in his chapter, an approach that we tentatively refer to as "factional governing".

## Notes

1. The availability of large volumes of data on individual voters in the USA coupled with growing access to expertise and technical resources to process these data has impacted positively formal political players' ability to target specific segments of the electorate and to engage in direct marketing over the last decade (see Spiller and Bergner 2014).
2. Emerson College Polling Society was named best collegiate polling organization by Bloomberg who assessed the work of all polling organizations during the 2016 US Presidential primaries (https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-06-29/ranking-the-2016-presidential-primary-polls-and-predictions?cmpid=yhoo.hosted).
3. www.nytimes.com/elections/results/iowa (Accessed November 4, 2016).
4. www.uspresidentialelectionnews.com/2011/02/2016-new-hampshire-primary-results-open-thread (Accessed November 30, 2016).
5. www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/primaries/SC (Accessed December 8, 2016).
6. www.elections.texastribune.org/2016/primary-election-results/ (Accessed December 13, 2016).
7. https://www.opensecrets.org/pres16/candidate?id=N00037006 (Accessed January 1, 2016).
8. https://www.opensecrets.org/pres16/candidate?id=N00023864 (Accessed January 1, 2016).

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CHAPTER 3

# Thinking What He Says: Market Research and the Making of Donald Trump's 2016 Presidential Campaign

*Brian Conley*

**Abstract** Much has been made of the unconventional nature of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. From his willingness to indulge in the politics of defamation and personal attack, to his near total reliance on earned media and massive rallies, Trump has defied everything a presidential candidate is supposed to do. But there is one thing that Trump has done that all viable presidential candidates in the USA now try to do: He based his message and market positioning on a detailed, research-driven understanding of the thinking and political instincts of the voter segments targeted by his campaign. It is the object of this chapter to analyze the systematic market research done by Trump to identify, target and position himself with specific voter segments.

**Keywords** Donald Trump · Market research · Segmentation Targeting and positioning

B. Conley (✉)
Suffolk University, Boston, MA, USA
e-mail: bconley@suffolk.edu



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## Introduction

Much has been made of the unconventional nature of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. From his willingness to indulge in the politics of defamation and personal attack, to his near total reliance on earned media and massive rallies, Trump has defied much of what a presidential candidate is supposed to do. But there is one thing that Trump did do that virtually all presidential candidates in the USA now try to do: He based his core message and policy positioning on a detailed, research-driven understanding of how specific voter segments targeted by his campaign think and behave politically. It is this targeting and the disciplined way in which Trump has positioned himself with specific voter groups that has enabled him not only to defy political convention, but also to benefit from doing so.

Indeed, among the factors that political observers frequently cited to explain the success of Trump's otherwise improbable presidential campaign is the affinity many of his supporters had for him as someone they saw as bucking political convention; someone who, for once, actually "says what he thinks." It was this trait that made Trump, in the thinking of many of his supporters, more trustworthy than his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton. This certainly was borne out in the polling done during the general election, which showed that voters consistently viewed Trump as more "trustworthy" than Clinton, sometimes by as much as eight points (Clement and Guskin 2016). As participants in a Pennsylvania focus group of Republican women asserted, Trump was someone "who speaks his mind, stands his ground and is refreshingly politically incorrect" (Cillizza 2016, p. 2). This was true despite the fact that the group also felt that Trump did "tend…to go too far" at times, with his rhetoric and personal attacks, and could "be a loose cannon" (Cillizza 2016, p. 2).

While scholars will likely continue to debate whether or not candidate Trump was in fact saying what he thought on the campaign trail, there is little doubt that he was saying what the voters targeted by his campaign wanted to hear. The reference to "rapists" in his presidential announcement; dismissing his tape-recorded admission of a history of sexual assault as just "locker room talk," and his call for a "total and complete" ban on all Muslims coming into the country all resonated with very specific audiences (Marantz 2016; Trump 2015a, b). To be sure, Trump is not the first US presidential candidate to tailor his message to certain

voters, based on ongoing demographic and public opinion research. In fact, such research-driven messaging and targeting has become standard practice in US politics, even in state-level races. Rather, what the Trump campaign represented was a bald attempt to formulate policy, and communicate those policies based solely on mimicking what specific voters thought about selected issues, without any effort to interact with or shape those opinions. As such, the Trump campaign highlights both the power of a market-based political strategy, but also critical ethical and leadership questions associated with such an approach. As political marketing scholars have asserted, simply repeating, and thus reinforcing, what targeted voter groups think, regardless of how base or inaccurate such beliefs may be, is merely pandering and not a form of political leadership.

It is the object of this chapter to examine the extent to which market research and market-based strategy shaped Donald Trump's successful 2016 presidential campaign. It will do so by first reviewing the unique role market research plays in market-oriented politics, and second, by critically evaluating how central research-based voter segmentation and targeting was to Trump's overall policy positioning during the general election.

## Literature Review: "Research-Driven Politics"

The steady growth in the quality and types of research gathered by political campaigns has paralleled, and in many ways reinforced, a desire on the part of a growing number of political campaigns and candidates to become more market or voter-oriented. The ability of a political organization to rest its strategy in the nuances of a targeted market largely hinges, as political marketing scholarship makes clear, on the degree to which its decision-making processes are research-driven (Lees-Marshment 2009; Braun 2012; Rademacher and Tuchfarber 1999). Many political campaigns and organizations seek to understand the public, and rely, as market-oriented efforts do, on established as well as newer research methodologies to do so. What distinguishes a market approach is the unique role research plays in molding every aspect of campaign decision making. It is research that enables a campaign to first skillfully segment the voting public, identify targets and finally communicate in a way that effectively positions its candidates and policies with its chosen audience.

Focus group data, polling and advanced statistical analysis can each provide a campaign with the sort of critical information and insights they need to create increasingly refined voter segments (Issenberg 2012, 2013; Rutenberg 2013; Nickerson and Rogers 2013). At the top level, campaigns often start by sorting voters by geographic, behavioral, demographic and psychographic characteristics, with more and more refined and specific classifications created within these groupings, based on both the quality of the data gathered and the campaign's technical ability to analyze the data (Smith and Saunders 1990; Baines 1999; Lees-Marshment 2009). Based on this type of intricate, ongoing research-based market segmentation campaigns test, develop, and if necessary adapt their targeting strategies. But, it is important to note, and often underemphasized, that the targeting process needs to be informed not only by what a campaign learns about unique voter segments, but also what it—whether it is a candidate, or public official—thinks and learns about itself. What issues does the candidate care about or think are the most pressing in society? What propelled him or her as a person into politics? It is only by gauging what the candidate or campaign stands for, and, as importantly, what the campaign thinks differentiates it from competing candidates that it can begin to think strategically about the discrete voter segments it might target, and potentially build a relationship with over time.

Indeed, by bringing together what it knows about voters and its own motivations, a candidate or campaign can engage in the critical process of planning how to position or reposition itself with selected voter segments. Positioning refers to the process by which a candidate or party situates itself politically with a specific voter segment, both in terms of competing candidates, but also in relation to the ideas, interests, concerns and aspirations, or "frames" that together define the lived experience of the target group (Cosgrove 2007). To achieve this, a candidate or party's positioning must thread intellectually, but also emotionally into how the targeted segment interacts with and perceives the world around them. It must, moreover, be readily comprehensible to the targeted segment, scholars argue, but also plausible and differentiating (Thurber and Nelson 1995; Braun 2012; Lees-Marshment 2009; Baines 1999).

However, this does not mean candidate positioning should be subordinate to how a segment currently thinks or behaves. Indeed, given the importance it places on voter research and targeting, certain dangers associated with political marketing can arise when parties or candidates

opt simply to follow, or pander to, rather than genuinely engage with, targeted voter segments. As research points out, voter frames may at once reflect an individual's political and non-political experiences, but nonetheless be fundamentally uninformed, internally inconsistent or intolerant of others, contrasting points of view or experiences (Coleman 2007; Cosgrove 2007, pp. 8, 23–31). In the absence of some type of "leadership" or effort by parties and candidates to forthrightly engage with targeted voters, and inform them about what they value, as a public official; what they understand to be credible, in terms of policy claims; and tenable within the legal and institutional confines of representative forms of democratic governance, then a market orientation risks being captured by simple the most popular, or prevailing set of ideas or beliefs, regardless of how misbegotten or unfounded they may be (Lees-Marshment 2009, pp. 270–273; Newman 1999; Lees-Marshment et al. 2014, pp. 289–306). It is essential, then, when seeking to strategically position a party or a candidate to be cognizant of the problems related to parroting the concerns of specific voter groups, including the challenges of delivering on promises that are too ambitious; popular, but counter-productive; or reactionary and thus potentially threatening to the public interest in general.

Taken together, segmentation, targeting and positioning strategies illustrate the dynamic ways in which ongoing research informs market-oriented campaigns. The question in 2016 was how much research shaped any of these activities within Donald Trump's successful presidential campaign.

## Research Design

To assess the extent to which Donald Trump's presidential campaign relied on market research to determine who the campaign targeted and how they positioned Trump with specific voter segments, the degree to which his campaign employed the following strategies is examined:

1. Segmentation, or the degree to which market research on specific voter segments shaped Trump's campaign strategy and decision making.
2. Targeting, or how systematic the Trump campaign was in focusing its communication strategy and resources on the specific voter segments identified by the campaign.

3. Positioning, or how deliberate, and responsible the Trump campaign was in trying to connect its policy preferences and proposals with the values and concerns of its targeted voter segments.

## Analysis

### *Segmentation*

Candidate Donald Trump prided himself, and was frequently lauded by his supporters, as being a candidate who spoke his mind, as someone who actually says what he thinks. For a candidate or elected official, this is no easy task, especially in the USA where, as the Pew Research Center reported in 2015, "fewer than three-in-ten Americans have expressed trust in the federal government in every major poll conducted since 2007" (Pew 2015). It was an especially impressive feat for Trump, given that what an analysis of his campaign shows is that far from spontaneous, his bid for the presidency was a highly calculated, data and research-driven effort to position himself as a political outsider committed to what many socially conservative whites regard as common sense solutions to the nation's problems. But, more significantly, it also shows that at base, Trump's positioning strategy rested on a willingness to cater, as a way of demonstrating his loyalty, to whatever his targeted segments wanted to hear, and already believed regardless of how inaccurate, baseless or abhorrent. It was a strategy aided, despite Trump's public statements to the contrary, by the work of an in-house data team, supported by the UK-based data-analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica, which specializes in developing sophisticated "psychological profiles" for every individual in any target voter population (Hope 2016).

The planning began as early as 2011 with a coordinated attempt by Trump and his advisors to gauge the political mood of both of the Republican electorate, as well the country as a whole (Sherman 2016). At the time, evidence showed that the GOP was dominated by a grassroots Right, which had been energized by the Tea Party movement that emerged in 2009, but that was also without clear national leadership (Skocpol and Williamson 2013). Polls conducted in late 2011, for instance, found that more than 40% of Republicans identified as "very conservative," but were divided in their opinion about who they would support for president in 2012 (Jensen 2011). But the rise of the Tea Party also pointed to something else: broad public disillusionment with

Obama, the national Democratic Party and political liberalism that cut across party lines and found common cause in a growing sense of economic and racial dislocation among working-class whites, especially in traditionally Democratic areas in the Midwest (Confessore 2016; Norton and Sommers 2011; Tesler 2016; Cohn 2016).

Trump had flirted with the idea of running for president as early as the late 1980s (Coppins 2014; Sherman 2016). But it was not until the period between 2011, when he first floated some of his policy ideas before a sympathetic audience at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, and early 2014 when an assembled group of advisors began in earnest to prep him for 2016 that the first strands of a coherent plan to run for the White House emerged (Trump 2011; Haberman and Burns 2016). A decision not to run in 2012, which by 2014 he saw as a missed opportunity, explains the halting nature of his launch (Coppins 2014). But what his advisors, led by long-time Republican operatives Roger Stone, Sam Nunberg and David Bossie, told Trump in 2014 was that the issues that tied together the Republican Right, and the white working-class voters that partially overlapped with the Tea Party, were the same he had discussed at CPAC in 2011, namely Obama, immigration, and latent economic nationalism (Trump 2011; Geraghty 2015; Sherman 2016; Haberman and Burns 2016; Costa 2016).

When the Tea Party burst onto the national scene in early 2009, it was notable both for its animus toward a president who had only been in office for a matter of months, but also by the cross section of voters the movement attracted. Far from being limited to conservative Republican men, who did nonetheless dominate the movement, it also drew in significant numbers of independents, women and Democrats from across the country. According to a 2012 *CBS News/New York Times* poll, for instance, while 54% of Tea Party supporters were Republicans, and 89% were white, 41% were either women or registered Independents. Another 8% were Democrats. Moreover, although 36% of them lived in the south, 22% were Midwestern and 18% lived in the northeast (Montopoli 2012). As significantly, 25% of Tea Party supporters reported being as likely to vote for Democrats as forRepublicans. Although public support for the Tea Party would fluctuate in the years between the 2012 and 2016 elections, the bundle of issues that appealed to many white working-class voters remained relatively stable (Newport 2014). Chief among them were concerns about the economy,

the scope of government and immigration, but also a sense that Obama's presidency and policies represented an implicit form of racial favoritism toward people of color that undercut the rights of white people (Montopoli 2012; Confessore 2016; Cohn 2016).

Together with conservative Republicans, these were the issues and voter segments—some well-known, some still forming in traditionally Democratic regions of the country—that Trump's advisors informed him market research and data suggested might serve as the base for a political novice, and outsider to stage a credible run for the presidency.

## *Targeting*

From the start, pundits struggled to make sense of Trump's campaign (Thompson 2016). Many concluded that the campaign, which only became more circus-like and incendiary as it went along, was little more than a reflection of Trump's famously combative personality. However, if you consider how the campaign understood, and segmented voters the overall strategic arch of Trump's candidacy quickly comes into focus: It was defined by an almost single-minded effort to connect with the various segments of socially conservative, disaffected white voter groups targeted by the campaign. Trump connected with his audience, as many commentators have noted, but he also effectively chose his audience. It is a trajectory that began with Trump's embrace in 2011 of the so-called birther movement, which sought to challenge Obama's presidency by claiming—without evidence—that he was not born in the USA and therefore not eligible to be president.

In many ways, Trump's foray into the birther movement can be seen as a "trial balloon," as Parker and Eder write, for his presidential ambitions (2016a, b, c, d, p. 3). It provided him and his circle of advisors with a way to field-test messaging that might work to position Trump with the campaign's unique voter segments. Their findings—that birther claims strongly resonated with Republicans and Tea Party supporters, but also with more conservative working-class whites—offered the campaign key insights into how a coalition of white voters might offer a pathway to the Republican nomination, and possibly the White House (Debnam 2011; Jensen 2015). More than any other topic, the birther issue offered Trump a way to publicly challenge President Obama, specifically his legitimacy as the nation's first African-American president, and to do so in a way that implicitly invoked the intersecting fears many

conservative whites harbor about immigration, Islamic terrorism and their declining social and economic status in the country (Confessore 2016; Sherman 2016). First and foremost, "the appeal of the birther issue," explains Nunberg, "was, 'I'm going to take this guy on, and I'm going to beat him'" (Parker and Eder 2016, p. 2). But, beyond that, Nick Confessore notes, it spoke to the fact that "for some whites, the election of the country's first black president was also a powerful symbol of their declining pre-eminence in American society" (2016, p. 5).

For Trump and his advisors, the reaction to the birther issue offered the first glimpse into how a campaign attacking Obama on the issues of the economy, immigration and terrorism might have the sort of crossover appeal needed to gain the support of both conservative Republicans and many traditionally Democratic working-class white voters, particularly in the industrial Midwest (Cohn 2016). As Cohn reports, research conducted by Pew in 2014 found that "positions like those held by Trump on trade, immigration, guns and the environment have considerable support from white working-class Democrats" (2016, p. 2). This, he continues, was clearly evident in the polling data which, by summer 2016 had "Trump lead[ing] among white voters without a college degree by a 57-to-31 margin," which was eight points better thanRomney in 2012 (2016, p. 2). Entering the general election, Trump remained competitive, Cohn concludes, in large part because he had significantly weakened Clinton's support, particularly in traditional Democratic strongholds in the Midwest and urban rustbelt—stretching from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania through Toledo, Ohio to Milwaukee, Wisconsin—by "adopt[ing] a platform" that enabled him to make "big gains among less educated whites" (2016, p. 3).

Trump's appeal among these voters would directly inform his targeting strategy, from what he said, how he said it, to where he said it and to whom. Indeed, a key element of Trump's targeting strategy was making sure he avoided, to the extent possible, situations where he might have to interact with, and possibly answer to different voter groups, and unfriendly media outlets (Colvin 2015). The campaign focused much of its energy, for example, on organizing events and other activities where every aspect of Trump's interaction with voters and the media could be carefully stage managed. The campaign even went so far as to deny press credentials to anymedia outlets deemed too critical of Trump, limiting the press's ability to cover his campaign. However, auditorium-based rallies, where, in front of large friendly crowds Trump was able to

practice his policy positioning, and appease the base by condemning the media, were the most conspicuous aspect of this strategy. At these rallies, Trump mastered the art of making his points in simple, emotive and often repetitive language that resonated with the audience (Maslansky 2016). Such performances, moreover, despite prominently featuring attacks on the media, were nonetheless irresistible to journalists and greatly contributed to the enormous amount of earned media Trump received throughout his campaign (Kalb 2016). Additionally, Trump's targeting strategy relied heavily on the tactical use of established conservative news media, radio and social media channels, notably Twitter, which afforded Trump the opportunity to commune with supporters and to freely attack his opponents without the risk of being scrutinized himself.

And, though it was slow to do so, particularly in comparison with the Clinton campaign, by summer 2016 the Trump campaign was relying heavily on data, notably "psychographic" profiles of possible supporters to help refine its targeting strategies (Goldmacher 2016). Publicly, Trump would continue to downplay the value of so-called big data to his campaign, as he had throughout the primary (Graham 2016). But, by summer's end, his campaign was spending at least $100,000 a week on polling, and would, in September alone, spend five million dollars to retain the services of the then little-known data analytics firm,Cambridge Analytica (Green and Issenberg 2016; Grassegger and Krogerus 2017; Hope 2016). The campaign's shift to data reflected, in large measure, the growing influence of Trump's more tech-savvy son-in-law, Jared Kushner, on overall strategy, especially after Trump clinched the Republican nomination in the May 3rd Indiana primary (Green and Issenberg 2016; Toppin 2016).

What data, particularly the highly nuanced data generated by Cambridge Analytica, enabled the campaign to do was quickly and accurately affirm, with individual voters, whatever political impression of Trump their psychographic profile suggested would most effectively resonate most with them. In particular, while Trump infamously spent many late nights on Twitter, his data team based in San Antonio, Texas and led by Brad Parscale, focused primarily on Facebook, where Cambridge Analytica developed its unique psychographic algorithms. On Facebook, they were able to find and nurture Trump supporters as well as use them to continually field-test messaging, and expand the audience (Grassegger and Krogerus 2017; Green and Issenberg 2016).

To get started, Parscale "developed rudimentary models," wrote Josh Green and Sasha Issenberg, "matching voters to their Facebook profiles and relying on that network's 'Lookalike Audiences' to expand his pool of targets" (Green and Issenberg 2016, p. 8). But, with the support of data engineers from Cambridge Analytica and the RNC, the campaign was able to quickly scale up these activities, using such things as Facebook's "brand-lift" function to assess the recall rate of ads, and programs like "Deep Root," which, as Jamel Toppin explains, informed the campaign's "scaled-back TV ad spending by identifying shows popular with specific voter blocks in specific regions" (Green and Issenberg 2016, p. 8; Toppin 2016, p. 4). As part their data-driven targeting strategy, the campaign even "built a custom geo-location tool," Toppin writes, "that plotted the location density of about 20 voter types over a live Google Maps interface." Of course, all of this was supported by a user-friendly, data "dashboard," built by the Cambridge Analytica team, that enabled the campaign to effortlessly parse data—with the click of a mouse—on 220 million adults living in the country (Hope 2016; Grassegger and Krogerus 2017). By election eve, data were shaping every major decision made by the campaign, from how it raised money to where Trump held his rallies.

Over the course of the general election, Trump had a clear message, which explicitly differentiated him, the outsider, successful businessman from what he described as the failed, elitist politicians who had abandoned the working people of America and led the country to ruin. The birther issue had helped bring this contrast into focus for Trump. It helped expose just how distrustful, and even contemptuous elements of his targeted voter segments were of President Obama, the government and anyone they viewed as "foreign." But, it also highlighted just how eager Trump was to indulge in rumor, falsehood and outright discrimination if that was where elements within his targeted segments were in their thinking.

## Positioning

For many seasoned political observers, on the left and the right, Trump's unexpected victory in the general elections was simply bafflingly. How could such an uninformed, unfiltered and unqualified candidate win the presidential nomination of one of the two major parties in the USA, let alone the presidency itself? At least one part of the answer lies in the

disciplined, yet uninhibited way in which Trump targeted specific voter segments with messaging that effectively positioned him with these groups by stating, without any concern for the veracity his claims, what they wanted to hear. Once he found his audience, and his issues, Trump did little else but affirm his commitment to, and sympathy for these segments, largely by differentiating himself from what he described, often in a cartoonish way, the ruinous policies of the nation's political elites, notably Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. And, as he made clear from the day he announced, it was to white, working-class America, who felt as though they were losing ground in the country that Trump wed himself as a candidate (Trump 2015a, b). He understood these voters, he claimed. He understood, in particular, that they felt betrayed and discarded by political elites in Washington, by a rapidly globalizing world economy and by the dictates of an ascendant multicultural, and implicitly female, liberalism that had taken hold in urban coastal America (Cohn 2016).

Trump's commitment to these voter segments was evident through this positioning strategy. But it was particularly pronounced in his policy statements regarding the economy, taxes and immigration. A month before the Republican Convention, at an aluminum factory outside of Pittsburgh, Trump gave a speech that effectively set the anti-elitist, nationalist tone that would govern his policy positioning on economic issues throughout the general election. The American worker, who had literally built the country, had been betrayed over the last two decades, Trump asserted, by politicians in Washington beholden to the forces of economic globalization. "Globalization has made the financial elite who donate to politicians very wealthy," he explained to the crowd of several hundred, "but it has left millions of our workers with nothing but poverty and heartache" (Trump 2016a, p. 2). What the political establishment had done, Trump argued, at the behest of politicians like Hillary Clinton, who along with her husband had supported a host of trade deals that costs millions of American jobs, was to take "from the people their means of making a living and supporting their families" (Trump 2016a, p. 2). And, those who benefit from globalization, and had become wealthy through such trade policies, he continued, were eager to see another Clinton presidency. "They knew," he stated, that "as long as she is in charge nothing will ever change…the inner cities will remain poor…factories will remain closed…borders will remain open…[and] special interests will remain firmly in control" (Trump 2016a, p. 4). The

American heartland, along with the nation's manufacturing core, will continue to be gutted in the process. It was all a "consequence of a leadership class that worships globalism over Americanism," he exclaimed (Trump 2016a, p. 7).

But Trump had a different vision, he told his audience. He was with white, hardworking America, and against the corporate and political elites who were more concerned with free trade, open borders and globalization than with the well-being of the country. He would restore the previously high standard of living of the white worker and guard their traditional cultural moorings against the travails of multicultural, elite liberalism. He would start, he announced, by "declaring American economic independence." "I want you to imagine how much better our future can be if we declare independence from the elites who've led us to one financial and foreign policy disaster after another" (Trump 2016a, p. 5). His plan, he explained, in a speech to the *New York Economic Club*, was to rebuild the country with "American hands," fueled by "American energy, harvested from American sources" (Trump 2016b, p. 7). He would, as he consistently reminded his supporters in his speeches, "make America great again." But, despite the rousing language, Trump did not specify how he would revive the economy. In particular, he did not explain how we would improve the economic well-being of skilled and semi-skilled working-class laborers, something that most economists, owing to changes in technology alone, believe will be very difficult to achieve (Dollar 2016; McGill 2016).

Trump did explain that a key pillar of his economic plan would be providing white, working America with immediate tax relief (Trump 2016c). But again, he disclosed only bits and pieces of his overall tax plan, which was rolled out in two phases between September 2015 and August 2016. He did claim that, when implemented, his tax proposals "will present a night-and-day contrast to the job-killing, tax-raising, poverty-inducing Obama-Clinton agenda" (Trump 2016c, p. 3). According to Trump, the failed tax policies of Obama and Clinton had added almost 14 million people to the 80 million people already out of the labor market. These people constituted, in Trump's opinion, a "silent nation of jobless Americans" (Trump 2016c, p. 3). Moreover, it was in the defense of these "jobless Americans" that Trump promised to crack down on illegal immigration, which, in his view, not only made communities across the country less safe, but led to unfair competition in the labor market and depressed wages.

What is clear from an analysis of Trump's positioning strategy is that his campaign understood, and sought to exploit the fact that for many in Trump's targeted voter segments no issue more viscerally captured their sense of betrayal by political elites and uncertainty about their own social status than immigration. "The fundamental problem with the immigration system in our country," Trump contended, "is that it serves the needs of the wealthy donors, political activists and powerful, powerful politicians" (Trump 2016d, pp. 2–3). It is the interests of these groups, Trump claimed, wrapped up as they were in misbegotten liberal concerns with the welfare of illegal immigrants that had shaped the nation's immigration policy over the last 8 years. Who has been ignored? "Our forgotten working people," he asserted, and the many ways that liberal Washington's failure to curb illegal immigration has negatively "impact[ed]…their jobs, wages, housing, schools, tax bills and general living conditions" (Trump 2016d, p. 3). Trump, on the other hand, eager to show his loyalty, promised to stand up for white, working America, by strictly enforcing existing immigration laws and reversing all Obama administration policies that he believes aide people in the country illegally. He will mass deport, adopt "zero-tolerance for criminal aliens," recruit "5000 more Border Patrol agents," "block funding for sanctuary cities," negate "unconstitutional executive orders," ban all immigrants from certain countries and regions of the world, and, of course, "build a great wall along the southern border" that Mexico will pay for (Trump 2016d, pp. 8–14). He will do this, as he explained about all his economic policies, in order to protect "America and its workers" (Trump 2016d, p. 18). But, again, what Trump did not do was inform his target audiences that experts generally believe that few, if any of these proposals will have the effect on immigration, illegal or otherwise, that Trump suggested. Claims about mass deportation, for example, are little more than rhetoric, experts argue, entirely disconnected from the legal, logistical or ethical challenges associated with an actual attempt to forcibly remove millions of people from the country (Bennett 2016). Equally dubious was the idea that the USA–Mexican border could be secured by erecting a wall (Harlan and Markon 2016). But such claims did connect Trump with his targeted voter segments.

The Clinton campaign had no effective response to many of Trump's attacks, particularly on the economy and the assertion that she was wed to elite business and political interests. As a result, Clinton allowed

Trump to define her on these issues, which fundamentally weakened her positioning with millions of traditionally Democratic voters as the candidate in the race who most forthrightly defended the rights of the working and middle classes. Indeed, the lack of an effective retort by Clinton enabled Trump to fill the space by digging deeper into the class and gender dynamics that he and many in his targeted segments believed informed the politics of liberalism. Clinton was transformed, in all ways, into the enemy with many white, working-class voters, particularly in the Midwest. They were registered Democrats and typically voted that way in presidential elections. But now they were being courted by a billionaire Republican who resonated with them as an embodiment of the defiant, politically incorrect white male, who like them was fed up with both controlling government and controlling women, both of which Hillary Clinton seemed to personify.

## Conclusion

What Donald Trump's surprising win in the 2016 US presidential election highlights, on arguably an unprecedented scale is the significant power, but also the substantial danger associated with political marketing. Trump's campaign was effectively an unbridled form of political marketing. Over the course of his campaign, for the nomination, then in the general election, he and his top advisors methodically used market research to segment, target and position Trump with selected groups of voters. But, what he and his campaign did not do was make any discernible attempt in its positioning strategy to lead these voters, or inform their thinking about how any of the complex social and economic issues Trump raised might reasonably be addressed within the confines of a pluralistic democracy.

Instead, Trump unabashedly stoked the prejudices and animosity of certain voter groups after identifying, by among other things, publicly embracing the birther issue, the appeal such rhetoric might have among his targeted voter segments. He did so in a calculated attempt to endear himself with these voters and possibly win their support. Indeed, to gain their support, Trump trafficked in all manner of unsubstantiated allegation, rumor, vitriol and fear. He did so as much to generate an unprecedented amount of free media for his campaign as he did to incite political elites and thus affirm his loyalty to voters who had grown equally contemptuous of the political establishment.

Given its inflammatory nature, Trump's presidential win can hardly be treated as a constructive example of how to implement a market-based strategy, even if it does offer some important insights into how market research may be used in voter segmentation and targeting. Rather, it must be treated as a case study, and a cautionary one at that, on the importance of making ethical leadership central to political marketing as an enterprise. In a market approach, leadership involves something that was conspicuously absent inTrump's 2016 presidential campaign, namely a commitment to differentiating one candidate, policy or party from another without denigrating or dehumanizing the latter. It entails, moreover, an actual engagement with voters, where candidates and elected officials base their policy formulations on credible discussions with the public about the challenges facing a country, or the world, and what politically might be done about it.

Leadership of this sort was clearly something that Trump felt was an unnecessary part of running for elected office. At one level, he might be right. He understood that the modern spectacle of campaigning, at least in media-saturated US politics, might be more effectively managed by studiously avoiding any consideration for the challenges of delivering, once elected, on what you promise on the campaign trail. But a lesson Trump will learn quite quickly, as he transitions to and governs from the White House, is that if you mobilize voters based on the market principle that their interests form the basis of the policy-making process, it is something they, the public, for better or worse, are likely to take seriously, and not soon forget.

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CHAPTER 4

# Trump and the Republican Brand Refresh

*Ken Cosgrove*

**Abstract** The chapter will introduce the concept, introduce the history of the GOP brand since 2000 and then outline how Trump: (A) presented himself using Reagan's branding, (B) developed a product that was more populist and harkened back to the kind of anger that Nixon and George Wallace had in the GOP back in the early 1970s, (C) branded as the restoration to a past, glorious America in which the rules were followed, the borders were secure, the values of the majority were valued most (both in racial and in cultural terms), there was no threat of terrorist violence, the economy worked for all and it didn't require a grad degree to get a job that paid decent money, (D) the wall will get its own section because it shows how Trump followed the law of the visual in his marketing, (E) the legacy of the Obama campaigns on Trump will be briefly explored. Then, the piece will close with the extent to which the Trump brand refresh can or cannot refresh the GOP brand.

**Keywords** Party brand · Personal brand · Populism
Brand refresh · Brand heritage

K. Cosgrove (✉)
Suffolk University, Boston, MA, USA
e-mail: kcosgrove@suffolk.edu



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## Introduction

The 2016 election cycle shows the impact that a brand refresh can have on a struggling political brand. Donald Trump solved the problem of a stale brand and a declining market share for the GOP. He did so by refreshing the party's brand. The brand refresh built deep loyalty among its target audiences. This brand loyalty did things like encourage them to act as part of Trump's sales force and to turn out on Election Day. The brand combined elements of the Trump personal brand and the Reagan Conservative brand. Team Trump updated the Reagan colors, fonts, slogans and positioning for the age of computer graphics, Web sites and social media. Such things are common in a brand refresh as the case of the Florida Panthers hockey team will show. Trump, like Reagan, proposed restoring the country to greatness, something that served as a positioning statement about its current condition that his opponent pledged to continue in the run up to the election. It made the selling proposition one of: change with Trump or status quo with Clinton. Trump adds to the GOP brand with the refresh by reaching for populism of Richard Nixon and Southern Democrat George Wallace. Neither of these earlier leaders fit the Reagan Conservative brand's emphasis on economic policy.

The refreshed brand is aspirational, emotive and represents an effort to reconnect the GOP with blocks of voters with whom it had once done very well and could again. The brand refresh was needed because of Republican product failures, because it spoke to audiences that were not happy with the policies and personalities of the Obama years, and because it very much picked the populist side in the ongoing Republican Civil War. The refreshed brand linked Trump to a variety of Republican figures and built a strong emotive identity for Trump that allowed him to drive the marketing and media narratives throughout the election cycle. Its power was amplified by his team's use of the same big crowd and social media marketing strategies that Bernie Sanders and Barack Obama employed as well as by Team Clinton's decision to market their candidate as the representative of continuity and stability, while trying to disqualify Trump for office as being unfit.[1]

## What's a Brand Refresh?

A brand refresh is like a style change or makeover. The goal is to engage the consumer, expand the number of channels used, redesign the packaging and focus on the ingredients.[2] A brand refresh is like a makeover.

It can give an old brand a new look that re-engages the consumer. It is a version of the idea that politicians work to define their opponents and themselves, but it focuses first on defining oneself and explaining how one is different than one's competitors.[3] This can be a version of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis with the existing brand, and it is clearly aimed at providing differentiation between the newly refreshed brand and the competitors largely by driving traffic to a Web site that can serve as the place where value-added messaging can be provided.[4] The brand refresh can do, as was recently done in the case of Miller Lite in which the brand was taken from moribund to going gang busters by a relatively simple change: putting the product in and presenting the brand in its original packaging with its original logo.[5]

A strong example of the brand refresh and its uses are provided by the Florida Panthers NHL team that completed a brand refresh just prior to the 2016 season. The Panthers had recently been sold to new ownership and that new ownership had dramatically changed the team's business model and invested in the on-ice product in order to increase revenue and interest in their product in South Florida. The team's prior ownership had given away lots of tickets and accustomed the market to the idea that its product could be had for little or no cost. The problem was that when a team like the Panthers, in a marginal market with an arena that is not in the easiest place to reach does this, it trades short-term survival for long-term stability. Thus, the new ownership had to deal with the popular perception that tickets were not worth buying because they could be gotten for very little and that the team was not worth the investment of leisure time because it soon leaves for a hockey hotbed like Quebec City or Toronto in any case. The team used the brand refresh to send a series of messages about its viability over the long term, its seriousness in its on-ice business and the values it represented. The brand refresh coincided with the Panthers being much better on the ice than in years past. Thus, an improved product was combined with updated team colors, logos and uniforms: three key touch points for the consumer in sports brand marketing. The brand refresh was undertaken with the goals of signaling a new start while keeping the best elements of the extant brand, its history and the feelings the core audience had for it while simultaneously making new value statements that fit with the martial values of the game that are used by some of the most established teams in the sport, like the Rangers and the Black Hawks, in their marketing. As team president (and Trump's

initial nominee for Secretary of the Army) Vincent Viola noted, "We wanted something that began a new tradition of winning and demonstrated courage and selfless dedication to a team pursuit of victory."[6] Like Trump would do with the GOP brand, the Panthers used the brand refresh to signal change and continuity. As the team's lead in conducting the brand refresh, John Viola noted, "We wanted to really put a bold emphasis on the idea that this was a new era for the franchise, it's not necessarily a new direction, but a new evolution, a new maturity for the franchise."[7] The brand refresh was intended to send a signal that the owners were committed to remaining in the market as Panthers Vice-Chairman Doug Cifu noted, "What we really wanted to say to the people of South Florida was that we are here to stay. We wanted to bring stability to this franchise and wanted to imprint on the franchise our own ideas about what a Florida panther meant and what the Florida Panthers mean to this community."[8] The Panthers leadership tapped into the martial values and traditions noted just above by designing its brand heritage, as several other NHL teams do, to resemble a martial shield. In this case, the logo is inspired by the US Army's 101st Airborne Division and the service it and all members of the armed forces gave during World War II's Battle of the Bulge.[9]

An example of the way in which a brand refresh is not a rebranding is the way in which the Panthers kept the team colors and logo in general while working to give them a more stable mature look, but they also added the Florida State Flag to the uniform as a sign of stability and commitment, a team patch to the shoulder that reads either "Florida" or "Panthers" depending on whether the team is home or away, patches the players can earn to show status on the shoulder above said flag and even a change to the way the jersey ties to create the effect of a miniature Florida state flag just below the neckline on the front of the jersey just above the shield,[10] To further emphasize continuity, tradition and stability, the jerseys have horizontal striping in an homage to the uniforms of the Original Six NHL teams and their uniforms.[11] The team was using the branding process to position itself in the minds of the customer, state its values and signal its intentions for the future. The Panthers show the way in which a brand refresh can be used to signal a number of different things to one or several audiences, visually, emotively and in terms of positioning. Donald Trump did something very similar to the GOP brand during the 2016 election cycle.

## Trump Refreshes the GOP Brand

The Trump GOP brand refresh resembles the Panthers brand refresh. Both kept elements of the old brand, both harkened back to traditions established within their industry, both signaled audiences about intent and both positioned the product in the market and made statements about seriousness. Trump kept the Reagan slogan but updated the logo and the colors for the social media age. Further, he brought back an emotively hotter brand personality than that John McCain or Mitt Romney had worked with in their recent Presidential campaigns. Trump, like the Panthers, identified his target market and focused on fixing the problems that market saw with the brand. Further, like the Panthers, he took advantage of new technology to educate the public about his brand refresh. He developed a strong presence on Twitter and a clear hashtag with "#MAGA." Like the Panthers, Trump drove traffic to his Web site and developed a whole new product line of merchandise to sell (largely red hats with his "Make America Great Again" tagline on them) that both acted to give his supporters the sense of solidarity that sports fans who wear team merchandise share while generating revenue and earned brand impressions for the team or candidate.

Trump undertook a brand refresh for the same reasons the Panthers undertook one; it was an effort to solve existing problems and reconnect in a lasting way with a flagging customer base. The brand refresh can make an existing brand and the products it supports more interesting to consumers than they are at present. Trump needed to refresh the GOP brand because of product failures, because the party's offerings were not appealing to some of its traditional voters and because it needed to find a way to emotionally engage with and turn out enough of its prototypical voters. During the George W. Bush years, the Republican brand suffered high-profile product failures that alienated both its core and casual audiences. The public, by the end of the Bush years, saw the GOP as the party of the status quo that featured ongoing wars and a looming economic crisis. The GOP's next two Presidential nominees did little to change these perceptions or give the public a sense that they were in touch with the problems facing average Americans. Internally, the party was waging a civil war between the true believers focused on conservative ideological purity and more moderate pragmatists eager to win elections with each feeling that the other would nominate candidates who

could not win and the Conservatives blaming the pragmatists for a slew of liberal policies[12] Simultaneously, the Democrats adopted a branded marketing and mobilization model that had Barack Obama as its brand personality that resonated with some formerly Republican audiences and engaged some of the fastest growing demographic groups in the country. The party held the House of Representatives because it focused on controlling state governments in response to its federal level wipe out in 2008.[13] Control of the House from 2010 on meant that the GOP could block President Obama's legislative initiatives but not his executive orders. It was these orders, Obama's more passive leadership style and a host of economic anxieties that helped the Trump brand refresh work. Like Wallace and Nixon, he argued that he could restore the country to a better past although, just like those two politicians, many of his critics argued that this past never really existed.[14] Consistent with the best political branding that engages the customer and build enthusiasm about and a strong emotive tie to the product, Trump, like Wallace, succeeded not because of what he said specifically but because of "the style and approach."[15]

## The Refreshed Trump GOP Brand and Its Heritage

Trump's refreshed brand is a hybrid featuring Reagan's tag line, an updated Reagan logo, Nixon's attitudes and orientation toward public policy, the promise keeping of the "Contract with America" and incorporates the populism of Southern Democrat George Wallace. The brand refresh takes the GOP from putting "Country First" or stressing "Compassionate Conservatism" back to the things that once comprised the GOP brand and popularized it with the rise of Conservatism: nationalism, traditional values, keeping the country safe and a strong economy all presented with the angry and patriotic emotions that Republicans have used for decades.

The Trump brand refresh allowed the party to reconnect with its working and middle class mostly white voters who had seen the party become too much about the interest of the establishment and not their interests.[16] It tweaked both the brand and the product and, as a result, generated considerable internal resistance. Something similar had happened within the GOP when Ronald Reagan led the Conservative movement into dominance. Trump's brand refresh reconnected the flagging GOP brand with audience segments with which it had succeeded during

the Reagan years by slightly tweaking the product and adopting a retro brand that leaned heavily on the Reagan heritage among others to do so. Trump, in refreshing the GOP brand, used Reagan's 1980 campaign slogan "Let's Make America Great Again" but refreshed its fonts, colors, products and the channels through which it was distributed to fit the 2010s. Trump's brand narrative did take much from Reagan because, like Reagan, Trump's narrative focused on restoration to lost glory and fighting those against those forces that had diminished it. Trump faced a different world and changed the brand accordingly. Trump's blue is darker than the Reagan blue, the typeface on the signage is and represents a clear effort to convey authority. The typeface is Akzidenz Grotesk, a font that is easy to read, expressive and modern in look.[17] Thus, the Trump logo and signage echoed Reagan but did so for the modern age and adapted the slogan for use on social media in the form of the "#MAGA" hashtag.

While Trump's brand refresh kept Reagan's tag line, it took its emotions, issue orientation and populist bent from two pre-Reagan Conservative movement era politicians: Republican Richard Nixon and Democrat George Wallace with a good dose of Trump's personal brand added in. Further, the refreshed GOP brand is social media ready. It stays within the brand heritage because Trump, like Reagan before him, argued for a restoration of lost glory but, like Nixon before him, also argued that the government should seek to dignify and represent the concerns of average, forgotten Americans in its daily activities. Trump, like Nixon, argued that it was elites who had made the government work for themselves more than for the average American.[18] Trump argued that American dignity could be restored through tighter immigration and trade policies, tax policies that favored companies that kept their manufacturing work onshore and a strong security state to keep the country safe from terrorists and criminals. This is not radically different from the things Richard Nixon was saying decades ago even if some of the policies, like Nixon's emphasis on crime and racial politics around things like desegregation don't match perfectly, they share an orientation.[19]

Like Nixon and Wallace, Trump presented himself as the champion of the forgotten little guy standing up for patriotism, normality and putting the country back on a solid foundation economically and culturally. Trump took Nixon's angry emotion but also his populist policies. Nixon campaigned on law and order, and crime and racial desegregation as evidence of elites being out of touch. Trump used their support

for free trade, black lives matter, legalization of out of status immigrants and their positions on a host of social issues as proof that they were the cause of the nation's problems and did not really understand the plight of average people.[20] Just like Nixon, Trump claimed that he did understand these problems and would put the government to work to help average Americans once again.[21] Nixon blamed the country's elite for enabling its problems and argued that he would stand up for it while making peace with the big government programs his working-class constituencies liked.[22]

Trump, like Nixon and George Wallace, gained traction because of significant social and global upheaval. Wallace was specifically reacting to social disorder related to the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War and political assassination.[23] From Wallace, Trump took the hot rhetoric and the ability to play on the audience's emotions while engaging them in a call and answer at rallies. As Carter (2016) notes, Wallace called out the names of "bearded hippies, pornographers, sophisticated intellectuals who mocked God, traitorous anti-Vietnam War protesters, welfare bums, cowardly politicians and "pointy-head college professors who can't even park a bicycle straight."[24] Trump updated the list of devils in the marketing to focus on immigrants, President Obama (whom he had spent years claiming was not born in the United States therefore not eligible to be President), crooked or lying opponents, the media and out of touch elites (and elite institutions like the New York Times) who were either just losers, failing or lacking in common sense. The net effect of Wallace and Trump's efforts was the same and consistent with the uses of branding in political marketing: They built a tight emotive connection between the candidate and their supporters. Such audience engagement is a form of brand co-creation. Trump was including the audience in making the brand real and highly emotive, as a result, he and they were one symbolically and standing together against a slew of people who had diminished the country.

The target audiences picked up on how Trump was part of and similar to a long line of successful Republican candidates. Thus, the hybrid brand that Trump created really refreshed the party brand because it updated it, added to it but didn't change it at its core. Trump's refreshed brand was positioned more like the Obama 08 or Sanders brand in that it positioned the candidate as standing with their supporters not the other way around. Trump went so far as to say in his nomination acceptance speech: "I am your voice"[25] several occasions in direct contrast to

his general election opponent whose campaign urged people to "stand with her." The relative difference in brand positioning was, as it was in 2008 and in the primary, one of a candidate inviting support with an offer to serve versus a candidate inviting people with offers to serve them (Clinton 16) or the country (McCain 08). The Trump brand refresh repositions the party as welcoming, leading the country toward a specific goal (become great again) and serving the interests of the general public rather than specific interest groups or segments of the population.

## Making the Brand Refresh Real: Big Crowds, Hot Emotions and Social Media

Trump took the Republican brand back to its roots in some ways but in others he very much applied the tactics used by Barack Obama and Bernie Sanders to create a refreshed GOP brand for the twenty-first century. Trump made his brand a living thing through the events that he staged, through his social media forays and through the direct conversations he would have with non-traditional media outlets, like sports talk radio stations, to which his audiences listened. Trump was able to run a campaign that generated a great deal of earned media, thus making it less reliant on paid advertising than was his opponent or most recent presidential campaigns.

The other way Trump's brand was made real was in the strategic emphasis the campaign placed on earned over paid media and in the way the candidate spoke. No 'high falutin' language for the candidate of the people. Instead, a Carnegie Mellon University study found that Trump spoke at just below a sixth-grade level.[26] Given Trump's less educated audience targets, speaking at such a level makes perfect sense. Language is a key part of making the brand real to the public, and Trump's coarser language was a way to make him accessible to average Americans. It is also something very much in keeping with the populist tradition in the GOP. Nixon and Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush were often very plain spoken. Thus, by speaking so directly, Trump brought the brand and the brand heritage to life for average voters while drawing a direct contrast with the elites he was running against. Trump's language and messaging, as repellant as they were to those at whom the brand was not aimed, fit perfectly with his core audience target's emotions and values. Having him stand up to protestors personally at rallies was also another way to make the brand promises real to the target audiences. As the

*Washington Post* wryly noted "Trump, for one, seems to intuit that many of his supporters are not grammarians. As Trump articulated, "I love the poorly educated!"."[27] And the poorly educated loved him. Trump carried those with less than a college degree by eight points even while losing the college educated by nine points and establishing the biggest difference between the two groups since 1980.[28]

Consistent with the brand refresh strategy, Trump used newer technology to get his message out and bond with his target audiences. The Trump campaign's uses of Twitter and the Web site to get his brand narrative out in an unfiltered way resembled strategies that had been initiated by Bernie Sanders and Barack Obama, but the scale of the effort and strength of the emotive branded message made it a center piece of his campaign. Through this kind of direct communication, Trump built strong relationships with his audience targets. Trump was the candidate who constantly drove the news and used new technology to get his message out directly to the consumer unfiltered. He was the candidate who had a nimble operation but also involved the people at every turn. Trump had a social media tool available that Reagan did not and took full advantage by building a hashtag of the campaign tag line #MAGA and inviting people to use it. Further, his campaign embraced co-creation and crowd sourcing to cement its relationships with the customer and get ideas that could work as Tapscott and Williams (2006) note is possible or that Kotler et al. (2010) argue is they key in contemporary marketing to building a high level of involvement. This stood in stark contrast to his opponent who had a structured brand and social media lifestyle groups but was much more restrictive in the ways in which people were allowed to interact with the brand.[29]

Team Trump took another page from Bernie Sanders and Barack Obama to use the big rally and crowd as a way to generate attention for and buy into their brand. Trump and Sanders both used a strategy of holding fewer but larger campaign events during the 2016 cycle. Doing so built credibility, awareness and support for their candidacies among key audiences and because of the new scarcity of access were not radically different than the Florida Panthers reducing the number of complimentary tickets to their games made available. As Tad Devine said of Sanders so was it of Trump, "The news of large crowds manages to make its way to people, particularly in Iowa and New Hampshire. It's demonstrating that the message Bernie is delivering is connecting with a large audience."[30] Big events have the potential to put the candidate

in touch with small donors and community activists, thus generating the resources needed to run such an undertaking[31] but most of all this strategy is capable of generating lots of earned media.[32] This strategy had been used by Barack Obama and Howard Dean before Sanders and Trump did it.[33] It is popular because it shows momentum and provides a contrast with rivals who might not be drawing as well in the early primaries. Trump's rallies generated an earned media because of what he said but also because of what protestors and the audience did at these rallies. Conflict sells and protestors regularly got into confrontations with Trump and his supporters during the rallies. Trump would egg his supporters on to expel the protestors and would be vocal while doing so. Conflict at Trump rallies was visually interesting so it generated high ratings for news outlets and thus, in turn, assured Team Trump that it would be rewarded with large amounts of earned media that allowed it to show Trump keeping his brand promises by standing up to the elements who had weakened America.

As Bertoni noted, the Trump team used strategies like targeting specific messages, automated campaigning and other tools related to search engines to get its message out to the right audiences.[34] The Trump team emphasized efficiency, analytics and data-driven campaigning on social media.[35] In addition to making the brand real and credible, they were also able to find supporters and donors[36] for their campaign and built their momentum as a result. The brand refresh was a key to a winning campaign because it fit within a lean operation and tapped into the target audiences' concerns, something Jared Kushner noted when he said Trump's "voters had concerns that would not have been obvious to a lot of people I would meet in the New York media world, the Upper East Side or at Robin Hood [Foundation] dinners".[37] Thus, Trump's brand refresh succeeded in building the kind of loyalty deep enough to turn the customers into evangelists for the cause and to turn them out on Election Day.

## Conclusions

The Trump brand refresh worked to win him the Presidency, but the question to which it will become the GOP house brand remains open as of this writing. Other factions in the party have their own visions of what the GOP brand and product should be and they enjoy significant positions of authority in the House and the Senate. The problems with

the Trump brand refresh are that firstly, at least rhetorically it places the Republican Party outside the liberal policy consensus that according to Berry[38] has dominated the USA since the 1960s. Secondly, the Trump coalition gives the new administration an ability to repel upper-income, well-educated voters who form a core part of the Republican electorate if it so chooses. Thirdly, there is a concern that this will shift the Republican product in a direction that Conservatives will not like, especially on economic policy, because, as noted by many observers, while Trump is fine with tax reductions, he is also fine with more spending. Thus, it is possible that he shifts the party away from some of its core identifiers and makes it more palatable to an entirely different audience but one with a more intermittent voting record. As Trump advisor Stephen Moore noted, "Just as Reagan converted the GOP into a conservative party, Trump has converted the GOP into a populist working-class party. In some ways this will be good for conservatives and in other ways possibly frustrating."[39]

A major problem for Trump is that much of this Conservative frustration could be expressed in ways that make life difficult for his presidency. On the other hand, the Trump brand refresh expanded the marketplace and the customer base for the GOP product. Given the way in which he was elected through visual, emotive successes that keep promises and are widely perceived as beneficial offer the opportunity for growth in the customer base just as the Florida Panthers winning games on the ice offers the potential for growth in their customer base. To make the refreshed brand endure, Trump will have to make good on things that are (1) highly visible, (2) emotionally compelling, (3) widely popular with his audiences, but also (4) have the ability to bring new supporters into the fold. All this with an audience that turns out intermittently, shifting demographics in the electorate and a potential split in his own party, and the kind of determined opposition the Democrats have not put up since Reagan.

## Notes

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CHAPTER 5

# The 2016 US Primaries: Parties and Candidates in a World of Big Data

*Neil Bendle, Joseph Ryoo and Alina Nastasoiu*

**Abstract** This year, 2016, saw changes in political campaigning including increasing use of social media. Our research considers what such changes, including the increased availability of data, mean for our understanding of political marketing and primary elections. We suggest and discuss the implications that these changes may wrench control of brands away from parties toward candidates with identities independent of their party. We note that there are specific decision-making challenges for voters in primaries, and problems for candidates in being market oriented in a world of sequential elections. We ask whether voters forecast their own choices effectively, and, despite the strong feelings generated in primaries, our analysis shows that primaries may poorly predict general election performance.

N. Bendle (✉) · J. Ryoo
Western University, London, ON, Canada
e-mail: nbendle@ivey.ca

J. Ryoo
e-mail: jryoo.phd@ivey.ca

A. Nastasoiu
McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada
e-mail: nastasom@mcmaster.ca



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Few American election seasons were as dramatic as 2016. Early in the process it seemed like the Democratic primary would be a dull coronation for Hillary Clinton. On the Republican side nearly all experts agreed that Donald Trump would not become the candidate. Yet Clinton faced a relatively vigorous challenge and Trump easily brushed aside a host of professional politicians. In this chapter we examine what we can learn from this unpredictable primary season.

## Strategy Considerations in Primary Elections

The primary system used in the USA presents fascinating strategic challenges with the principal one being that two elections with different electorates must be won in the space of only a few months. (For ease of writing we concentrate on the presidential nominee selection process and call both primaries and caucuses by the generic term primaries despite sizeable differences (Johnson 2006).) Consider the median voter theorem from the work of Downs (1957) and Hotelling (1929). Although an obvious simplification of reality, the underlying insight remains useful. In a two-candidate election, all else being equal, the candidate nearer the political views of the median voter will win. The challenge is that the median voter in the primary is, by virtue of self-selection, different from the median voter in the general (presidential) election.

Let us define the median voter in the general election as the center of US politics. The median voter in a Republican primary, for example, is to the right of center. A candidate must appeal to these right-of-center voters in the primary but then also appeal to more centrist voters a few months later. In previous years, a candidate might make contradictory promises and hope the cameras were not running or that the incriminating footage merely gathered dust. Nowadays almost every interaction is caught on cell phones and digitally archived. Candidates cannot say contradictory things and expect it not to be noticed.

This ubiquity of recording devices threatens the idea of pivoting—that the candidate feeds party-tailored policies and messages to their[1] base and then moderates the policies and tone for the general public. In a classic example of a gaffe—revealing a truth that is not supposed to be

aired publicly—Eric Fehrnstrom, Mitt Romney's senior campaign adviser in the 2012 presidential election, revealed that the Romney team always planned to pivot after the primary. "It's almost like an Etch A Sketch. You can kind of shake it up, and we start all over again" (Cohen 2012). The problem with pivoting, indeed any policy or message change, is that it can make the candidate look inauthentic which was a problem that dogged Romney.

Pivoting was tackled differently by 2016s two major party candidates. Hillary Clinton was perceived to be forced to change her positions, especially on trade, by her populist rival—Bernie Sanders. Clearly her team thought this advisable but when, for example, her support for the Trans Pacific Partnership disappeared it left her struggling to explain both her prior enthusiasm and her new position. Perceptions of untrustworthiness negatively impacted her campaign.[2] We do not want to overstate the impact of 2016s pivots on these perceptions because many voters had, fairly or unfairly, developed feelings about Clinton long before 2016.

The Republicans meanwhile chose a celebrity businessman to head their ticket. Donald Trump made a big bet that his outsized personality, and the unpopularity of his general election rival could secure him enough votes without clear policy concessions. A potential strength was that the detail in his policy platform was generally low, and he relied heavily on mood music. For example, one of his most well-known and controversial policy proposals—"…a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on.[3]"—seemed more about signaling intent. There never appeared a detailed plan and so it was hard for critics to highlight changes in the plan. No one, including probably the candidate, understood the details enough to confidently point to a pivot.[4]

## Strategic Voting

Strategic voting is a key consideration in primaries. While this can sometimes matter in other US elections—for example, supporters of third-party candidates in the general election may choose strategically—strategic voting is central to primary elections. The normative advice is that one should consider the electability of a candidate, how likely they are to win the general election, when voting in the primary. Electability has widely been perceived as extremely important in primaries (Abramowitz 1989; Abramowitz et al. 1981; Abramson et al. 1992; Bendle 2014; Bendle and

Nastasoiu 2014), and strategic voting has even been assessed experimentally (Cherry and Kroll 2003). The practical challenge is that a voter must form a perceived probability of a candidate winning the general election. When examining electability, a researcher must address two questions that are hard to disentangle. Do voters consider electability? And if so, how do they decide what candidate is electable?

The campaign in 2016 gave mixed support to electability's importance. In the Democratic primary, Clinton was perceived to be the more centrist candidate and so, using the Hotelling line logic, the more electable. Hillary Clinton's win may have provided initial support for electability's importance. She followed a long line of centrists who had secured nominations against base-focused rivals, e.g., Kerry versus Dean in 2004, McCain versus Huckabee in 2008, Romney versus Santorum in 2012.

Few thought Clinton a natural political performer and given this, and the fact such an experienced candidate would find it hard to run on a platform of change, some argued that Bernie Sanders, her Democratic rival, would be stronger in the general election. Polling seemed to support this idea, but many observers remained unconvinced.[5] They argued that Sanders had not faced the hostility from Republicans that Clinton had and that Sanders' support would inevitably drop when attacked.

The challenge for the observer is that a voter might have chosen either Clinton or Sanders, while supporting who they saw as the more electable candidate. Indeed, the Electoral College further complicates our already fiendishly difficult assessments of electability. To assess electability, a voter must not only predict a candidate's popularity, but the precise distribution of popularity across the states that the voter predicts to be crucial. Indeed, a voter should really aim to also predict the winner of the other party's primary and support a candidate, especially suited to beat the other party's predicted nominee.

Electability is an especially difficult prediction given the outcome of the counterfactual—Sanders winning the 2016 nomination and challenging Trump—remains unknown. Hillary lost the general election, but no one can prove whether Sanders would have done better or worse. Decision making generally improves with regular feedback, but one selection every four years when you do not know how the non-chosen alternative would have performed in a changing world with unique candidates each time makes it hard for advancement at either the individual or collective decision-making level (Bendle and Cotte 2016).

On the Republican side, Donald Trump's closest rival, Ted Cruz, showed limited crossover appeal to centrist voters, while those thought to be most plausible presidential candidates—not least Jeb Bush—did remarkably poorly. Some argued that the eventual nominee, Trump, running as an anti-politician would be able to rally general election voters hostile to the status quo. That said, Trump showed little sign of appeal to Hispanics and other groups that GOP insiders had suggested that the party needed to win the general election (RNC 2013).

One interpretation is that the Republican primary electorate ignored electability to punish the establishment candidates. A second interpretation is that Republican voters correctly, as it turned out, believed that Trump would win. Before we credit Republican voters for their foresight, this belief seems similar to the incorrect, as it turned out, argument that Romney would win in 2012 despite the polling. Were Republican voters making an unbiased assessment or exhibiting a motivated belief? If assessments of electability are based upon motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990), then electability may matter to many voters, yet conventional assessments of electability may be weak predictors of how electability concerns impact decisions as each voter has an idiosyncratic, and often heavily biased, assessment of electability.

## Other Challenges

Primaries also present an interesting ethical challenge. Unfortunately, prejudice remains a significant factor in US politics so a voter considering electability should factor in if the candidate they are nominating will be fairly treated in the general election. The ethical challenge is what to do next. It is ineffective to support doomed candidates who prejudiced general election voters reject. The alternative, not supporting a qualified candidate who others are prejudiced against, seems ethically dubious (Bendle and Thomson 2016).

A fascinating further challenge is that voters may misjudge their own future support. Primary campaign voters are often emotionally invested in their candidate and might swear never to vote for any other candidate from their party but might not accurately predict what they will later do. We saw PUMAs in 2008 threatening, but failing, to derail Barack Obama's campaign after Hillary Clinton lost that year's primary. In 2016, #BernieorBust activists helped disrupt the Democratic party

convention but despite the suggestion that Bernie supporters would not back her, Clinton won more votes than any presidential candidate other than Barack Obama. On the Republican side, the #NeverTrump movement gained considerable media attention. Despite this, Trump's eventual votes exceeded those of Mitt Romney who failed to generate similar (negative) passions. A modest number of votes can tip an election and so political marketers should work on soothing passions after a primary campaign but wide-scale defection from the major party candidates do not seem to have happened even in the unusually tumultuous 2016 campaign.

## Primary Campaigning

Primary campaigns are massively complex management tasks that have to be quickly created only to be dismantled after the election. Some apparatus may convert for use in the general election, but most candidates do not earn the nomination. Additionally, the most contested states in the primaries are often different from those in the general election. New York was key to the Democratic primary but FiveThirtyEight (www.fivethirtyeight.com) a polling aggregation and news site, as at October 16, 2016, gave New York only a 0.2% chance of being the state that determined the presidency compared to Florida's 19%.

Where to target resources is critical and the rules of the game dictate this. Whether a state awards its delegates on a proportional or a winner takes all basis impacts resource allocation (Ridout et al. 2009). Some states are simply better targets for resources than others. Efficient resource allocation demands states not be treated the same.

What then should a party aiming to maximize its chance of winning the general election do? Ignoring important considerations about fairness, should a party change its primary rules to make the views of voters in pivotal general election states count more heavily? For example, Florida, a swing state in the general election, could be awarded more delegates compared to its population than Texas, which tends to be predictably Republican in the general election. This might make sense if candidates performing well in given states in a primary are likely to also perform well there in the general election. To assess this we considered the last five contested primaries and recorded the vote share that each of the eventual nominees gained in each primary contest, this gave us 239 data points. (The nominees were Obama (*D*) 2008, McCain (*R*) 2008,

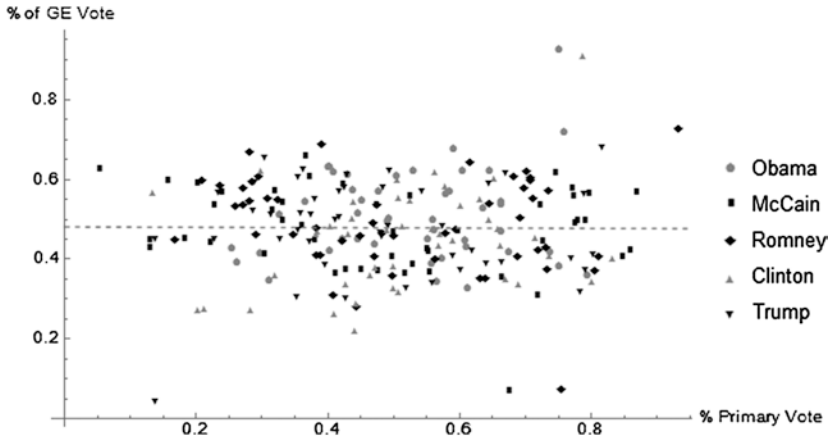


**Fig. 5.1** Nominees' primary popular vote versus general election vote by state

Romney (*R*) 2012, Trump (*R*) 2016, and Clinton (*D*) 2016. Fifty-one primaries in areas that vote in the general election—the states and DC—for five years gives 255 data points but popular vote totals are not always available, and we excluded the results from Michigan in 2008 when Barack Obama was not on the primary ballot.)

We then plotted a nominee's share of vote in the primary against their share of the vote in the general election in the same state. For example, in 2016 Hillary Clinton won 43% of the vote in the Wisconsin primary and 46% in the general election. Figure 5.1 illustrates no obvious relationship between primary and general election vote share in a state. The flat dashed line shows we do not expect the general election vote share to be higher, or lower, at any given level of primary vote share suggesting little reason to overweight delegations from swing states.

They are multiple complications to primaries—our simple analysis could miss crucial features. As such, we ran a regression predicting each of the nominees' general election vote share from the primary vote share and control variables. These control variables were: (1) the year the campaign occurred in, (2) whether the candidate was a Republican or not, and (3) the number of days into the process (which captures changes over time). Finally, we included fixed effects to account for state-specific factors. This model failed to find a significant relationship between primary vote share and general election vote share. To illustrate an example

of why this might be the case, consider Barack Obama who managed to gain a landslide 75% in the Alaska caucuses but only gained 38% in the general election. The choices of primary voters are not good predictions of general election voters' preferences. Changing the process to overweight the views of those in key general election states seems unlikely to produce nominees with higher general election vote shares.

## The Impact of Technology on Communication and Research

Technology has developed rapidly, and its continued absorption into political communications is impacting primary campaigns. Many of the changes have been in communications technology. In an ideal world, campaigns target individual voters with personalized messages. This is one reason why advertising dollars have shifted online where personalized targeting is often a possibility.

Technology more generally means campaigns have a greater ability to send messages. One can consider two types of message strategy. The first is to try to send the right message to the right people. This includes social media advertising, search engine marketing (paying for clicks), and search engine optimization (efforts to improve the results of organic unpaid searches). Such approaches are gradually being adopted, and technically proficient campaigns can hope to make a better use of scarce funds and human efforts.

The second approach tends to be more high profile. This is the use of online media, specifically social media, to broadcast messages to willing recipients. A key part of the Trump strategy was to get recruits to opt into communications from the candidate. He would then engage them with a near constant flow of messages; some entertaining, some organizational, others offensive and highly controversial. The messages did not stick to the motherhood and apple pie style of communication that many campaigns traditionally favor. This allowed Trump to appear authentic despite low levels of factual support for much of the content. PolitiFact gave Trump lie of the year in 2015 for his misstatements in the primary.

Social media, while it can be an interactive media, is not necessarily so. Despite retweeting often being the most common form of political communication (Cook 2016), Clinton, Sanders, Trump, Carson, Cruz, and Rubio collectively tweeted much more original content than retweets—6716 tweets versus 3894 retweets, in the January to May period.

Ted Cruz, the most active overall on Twitter, was the only one of these candidates to retweet more than tweet. Rather than serving as a conduit for sharing other people's ideas, candidates are much more likely to use Twitter to share their own. We might think of a candidate's social media as surprisingly close to television where voters decide upon the channel and then candidates aim messages at them.

To understand the messages sent, we looked at candidates' posts on two popular social media platforms: Twitter and Facebook. The data were collected starting from the date of the first Democratic Primary debate (October 13, 2015), to the date of the endorsement of Hilary Clinton by Bernie Sanders (July 12, 2016). The data we collected were then cleaned; to do this, we first removed greetings (e.g., "Hello" and "Good Morning") and the names of American states. We next removed stopwords; these are very common but uninformative, as all writers use them a great deal (e.g., "and", "the"). This cleaning was performed automatically using a publicly available package, tm, for the R program. (R is a free software language for statistical and data analysis that can be downloaded at www.r-project.org).

To understand each candidate's use of words, we calculated the term frequency-inverse document frequency (tf-idf) of words in each candidate's social media data. The tf-idf measures how common a word is in the specific text (e.g., Jeb Bush's tweets) compared to the text from all candidates (e.g., all candidate's tweets). This helps us see which candidate has an unusually high tendency to use any specific word, and hence what any candidate especially focused on compared to their peers. To further tidy the data, we removed the bottom quartile of words ranked by their tf-idf because these are used at a similar frequency across all candidates. In addition, we adopted a minimum frequency cutoff of five words, i.e., words used less than five times do not show in the word clouds. Finally, a process known as part-of-speech tagging was used to remove any uninformative words that remained (e.g., pronouns and interjections).

After we had cleaned the data as described above word clouds were generated for each candidate's Twitter and Facebook posts separately where each word's size displays its relative importance to that candidate. Figure 5.2 shows a selection of wordclouds. Jeb Bush's posts are relatively generic, with some mention of rivals, Hillary and Trump. Rand Paul gives a prominent role to liberty, while Donald Trump focuses on the words safe and America.


**Fig. 5.2** Wordclouds of candidate's social media messages. From *Top* Jeb Bush, Rand Paul, Donald Trump with Facebook on *Left* and Twitter on *Right*

Changes in technology have created a profusion of new data sources that allow academics and political marketers to understand campaigns. Given that candidate pronouncements now generally come in digital form, they can be text-mined by those seeking to understand the process and by political rivals. (See Bendle and Wang 2016 for details of commercial analysis.) Additionally, some traditional data sources have become more easily accessible. Polling data are often available online, and election return data are easy to access. For instance, Real Clear Politics contains archives of polling and election data. The Iowa Electronic Markets, established as far back as 1988, can be useful predictive tools (Berg et al. 2008). If one accepts the effectiveness of the prediction markets, you can assess performance throughout a campaign (and not just at the time of the actual voting) from a candidate's market price.

Perhaps one of the most interesting developments in recent US elections is the data aggregators, such as FiveThirtyEight, and the Princeton Electoral Consortium. These often create sophisticated models based upon available polling data. Not only do these predict elections but they also can track performance relative to targets during the primary election campaign which can be very useful if one is willing to assume they are the reasonable, even if imperfect, estimates of performance.

An example shows how to use these new data sources to examine research questions. FiveThirtyEight measures how candidates collecting delegates compared to the projected number they need for the nomination. This projected number adjusts for the characteristics of the state, so it corrects for expectations. We combine this with the data from the Iowa Electronic Markets, which gives an estimate of the chance of a candidate winning. For example, if Trump has a price of 80 cents for a contract that pays a dollar if he wins the nomination, this suggests that market participants think he has about an 80% of winning the nomination. Movements in this price reflect events of the day as the market revises up or down estimates of a candidate's likelihood of success.

Let us assume we want to understand whether there is a relationship between the success of Bernie Sanders and Trump's likelihood of winning the nomination. For example, we might conjecture that Republican voters think Trump is better suited to face Hillary Clinton and might choose someone else if they knew Sanders would win. We ran a simple ordinary least squares regression where the dependent variable was the closing price for Trump (i.e., his performance). Clearly, this is likely to be influenced by Trump's delegate haul, so we used the cumulative percentage of delegates that Trump has amassed versus his target (Percentage of

**Table 5.1** What predicts Trump's nomination price?

| | *Estimate* | *Std. Error* | *t value* |
|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 2.33*** | 0.38 | 6.17 |
| Percentage of Trump target | 0.51*** | 0.10 | 5.19 |
| Log of days | 0.43*** | 0.03 | 15.62 |
| Percentage of sanders target | –4.38*** | 0.48 | –9.05 |

*** *significant at p < 0.01*

Trump Target) as an independent variable. We also used the logarithm of the number of days (Log of Days) from when the market data starts (January 24, a few days before the first vote.) This captures the fact that the market will become more confident later in a campaign. The number of days was logged as events happening early in the campaign are likely to be more impactful than events happening later when there are fewer delegates still available to win.

The key independent variable we checked was Sanders' performance to see its impact on Trump's performance. We used the cumulative percentage of delegates that Sanders has amassed versus his target (Percentage of Sanders Target), so as this goes up Sanders is closer to being the Democratic nominee. This shows the impact of Sanders' performance on the market's assessment of Trump's likelihood of gaining the nomination.

Table 5.1 shows that, as expected, over time Trump's nomination becomes more certain and that his successes increase the market assessment of his performance. More curious is Sanders' success seems to have a negative impact on Trump's nomination chances according to the market. We do not have enough information to come to any firm conclusion but it does suggest an interesting area of investigation; namely that the market may credit voters with an intuitive understanding of competitive interactions. That voters think that some candidates (here Sanders) are being better suited to face some other candidates (here Trump) and so when Sanders' performance improves, Republican primary voters become less likely to choose Trump.

## Brand in the 2016 Primary

New technologies mean that the candidates can get their messages to voters without going through party channels. In a primary, each candidate must build up a personal staff and the potential of online fundraising

means that candidates also have a direct route to funds in which they can ask for money at least as easily as the central party. The implication of each candidate having their own election machinery, their own fundraising, and their own method of communications means that they are not especially dependent upon the party. Donald Trump could win the primary despite not appealing to many of the traditional funders of Republicans, such as Charles Koch (Caldwell 2016). Put simply, each candidate has their own brand equity (Parker 2012), which shows potential to become increasingly independent of the party brand.

Political parties have greatly improved brand management (Bartle 2002; Knuckey and Lees-Marshment 2005; Marland 2016), but the control necessary to manage a brand is under threat if the party establishments cannot control the primary process. Trump's platform was notably different from that of Mitt Romney who won the Republican nomination in 2012. Trump seems to feel less committed to the Republican establishment and happily insulted them during the primary. Bernie Sanders, an improbable candidate given his loose ties to the Democratic Party, ran as an outsider with more success than was initially predicted. If he had won, the Democratic Party brand would have changed radically. A primary process where candidates can circumvent the traditional party structures entails the party losing power over the candidate.

This means that a party brand may need to be reinvented each election cycle, casting doubt on the notion of party ideology. Imagine if Volvo had to reinvent its image every four years. "We are no longer safety; now we are a midlife crisis vehicle". Commercial marketers would have nightmares, but it is not any easier for political marketers. Changing brand positioning every cycle is liable to cause massive confusion among the voters and can only erode loyalty to the parties. If you want greater infrastructure investment, a hawkish policy toward Russia, or more protectionism, your party choice might flip regularly in a world where candidates emerge from primaries who owe little allegiance to the party. From a campaigning standpoint, lack of centralized control over nominees could create greater challenges in identifying party voters.

If candidates can go directly to the voters, then charisma, rather than the precise policy details, can mean those with a clear, though perhaps heretical, view might win. Within the Republican Party, a less powerful establishment could conceivably allow for the nomination of a libertarian committed to cutting defense spending or a social conservative happy to tax the rich. The Democrats might choose a wall-builder who appeals to the white working class, or an environmentalist happy to sever all

ties with allies in the Middle East. This will create difficulties for elected representatives if the top of their ticket advocates something they have been opposed to for their entire career. The elected representatives are unlikely to change their views as radically as the leadership does each cycle—how then does a leader work with a Congress of their own party who does not agree with them? The primary system in a world where charismatic candidates can reach the voters directly is likely to create increasing challenges for parties.

## Conclusion

Primary election strategy is a fascinating topic, and the 2016 primary election cycle suggests that strategies are in flux. The increasing use of social media and changing fundraising and communication technologies suggests that candidates may have the potential to wrench control of brands away from parties. This suggests a diminished role of party unity and increasing challenges managing party brands.

There are specific decision-making challenges for voters in primaries. How can the average voter predict who will win a general election with any degree of accuracy, especially given that primaries poorly predict general election performance? Indeed, voters may not even know how they will personally behave in the future never mind how others will. There are many unanswered questions about primaries, but new data sources give us potential to start tackling some of the puzzles.

## Notes

1. We employ the convention of using the third person for those of unknown gender. While this may appear incorrect to some such a language choice is both simpler than writing out she/he or him/her, and more inclusive of those not well described by a binary gender classification.
2. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/07/25/4-brutal-poll-numbers-that-greet-hillary-clinton-at-the-democratic-national-convention/, 4 brutal poll numbers that greet Hillary Clinton at the Democratic National Convention, by Aaron Blake in The Washington Post, 25 July 2016, accessed November 12, 2016.
3. https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/donald-j.-trump-statement-on-preventing-muslim-immigration, Donald J. Trump Statement on Preventing Muslim Immigration, 07 December 2015, accessed November 12, 2016.

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5. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2016/04/polls_say_bernie_is_more_electable_than_hillary_don_t_believe_them.html, Polls Say Bernie Is More Electable Than Hillary. Don't Believe Them By William Saletan, Slate.com, 26 April 2016, accessed November 12, 2016.

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CHAPTER 6

# The Clinton Campaign: Appeals to Moderate Swing Voters Through Anti-Trump Targeted Communication

*Edward Elder*

**Abstract** By looking at Hillary Clinton's verbal communication during the 2016 presidential election, this chapter offers much-needed insight into the communication aspect of campaign targeting. Using analysis of speeches and debate performances, the chapter looks closely at prominent and important themes and issues Clinton highlighted during the campaign that could have appealed to moderate swing voters who did not have a positive opinion of her Republican opponent, Donald Trump. The chapter also examines Clinton's verbal communication from a broader perspective to better understand how her overall message may have been received by this less politically engaged demographic. The chapter concludes by highlighting what impact Clinton's communication may have had on her evidential election defeat, and what lessons this teaches us about contemporary thinking around targeted communication.

**Keywords** Communication · Targeting · Moderate swing voters · Economy · Character attack

E. Elder (✉)
University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand
e-mail: eeld001@aucklanduni.ac.nz



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## Introduction

By the time Hillary Clinton secured the Democratic Party's nomination for president of the USA, her communication had already shifted focus to the eventual Republican nominee, Donald Trump (Pew Research Center 2016). Clinton's focus on Trump was understandable. Given Trump's record-low favorable ratings, Clinton appeared set to gain substantial support from moderate swing voters as well as, potentially, moderate Republicans. With that in mind, this chapter focuses on Clinton's communication relating to Trump during the 2016 US presidential election. Through analysis of specific issues and broader trends found in Clinton's communication, this chapter looks at how Clinton attempted to portray Trump in a negative light, and how she comparatively presented herself, in her outreach to the unusually volatile swing voting bloc.

## Review of Previous Literature

With its growing importance in contemporary political campaigns, targeting has become a prominent topic of research in political marketing. Research in this area has focused on campaigns' efforts to collect voter information so they can best utilize their resources in targeting efforts (see Issenberg 2012). As Lees-Marshment (2014, p. 177) notes, trying to communicate the same message to all potential voters is not as effective as targeting messages to the demographics that will be most receptive to them (also see Hillygus and Shields 2008). But in many cases the study of targeted communication is only a small aspect of broader studies into targeting strategy. This includes Knuckey and Lees-Marshment (2005, p. 46) highlighting how the Bush 2000 presidential campaign targeted Latino voters in advertising in their study of the campaign's strategy, Johnson (2013, pp. 16–17) highlighting how the Obama re-election campaign used technology and data to target demographics and individuals, and Ridout (2014) highlighting the content of the Obama and Romney 2012 campaign advertising that targeted certain demographics in his study of advertising testing and allocation (also see Busby 2009; Lees-Marshment 2010, p. 75; Nteta and Schaffner 2013; McGough 2005, pp. 105–106; Ridout et al. 2012).

Others look a little closer at targeted communication, as well as highlighting the value and risk of targeted portrayals of the candidate/

party and their opponent. Leppäniemi et al.'s (2010) research on the targeting of young voters in the 2007 Finnish election is also more focused on strategy than communication. However, important to this study, they quote one expert who notes that successful marketing "bring(s) out the best features of the product and try(s) to differentiate the product from the competitors in a most positive way. Thus, it is vital to communicate the benefits the consumer gains if voting for the candidate in question." (Also see Harmer and Wring 2013, p. 271). Hersh and Schaffner (2013) question the benefit of using targeted over generalized appeals, as they found targeted appeals may result in a net loss of support for a candidate. They note that, while effective targeting normally results in modest improvements in image among desired targets, there is a risk of losing more support among other demographics who consume the communication because of alienation and mixed messaging.

Relevant research that focuses on political marketing communication more broadly tends to look at the concept known as market orientation. Robinson (2006) notes the importance of identifying target audiences as well as offering voters something in exchange for their support. These ideas, broadly speaking, do correlate with part of the methodology of this research. But the research focuses on the more party-centric context of New Zealand, it focuses on advertising, and it does not primarily focus on targeting (also see Robinson 2010). While Elder (2016b) looks more explicitly at verbal communication in the context of US politics, he does so within the context of less targeted governmental communication. He goes as far as to note that government communication should be less targeted than campaign communication, as governing politicians need to speak to the public at large (also see Elder 2016a).

So this research fills a gap in the literature on targeted communication by focusing on the verbal communication used by a candidate, rather than the strategy and mechanisms of targeting in political campaigns. It also looks at such appeals in more generalized communication (speeches and debates) as opposed to specific targeted outputs (mailers and Facebook messages). By looking at prominent specific issues as well as the broader trends found in the communication, this research also looks at such communication from a micro- and macro-perspective. We, therefore, get a better understanding of the intended strategy and the likely public interpretation of Clinton's communication strategy.[1]

## Methodology

This chapter's case study was conducted using qualitative discourse analysis, with the scope set on the anticipation of being both practical and intellectually fruitful (Denscombe 2007, pp. 44–45). The empirical research focused on analyzing eighteen pieces of communication by Clinton from May to early November 2016 (2–3 pieces per month). The transcripts were collected from the Hillary Clinton (https://www.hillaryclinton.com/speeches/) and New York Times websites (http://www.nytimes.com/). The communication selected was based on one of three criteria: It was highly publicized communication; the speech was explicitly themed on Trump; and when the communication was delivered.

The communication was analyzed using the NVivo coding software using a grounded theory approach, where the analysis helped continually shape the coding process (Corbin and Holt 2005). The transcripts were read in full to get an idea of broad trends and how the communication might be received. Common issues discussed were then identified and turned into coding labels, influenced by ideas noted in previous literature as well as by practitioners (Goulding 2002, p. 56). Demographics the communication may have appealed to were also turned into coding labels. The data were then re-read and coded. Once finalized, each coding label was analyzed, looking for both positive and negative trends in Clinton's communication (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The most important and prominent trends in Clinton's communication that appeared targeted at, or possibly appealing to, moderate swing voters[2] were evaluated.

## Case Study Section 1: Specific Issues

As Burton and Mircale (2014, pp. 27–28) note, the number of swing voters open to a campaign's message is normally small. But this was not the case during the 2016 presidential election campaign. Due to the unpopularity of both Trump and Clinton (see Collin 2016), the number of potential moderate swing voters was relatively high.[3] The analysis in this section of the case study looks at how Clinton attempted to use communication around particular issues to influence moderate swing voters' perceptions of Trump. It also outlines how Clinton communicated the negative impact a Trump presidency could have on them, as well as how Clinton comparatively presented herself on the same issues.

### *The Economy*

The most common issue Clinton discussed in analyzed communication was the economy (18.03%). This is understandable, given that it was considered the most important election issue by 43% of Americans (Edwards-Levy 2016). Clinton's main economic argument against Trump was that he was not genuine in his promise to help the working and middle classes. Thus, Clinton focused on Trump's claim that wages were too high, that he would give tax cuts to rich people like himself, and that he would allow Republicans to remove regulations on Wall Street bankers. Clinton also focused on Trump's present and past business practices, such as not paying taxes, making products overseas, and welcoming the 2008 financial crisis for personal gain at the expense of others. This argument was most effectively seen in Clinton's accusation that Trump stiffed small business owners and their workers of the money he owed them, as can be seen in the quote below.

> He's made a career out of stiffing small businesses from Atlantic City to Las Vegas. There are companies that were left hanging because he refused to pay their bills. A lot of those companies scraped together what they could to pay their employees, and many of them put their businesses at risk and some of them ended up taking bankruptcy. It wasn't because Trump couldn't pay them; it was because he wouldn't… I've met small businesses that provided pianos, installed glass or marble, all of whom were denied payment, and after going back time and again, being told, 'Well, maybe we'll pay you 30 cents on the dollar or 50 cents on the dollar.' That's not how we do business in America. (HillaryClinton.com 2016, 11 August)

Again, this argument seemed like Clinton's most effective economic argument against Trump. But such communication was only found in four pieces of communication analyzed. Furthermore, Clinton's communication on what economic impact a Trump presidency could have on moderate swing voters was often abstract, unclear or implicit. For example, in three of the four cases like that above, Clinton linked the accusation to a hypothetical scenario where her father, a small business owner himself, was not paid by Trump for his services—with her father being an implicit surrogate for small business owners as well as, at a stretch, working- and middle-class families. The main message was "Trump has done this before, why would you trust him now?" rather than "This is how a Trump presidency could specifically hurt you and your family

economically." By focusing more on Trump's past indiscretions than their effect on people, Clinton's argument was more a character attack.

Clinton also focused on the hardships this demographic was experiencing, such as rising inequality and the lack of good paying jobs and upward mobility. Thus, Clinton's self-positioning on this issue was less directly related to her communication on Trump and more related to solving the economic problems people were facing. This communication came under the umbrella theme of "making the economy work for everyone, not just those at the top." In doing so, Clinton tried to present herself as a champion of the working and middle classes by highlighting her support for unions, investment in middle-class job creation, and a raise in the minimum wage. So, when looking at Clinton's anti-Trump communication on the economy, isolated for all other variables, it does seem strategically understandable.

### *Unfit for Office*

Given polling around the issue (see Bayer 2016), Clinton's argument throughout the campaign that Trump was unfit for office also seems strategically understandable when looked at in isolation. Clinton made this argument on the grounds that Trump did not have the temperament or experience to be President. Around Trump's temperament Clinton highlighted Trump's habitual lying and trafficking in conspiracy theories, his animated reality show personality, as well as his personal attacks on people who criticized or disagreed with him—including a gold star family (see Burns 2016). Clinton communicated the implications this could have on moderates (and the population generally) by linking Trump's temperament with the fact that the president has power over the United States' nuclear arsenal. This can be seen in remarks made by Clinton during her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, as seen below.

> Do you really think Donald Trump has the temperament to be commander-in-chief?… Imagine him in the Oval Office facing a real crisis. A man you can bait with a tweet is not a man we can trust with nuclear weapons… [W]hat worried President Kennedy during that very dangerous time was that a war might be started – not by big men with self-control and restraint, but by little men, the ones moved by fear and pride.

> America's strength doesn't come from lashing out. It relies on smarts, judgment, cool resolve, and the precise and strategic application of power. And that's the kind of commander-in-chief I pledge to be. (HillaryClinton.com 2016, 29 July)

While Clinton argued Trump did not have the temperament or experience to be President, she portrayed herself as being a thick-skinned leader with better knowledge and judgment. This can be seen in the last three sentences of the quote above. This self-portrayal was often backed up with evidence of her prerequisite experience, such as how she served on the Senate Armed Services Committee or, more often, how she was in the Situation Room when American troops killed Osama Bin Laden. In doing so, Clinton attempted to create a clear point of difference between Trump and herself. The polling noted earlier does suggest this communication strategy was either effective or, at least, played into the public's perceptions of the two candidates around this issue.

### *Gender*

Clinton also attempted to create a clear point of difference between Trump and herself by portraying Trump as both anti-women's rights politically and misogynistic personally. To portray Trump as anti-women's rights, Clinton highlighted Trump's statements about how women should be punished for having abortions and that a pregnancy was an inconvenience to employers, as well as arguing Trump did not believe in equal pay. However, Clinton's most explicit attempt to gain support among moderate women around the issue of gender was by highlighting Trump's comments and actions that could be interpreted as sexist and misogynistic. This included highlighting numerous things Trump had said and done publicly, as can be seen in the quote below.

> [H]e sure has spent a lot of time demeaning, degrading, insulting, and assaulting women… He calls women 'ugly,' 'disgusting,' 'nasty' all the time. He calls women 'pigs,' rates bodies on a scale from 1 to 10… Donald Trump was bragging about grabbing women, mistreating women… [S]ince that tape came out, twelve women have come forward and said 'What he said on that tape is what he did to me.'… He said he couldn't possibly have said those things because the women weren't

> attractive enough to assault… Well, I guess the bottom line is he thinks belittling women makes him a bigger man. And I don't think there's a woman anywhere who doesn't know what that feels like. He doesn't look at us and see full human beings, with our dreams and purposes, our own capabilities. And he has shown us that clearly throughout this campaign. (HillaryClinton.com 2016, 3 November)

Such communication by Clinton became more explicit and frequent starting in late September, especially after the Access Hollywood footage of Trump bragging about groping women was released (see Fahrenthold 2016). In terms of how this would affect the target demographic, Clinton linked her argument to the potential effect of Trump's rhetoric and behavior on their children. Clinton suggested such communication from Trump could have negatively impact young girls' confidence and sense of self-worth, as well as how Trump was not someone parents wanted their young boys looking up to. Clinton linked herself to this argument by talking about being a mother and a grandmother herself, which correlated with the emphasis of her own gender in her branding[4] and communication. This included using inclusive pronouns when talking about women's rights, highlighting her support for female equality in the workplace, as well as replying to Trump's accusation of her of playing the women's card with "deal me in."

Again, it is unsurprising Clinton would attempt to create a clear point of difference between Trump and herself on the issue of gender given Trump's perceived unfavorability among moderate women (see Gabriel 2016; Newport and Saad 2016) as well as this demographics anticipated influence on the outcome of the election (Askarinam 2016). As can be seen in Clinton's communication around the issue of fitness for office as well as the issue of the economy, in isolation Clinton's communication seems strategically sound.

## Case Study Section 2: Broader Trends

While Clinton's attempts to appeal to moderate swing voters through anti-Trump communication appears strategically sound when looked at individually, it appears less effective when looked at from a broader perspective. Therefore, this section highlights two broader trends in Clinton's communication that may have caused her anti-Trump communication to resonate less with this target demographic.

### *A Call for Unity*

One of the trends running through the previous section of this chapter is that Clinton placed emphasis on critiquing Trump's character more than on outlining how he could negatively and tangibly affect moderate swing voters' lives. This is clearly visible when looking at Clinton's anti-Trump communication more broadly as well. Overall, Clinton differentiated herself and the American people from Trump based on the idea that "that's not who we are" and that America was "stronger together." In other words, Clinton presented Trump as a divider, while presenting herself and America as united. While this broad theme was normally implied as an underlying narrative throughout Clinton's communication, it can be seen more explicitly in the quote below.

> [T]his is who Donald Trump is… this is not who we are. That's why… I want to send a message — we all should — to every boy and girl and, indeed, to the entire world that America already is great, but we are great because we are good, and we will respect one another, and we will work with one another, and we will celebrate our diversity. These are very important values to me, because this is the America that I know and love. And I can pledge to you tonight that this is the America that I will serve if I'm so fortunate enough to become your president. (New York Times 2016, 9 October)

So, while Clinton's anti-Trump communication focused on the economy more than any other individual issue, her broader anti-Trump message was more cultural and abstract. As President Obama's former Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel has argued (Political Future of Cities 2016), Clinton's socially inclusive message drowned out her message around tangible economic benefits. Emanuel argued that tangible economic benefits were a determining variable for moderate swing voters in key states and what Democrats historically focus on when they are successful (also see Memoli 2016). This argument was backed up by Trump's campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, who noted at the Campaign Managers Conference at the Harvard Institute of Politics that:

> There's a difference to voters between what offends you and what affects you. And they were being told constantly, 'Stare at this, care about this, make this the deal-breaker once and for all.' And they were told that five or six times a week about different things. And yet… they voted the way voters have always voted: on things that affect them, not just things that offend them. (Keith 2016)

This showed up in polling going into Election Day. The same poll that showed the economy was the most important issue to voters also showed that a majority of Americans did not consider the candidates' personal qualities to be a top concern in determining whom they supported. It noted that 32% of respondents said Clinton had focused on the candidates' personal qualities, while 26% noted that she had focused on social issues. Only 18% thought the economy was one of the main messages of her campaign (Edwards-Levy 2016). Thus, Clinton's call for unity was ineffective because it was not what the most important demographic in the election was voting on.

### *Too Many Topics and Too Many Details*

Compounding the lack of correlation between the broader theme of Clinton's anti-Trump communication and moderate swing voters' decision making was how inconsistent her communication was, as noted by Conway in the quote above. Clinton tended to cover multiple detailed arguments in a single speech, even when the aim was to focus on one. Furthermore, Clinton would do so by highlighting multiple aspects of each argument. As mentioned in this chapter's section on the economy, for example, Clinton attacked Trump on multiple aspects of his potential economic platform as well as multiple aspects of his history as a businessman. Furthermore, Clinton's correlating self-portrayals were often overly dense and detail oriented. Clinton would cover multiple relevant policies she was promoting in detail during single speeches, some of which only appeared one or two times in the analyzed communication (i.e., cracking down on tax gaming, the Buffett rule).

When questioned about why she gave very complex policy speeches, Clinton responded, "it's the path I prefer." Clinton noted that by telling people exactly what she wanted to do and how she was going to do it, the public could keep her accountable (Thrush 2016). The problem with this argument, however, is that the density of the speeches made retaining important information difficult. With this, there was less chance Clinton's overall message was going to be picked up and circulated into mainstream media coverage, where most moderate swing voters get their political information. In other words, those with a high pallet for politics may have been able to keep Clinton accountable. But the less politically engaged, such as most moderate swing voters, would not have been in that position. In sum, as noted by Obama's former speech writer, Jon

Favearu, a campaign should maintain a consistent and understandable message about you and your opponent (Favreau and Pheiffer 2016). Clinton's communication had neither of these qualities, meaning that it was less likely to resonate with moderate swing voters.

## Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter highlights how targeted anti-opponent communication needs to provide tangible implications for the target audience, while also presenting an appealing alternative. When looked at a micro-level, Clinton's anti-Trump communication around prominent specific issues does appear strategically sound. However, when looked at more broadly, it is easier to see why Clinton's message did not resonate with moderate swing voters. While this demographic desired palatable answers to their economic woes, Clinton provided dense detail around too many subjects for it to be easily consumable by this less politically engaged demographic. Clinton's remaining underlying cultural message about Trump not representing America, and that the country was stronger together, also did not resonate.[5] Clinton's reliance on personal attacks suggested she depended too much on people voting for her on the grounds of how disliked Trump was. The message "vote for me because the other guy is so awful" was enough to play into Trump's already unfavorable personal image. But, given her own unpopularity, it was not enough for them to invest in her politically (Klein et al. 2016). In essence, Clinton needed to better position herself against Trump on the issues that mattered to moderates in key swing states.[6]

## Notes

1. While communication can be interpreted in numerous ways (Bell 2008), this research was conducted with base knowledge in audience reception theory (for example see Landtsheer et al. 2008).
2. Moderate swing voters here are seen as predominately white working-to-middle class men and women who may lean Republican or Democrat, but can be convinced to vote for either major party's candidate.
3. This can be seen in the volatility of poll results over the course of the campaign (see Real Clear Politics 2016, 8 November).
4. Such as using the slogan "I'm With Her".

5. There are several other factors around Clinton's communication that should be noted. By trying to target so many other demographics at the same time, Clinton's message was also inconsistent and contradictory. Clinton also struggled to promote herself as a champion of the working and middle classes due to her own personal brand—such as her perceived ties to the economic elite and support of unpopular trade agreements until it was politically inconvenient. Also, by countering Trump's brand with one of experience and delivery, Clinton also presented herself as the status quo in an election where people wanted change.
6. Communication itself is only one variable in the larger story of this election. There are numerous other factors that contributed to the Election Day result.

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CHAPTER 7

# "Feel the Bern": Marketing Bernie Sanders and Democratic Socialism to Primary Voters

*Jamie Gillies*

**Abstract** While many argue that Bernie Sanders's feisty challenge to Hillary Clinton was as much about Clinton's weakness as a candidate, this chapter considers how the Sanders campaign was able to take an avuncular, unpresidential curmudgeon and market and brand democratic socialism both to a deeply committed left-of-centre base and to many voters who were not ideologically committed but who wanted change. It underscores how Sanders's messaging became more important than the candidate himself and why so many people supported Sanders instead of the presumptive Democratic nominee. Sanders, like Trump, used populist themes and simple messaging that were outside the Democratic Party establishment. Far from being a one-trick pony, Sanders tapped into a strain of populism that Clinton's campaign either missed or did not fully consider. This chapter also draws upon marketing and branding research to show that Sanders is perhaps far closer in spirit to Trump than what many commentators might have expected or, indeed, noticed: They both blame the media and the party for the perceived unfairness and rigging of the entire system.

J. Gillies (✉)
St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB, Canada
e-mail: jgillies@stu.ca



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## Introduction

If Barack Obama, a once in a generation political communicator, needed almost the entire 2008 Democratic primary process to defeat Hillary Clinton, the best funded candidate in political history, the fact that Bernie Sanders, a decidedly non-presidential outsider independent Democratic socialist, took 47% of the vote in the 2016 primaries against Clinton should have told the Clinton campaign a lot about what was happening with the American electorate.

There are two narratives in the 2016 Democratic primary fight. The first is that Hillary Clinton just was not a very good candidate to appeal to and hold the Obama coalition that helped elect a Democrat president in 2008 and 2012 (deBoer 2016), and as a marketing and branding exercise, Clinton proved to be almost impossible to build a positive message around (Maheshwari 2016). The other narrative is that Bernie Sanders represented a movement among a segment of voters that the Clinton establishment believed was a fringe in the party when in reality Sanders supporters were a sizeable chunk of the Democratic electorate combined with predominantly white working-class and middle-income voters from traditional Democratic rust belt states. The blind spot, that belief that Sanders supporters would fall in line and vote for Clinton, was perhaps the gravest mistake the Clinton campaign made and allowed Donald Trump's data team, all alone with a populist economic message, to sway just enough voters, or lower enthusiasm for Clinton to convince others either to vote for a third party or just stay home, in Pennsylvania, Ohio Michigan and Wisconsin to win the presidency (Green and Issenberg 2016a, b).

In both of those Democratic primary narratives, Sanders proved to be not simply a vehicle for a movement but an adept campaigner, a smart tactician, and most of all surprisingly marketable to particular demographics. Like Obama, Howard Dean, Dennis Kucinich, George McGovern, Eugene McCarthy, and Henry Wallace before him, Sanders captured a progressive spirit within the Democratic Party and even though he did not get the nomination, nor was put on the ticket by the Clinton campaign, his team of political marketing experts did a better

job selling Sanders to the base than did the Clinton team. In understanding Sanders' appeal and the way that he was packaged, we can also understand part of the appeal of Donald Trump and why, in an election where populist themes played out, an outsider is now president.

In this chapter, the Bernie Sanders campaign's messaging and political marketing will be examined to consider both the responsiveness to Sanders's core message, an appeal that surprised the Clinton campaign and the Democratic Party, and then the subsequent mistake in the failures of the Clinton campaign to adequately tap into Sanders' core message and recruit his primary voters.

## Economic Populism and Democratic Progressivism

"I'm here to represent the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party," is a phrase that former Vermont Governor Howard Dean started to use as he took the lead in the initial stage of the Democratic presidential primary process in 2003 (Kreiss 2012, p. 44). Dean cast himself as an outsider anti-war Governor who was the standard bearer of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Like Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone, Dean saw the need for a conviction-style politics in the Democratic Party, connected to a base of the party that had long been ignored, especially during the Clinton years. That appeal, ironically, was with the so-called Reagan Democrats, white working-class voters in the rust belt, the upper Midwest Great Lakes states from Minnesota to Pennsylvania. Dean upset the presidential election contest in 2004 and nearly caused a shakeup of the party unseen since the candidacy of George McGovern in 1972. Despite his campaign falling apart and despite the fact that unabashed progressives like Wellstone and Dean were often seen as a vocal but ineffective minority among Democrats, who had finally returned to power in Washington with the election of Bill Clinton as a triangulating moderate, there was real power with the Dean supporters in 2004. The political marketing and campaigning ideas championed by Howard Dean's campaign manager Joe Trippi, especially the use of early social media sites like Meetup.com and linking Democratic primary voters to social movement sites like MoveOn.org, was used to near electoral perfection by the Barack Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012 (Trippi 2004). The Obama coalition that held through two presidential elections was able to be malleable enough to appeal to those Howard Dean progressives, as well as bring along most of the standard Democratic voters

and build a so-called blue wall of at least 270 electoral votes in traditional states that were always strengths of the Democratic Party.

But 2016 was not 2012. The Obama policies had been very beneficial to blue state parts of the country, especially along the west and east coasts. But like Reagan-era policies that proclaimed to champion the rust belt but actually led to a dramatic decline in manufacturing jobs, a narrative had developed in these states that the economic growth during the Obama years after the 2007–2008 financial crisis did not fundamentally improve the economies of these states (Cassidy 2017). This is a narrative that Bernie Sanders intuitively understood. His primary reason for jumping into the presidential race in 2015 had to do with what he saw as an abandonment of voters who were not necessarily just socially progressive but whose livelihoods were being forgotten in an American economy that did not benefit trade and manufacturing-dependent states like those in the upper Midwest. It was Sanders, not Trump, who had first decried the effects of trade agreements like NAFTA that were hurting American manufacturing. Sanders was of course viewing this through the lens of American labor organizations and was arguing for more well-paid union jobs, as opposed to a more populist economic nationalism. And it was Sanders who drew a sharp contrast between himself and Hillary Clinton, a champion of these broadly globalizing trade agreements. It was on this issue primarily that Sanders' appeal took off with Democratic primary voters.

## Messaging and Marketing to the Sanders Coalition

To understand the Sanders phenomenon, one has to understand the basis for Bernie Sanders's candidacy and the digital marketing and campaign team behind it, led by Revolution Messaging, a digital strategy firm that had worked on progressive campaigns previously and was hired by Sanders in early 2015 to coordinate his social media political marketing and branding. Sanders wanted to focus on income inequality, on rights of working-class Americans, and on social democratic values that he had been championing as a community organizer in his hometown of Burlington, Vermont, and as the member of Congress and Senator from Vermont. With Hillary Clinton's campaign machine clearing the hurdle of a potential challenge from Vice President Joe Biden, and Elizabeth Warren, the progressive Massachusetts Senator choosing not to run, Sanders believed that someone had to stand up for those issues.

With longtime Democratic strategist Tad Devine advising him as part of his presidential exploratory committee, Sanders took initial steps in 2014 to consider a run for president. But Sanders was at an enormous disadvantage. For one, he was not a member of the Democratic Party. As an independent politician, he had never aligned with the rough and tumble of the complicated Democratic Party. If he ran as an independent, the fear was that he would be treated simply as a spoiler candidate, splitting the left, like a Ralph Nader and helping to elect a Republican.

In another election year, Sanders's presidential challenge might have been similar to the candidacy of Ron Paul in 2008. Sanders would have had a core base of about 5–10% of the primary electorate who were intrigued by his out of the mainstream ideas. But 2016 proved to be no ordinary election. Sanders's campaign, especially the marketing strategists, recognized that his almost retro Democratic socialism and economic populism had tremendous voter appeal, far more than Sanders himself may have realized.

The Sanders coalition tapped into a few themes shortly after he announced his candidacy and he garnered the support of a number of groups that would prove to be a fragile mix of the American electorate: the first group were disaffected progressives. This is the group that supports people like Elizabeth Warren. They felt that the Democratic Party had paid lip service to their concerns and that while Obama addressed them rhetorically, the party itself never formally addressed them as party gospel. These were mostly white progressives, who had been part of the Obama coalition but had not been enfranchised the way in which African-American and Hispanic activists had in terms of taking up prominent positions of authority within the Democratic Party apparatus. Despite Sanders's outsider status as an independent, he quickly found these longtime Democratic activists as a base within the party and this helped immensely with grassroots organizing.

The second were income inequality warriors. This is the group activated by the Occupy Wall Street movement and 99% protests. This group was a blind spot to the Clinton campaign in their failure to recognize how angry people were about the bailout of the banks in 2008 and 2009. These people viewed Washington as an entitled cesspool of corporate greed. Sanders had voted against all of the financial bailout initiatives in a progressively principled way because the legislation did not do enough to alleviate the inequality gaps between those who were hurt during the financial crises and the financial executives who were

still giving themselves multi-million dollar bonuses even after essentially bankrupting the American economy. That organizational power of these protestors was actually real. They had developed their own social media networks, and the Sanders campaign provided a vehicle for those concerns. The intellectual heft behind these forces, people like former Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich, endorsed Sanders early on and they provided a wellspring of support to his early candidacy. Ironically, this message was the one that resonated with many voters in the rust belt, and they supported Sanders during the primaries but many would ultimately be part of the broad range of voters that selected Trump on Election Day.

The third group were millennial and younger voters, as well as voters who had not participated in politics before. This was the biggest surprise to many in the Sanders campaign and the group in which the marketing and branding team often focused their efforts. Despite Sanders's age of over 74 and his thick Brooklyn accent, this decidedly avuncular Jewish socialist altacocker underwent an extensive marketing and branding operation that made him the face of a movement that broadly championed socially progressive urban values and rural working-class economic populist concerns. It was millennial social media experts and activists that allowed Sanders's marketing to go viral.

The final part of the coalition were white working-class voters who had stuck with Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 but who, like progressives, had become disillusioned with the Democratic Party. This group is often a set of swing voters in pivotal elections. Referred to as the Reagan Democrats, they are not simply loyal to party and do often help swing presidential elections. Sanders's campaign tapped into a deep resentment among this group that was angered by both the greed of Wall Street and unfettered capitalism as well as the lack of an economic populism in the Obama years that focused on workers' concerns about the economic effects of increased trade liberalization and globalization. While some of this anger is rational, Sanders understood the emotionality of it as well and tapped into a deep-ceded vitriol against the establishment. Unfortunately for Hillary Clinton, that resentment was directed toward both Democratic and Republican politicians and power bases. Sanders was able to harness some of that as the primary campaign heated up and helped explain his state primary victories over Hillary Clinton in northeastern and rust belt states. Clinton won the nomination with overwhelming support among high-income white and working-class

nonwhite Democrats. But the campaign did not pay enough attention to the four key parts of the Sanders coalition.

## The Primary Campaign and the Role of Revolution Messaging

In one of the early surprises to the campaign, Bernie Sanders started getting tens of thousands of people out to events to hear him speak beginning in July 2015. This is in keeping with new trends in American presidential campaigns that rely on and utilize effectively social media marketing and can convert branding and brand image to votes (Newman 2016, pp. 38–40). Just two months into a campaign viewed by both political and Democratic Party insiders as a long shot at best, Sanders was drawing more people than Hillary Clinton. One of the major reasons for his appeal was a command for digital strategy that the Clinton campaign simply did not have. Despite the Clinton campaign's supposed digital advantage in both the primary and the general election, selling Clinton and getting voters to appeal to her message proved difficult (Thrush 2016) and the data-driven campaign, led by campaign manager Robby Mook and digital strategist Teddy Goff, missed trends in the primaries with Sanders supporters that could have won them the general.

Like the Trump campaign's argument that their ground game and get out the vote operations were in people's hearts, Sanders's digital strategy relied on both a well-organized and efficient team primarily with Revolution Messaging, a Washington, D.C. agency specializing in digital fundraising and social media marketing that was integral to the Obama fundraising efforts, and also on the same kinds of social media digital groups that had made Dean's and Obama's early campaigns so effective (Corasaniti 2016). Revolution Messaging was able to understand the people-powered revolution that Sanders was leading and work to allow Bernie's supporters to have their own voice throughout the campaign. The pinnacle moment came when Winnie Wong, the digital strategist and co-founder of People For Bernie, a campaign group not affiliated directly with the Sanders campaign but who Revolution incorporated into the Sanders movement, coined the hashtag #FeelTheBern (Grossman 2016).

#FeelTheBern occurred organically, generating exposure through a series of tweets leading up to Sanders's first mega-rally in early July 2015 in Madison, Wisconsin. It had a galvanizing effect on both millennials

and students enchanted by Sanders' promise of policy ideas such as free post-secondary education tuition at public universities, and the organized left, who saw in Sanders a true blue progressive. With the development of social media as a campaign organizational tool, both Sanders's marketing team and Trump's social media experts understood that the 2016 election would be the first to truly integrate Twitter and Facebook as the primary way to reach mass publics. This was especially true during the primaries themselves, where organizational agility online, especially in retail politics states like Iowa and New Hampshire, proved invaluable. Sanders was able to take his message online, and then, once his team branded him as the outsider against Clinton, with some well-designed thematic communications and an array of effective online marketing, he was able to cobble together the anti-Clinton coalition under the umbrella of a cool Sanders brand.

Part of the success was due to Sanders surrogate supporters who helped make the campaign's messages appealing, by retweeting the campaign's themes and doing their own messaging on social media, in support of Sanders. From Atlanta rap artist Killer Mike to Hollywood actors who were also activists, to longtime stalwarts of the progressive movement, to union leaders, Sanders quickly found a receptive audience among the same groups that had backed Dean over establishment Democrats in 2004, and early on backed an insurgent and relatively unknown Barack Obama, over Hillary Clinton in 2008. Their online fundraising was impressive for an outsider candidate, and they used innovative social media marketing to fundraise (Revolution Messaging 2016).

Surprising not just the Clinton campaign but Sanders' own core group, his message took off in the fall of 2015 just as the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary campaigns were starting. Jeff Weaver, Sanders's campaign manager, Tad Devine, senior advisor, and the digital team of Arianna Jones, the Deputy Communications director, along with Scott Goodstein, the CEO of Revolution Messaging, a veteran of the Obama digital team, were instrumental in facilitating this organic grass roots messaging to launch Sanders on to the national stage (Samuelsohn 2016). Goodstein's digital strategy firm utilized a small team of experts, Shauna Daly for research, Keegan Goudiss for social media tracking and advertising, Walker Hamilton for technology, Arun Chaudhary as creative director, Michael Whitney for digital fundraising, and Kenneth Pennington, Sanders' own social media manager, to build a remarkable marketing and branding unit (Gaudiano 2016; Revolution Messaging 2015).

Sanders's career-long attention paid to economically progressive themes found a home with these disparate parts of the coalition and even the most socially conservative, the white working class, responded to the economic populism and class warriorism that Sanders was championing. He was the only candidate in the campaign that focused on the everyday struggles of Americans just trying to make it paycheck to paycheck. The size and force of those who would ultimately support Sanders in the state primaries demonstrated that his electability issue, which was the singular argument the Clinton campaign made against Sanders, was not a problem. In fact, it was white working-class voters that gravitated away from Clinton in the primaries because Sanders offered the vision of hope and change. This was reinforced with the digital marketing efforts of the Sanders campaign and played out extraordinarily effectively in four key primary contests: the Iowa caucuses, and the New Hampshire, Michigan, and Wisconsin primaries.

The second pivotal moment in the campaign was Sanders's media push in late 2015 as his viability as a candidate was increasing. In an appearance on Face The Nation in December, Sanders said that:

> Many of Trump's supporters are working-class people and they're angry, and they're angry because they're working longer hours for lower wages, they're angry because their jobs have left this country and gone to China or other low-wage countries, they're angry because they can't afford to send their kids to college so they can't retire with dignity. (Kaplan 2015)

On opposite ends of the political spectrum, Sanders and Trump had similar economic populist messaging in the primaries and it was a group of voters, who had supported Barack Obama twice, that broke for Trump this election and helped to allow his victory. Sanders intuitively urged the Democrats to target these voters. Perhaps because of a connection to rural Vermont and a real understanding of the struggles of white working-class voters who had not benefitted from Bush and Obama era economic policies, Sanders correctly identified the rage that many of these voters felt toward establishment politicians. This was not ideological. It was about the limitations and failures of the hope and change narrative from 2008 and the obstructionist non-populism of mainstream Republican candidates.

In a grumpy way, Bernie Sanders offered real solutions to white working-class struggles, and this was a narrative that the digital marketing team

was able to forefront in branding Sanders not as a politician but as a voice of a larger movement of voters frustrated with the status quo. In retrospect, it is quite easy to pinpoint the weaknesses of the Clinton campaign in how Sanders marketed to the disaffected parts of the Obama coalition.

## Marketing Bernie on the Campaign Trail

Political observers, both longtime strategists and media experts, made mistakes in this election campaign. From underestimating Trump's outsider appeal to amplified gaffes and errors during the campaign that they truly believed would be disastrous to Trump's candidacy, Trump really did defy the odds. But observers also missed the point of Bernie Sanders's appeal and this myopic understanding of where the Democratic Party would need support allowed for the biggest mistake in the campaign. Hillary Clinton's team assumed that balancing the Democratic ticket regionally, with a popular Senator from a swing state in Tim Kaine, would bring stability to the party and unite the left. It had worked for both Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, in choosing safe running mates. But 2016 was not a typical election, and failing to address and unite the ticket on ideological grounds, was an unforced error. Sanders was not viewed as a Senator from Vermont by the end of the campaign. He was the voice of the angriest part of the Democratic coalition that held together through most of the 2000s.

#FeelTheBern digital marketing translated into mega-rallies in the leadup to the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary. Sanders's crowds were larger than Clinton's and were equally as exciting and boisterous as Trump's. He targeted upper Midwest college towns as venues, but the crowds were not just students. The branding of Bernie played a key role here. As the campaign transitioned to legitimate and Sanders began polling well in early primary states, Revolution Messaging used well-chosen bold light blue and white colors to differentiate Sanders from Clinton and the Republican candidates. Where Clinton's branding opted for symbolism that linked Hillary to long-standing supportive mainstream Democratic groups, like the Human Rights Campaign and Planned Parenthood, Sanders's opted for contrast, with marketing around the term 'revolution.' That was key. Even in early discussions prior to the nomination about Clinton's branding, the Stronger Together and I'm With Her catchphrases had their share of critics. It was not about the people, not about the ideas and more about a strategic

belief that the goal was holding the Obama voters and not about offering a new vision for the country.

It was in the 'revolution' branding that Sanders's digital team and branding experts beat Clinton. Even Sanders himself, a man whose "barber was the wind," and whose campaign wanted your "vacuum pennies," as late night comedians suggested, was brandable (Brennan 2016; Lavender 2016). There are connections back to the campaigns of Adlai Stevenson in the 1950s, where slogans such as "Better a hole in a shoe than a hole in a head" with how the team marketed Bernie. Perhaps the most effective was the backdrop of his speaking events, where the Sanders logo was prominent but also a silhouette of Bernie himself that suggested sophistication behind the democratic socialism message. This branding was very effective with millennial voters and resonated with a group that had a more positive view of socialism than capitalism (Talbot 2015).

Ironically, it was the message itself that became the Sanders campaign's most important marketing tool. As an unreconstructed Democratic socialist, Sanders was not selling a particularly new ideology or way of thinking. It was consistent with his message going back to Vermont municipal politics. But in a year that also produced Trump, Sanders was no left-wing crank. In any other year, Sanders might have been a Ron Paul-type candidate, where a small but committed group of around 10% of the primary voters vehemently rallied to him. But 2016 allowed for economic populism. Revolution Messaging, which had advisers from the Obama digital teams, and had seen the effective ways in which the Occupy Wall Street and 99% movements had used social media and organized, brought those ideas to Sanders.

Clinton's blind side was that Sanders's branding and marketing, especially as he started winning key primaries, instilled fierce loyalty because it was essentially branded as a "people-powered revolution," and more intensely loyal than previous incarnations of progressive candidates leading grass roots movements like Howard Dean.

## The Ignored Wake-up Calls from the Primaries to the Convention

The decisive victory by Sanders in the New Hampshire primary, and the tie in the Iowa caucuses, were events dismissed by the Clinton campaign as mere rough patches on their eventual cruise to victory. The resounding victories in southern states and Clinton's rout on Super

Tuesday suggested that the strategists were right. But in the states Clinton needed to win on Election Day, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, her campaign message was not resonating. While she won in Pennsylvania, she performed under expectations in the western half of the state and in two election shockers, Sanders won the Michigan and Wisconsin primaries.

Those victories should have been the campaign wake-up calls that Clinton was vulnerable in the general election in particular swing states. Polls on primary voting days in both of those states showed Clinton with sizeable leads. But in both cases, Sanders won handily. The economic populist message resonated with these voters. It is a central argument Trump used in the general election campaign as well. Sanders did not focus on Democratic sacred cow social issues, and he did not really engage in Democratic identity politics except in terms of class. He focused on jobs and inequality, on factory closures, on how technology and cheap labor overseas was tearing the fabric of these communities apart because there was no hope. All Hillary Clinton offered was job retraining programs. It was not enough in the general election because it failed to connect to voters on an emotional level (Severns and Meyer 2016). In Michigan and Wisconsin, some of the people who voted for Sanders in those primaries wound up voting for Trump in the general election, or voting for third-party candidates (Silver 2016). It might not have been a majority of them, but it was enough, in counties like Macomb County, Michigan, and rural Wisconsin counties, to tip the election to Trump.

Following the primary contests, where Sanders received 47% of non-super delegate votes, Clinton's campaign blamed Sanders for dividing the Democratic Party. The #BernieOrBust people on the floor of the Democratic Party's convention demonstrated the real threat that the Sanders voters were to the party's establishment. But the media portrayed the Democratic convention as a well-run event, with the expected polling bump, as compared to the chaos of the Republican convention, with Trump's biggest challenger, Ted Cruz, openly encouraging party members to "vote their conscience."

But just as Sanders agreed to campaign and support the ticket of Hillary Clinton and Tim Kaine, even uniting the party on the convention floor, the Wikileaks revelations of hacked Democratic National Committee emails showed meddling and attempts at rigging a primary process that Clinton likely would have won anyway. Sanders worked to

unite the Democratic Party around Hillary Clinton, making perhaps the most credible argument for her candidacy, that Clinton was still much better than what he described as the phony populism of Donald Trump. However, as the emails continued to leak from inside the Democratic National Committee that demonstrated favoritism toward Clinton and attempts to sabotage the Sanders campaign, Sanders supporters were deeply hurt. While the media played out as if the Democratic convention was a well-orchestrated affair and unity moment, unlike the ramshackle disorder of the Republican convention, the Democratic Party was in serious trouble. Sanders organizers, the key people in his primary challenge, were deeply hurt by what its own party had done. The Clinton campaign failed to recognize this, and despite putting pressure on DNC Chair Debbie Wasserman-Schultz to resign in the face of the email revelations, the wind was out of the sails of the grass roots of the party.

That betrayal would be felt by the Clinton campaign on Election Day when its voter base did not come out in the numbers it had hoped in western Pennsylvania, suburban Michigan and rural Wisconsin, the very same places where Sanders ran up surprising victories in the primaries (Hoffman 2016). Some of those Sanders voters turned on Clinton, either staying home and voting in smaller numbers or doing what the campaign thought was unthinkable by actually voting for Trump. The ousting of Wasserman-Schultz and the bitter resentment of being taken for granted after Sanders came up short, Clinton's campaign either inadvertently or still in the mood to settle political scores, wound up alienating a key group that Clinton did not have in the general election campaign: Sanders's state-level organizers. Those individuals had harnessed the digital branding and marketing into actual voters and supporters. Many stayed home during the general elections. Others refused to reconcile their voting databases with Clinton's campaign and work together. And others did the once unthinkable. As one longtime progressive Democratic activist described it, on the day of the Rhode Island primary, "I can't stand Hillary. Half of what Bernie Sanders cares about, Donald Trump cares about as well. And the other half, I don't care! So if Hillary gets the nomination, I'll vote for Trump."

That real anger and real devotion to Sanders demonstrated the fundamental weakness in the assumption that the Obama coalition would come out and support Hillary Clinton. The Sanders case study, and the Clinton campaign's failure to harness the primary season energy of the Sanders base, demonstrates an important trend in political marking in an

era of populist movements. The traditional thinking around the marketability of a candidate is being replaced with the marketability of a candidate's ideas. While Trump may have had branding advantages such as name recognition, it was the economic populist ideas he adapted into his economic nationalism campaign rhetoric that would prove consequential in the outcome. Sanders, aesthetically, was not a modern marketable commodity. But when his ideas were packaged as a cool brand, that no longer mattered as much. Party branding was hurt in the 2016 election, not just with the Republican brand being taken over by the Trump brand, but with the Democratic Party as well. Sanders was not a Democrat. He fought his way in and upset the Democratic Party brand.

## Conclusion

The Trump campaign took some of Sanders' core economic populist message, but it morphed into Trump's larger and more ominous economic nationalist policy ideas. While Sanders and Trump lined up on trade agreements and on trying to appeal to a disillusioned white working class, they came at it in vastly different ways. Sanders is a true believer in terms of people-powered social democratic populism. Trump used economic nationalism as a powerful voting tool. As Bendle et al. and Raynauld and Turcotte argue in this book, Trump's use of economic nationalism was in many ways playing with fire because when the core populist message was unleashed, it also untethered some of the far-right racism, xenophobia and anti-globalism that had no mainstream place in the Republican Party. Sanders, on the other hand, was offering an expanded social safety net, increased taxes on corporations and investment profits, along with a renegotiation of trade deals, which he is still advocating for in 2017 (Sanders 2016). Trump's vision was less about populism and more about economic nationalism. His rhetoric, and optics, have been populist, especially around American corporations moving offshore, but his larger vision is far more nationalistic than Sanders.

For Sanders, his personal political brand has massively expanded with the exposure garnered from the campaign. Despite his independent status, Sanders has been given a position within the Democratic Party leadership, and in 2017, there is recognition that the party cannot ignore Sanders's core messages or the concerns of his primary voters. Much of that was the result of the extensive effort by Revolution Messaging in

harnessing Sanders's core ideas around democratic socialism. They are one of the big winners out of this election in terms of being able to market ideas that clashed with party branding and marketing. The outsider politician, not just outside the Beltway, but also with policy ideas outside the mainstream of both the Republican and Democratic parties, is now a formidable contender in future national elections.

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CHAPTER 8

# The US Presidential Race: Advances and Insights for Political Marketing Practice

*Jamie Gillies*

**Abstract** The concluding chapter reflects on why the 2016 election was so important in terms of marketing in politics. The key points tackled in the book are summarized and integrated to provide a clear set of examples and insights for both academic audiences and practitioners. It also includes a set of lessons for practitioners that draws on the lessons from the individual chapters and concisely outlines what practitioners can take in terms of advice from the book.

**Keywords** Political marketing · Political branding · Personalization

The 2016 US presidential election will have profound effects on global politics, particularly as Donald Trump's economic nationalist vision bumps up against a trading world increasingly reliant on global supply chains and an integrated producer and consumer marketplace. But the election campaign itself was also about understanding the political marketing techniques and theories that were tried and tested. Utilizing populist and nationalist targeted communication, based on market-oriented metrics, was perhaps the most important factor in the ultimate victory

J. Gillies (✉)
St. Thomas University, Fredericton, NB, Canada
e-mail: jgillies@stu.ca



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of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton. What was even more surprising than the result was the mistaken belief by many that Trump's campaign was an on-the-fly and non-strategic phenomenon when in reality it was a carefully considered and efficient voter marketing operation that evolved as the Trump, Republican and conservative brands shifted from the primaries to the general election.

But while Trump won, this should not suggest that other campaigns and candidates did much worse in terms of their targeted communication. As Bendle et al.'s research shows in this volume, other campaigns utilized quite well the same kinds of marketing strategies and investments in data that paid dividends in the Trump campaign. The investments in social media marketing, personal branding, and market-driven targeted communication utilizing new pathways and media are likely here to stay. It truly was the social media election campaign, and it demonstrated that outsider candidates could also run entirely outside the mainstream media. Earned media became a much talked about buzzword, as Trump generated week after week of media cycle wins without spending a dime on television advertising.

This decline in the purchase of traditional media advertising, the way in which media covered the Trump phenomenon, and the disruption by social media as the conduit through which voters received information about the campaign did have an effect on polling and the perceptions of the horse race. Pollsters and polling aggregators clearly missed volatility in the electorate, based projections on what had worked previously, and failed to somehow see the whole coalition that emerged that supported Trump. Polling mistakes are becoming more commonplace, as the Brexit result and other recent national election results show where polling was off significantly and beyond aggregated margins of error. Pollsters are either missing trends or overstating voters tacking to traditional expectations of both candidate and result. Voters are voting against their own interests and against the conventional wisdom. They are voting based on emotion and not just on rationality. They are voting to disrupt, and sometimes tear down, existing institutions. That has to be factored into achieving accurate polling data.

The 2016 result also fits a pattern going back to 2000, of eight years of Democratic executive rule followed by a Republican winning the White House. So while the result is part of a larger electoral pattern in the USA, Trump's candidacy is not. This augers well for strange political times ahead, given the likelihood of self-funded candidates mounting

campaigns for the presidency. Among the billionaire class, one question likely being asked is not why did Trump win but why did anybody not do this before him. If someone has personal brand recognition, money, and an ego, apparently you can be president. That is perhaps going to lead to some fascinating leadership contests in the near future.

If there is a takeaway from the 2016 campaign, beyond the obvious criticism of the tactics used and the explosion in un-coded racist, xenophobic, sexist, and nationalist rhetoric, it is that personality-driven politics and an increasingly personalized electorate, that responds not to party symbols but cultural and economic symbols on both the left and right, is the model for future presidential contests. Themes of national identity, immigration threats, and national and economic security were the prominent features of the campaign. But it was how Trump stood out in his articulation of those themes that makes 2016 different. Populism has been a near constant in American national politics. The last presidential election where populism and nationalism were not one of the key factors in deciding the contest was the 1988 election between George H.W. Bush and Michael Dukakis. Since 1992, politicians from both parties have used populist rhetoric and impulses as part of their core messaging and targeted communications. The contrast, however, between Trump's nationalist populism and Clinton's lack of populism does make 2016 more consequential.

Even considering the 2016 election objectively, and within the confines of other presidential contests in the USA, the Trump/Clinton election is an outlier. In a field that Republican insiders considered the strongest presidential field in generations, the candidate perceived as the weakest link to their brand and party heritage won. Democrats opted for the Republican model in their campaign, selecting the person who had paid their dues as the candidate, just as the Republicans had in 2008 with John McCain and 2012 with Mitt Romney. When the forgone conclusion candidate gets the nomination, like Walter Mondale in 1984, or Al Gore in 2000, Democrats tend to do poorly with these also-rans. There is considerable marketing strength in selling something new, as opposed to selling old wine in new bottles. Hillary Clinton really was disadvantaged because of this particular problem. Marketers saw a model like Richard Nixon in the design of Clinton's campaign precisely because she was such a known political entity, that any attempt to brand her in a new form would be perceived as disingenuous just as marketers tried to create a new Nixon in 1968.

## Lessons for Practitioners

The obvious lesson for political marketing and branding specialists is that the Trump campaign's tactics worked. One can design a national election campaign focused on emotive populist messaging, outsider cleaning up Washington rhetoric, attack all groups and candidates that criticize your beliefs, be lambasted in the media and by the public for previously campaign–destroying scandals, double down on demagoguery, and still win. But, this can be an extremely risky strategy, because by refusing to engage in the politically correct discourses of modern American politics, forces that are unleashed can be damaging to American society, dangerous to control and lead to tremendous amounts of uncertainty inside and outside the country. Furthermore, it ties a candidate to their platitudes so if they are unable to follow through, the blame resides solely with them. Perhaps those destabilizing effects were part of Trump's strategy, as the anti-politician attempting to fundamentally break apart the status quo of Washington, D.C. But it is equally apparent that these data-driven themes that Trump drove home on the campaign trail lacked serious follow-on policy development prior to taking office. As a result, much of the campaign was void of any substantive discussion whatsoever and had the air of a reality show carnival, where news cycles were dominated by pseudo-scandals and the politics of character assassination. Had Trump lost, Clinton's campaign would have been criticized for similar techniques as the victor in a scorched-earth campaign about nothing substantive.

So for digital marketing specialists considering the case study of the 2016 election, take the strategies used with a grain of salt. These might have worked one time, since Trump really is an anomaly in American politics, but a second populist and nationalist insurgent campaign might not. This is something the Trump campaign also might consider in any 2020 re-election bid.

The second lesson is that data-driven personalized branding and marketing needs authenticity. Since this election became about personalized politics, Hillary Clinton was at an enormous disadvantage in the general election because her campaign focused on a strategy of inclusiveness in messaging, using slogans such as Stronger Together and I'm With Her, with Clinton's competence and experience as the brand connector to voter's belief systems. But that does not work necessarily well with swing voters and nonpartisans. Trump, and to a lesser extent, Sanders,

understood that to drive voter turnout, you need branding around a mass movement idea, where voters believe they are part of a movement or revolution. While Trump's was personality- and cultural-driven, like Obama's, and Sanders's was idea-driven, Clinton's was neither, since ideas ceased being the narrative of the campaign as soon as Clinton faced Trump in the general. So Clinton had the air of being inauthentic because she was the insider politician running against the anti-politician. That is extremely difficult to overcome.

So for branding experts, the key is to ideally build or improve or reintroduce the brand around a charismatic candidate. In the absence of that, strategists double down on negative portrayals of their opponents and engage in character assassination. For Clinton, this almost worked, since there were limitations to Trump's appeal among the general electorate. This similar kind of strategy, when the party leader or candidate is not charismatic, has been skilfully deployed in other recent national elections, like in Canada, for example, in 2011 by the Conservative Party of Canada and its leader Stephen Harper. If you can make opponents look weak and go negative early to define and brand them, you can mask perceived weaknesses in your own candidacy. That was the Clinton campaign's goal but they came up short.

This raises an obvious counterfactual. Had Hillary Clinton's campaign team not gone negative so quickly on the Trump brand, perhaps Trump would have won by a larger margin given the force of his personality and loyalty to that personal brand. 2016 was an election where much of the electorate wanted change. The fact the popular vote was so close, and the Electoral College vote was quite narrow, with campaign dynamics in the last week perhaps deciding the contest, can be perceived as a failure of the Trump campaign's off-message disorganization and its luck with depressed vote turnout in very particular parts of a few swing states.

The third lesson, one that the 2016 campaign proved, is that personal branding of candidates and linking that brand to a personalization of politics is here to stay. The fact that Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump were able to so successfully perform amidst fields of candidates that were considered better organized and better linked with the party apparatus, speaks to the appeal of outsider and outside the political mainstream candidates with either strong personalities, with known brands and name recognition beyond politics, or with message- and movement-oriented branding where significant targeted communication data have been conducted ahead of a campaign launch.

The fourth lesson is the need for continued investment in social media marketing. More voters received their information about the 2016 election from social media platforms than from traditional news sources. The potential to micro-target voters through social media metadata has never been stronger, and campaigns are using big data to find voters and voter groups where their political messaging might resonate. Any national election campaign that does not invest in this will be at a disadvantage. Vote targeting is becoming more precise and front-loading those efforts prior to a campaign can only improve how candidates target their communication. The example from the 2016 campaign, where the Trump data team integrated their Cambridge Analytica voter database with the Republican National Committee database, shows that this can be a very effective tool. That data integration likely had effects not only on Trump finding enough Republican voters but also on the Republican Party holding the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2016.

The final lesson, articulated in Cosgrove's chapter, is that Trump's victory proves that private sector-style personal branding techniques are going to be part of future national campaigns. Trump's hats, merchandise, and sloganeering were pivotal parts of his successful strategy. The signs, slogans, and rallies had a galvanizing effect on his supporters because they were designed like sports team and brand name merchandise. They were free advertising not just at events but in the coverage of those events through earned media attention. Like sports team clothing, or designer styles, or even camouflage clothing, it allowed Trump supporters to find common cause among disparate groups of people. That investment saved Trump's campaign millions in advertising costs that the Clinton campaign never had the opportunity to save. It allowed his campaign to be more nimble down the stretch, and target those states that did flip from blue to red.

Underscoring all of these lessons is that this election also has the potential to rip the American societal fabric apart. It tore it significantly as this kind of populist wave has been building gradually as emotion-led political appeals permeated talk radio, television news channels, and finally the Tea Party-led disruption of the Republican Party. Racist, race-based, xenophobic, and cultural values-based messaging are powerful organizational tools in elections. Providing a valve to relieve these negative impulses in society has been something both political parties in

the USA have been able to control since the 1970s. The organizational structure of both parties has tempered more extreme points of view and helped moderate an American political discourse. 2016 may prove to be the turning point. A candidate said whatever he wanted, refused to apologize for politically incorrect viewpoints, defended his supporters who expressed these views, brought out and harnessed more extreme political discourse, and won. That should tell practitioners and observers a great deal about the American social fabric as we move towards 2020.

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