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Presidential Brands 2008 Releases Study on Brand Equity of Republican Candidates

New Brand Study Shows South Carolinians Perceive Rudy Giuliani as American Icon, John McCain as American Hero and Mitt Romney as American Idol

COLUMBIA, S.C. – Perceptions of the leading contenders for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination include Rudy Giuliani as an American Icon, John McCain as an American Hero, and Mitt Romney as an American Idol. Those are among the findings of Presidential Brands 2008, a brand study of the 2008 Republican candidates for president. The strength of the Giuliani and McCain brands have the two locked in a neck-and-neck race and far outpacing their rivals in South Carolina's first-in-the-South Republican primary.

Using polling and its expertise in branding, the Presidential Brands team assessed the brands of both Democratic and Republican candidates. Results of a Democratic brand study were released on May 2.

"A brand is all about consumer experience – the collection of images and ideas that products and services bring immediately to mind. Just like companies, political candidates market themselves aggressively in an attempt to build brand equity," 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.

The study examines five key dimensions of presidential branding – familiarity, reputation, personality, performance and connectivity.

"By looking at these elements, we can see how public perceptions of candidates are shaped, how they change over time and how those perceptions impact voting decisions," 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.

Rudy Giuliani's brand is primarily built on Reputation and Personality. He leads the field with a 72 percent favorability rating. When unfavorable ratings are factored in, he emerges with a net score of 50 percent on Reputation. On Personality attributes such as trustworthy, interesting, likable, warm and charming and looking presidential, Giuliani's average net score is 26 percent, compared to 12 percent for Mitt Romney and 10 percent for John McCain.

"Giuliani earned his reputation as an American icon and burnished his personality as 'America's Mayor' in the days after 9/11," said Newsome. "Republican voters see Giuliani like Allstate – 'you're in good hands.' We also see Giuliani as a crossover vehicle such as a Toyota RAV4 in that his moderate positions on some key issues among Republican primary voters don't seem to lessen his appeal. Finally, Giuliani's like a new pair of Levis blue jeans – it's an All-American brand, but it still takes a while to break them in enough to make them real comfortable."

Like Giuliani, McCain has a strong Reputation score, but he really outshines his opponents on Performance. 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, McCain's average score (34 percent) is more than twice that of his nearest rival, Giuliani (16 percent).

"McCain is seen as an American Hero with the experience and preparation to lead his country in dangerous times, Newsome said. "What else could he be than a pickup truck that's 'Built Ford Tough.' He's rugged Wrangler jeans or a Timex watch that takes a licking but keeps on ticking."

Mitt Romney remains a mystery to most respondents – but he's chosen as looking the most presidential of all the candidates. His strength seems to be in the area of Personality where he's recognized for some warmth and personal charm.

"Romney's an American Idol – he looks the part despite the fact that people don't seem to know enough about him to judge him fairly on other attributes," Newsome said. "He's a Dodge Viper – it looks like it's built for speed, but it's pretty unfamiliar to the average driver. Romney isn't a jeans guy at all – he's more like high quality chinos from Brooks Brothers. He also reminds us of Starbucks, where the atmosphere is as important as the coffee."

So how do these Presidential Brands translate into votes?

Just as McCain and Giuliani essentially split the individual brand attributes we measure, they are virtually tied in the horse race. In the multi-candidate field, McCain leads Giuliani 29 percent to 25 percent, which is within the survey's margin of error. Romney, Fred Thompson and Newt Gingrich each have support in the 10 to 11 percent range.

If the race is narrowed to the top three contenders, McCain, Giuliani and Romney, the New Yorker gains two points on McCain, but still trails with 34 percent to McCain's 36 percent. Again, this is within the margin of error. Romney remains a distant third at 21 percent.

"It should be noted that while we asked this traditional question of political polling, we didn't ask it in the usual way," Brown said. "Our interest isn't the horse race, but the brand perceptions of the candidates. By asking respondents to rate the candidates on individual attributes *before* asking them to declare a preference, we believe we get a clearer picture of how the candidates are seen by voters."

Full results and analysis of the brands of both Republican and Democratic candidates can be found 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 voters, likely Republican Primary voters in South Carolina. Sampling error is +/- 4.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The study was conducted April 9-16, 2007, prior to the first Republican presidential candidate debate in California.

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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