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Presidential Brands 2008 Looks at the Brand Equity of Candidates and Its Effect on Voters

Branding Study Looks at Consumers' Experience With and Perceptions of the Democratic Candidate Brands and How that Impacts Brand Loyalty of the Candidates Among South Carolinians

COLUMBIA, S.C. – Hillary Clinton embodies competence; Barack Obama has star power, and John Edwards is compassionate. Those are among the findings of Presidential Brands 2008, a brand study of the 2008 Democratic candidates for president. Hillary Clinton's brand – and the public's perception of her performance capabilities -- creates a brand equity among South Carolina voters that currently gives her a double-digit lead over her nearest rivals in South Carolina's first-in-the-South Democratic primary.

Using polling and its expertise in branding, the Presidential Brands team assessed the brands of both Democratic and Republican candidates. Results of a Republican brand study will be released on May 9.

A brand – when referring to a product, company or a presidential candidate -- is all about consumer experience. It is represented by a collection of images and ideas that help to uniquely differentiate products or services that appear to be identical. Brand preferences and other reactions are created by the accumulation of encounters, both directly relating to its use, and through the influence of messaging, advertising, design and public relations.

"Branding is a critical element for business success, and one can argue that political candidates engage in branding themselves as aggressively and often as effectively as successful companies," said Mark Newsome, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of Columbia, S.C. based Chernoff Newman, a marketing communications agency that conducted the brand study along with MarketSearch.

"Rather than conducting just another political poll, we looked at five key dimensions of presidential branding: familiarity, reputation, personality, performance and connectivity, and the results provide a fascinating portrait of public perceptions of the candidates," said Frank Brown, president and CEO of MarketSearch, a full-service research firm that designs and conducts both quantitative and qualitative studies for private, corporate, government and non-profit organizations worldwide.

Brown said these attributes equate to brand awareness, reputation, appeal, performance and relevance, the elements of corporate branding that Chernoff Newman and MarketSearch have used in serving clients such as Shell Oil, Sears, Pirelli, No Nonsense, Nickelodeon, Bank One, Nextel, Michelin, BMW and Sonoco.

Hillary Clinton's brand is clearly based on Performance. Respondents favored Clinton by an average score of 43 on attributes such as having the most respect from other countries, preparation to be president, relevant experience, intelligence and having the best plan for the war in Iraq. Clinton's closest rival is Obama, with a Performance score of 11.

"If Clinton were a car, she'd probably be a Volvo stationwagon: solid, reliable and there to get the job done," Newsome said. "In the same way, she's like Microsoft and the New York Yankees."

Obama's appeal is based on Personality. On attributes such as trustworthy, interesting, likable, warm and charming and "looks presidential," Obama's net score is 26, compared to 18 for Edwards and 15 for Clinton.

"Obama is a Z4 convertible. He's Apple to Clinton's Microsoft," Newsome said.

John Edwards makes up some ground on his rivals in the realm of Connectivity with voters. On attributes such as compassion, sensitivity to the needs of the poor and underprivileged and the sense of their being “in-tune” with voters, Edwards’ average score is 29, followed by Clinton with 24 and Obama with 19.

“Edwards is a Prius – good for you, yet comfortable. He’s like a Blackberry – always there, keeping you in touch,” Brown said.

So how do these Presidential Brands translate into votes?

At this point in South Carolina, Performance outpaces Personality and Connectivity. In a multi-candidate field, Clinton draws 38 percent, with Obama at 21, Edwards at 17 and everybody else far behind. If the field is narrowed to just the top three, Clinton still enjoys a double-digit lead with 43 percent and Obama and Edwards tied at 25.

Full results and analysis of the study can be downloaded at www.presidentialbrands2008.com.

Using this study as a baseline, Chernoff Newman and MarketSearch will continue to track changes in the perception of the brands and how those changes impact voter decisions over the course of the campaign.

About the Study

Study findings are based on a telephone survey of 400 registered, likely Democratic Primary voters in South Carolina. Sampling error is +/- 4.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. The study was conducted April 9-16, 2007, prior to the first Democratic presidential candidate debate in South Carolina.

About Chernoff Newman

Recognized as one of the top firms in the Southeast, Chernoff Newman is a full-service advertising, public relations and marketing communications firm with offices in Columbia, S.C. and Orlando, Fla. Through a client-focused approach, Chernoff Newman consistently develops and implements successful communications efforts for a variety of clients, including leaders in banking, education, energy, food services, gaming, health care, technology, tourism and more. For more information, call (803) 254-8158 or visit www.chernoffnewman.com.

About MarketSearch

MarketSearch is a market and opinion research company based in Columbia, South Carolina. Image and branding research has been a key element of the MarketSearch brand for more than 20 years.

Since 1985, MarketSearch has been privileged to have been a part of many branding studies, product launches and line extensions, package development, product naming, logo testing, strategic planning and advertising development, to comprehensive re-branding efforts for major and minor brands and organizations. During this time, personnel at MarketSearch have developed a detailed understanding of branding issues, methodological approaches and strategies and a base of information that provides a context for creative study design, sound judgment and practical analyses. For more information, call (803) 254-6958 or visit www.msearch.com.

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