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**Political Parties as Brands: Developing and Testing a Conceptual Framework for Understanding Party Equity**

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**Political Parties as Brands: Developing and Testing a Conceptual  
Framework for Understanding Party Equity**

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**Dissertation**

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*For my parents, Lourdes and Edevar*

*Valeu a pena? Tudo vale a pena  
Se a alma não é pequena.  
Quem quer passar além do Bojador  
Tem que passar além da dor.  
Deus ao mar o perigo e o abysmo deu,  
Mas nelle é que espelhou o céu.*

*Fernando Pessoa, “Mar Portuguez”*

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December 6, 2007  
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# **Political Parties as Brands: Developing and Testing a Conceptual Framework for Understanding Party Equity**

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Gracieli Scremin, Ph.D.  
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Brands are synthesizers of meaning that affect the manner in which consumers respond to marketing efforts such as advertising. In the context of politics, political parties exert a similar role. In this dissertation, I examined the role of parties-as-brands and offered a model based on the concept of *party equity* – i.e., the added value generated by an entity's (e.g., a political candidate or organization) association to a particular party. Hypotheses were offered addressing party equity outcomes in the context of party personality congruent and incongruent political campaign messages. The moderating role of participants' party loyalty and political knowledge was also examined. Results indicated that party personality congruence did not affect responses to candidates whose personality matched traits commonly associated with the Democratic Party but that Republican candidates had an advantage over Democratic and Independent candidates when their personality matched traits commonly associated with the Republican Party. In the language of party equity this meant that Democratic personality traits yielded no added value or equity for Democratic candidates but that Republican personality traits generated equity for Republican candidates.

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## **CHAPTER 1.**

### **Introduction**

In 2005, the world's top 100 brands were estimated to be worth \$434 billion or 4% of the American GDP (Arvidsson, 2006). Brands are valuable assets for the economy at large and for the companies that own them. Often, a brand is the most valuable asset that a company possesses. The Coke brand, for example, is estimated to be worth \$67 billion or more than double the value of Coca-Cola Company's assets combined (Brandchannel.com, 2007). The primary role of brands is to facilitate differentiation among similar products (Kotler, 1991) although the value of brands stretches well beyond this basic function (Aaker, 1996; Fournier, 1998; Keller, 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Brands can epitomize the core identity of a company and of its products. Brands can also instill personality traits in products; traits with which special segments of consumers can identify. To loyal customers, brands can be powerful symbols and complex systems of meaning. Brands can also impact the larger culture by mirroring and shaping mundane aspects of life, even art. That is why the value of brands is said to reside in both functional and intangible or symbolic benefits (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry, 1989; McCracken, 1986).

In this dissertation, it is proposed that political parties exert a similar role to that of brands (Martín-Barbero, 2006; Reeves, de Chernatony, and Carrigan, 2006). That is, parties carry within them meaning that helps voters differentiate among candidate "offerings." In this sense, like brands, political parties have equity or value that stems

from the associations voters and others hold in connection to political parties. This means, for example, that the ideas that come to one's mind when an otherwise unknown candidate is said to be a Republican epitomize the brand value the Republican Party holds for the voter. It is argued here that this value, what we call party equity, affects the manner in which voters respond to political messages.

Brand experts believe that the core value of brands lies in the synthesis of meaning role that a brand name/symbol exerts for consumers (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Klein, 1999). For example, a consumer who is trying to decide among three car brands - let's say, Ford, Toyota, Volkswagen - can use associations he or she has regarding each of the brands to differentiate among them and aid in the purchasing decision making process. We argue that the same holds true for political parties; that is, voters use information they know about the parties - like consumers use information about brands - to aid them in making voting decisions.

Hence, the core idea around which this dissertation is built is that political parties offer voters, like brands offer consumers, *bundles of meaning* (Erdem and Swait, 1998). In other words, political parties help voters both synthesize and organize information about candidates, groups, the parties themselves, and processes related to the political context. In doing so, political parties affect the manner in which voters respond to political messages. It is argued, therefore, that the tools marketing scholars have applied to understand the role of brands in consumer behavior can be used to understand the role of political parties in voting behavior. We begin this task by applying the concept of brand equity to the context of political parties, providing a conceptual model of what

*party equity* is and how it is formed and maintained, and by offering a set of hypotheses about the role of party personality, party loyalty, and political knowledge on party equity outcomes.

By drawing parallels between political parties and brands, this dissertation offers a new perspective on the role of parties in voting behavior. We call the value of parties-as-brands “party equity” and specify its elements through the development of a conceptual model. Accordingly, party equity is defined as the added value an entity yields by being associated to a particular political party. Insights and knowledge from branding practice and research, which have long been used in political campaigns by political consultants (Luntz, 1988), are used here to introduce the idea that political parties can be viewed as brands and that this perspective entails fruitful new avenues for research in political branding and communication.

Researchers have often examined brands with respect to their equity (Aaker, 1996). Brand equity is said to be, specifically, the differential effect yielded from marketing a product of a certain brand name versus marketing the same product with another or no brand name. The study of brand equity has helped advance knowledge of several brand concepts and promote greater understanding of their specific functions. Brands are believed to synthesize meaning for consumers and it is from this synthesized meaning that the equity of a brand resides.

Based on models of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Ross, 2006), the proposed theoretical model of party equity consists of the antecedents, components (i.e., party awareness and associations), and outcomes of party equity. Our main focus

here will be on understanding the role of party associations in how people respond to campaign messages. More specifically, party associations will be studied as a manifestation of people's expectations about the personality traits of candidates linked to specific political parties. We will draw on trait ownership theory (Hayes, 2005) and literature on party image (Matthews and Prothro, 1964; Philpot, 2007; Rahn, 1993; Trilling, 1976) to test the impact of party personality congruent versus incongruent political messages.

The concept of party equity rests on the assumption that people's knowledge about a political party affects the manner in which individuals respond to messages from, about, or related to the party. A simple test of equity is to assess whether different effects emerge from exposure to messages identical in every way but with respect to the party sponsoring or linked to the sponsor of the message. Hence, in this dissertation, we assess the extent to which messages sponsored by candidates from different parties generate equity and offer hypotheses to examine the manner in which individuals respond to messages that are congruent versus incongruent with a political party's personality (i.e., set of traits most commonly associated to a particular political party). Drawing on the theories of party issue and trait ownership, a hypothesis is drawn that predicts people's responses will be significantly different to messages that are congruent with the party personality of the message's sponsoring candidate versus incongruent, meaning that we expect different amounts of equity to be accrued from party personality congruent versus incongruent messages. Four hypotheses are offered



about the moderating role of party loyalty and political knowledge on people's responses to congruent versus incongruent party personality messages.

In order to build a model of party equity from a solid conceptual foundation, a thorough review of the literature on the role of brands in consumer behavior and of parties in voting behavior is presented. Chapters 2 and 3 offer an overview of the findings and insights from these two literatures. A model of voter-based party equity is provided in Chapter 4 and a theoretical account of how the model works along with hypotheses laid out to test the model are offered in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 covers the method used in the pretests and main study. In Chapter 7 we report the findings from the pretests and main study and in Chapter 8 we discuss the meaning behind these findings. Chapter 9 offers a discussion on the limitations of the study and directions for future research in the area of party equity and political branding.

We begin with a review of the literature pertaining to the role of brands in consumer behavior followed by a review on the role of political parties in voting behavior. Both of these literatures are believed to have core parallels, the most important of which is that both brands and parties serve as synthesizers or bundles of meaning to consumers and voters.

## **CHAPTER 2.**

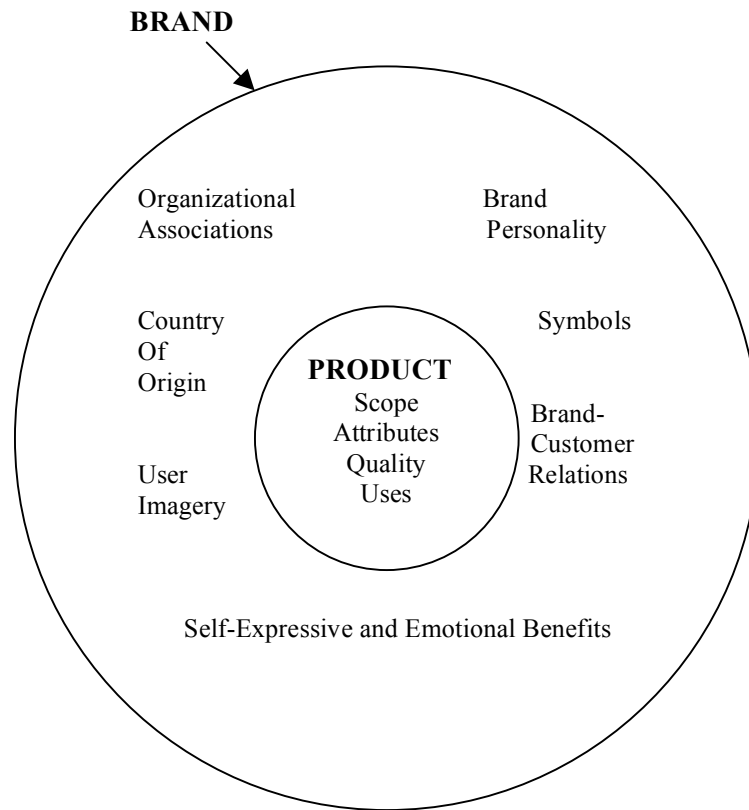
### **Brands and their role in consumer behavior**

What is a brand and what do brands do? What role do brands play for the producers and consumers of branded products? Kotler (1991) defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (1991, p. 442). More broadly, “brands”<sup>1</sup> can be construed as sets of tangible and intangible characteristics that represent and communicate information about the functional and symbolic benefits of products, services, or ideas (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Arvidsson, 2006; Schmidt and Ludlow 2002, Vessenes, 2004). Grassel (1999) argues that brands are emergent products since brands possess value which transcends that of the products they represent. This is similar to the idea advanced by Aaker in his work on brand equity and identity (1991, 1996). For Aaker, brands encompass associations, imagery, self-expressive and emotional benefits that include but cannot simply be reduced to product characteristics and uses (see figure 2.1).

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<sup>1</sup> The term “brand” has been defined in many ways. Brands are also commonly defined as symbols of representation and individual expression (Arvidsson, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Schultz, 2005).

**Figure 2.1 A Brand Is More Than a Product (Aaker, 1996, p. 74)**



### Brands as Product Differentiators

The most basic component of a brand is its name. Brand names represent nearly anything that is sold to consumers. The common use of brands names to represent products and differentiate them from competitors began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the move toward manufacturers marketing and advertising their own products, thereby ceasing to depend on retailers to fulfill that task. As the basic needs of individuals began to be met more fully by the products available in the market and with little differentiation among the functional benefits that products in the same category offered to consumers, the use of brands became widespread (Aaker, 1996).

Brand-based product differentiation begins with a unique name, logo, design, etc. (i.e., potentially all the elements included in Kotler’s definition of brands – see above). For instance, brand name fittingness has been found to affect awareness of specific product brands (Kanungo, 1968). Likewise, differentiating brand names with pictorial representation has been found to enhance product brand recognition and awareness (MacInnis, Shapiro, and Gayathri, 1999). Brands also differentiate products on the basis of particular images and associations (Keller, 1993; Park, Jaworski, MacInnis, 1986; Vessenes, 2004). For instance, Nike developed a strong image and set of associations around its brand name through advertising which managed to successfully draw associations between the Nike brand and famous athletes – e.g., Michael Jordan. These associations helped Nike secure a distinctive brand image for its products - an image famously synthesized by Nike’s slogan, “Just Do It.” A summary of key brand functions is provide on table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1 Some Key Brand Functions**

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aid in product recognition and differentiation</li> <li>- Cue of tangible product benefits</li> <li>- Cue and provider of symbolic benefits</li> <li>- Aid in decision-making, product choice</li> <li>- Guide of why and how product is consumed</li> </ul> |
|---|

### Brands as Heuristics in Decision Making

Brands also provide signaling information to consumers that reduces purchase risk, simplifies purchase decisions, and serves as markers of product quality and performance (Hoyer and Brown, 1990; Janiszewski and van Osselaer, 2000; Macdonald and Sharp, 2000; Riley and de Chernatony, 2000). Another key function of brands is that they can help structure consumer choice and experience (Arvidsson, 2006; Schmidt and Ludlow, 2002). In an effort to differentiate products and services from the competition, brands can be used to stand for meanings with which consumers can easily associate. For instance, the brand Volvo has come to stand for safety and Apple computers for freshness and creativity.

Another way of looking at the role of brands is that they help consumers navigate the market and identify how best to satisfy their perceived wants and needs. The assumption behind the usefulness of brands is that there's too much information and too much competitive information at that, for consumers to be able to notice and discern. Brands are symbols and systems of meaning that help consumers condense great amounts of information about products and services (Arvidsson, 2006; Keller, 2001).

Brands differ in terms of what they represent for the companies that own them. A brand can stand for a single product (e.g., Dasani water), a collection of products (e.g., Diesel jeans), an entity, or corporation (e.g., Greenpeace, Johnson & Johnson). Often, companies must understand and deal with how consumer perceptions of the corporate brand affect perceptions of product brands (Einwiller, et al. 2006; Kay, 2007). Companies spend billions of dollars yearly in "corporate image" advertising campaigns

with the intent of promoting goodwill among the public and affecting the long term brand value of the corporation itself (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Companies do so because consumer perceptions of the corporate brand affect how valuable consumers perceive a company's product brands to be (Balmer 2001; de Chernatony, 2002).

Corporate brands and single brands tend to share a symbiotic relationship in that what is said and heard about the corporate brand affects product brands and vice-versa (Einwiller, et al. 2006). Applied to the context of political parties, corporate brands are akin to political parties and product brands to a party's affiliated politicians. The idea introduced in this dissertation is that what happens to the corporate brand – the political party – affects voters perceptions of the party's candidates and elected officials. The voter-based model of party equity offered in chapter four explains the role of voter perceptions of a political party – “the corporate brand” – on voter response to messages from, about, or related to the political party.

To simplify our understanding of the various roles played by brands, Aaker (1996), Keller (1993) and others have modeled and examined different brand concepts (see Table 2.2 for concept definitions). The next sections review literature pertaining to each of these key concepts and provide brief discussions on how they could be applied to the concept of parties-as-brands. The review begins by addressing the concept of brand awareness.

**Table 2.2 Definitions of Key Brand Dimensions**

<b>Brand awareness</b>	the extent to which one recognizes and recalls a brand - i.e., one's level of acquaintance with the brand (Aaker, 1996)
<b>Brand loyalty</b>	typically defined in two dimensions: a behavioral dimension and an attitudinal one (Day, 1969). To be considered brand loyal, a customer must have strong positive attitudes toward a particular brand and demonstrate repeat purchase behavior
<b>Brand image/associations</b>	all the brand associations residing the minds of audiences and voters (Dichter, 1985)
<b>Brand identity</b>	set of brand associations strategists seek to create and maintain. What a brand stands for from the marketer's perspective (Aaker, 1996)
<b>Brand personality</b>	human-like traits attached to a brand (Aaker, 1997). Can be viewed both from the perspective of consumers (a brand image perspective) and of the organization (a brand identity perspective)
<b>Brand equity</b>	the residual value of a brand when one is exposed to a brand message in which the brand name is present vs. when the brand name is not (Keller, 1993)

### *Brand Awareness*

Brand awareness refers to one's level of acquaintance with a brand or "the strength of a brand's presence in the consumer's mind" (Aaker, 1996, p. 10). Brand awareness consists of two key components (Aaker 1996; Percy and Rossiter, 1992). The first is brand recognition, an element related to consumers' liking and overall level of familiarity with a brand. Brand recognition is often assessed through questions like "have you seen this brand before?" The second component of brand awareness is brand

recall. Recalling a brand means remembering its name in association with the brand's product category. A common question used for assessing brand recall is "what brands of this product class can you remember?" A strong brand will more likely elicit "top of mind" recall; this means that it will be remembered before competitor brand names (Aaker, 1996).

Brand awareness has been shown to play an important role in the consumer choice process. Research findings suggest that brand awareness can serve as a heuristic or rule of thumb in purchase decisions such that when consumers are faced with the choice between a familiar versus an unknown product brand, they are more likely to select the familiar one (Hoyer and Brown, 1990; Macdonald and Sharp, 2000). Furthermore, consumers seem willing to pay a premium price for acquiring a familiar brand. The logic behind the use of brand awareness as a heuristic in purchase decisions is that familiarity stands for product quality (Aaker, 1996) because if the marketer is willing to spend money in advertising, customers reason, it must be because the product is of decent quality (on the premise that advertisers would not waste their time and money advertising a bad product). Hence, brand awareness becomes a signal of product quality for consumers (1996).

However, there's a catch as to under what circumstances brand awareness would more likely be used as a purchasing decision heuristic. According to the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Caccioppo, 1984), people would be more inclined to base their purchasing decisions on heuristic cues such as brand awareness when they lack motivation, ability and/or opportunity to make decisions (i.e., under low consumer



involvement conditions). This is likely to occur in situations where consumers are not invested in the purchasing decision – i.e., when the cost of making a bad purchase is low or the consequences of purchasing a bad product are hard to pinpoint.

Applying the concept of brand awareness to the context of the American political party system would seem futile if we were to conceptualize it strictly in terms of recognition and recall. This is, of course, because political party recognition and recall are fairly high among American voters; a typical voter would be able to easily recognize the Republican and Democratic Parties and name them when asked to recall political parties. This would likely not be the case in countries where the number of political parties is larger. Hence, the usefulness of brand awareness for the study of the role of political parties in voting behavior hinges on a more nuanced application; meaning that we would need think of party “brand” awareness not in terms of *whether* but *to what extent* voters are familiar with a political party. This means that party awareness would need to be examined in conjunction with more complex concepts such as party loyalty and political knowledge (i.e., one’s level of knowledge with respect to general political matters).

### *Brand Loyalty*

Aaker (1996) assigns a special role to brand loyalty in his brand equity model. According to Aaker, brand loyalty should be treated as both a driver and a consequence of brand equity. Strictly from a financial sense, brand loyalty matters because loyal customers are usually responsible for most of a brand’s sales – fitting the classic marketing 80/20 rule which states that roughly eighty percent of a company’s sales are

generated from purchases made by twenty percent of its customers – that is, the most loyal (Messer, 2003). As such, Aaker (1996) argues that brand loyalty should occupy a special place in his brand equity model because “a brand’s value to a firm is largely created by the customer loyalty it commands” (1996, p.21). Loyal customers enhance the value of brands also because it is less costly for a firm to retain their existing customers than attract new ones (Reichheld, 1993). That is, individuals’ level of brand loyalty affects their responses to the marketing efforts of a brand. The same is true in the context of politics where *party* loyalty figures as an important determinant of how individuals respond to political messages. As we shall see in chapter three, partisanship (party identification or party ID) has long occupied a prominent role in the political communication effects literature. Researchers, especially within the limited media effects tradition (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948; Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955), have argued that party ID is one of the most important predictors of political behavior.

### *Brand Identity*

Messages sent about a brand are not always decoded by message receivers in the way intended by senders. This is to say that brands can be examined from the perspective of the sender or source of brand messages and/or from the perspective of brand message receivers (Nandan, 2005). Brand identity refers to the “unique set of brand associations that the *brand strategist aspires to create or maintain*” (Aaker, 1996, p. 68, italics added). Therefore, the concept of brand identity focuses on the perspective of the message source. It deals with the direction, purpose, and meaning

(1996) of the brand from the point of view of the entity that owns the brand (de Chernatony, 1999; Ponder and Barnes, 2004).

Understanding brands from this perspective is important because research shows that brands with a strong sense of identity come across as more genuine, trustworthy, and valuable (Nandam, 2005; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; de Chernatony, 1999). This is tied to the basic element in the definition of marketing which states that marketers and consumers meet in the marketplace to exchange goods that are of value to both (Kotler, 1991). Strong, respected brands become desirable markers to consumers who wish to accrue the benefits associated with using/having the brand. That is, brands with desirable identities are able to attract consumers who wish to associate themselves with the brand. Weak brand identities do not allow for this type of relationship to develop between marketers and consumers. As Aaker (1996) puts it: “brand identity should help establish a relationship between the brand and the customer by generating a value proposition involving functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits” (1996, p. 68).

The distinction between meaning intended by the message source versus meaning decoded by message receivers is important for the study of political parties. Adapted to the context of political parties, brand identity is what the parties communicate about themselves – the *planned messages* sent by the political parties to voters. Conversely, *unplanned messages* are those written or said about a party without the party’s control – e.g., news stories, word of mouth. Unplanned messages are more closely related to how information is decoded by audiences and are the result of media’s interpretation of

planned messages sent by the political parties. Ultimately, the value or equity of a party, as we shall see later on, is said to depend on how wide the gap is between what the party says about itself (i.e., party identity) and what others say about the party and how voters come to decode party-related information (i.e., party image, see below). More positive party equity results from a narrower gap between party identity and image.

### *Brand Image and Brand Personality*

In contrast to the concept of brand identity, brand image refers to the meaning of brands from the perspective of consumers and others looking at the brand from an “outside-in” perspective. Dichter (1985) defines brand image as the “total impressions in the minds of consumers.” Brand image encompasses “perceptions about a brand as reflected by brand associations held in consumer memory” (Keller, 1993). According to Plummer (2000) the concept of brand image is composed of: (1), the physical attributes of a product; (2), the functional characteristics or benefits of the product (both tangible and intangible), and (3), how the brand is characterized or its personality.

According to Park’s (1986) research on impression formation, when forming impressions of people, individuals are more likely to recall people’s personality traits, rather than other types of characteristics such as people’s behaviors and physical characteristics. Likewise, brand traits influence consumers’ impressions of brands (Freling and Forbes, 2005; Plummer, 1985). The concept of brand personality was developed to account for the role of these traits in the context of consumption of

branded products (Plummer 2000, Aaker, 1997) and has been the single most studied manifestation of brand image to date.

Jennifer Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (1997, p. 347). As such, the concept of brand personality parallels that of human personality, although the primary trait dimensions of each of these concepts differ. Based on Aaker’s research, brand personality is composed of five primary trait dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. While perceptions of human personality traits are formed on the basis of behavior, attitudes, beliefs and both physical and demographic characteristics of individuals, brand personality traits are “formed and influenced by any direct or indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 348) such as product related attributes, advertising, product use, brand endorsers, product category associations, distribution channel, etc.

Plummer (2000) holds that the concept of brand personality can be approached from two angles: from the perspective of what and how companies want to portray about their brand’s personality (a brand identity perspective) and from the consumer perceptions of a brand’s personality (a brand image perspective). Most of the research on brand personality deals with the concept as it relates to the latter. Plummer’s research itself deals with this aspect of brand personality for it is concerned with how to describe (brand) perceptual reality from the point of view of the consumer (2000, p. 81). Similar to Aaker’s exploration of the dimensions of brand personality, Plummer’s research attempts to identify the salient traits of a brand’s personality in order to draw

comparisons to salient components of other brands' personality profiles. One of Plummer's major points is that the concept of brand personality is only useful in so far as it can be applied comparatively across brands.

The function of brand personality hinges largely on the intangible or symbolic benefits that brands provide to consumers. One often cited role of brand personality is that of mediator in the relationship between products and (the enactment of) self-identity (Aaker, Fournier, and Adam, 2004; Fournier, 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2000). Brand personality traits work as cues about the attractiveness and match of the branded product in relation to one's self concept (i.e., one's actual and ideal self image). Brand personality can also mediate links between the self in negotiation with social roles (Aaker, Fournier, and Adam, 2004; Fournier, 1998; Ritson and Elliott, 1999). Research by Fournier, for example, reveals that consumers can form bonds with brands that are similar to bonds formed between people. Like Aaker and Plummer, Fournier's research takes up the metaphor of brands as inanimate objects imbued with human characteristics that can provide consumers with an array of intangible benefits. In McCracken's (1989) words:

*"consumers turn to their goods not only as bundles of utility with which to serve functions and satisfy needs, but also as bundles of meaning with which to fashion who they are and the world in which they live" (1989, p. 310).*

#### *Brand Image and Party Image*

The concepts of brand image and party image are closely related. In fact, in their seminal work on candidate images, Nimmo (1976) writes that the concept of image itself, as it is applied to the political context, has been borrowed from marketing's

brand image concept. Both party and brand image have been defined as all of the associations held in the minds of voters/consumers about a party/brand (Liu, 2006). Nonetheless, the concepts of brand and party image differ in terms of how they have been traditionally operationalized. Suffice it to say at this point that, for the most part, party image has been operationalized as party attitude (i.e., voter likes and dislikes with respect to a political party) (Liu, 2006; Matthew and Prothro, 1966; Trilling, 1976) while operationalizations of brand image have been truer to the essence of the definition of image as the totality of brand-related associations (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). In this sense, the most often studied set of brand associations has been brand personality although no study has yet adapted the concept to the context of political parties. Hayes (2005) has come closest with his theory of trait ownership (to be discussed later in more detail) in which he proposes that voters view parties as holders of human-like traits such as compassion, morality, leadership, and empathy. An understanding of party personality would further develop the idea proposed in Hayes and shed light on how voters' perceptions of political parties affect their voting behavior.

#### *The Added Value of Brands: Brand Equity*

Brands also possess equity; a concept construed both in terms of tangible (monetary) and intangible (e.g., attitudes toward the brand) values. Conceptually, brand equity is the value that a brand possesses based on the brand's image or the totality of what consumers, distributors, dealers, even competitors, think and feel about the brand. To businesses, building brand equity serves different purposes, of which some of the

most important are customer loyalty and price inelasticity (Aaker, 1991, Keller, 2001, Wiedmann and Buxel, 2005). To consumers, brand equity aids in decision-making (products of highest brand equity will tend to be preferred) and helps structure consumption experience (Arvidsson, 2006).

Keller (1993) defines brand equity as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” (1993, p. 1). This means that brand equity can be thought of as the effect of a marketing activity – e.g., advertising – for a branded product vs. the effect of a marketing effort for the same product when another brand name or no brand name is used. Keller’s conceptualization of brand equity therefore relies on the idea that brands possess added or residual value, one that surpasses the value a product has when stripped of its brand name. An implication of Keller’s definition of brand equity is therefore that prior knowledge held in consumer memory about a brand contains inherent value (either positive or negative) and affects consumer response to information encountered about the brand.

Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) developed the two most prominent models of brand equity. These two models are reviewed in depth in the next section. However, a major shortcoming of these models with respect to what they can offer to the study of political parties is that they were developed for examining brand equity in the context of consumer products. Ross (2006) adapted Keller’s customer-based brand equity model and applied it to the context of sports. The contexts of sports and politics share important parallels. In both, the experience of “consumers” (fans and voters) is often indirect or mass mediated (i.e., not experienced directly but via the mass media). Also,



in particular sport contexts – e.g., sports at the collegiate level – teams are engaged in a paired effort of attracting viewers/fans and raising monetary donations; the same happens in the context of political parties. Ross’ model of brand equity is therefore reviewed and used as a springboard for the development of a voter-based brand equity model which will be proposed in chapter four.

### Brand Equity Models

This section presents three models of brand equity upon which a proposed model of voter-based party equity will be developed. As it will be argued in more depth in chapter four, the concepts and brand dimensions featured in the following models are applicable to the context of political parties.

#### *Aaker (1991) – Earliest Model of Brand Equity*

In “Building Strong Brands,” David Aaker (1996) provides the following definition to the concept of brand equity:

*“Brand equity is a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand’s name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and /or that firm’s customers” (Aaker, 1996, p.7)*

In Aaker’s conceptualization, brand equity epitomizes the value that brands provide to firms and customers. Brand equity is divided into four brand asset categories comprising of: brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. Figure 2.2 illustrates these asset categories and summarizes their benefits. Aaker argues that each of these so-called brand assets can directly create and shape

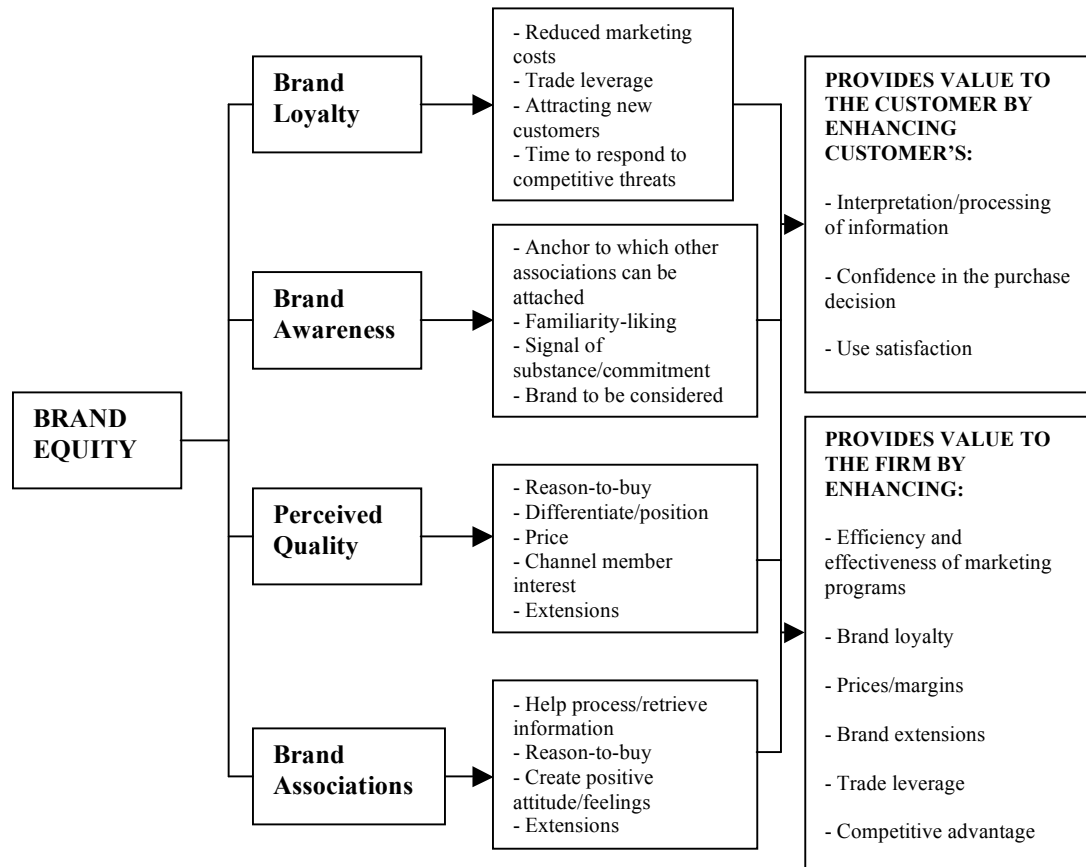
equity for a brand. Aaker's model is a starting point for subsequent models of brand equity. In contrast to Keller's model (see below) Aaker conceptualizes brand equity in broader terms thereby posing a challenge for researchers seeking to operationalize the dimensions of model.

Brand awareness forms the basis of Aaker's brand equity model and is defined as composite of brand recognition and recall (see brand awareness section above). Brand associations are defined as anything, any type of information held in consumer memory about the brand. Perceived quality is conceptualized as both a brand association and a brand asset dimension as it is believed to play an important role in building and maintaining brand equity (Aaker, 1996). Likewise, brand loyalty is viewed as both a brand association and a brand asset because of the value loyal consumers bring to companies in the form of healthy revenue streams.

Research findings suggest that the asset dimensions proposed by Aaker bear significant effects on brand equity (Tranberg and Hansen, 1986; Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey, 2005). Research also points toward important linkages among different brand asset dimensions. For example, Tranberg and Hansen (1986) found brand awareness to be a critical driver of brand loyalty. Such linkages are not surprising since assets categories can be conceptualized as steps forming stronger levels of brand equity. Hence, awareness can be viewed as the base level of a brand equity conceptual "pyramid" while different types of brand associations constitute its higher levels. In simpler terms then, brand equity can be viewed as driven primarily by two brand asset

dimensions, brand awareness and brand associations. These two are the main dimensions of Keller's (1993) brand equity model. It is to his model that we turn next.

**Figure 2.2 Brand Equity and Value (Aaker, 1996)**



*Keller (1993) – Consumer-Based Brand Equity*

In Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand equity, brand equity is composed of all the information and attitudes consumers associate with a brand; be them about people, other brands, places, and things (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Keller, 2003). As such, associations form the basis of knowledge that consumers have about brands. It is

also through associations that brand meanings are built, maintained, and changed (2003). The notion of brand associations parallels that of the psychological construct of schema which holds that knowledge is structured in the brain in the form of nodes (pieces of knowledge/information) and associative links (Wyer and Srull, 1989). As such, knowledge about brands consists of brand nodes to which a variety of associations are linked (Keller, 1993, p. 2). Brand associations can structure consumer decision-making by affecting people's perceptions of product attributes and benefits. Brands associations can also shape people's attitudes in relation to the branded product. In this sense, positive attitude associations lead to positive brand attitudes while negative attitude associations lead to negative attitudes toward the brand.

As seen above, Keller defines brand equity on the basis of "marketing effects uniquely attributable to the brand – for example, when certain outcomes result from the marketing of a product or service because of its brand name that would not occur if the same product or service did not have that name" (1993, p.1). Because Keller's model approaches the conceptualization of brand equity from the perspective of the consumer - or rather of the value yielded from consumer knowledge/associations about the brand - it is referred to as a model of "customer-based brand equity." His model is composed of two dimensions: brand awareness and brand image/associations. Brand awareness and brand associations are not components of brand equity per se, but of *brand knowledge*; that is, the two dimensions are believed to play a relevant role in how brand knowledge builds and shapes brand equity (see figure 2.3 below)

Brand awareness, as we have seen, relates to the consumer's level of familiarity with a brand. It consists of two factors referring to a person's ability to remember a brand when the brand name is used as a cue (brand recognition) and when the given cue is the brand's product category (brand recall). Brand awareness affects and shapes brand equity because consumers tend to prefer products with familiar brand names (Jacoby, Syzabillo, and Busato-Schach, 1977). This is especially true in cases of low involvement where consumers lack the motivation and ability to engage in purchasing decisions (Hoyer and Brown, 1990; Macdonald and Sharp, 2000). Brand awareness also affects consumer decision-making by impacting the development and strength of brand associations (Low and Lamb, 2000).

In Keller's customer-based brand equity model, brand image is defined as consumer perceptions of a brand reflected in brand associations held in consumer memory (1993, p.3). Brand associations and image are interchangeable concepts and they should be thought of as information nodes that carry brand meaning for consumers. There are different types of brand associations varying according to their level of abstraction. They are classified in categories - attributes, benefits, and attitudes – that vary in terms of favorability, strength, and uniqueness.

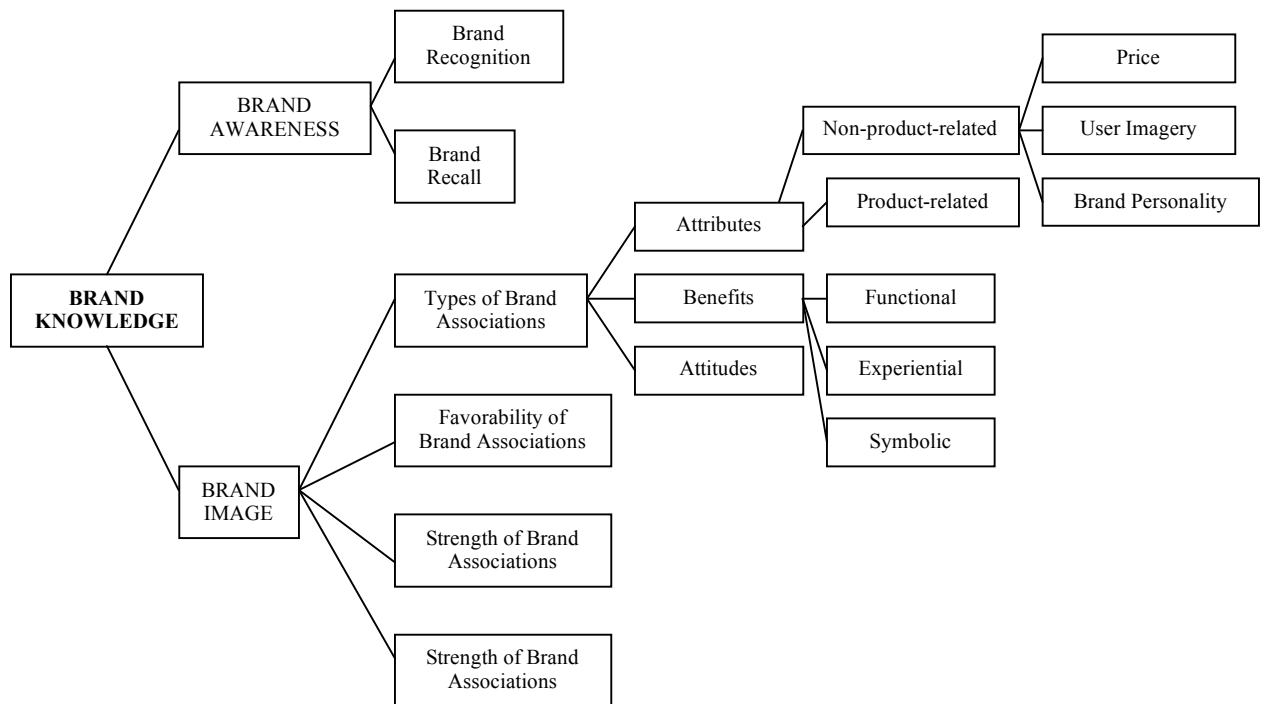
Attributes consist of the descriptive features that characterize products or services (1993, p.4). They can be product-related – i.e., basic attributes necessary for product performance - or non-product related – i.e., attributes not directly related to product performance but important in shaping consumer perceptions of the brand; attributes such as price, packaging, user and usage imagery. Brand personality, for instance, is

classified as a type of non-product related attribute. User imagery are the perceptions and beliefs consumers have about brand users based on demographic (gender, age, social class) and psychographic (lifestyle, beliefs, attitudes) characteristics of typical users. Usage imagery relates to ideas consumers have about how and when a branded product should be bought/used.

Benefits refer to what consumers believe the brand can do for them or the personal value consumers attach to the brand. Benefits can be functional, experiential, and symbolic. Functional benefits are those reaped from product-related attributes and are related to the fulfillment of basic needs such as physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1970) – and needs related to risk-avoidance (Rossiter and Percy, 1987). Experiential benefits are related to product-related attributes and the fulfillment of needs such as sensory pleasure, variety, and cognitive stimulation. Symbolic benefits correspond to non-product related attributes and the fulfillment of needs such as social approval and personal expression (Escalas and Bettman, 2003, Tidwell and Horgan, 1992).

Attitudes consist of consumers' overall evaluations of a brand (Wilkie, 1986). Brand attitudes are believed to be shaped by people's beliefs about product-related and non-product related attributes. This hypothesized link between attitudes and beliefs is derived from application of expectancy-value attitude models (e.g., Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) that conceptualize attitudes as functions of people's beliefs.

**Figure 2.3 Dimensions of Brand Knowledge (Keller, 1993)**



*Ross (2006) – Spectator-Based Brand Equity*

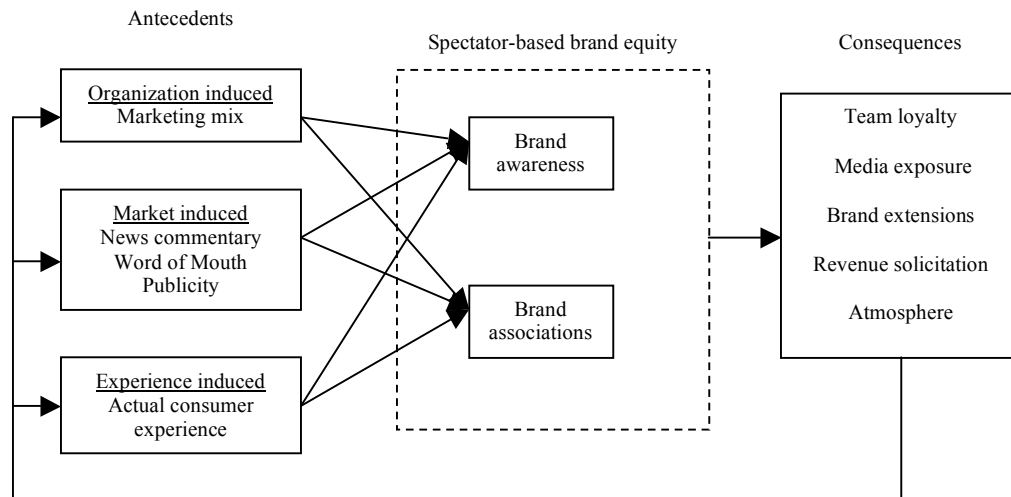
Ross’ model of “spectator-based brand equity” is based on Gladden et al.’s (1998) conceptual framework for assessing brand equity in Division I athletics, Berry’s (2002) conceptualization of service brand equity, and Keller’s (1993) customer-based brand equity model. A review of Ross’ brand equity model is useful for the purpose of examining brands in the context of politics because it provides an example of how brand equity can be applied to contexts where the “product” being offered to consumers is intangible, inconsistent, and perishable in nature (Gladden et al., 1998) and where consumer experience with the product is, for the most part, indirect or mass mediated (Ross, 2006).

Ross divides his model into three parts (see figure 2.4): antecedents of brand equity, spectator-based brand equity, and consequences of brand equity. A specification of spectator-based brand equity's antecedents and consequences is included in the model to account for the uniqueness of the context of sports. Antecedents and consequences are also based on Berry's (2002) conceptualization of brand equity for service brands.

In Ross' model, antecedents are divided into organization-induced, market-induced, and experience-induced. Organization-induced antecedents are managerially controlled variables or the elements in the organization's marketing mix (i.e., product, price, distribution, and promotion) over which the organization has control. Market-induced antecedents refer to "the sources consumers use to absorb information about the brand," information that is "uncontrolled and unpaid for by the organization itself" (Ross, 2006, p.29), these include news about sports events, publicity and word-of-mouth. Experience-induced antecedents account for the actual experience of the consumer with the brand. Berry (2002) indicates that if consumer experience is different from organization and market-induced information, consumers will trust their experience and not the information delivered by other sources.



**Figure 2.4 A Spectator-Based Brand Equity Model (Ross, 2006)**



In Ross' conceptualization, brand equity is formed by the same components outlined by Keller (1993): brand awareness and brand associations. These are believed to constitute the core of spectator-based brand equity. This is based of course on the view that brand awareness and associations form the basis of important consumer behavior outcomes such as brand loyalty and perceived product quality (Aaker, 1991).

Similar to his proposed antecedents of spectator-based brand equity, Ross adapts the consequences or outcomes of brand equity to fit the uniqueness of the context of sports. As specified in his model, three of the most important consequences of spectator-based brand equity are team loyalty, atmosphere (level of excitement and entertainment provided to sport spectators), revenue solicitation (raising funds for sports organizations, especially at the amateur level), and extension opportunities (additional products and services beyond the organization's core product) (Ross, 2006).

### Brand Equity Applied to the Context of Political Parties

Party equity can aid voters in information processing and decision-making (Popkin, 1991) and enhance a party's ability to build and maintain voter loyalty, raise funds, develop successful campaigns, etc. (Petrocik, Benoit, Hansen, 2003; Norpoth and Buchanan, 1992). Hence, the application of the concept of equity in the context of political parties can broaden the scope of the study of the role of political parties in voting behavior which thus far has been limited at exploring the role of party image and party issue and trait-ownership (Matthew and Prothro, 1966; Hayes, 2005; Petrocik, 1994). For instance, most studies on party image have operationalized the concept simply as the attitudes or likes and dislikes of voters with respect to political parties. This lies in contrast to operationalizations of brand image that treat attitudes as one of the many dimensions relevant to building accurate accounts of the image consumers have of brands. In chapter 4 the models of brand equity presented in this section are adapted to fit and expand the study of political parties in the context of voting behavior.

### Political Parties as Political Brands

Brands provide value and meaning to consumers that go beyond the functional benefits of the products brands represent. Moreover, strong brands such as Nike, Apple Computers, Starbucks and Whole Foods are able to communicate a vision and provide consumers with an abundance of what Russell Belk (1988) calls "bundles of meaning." Similarly, political parties are organizations developed around strong visions and

ideologies. The contention here is that political parties too can be viewed as bundles of meaning. For voters, political parties synthesize a wide array of information and experience so that a party name - be it Republican, Democratic, or Green – leads to different types of associations in the minds of voters and shapes how voters process information about candidates and parties.

Although some shun the application of branding principles to the context of politics, journalists, writers, politicians, political consultants, and voters routinely think and talk about political parties in branding terms. For example, a leaked memo shows Phillip Gould's – Britain's Labour Party's chief pollster - concern about the party's brand image: "the New Labour *brand* has been badly contaminated. It is the object of constant criticism and, even worse, ridicule" (BBC, 2000, italics added). Likewise, Naomi Klein (1999), author of "No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies," likens parties as brands when she suggests that one of main failures of the 2004 Democratic presidential campaign was that "Democrats didn't fully understand that the success of Karl Rove's party is really a success in branding" (AlterNet, 2005). She says:

*"Identity branding is something that the corporate world has understood for some time now. They're not selling a product; they're selling a desired identity, an aspirational identity of the people who consume their product. Nike understands that, Apple understands that, and so do all the successful brands. Karl Rove understands that too."* (2005)

European scholars have been quicker at acknowledging the importance of political parties as brands in shaping the outcomes of political campaigns and voting behavior. Smith (2001) provides a model of factors that shape brand image in British politics. He ascertains that political parties hold brand equity and that such equity is

driven primarily by a party's brand image. In Smith's conceptualization, party image is shaped primarily by events – controlled and uncontrolled by the party - media coverage, celebrity endorsements, and image-based advertising. In Spain, Martín-Barbero (2006) presents a brand-based model that assesses party brand identities via the web by contending that, like brands, politics revolves around the idea of identity. Focusing on the British political context, Reeves, de Chernatony, and Carrigan (2006) present the idea that voters in the UK have increasingly come to view political parties as brands. They argue that the pervasiveness of brands in British society lead voters to 'read' and experience political parties similarly to how, as consumers, citizens read and experience product brands. The diminishing power of ideology as a driving predictor of electoral outcomes and the increasing application of marketing-based tools by politicians, parties, and their political consultants are also cited in Reeves et al. (2006) as factors leading voters and others involved in the political process in Britain to view political parties as brands.

### Summary: The Role of Brands in Consumer Behavior

Brands and their meaning affect the manner in which consumers think, feel, and evaluate branded products. Brands come in a variety of forms. They can be corporate (e.g., *Volkswagen*) or stand for a product (e.g., *Charmin*). They can represent tangible products (e.g., *Ford*) or intangible services and ideas (e.g., *Progressive*, *Green Peace*). The basic thrust behind the value of all brands is that they provide a basis for product<sup>2</sup> recognition, associations, and meaning to consumers. Moreover, and most crucial for the purposes of this study, the concept of brands is useful for its potential to form the basis of new theoretical frameworks designed to capture how perceptions of brands aid in decision-making and help structure individual experience with products, services and ideas. Therein lies the value of a brand-based approach to the study of political parties: that of providing a holistic perspective on the meaning of political parties and its impact on voting behavior.

In this section, brands were broadly conceptualized “bundles of meaning” to account for their function as tools of synthesis and organization of information about the functional and symbolic benefits of products. The section also presented an overview of major brand concepts and brand equity models. Subsequently, the three models of brand equity presented are to serve as guides for the application of key brand concepts – namely, brand awareness, associations, identity, image, personality and, of course, equity – in the context of political parties. However, for us to obtain a better understanding of how brand equity models ought to work in the context of political

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<sup>2</sup> “product” is construed here in a broad way that is meant to stand for services and ideas.

parties, we must first review literature on the role of parties in voting behavior. That is the goal of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3.**

### **Political parties and their role in voting behavior**

What role do political parties play in voting behavior? In the three decades after the famous Eire County studies of the 1940s (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948), which evaluated how media exposure along with other demographic factors impacted voting behavior, the widespread belief among political researchers and practitioners was that political parties, or rather, voters' party identification (party ID) was a key determinant of electoral behavior. Although some still contend that party ID exerts a substantial influence on the political decisions of the average American voter (Keith et al. 1992), the role of political parties, in so far as it reflects mainly the impact of party ID on voting behavior, seems to have dwindled since the 1940s and 50s (Wattenberg, 1990). So the question becomes, if the influence of political parties is not as instrumental in determining voting behavior as it once was, why should we bother examining it? This study's key assumption is that political parties still exert a significant influence on voting behavior, albeit one that is qualitatively different from the default role played by party ID in the two decades following World War II. This influence or role of parties in voting behavior is worth examining, especially from a new perspective which equates the role of parties as that of brands or "bundles of meaning."

### Party Identification and Loyalty

In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, the Columbia (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948) and Michigan (Campbell et al. 1960) schools asserted that party ID played a significant role in determining voting behavior. The two schools also asserted that political campaigns were limited at persuading voters precisely because most votes were cast according to one's party of preference. The influence of party identification (party ID) on voting behavior began to decrease in the 1960s with changes in the political alignment of the parties and of the issues that concerned voters (Matthew and Prothro, 1966).

### Party Image

With party ID's diminishing role as a major determinant of voting behavior, political parties' role in campaigns began to be examined from different perspectives. The most notable of which has been through the concept of party image. The term "party image" refers to the mental pictures held by voters about a political party, or all of the things that come to a voters' mind when thinking of a party (Liu, 2006; Trilling 1976). Research on party images, however, often approaches the concept in a much narrower sense by treating it simply as the likes and dislikes of voters about a political party (Matthew and Prothro, 1966; Trilling, 1976). This definition of party image mirrors the notion of 'attitude' as it is laid out in psychological research. Others have broadened their treatment of the concept by looking at party image as traits or "intrinsic



values” voters attribute to political parties (Hayes, 2005; Liu, 2006) such as “caring,” “competent,” “decisive,” “moderate,” “modern,” and “strong” (2006, p.28).

Party image appears to have a significant impact on multiple aspects of electoral behavior. Trilling (1976) explored the role of party images in what he called the ‘decomposition’ of American parties. Like Matthew and Prothro’s (1966) research on the impact of shifting party images on party loyalties of white Southerners, Trilling’s research showed that as party images become increasingly incongruent with previously held party perceptions, party alliances become jeopardized and begin to change (1976). Another role of party image concerns its impact on voters’ perceptions of political candidates and its effect on political campaign outcomes. Studies on party image and theories related to the concept have addressed its role in political campaigns in depth and so it is to them we turn next.

Rahn’s study (1993) on party image stereotypes and its effects on individuals’ responses to political messages indicates that people tend to use common beliefs about political parties to make inferences about political candidates’ stances on a variety of issues. Recently, Philpot (2007) offered a model of party image change based on the notion that political party images are stable but not static. According to the model, party image change depends on the new projected image of the party, the old projected party image, voter’s predispositions, and alternative projected party images communicated by sources outside of the party (e.g., the media). All of these elements influence the outcome of party attempts to change its image among voters (2007).

### Political Parties as Heuristics in Decision Making

In his “The Reasoning Voter” Popkin (1991) poses a question of crucial importance to political communication practitioners and researchers: what is more important to voters, substance or style? (p. 5). Theories of voting answer this question in many ways, with camps usually split between political scientists who argue that substance (i.e., issues) matters more to voters than style (i.e., images) and scholars in political communication who often argue in favor of style over substance. As Popkin maintains, however, the dichotomy of substance/style may be a false one as voters may use information holistically and interchangeably by drawing, for instance, stylistic inferences about political candidates from substantive information and vice versa. In fact, whatever voters think and know about political parties, whether it is information about an issue of concern to voters or a trait voters readily associate with a party, all of this information may be construed as party image or the entire universe of mental pictures or representations held by voters about political parties.

One of the keys to unveiling what mental pictures weigh most to voters in their representations of party image – be it style, substance, or other factors – is an understanding of how voters process information. From a cognitive psychology standpoint, individuals are not motivated to deliberatively process most of the information they encounter. Instead, people tend to use shortcuts or rules of thumb with which to make inferences; shortcuts such as “candidate A is a Democrat, so she must support welfare spending” or “all things being equal, Republican candidates are anti-gun control.”

Petrocik's (1996) issue ownership theory explores how issue handling reputations held by political parties can be used by voters as heuristics with which to make inferences about Republican and Democratic candidates' abilities to handle a variety of issues. Take the issue of minority rights, for example. As a political issue, voters perceive minority rights to be "owned" by the Democratic party (please see Petrocik for each party's issue ownership list); meaning that, all things being equal, voters tend to perceive Democratic candidates as better able to handle minority rights issues than Republican candidates. Issue ownership perceptions help shape voters' evaluations of candidates – and in the particular case of minority rights, Democratic candidates would be the ones who would likely benefit.

Another set of shortcuts applied by voters to evaluate candidates (a set that is related to voters' perceptions of issue ownership) has to do with the traits voters are more likely to associate with Republicans and Democrats. In this respect, traits can be viewed as the default style or image voters attach to candidates from the Republican and Democratic parties. Hayes (2005) describes this as "trait ownership." In terms of trait ownership, "leadership" and "morality" are traits more often linked to Republican candidates while "compassion" and "empathy," for example, are more often associated with Democratic candidates (Hayes, 2005).

The next section provides a more detailed overview of the theories of issue and trait ownership. These theories play an instrumental role at informing us about the role of political parties in voting behavior. Their insights will serve to strengthen the application of brand concepts to the context of political parties and the development of

a model of party equity. A discussion of how these theories contribute to the development of the proposed model is included after they have been presented.

### Issue Ownership Theory

According to issue ownership theory (Petrocik, 1996), voters are influenced by a party's reputation for better handling certain issues over others. In the context of American politics, the reputations of the Republican and Democratic parties are aligned as follows: Republicans are generally seen as better able to handle matters related to defense, taxes, and social norms (e.g., family values) whereas Democrats have a stronger reputation for dealing with issues of social welfare (e.g., healthcare, education) and social group relations (e.g., civil rights). In issue ownership theory terminology we would say then that each party *owns* the issues around which they have built more solid reputations. Because of these reputations, issue ownership theory predicts and research data indicates that candidates who are successful at making their party's "owned" issues salient in the minds of voters will hold an advantage in relation to candidates from the opposing party. As such, candidates attempt to set election issue agendas in accordance to their party's issue handling reputations (Petrocik, Benoit, Hansen, 2003).

Issue ownership theory is built upon the notion that voters utilize shortcuts or rules of thumbs to make voting decisions. This means that instead of employing all the available information about candidates and their parties, voters rely on a few key pieces of information from which to form their opinions (Downs, 1957; Popkin 1991; Rahn, 1993). The notion of heuristics or shortcuts was first introduced in the context of voting

by Anthony Downs (1957) who contended that voters possess few incentives to gather information about politics and therefore rely on cues such as party identification to make their political judgments. In the context of issue ownership theory, a party's history of concern for and success at dealing with certain issues works as a heuristic. As such, voters tend to make use of an issue ownership heuristic to evaluate whether issues of their concern will be best handled by Democratic or Republican candidates (Abbe et al., 2003; Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; Petrocik, 1996).

Hence, according to issue ownership theory an effective strategy for political campaigns would be to attempt to affect salience of the voters' issue agendas toward ownership issues. Such strategy fits in with the notion, first articulated in agenda setting theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), that media content is not effective at changing what people think (i.e., people's *opinions* about issues) but at changing what people think *about* (i.e., what *issues* they think about) . Coupled with issue ownership theory and translated to fit the context of political campaigns this classic agenda setting statement would mean that campaigns are less effective at persuading voters to adopt specific issue positions and more effective at priming the issues with which voters evaluate the suitability of candidates. Because of this, campaigns compete to define the political race in terms of issues owned by their respective parties in order to maximize the advantages related to their parties' issue handling reputations.

Research by Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen (2003) confirms the tendency for political campaigns to emphasize "owned" issues and the advantages that such emphasis confers. The authors conducted an examination of presidential campaign

materials from 1952 to 2000 and found that Democratic-owned issues were most often referenced by Democratic candidates while Republican candidates were responsible for most references to GOP-owned issues (2003). In addition, using data from the National Election Study to gauge voters' issue concerns, the authors found a credible correlation (.74) between campaign issue focus and public salience of issue concerns, such that, for example, when GOP-owned issues held greater salience over Democratic-owned issues, voters' concerns tilted in favor of issues owned by the GOP. More importantly, the findings from the study suggested that issue salience predicted votes toward the candidate whose party owned the issue or set of issues that were most salient in the public agenda.

Findings from Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) and Abbe et al. (2003) corroborate with results from Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen's (2003) study by indicating that campaigns benefit from a focus on ownership issues. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) conducted experiments designed to test the impact of political ad messages featuring the issue of crime – a Republican-owned issue – and unemployment – a Democratic-owned issue. They found that congruence between ad party sponsorship and issue ownership was effective at changing audience's voting preference and candidate policy position ratings (i.e., how effective voters believed candidates were at tackling the issue featured in the ad). Or in other words, when exposed to a message from a Democratic candidate featuring a Democratic-owned issue – unemployment – viewers' voting preference was more likely to shift toward the Democratic candidate. Similarly, findings from Abbe et al. (2003) indicated that “when a candidate and voter agree on

what is the most important issue in the election, the voter is more likely to vote for that candidate if that candidate's party owns the issue" (2003, p. 419).

According to Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994), the effectiveness of messages featuring issues that are owned by the sponsor's party rests primarily on two psychological premises. The first is the notion of "confirmatory bias" which holds that people are more receptive to messages that confirm existing stereotypes (Rahn, 1993). In that vein, research conducted by Rahn (1993) on the role of partisan stereotypes in information processing suggests that these stereotypes exert considerable influence on voters' perceptions of candidates. The second premise rests on the common finding in information processing research that credible sources are more persuasive (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). This is to say that, for instance, when a Republican candidate delivers a message on a Republican-owned issue (e.g., family values), the message will find less resistance among the voting public than when a Democratic candidate delivers the same message.

#### Trait Ownership Theory

In his development of trait-ownership theory (the precepts of which are built from issue-ownership theory), Hayes (2005) found that candidates who are perceived to "own" their party-related traits plus traits "owned" by the opposing party held an advantage in relation to their opponents. Like issue-ownership, Hayes argues, party traits arise from each party's reputation for better handling a certain set of issues. Hence, Republicans are generally perceived to be strong leaders and moral (trait reputations which arise from a Republican concern over issues such as defense and

social morals) and Democrats to be compassionate and empathetic (trait perceptions stemming from a Democratic concern over issues of such as social welfare and civil rights).

Aside from Hayes' findings on the advantages held by candidates who successfully trespassed into opposing party trait territory, no other studies have been published on the effects of trait ownership on candidate perceptions, campaign effects, and other types of electoral behavior outcomes. However, it seems clear that voters hold associations between political parties and traits and use these traits to draw inferences about political candidates.

#### The Link Between Ownership Theories and Party Equity

What research findings in both issue and trait ownership studies suggest is that voters' beliefs regarding political parties affect voting behavior. In essence, this means that political parties possess a value that stretches beyond their basic function in the political system as organizers of political/ideological factions and of political campaigns. This residual value political parties possess, which here we call party equity, is the subject of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 4.

### A voter-based model of party equity

#### Why equity?

*“Brand equity should be an important research domain in marketing because it is considered the composite of important consumer behavior variables such as brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand associations”*

*Ross, 2005, p. 23*

Of all brand concepts one could apply to the study of political parties in the context of voting behavior, why start with the concept of equity? Why not begin by applying more easily identifiable concepts such as brand image or loyalty? It is argued here, as it is elsewhere (Aaker, 1996; Ross, 2005), that equity stands in the unique position of being the composite of key brand concepts, of which some of the most important were presented in chapter 2, namely brand awareness, identity, image, loyalty and personality. Hence, the application of brand equity enables us to automatically introduce other key brand concepts to the study of political parties. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to specify, through the development of a voter-based model of party equity, the elements and the process that constitute equity applied to the context of political parties.

The model is an attempt at conceptualizing the elements that constitute party equity. Party equity is defined as the added value an entity yields by being associated to a particular political party. Party equity is based on the reputations that parties build over

time (Petrocik, 1992). These reputations are formed by the kinds of information individuals receive from the political party itself, the media and other sources of information that are not controlled by the political party, and direct-individual experience. Additional factors that play a role in terms of how party equity is shaped are individual differences such as race, gender, one's level of political knowledge, and party loyalty.

#### Elements of party equity

Returning to the brand equity models presented in chapter 2, we saw that brand equity was the result of brand awareness, loyalty, perceived quality, and associations (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, 2001; Ross, 2006)<sup>3</sup>. In keeping with these models, while adapting them to the context of political parties, brand awareness and associations are construed here as forming *voter-based party equity*; that is, brand equity applied to the study of the role of political parties in voting behavior. Likewise, in order to keep terminology straightforward, the model will follow this simple rule: the word “brand” will be substituted by the word “party.” The justification for this substitution is founded on the very argument around which the proposed model is developed: that brands and political parties serve similar functions by providing individuals with *synthesis of meaning* which helps voters/consumers retrieve, process, and store information.

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<sup>3</sup> Although Aaker's model (1991) includes, along with brand awareness and associations, brand loyalty and perceived quality as assets of brand equity, they are different types of brand associations and were only included in Aaker's model separately because of their special roles in developing equity for commercial brands.

As we saw in chapter 2, Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991) have developed two of the most prominent models of brand equity. Other models are usually adaptations of one of these two models. Likewise, the party equity model proposed here is an adaptation of earlier models: Aaker's (1991) brand equity model, Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity model and a model based on Keller's, Ross' (2006) spectator-based brand equity model. The usefulness of these models comes from Aaker's focus on brand loyalty, Keller's detailed specification of the role of brand awareness and associations as key drivers of brand equity, and Ross' insights on how the brand equity concept can be applied to a context outside the realm of consumer products; one that shares many parallels with that of politics, the context of sports. Let's turn to an examination of some of the core parallels between the context of politics and sports before moving on to a detailed explanation of the voter-based party equity model.

End-consumers of sports and of politics (i.e., voters) have similar experiences within each respective context. This happens because individual experience of politics and sports are mediated; meaning that voters and sports fans tend to rely on media such as newspapers, TV news programs, magazines, and radio shows, for information about the happenings in politics and sports. Likewise, in both these contexts the "goods" transferred from marketers (marketers in sports = sport teams, marketers in politics = political parties/candidates) to fans and voters are akin to service goods. The literature distinguishes services from other types of goods by outlining four unique characteristics

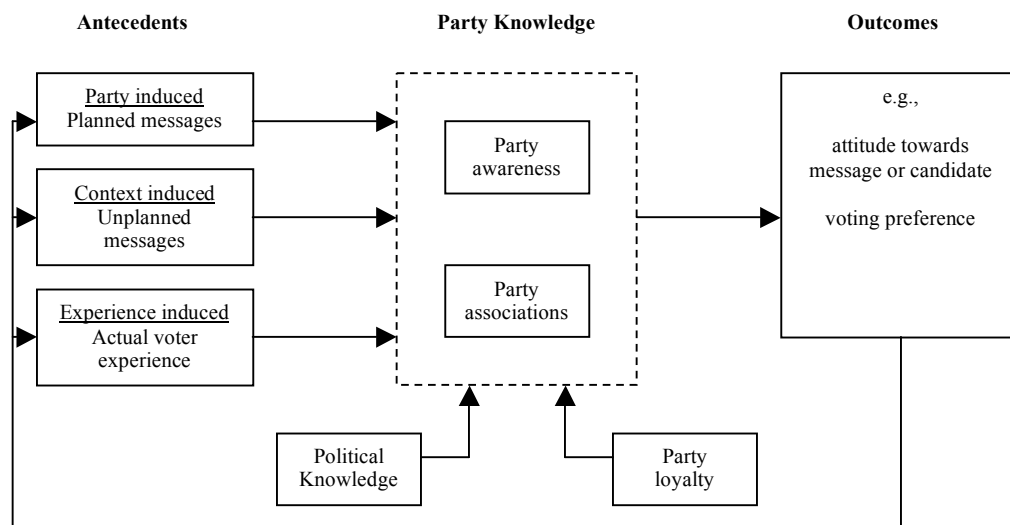
of services, denoted through the acronym SHIP: Simultaneity, Heterogeneity, Intangibility, and Perishability (Iacobucci, 1998).

Simultaneity (the S in SHIP) refers to the inseparability of production and consumption in a services context. The implication of simultaneity is that services cannot be accumulated, such that it is impossible to build a ready supply. For instance, it is impossible for a party to build a ready supply of memorable moments in which its politicians deliver messages supporting policies that both further the reputation and affirm the identity of the party. Likewise, in politics, process is what matters most and political processes deliver goods that are heterogeneous, intangible, and perishable (the H, I, and P in SHIP). There is a lack a consistency or homogeneity with respect to outcomes delivered by political goods. For instance, political parties and its politicians cannot always support and deliver on policies that are congruent with the expectations voters attach to the party. Furthermore, political results are never the same. Also, as it has been noted above, political goods cannot be stored for later delivery – as the political process changes, so do the ideas, policies, and decisions that move that process along, thereby making intangible and perishable the goods delivered by political parties and their politicians.

Given some of the crucial parallels between the context of sports and politics, the model herein proposed has been derived primarily from Ross' (2006) spectator-based brand equity model. It is composed of three basic components: antecedents to party equity, voter-based party equity, and outcomes of party equity. The proposed model also contains a feedback loop which denotes the influence of party equity outcomes on

party equity's antecedents (please see figure 4.1 below). In the remainder of the chapter, the dimensions that constitute each of the three basic components of the model will be presented. Chapter 5 finishes the presentation of the model by providing a theoretical account of how it works and hypotheses designed to test the model.

### Figure 4.1 A Voter-Based Model of Party Equity



### Party Knowledge as Voter-Based Party Equity

Voter-based party equity refers to the value that a particular political party contains as reflected in voters' responses to information encountered about the party. Recall from chapter 2 that Keller (1993) defines customer-based brand equity as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of a

brand” (1993, p. 2). This means that, conceptually, equity is the yield accrued by marketers from the knowledge (e.g., familiarity, beliefs and attitudes) consumers possess about a branded product, service, or idea. In the context of political parties this means that equity is the value – positive or negative – that is extracted by a political party from voters’ awareness, loyalty, and beliefs and attitudes (associations) about the party. This notion parallels the theories of issue and trait ownership (Petrocik, 1996; Hayes, 2005) which hold that voters’ responses to party messages are influenced by what voters perceive to be the reputation of a party with respect to a party’s issue-handling abilities and personality traits. Research on the effects of issue-ownership, for example, suggest that known political parties carry a “baggage,” what we call *party equity* - the sum of voters’ knowledge about a party – that impact voters’ responses to messages from, about, or related to a political party (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994).

Party equity’s antecedents will be introduced before we address the specific elements that constitute voter-based party equity. These antecedents are classified as party induced, context induced, and experience induced. They reflect what Hart (1998) views as the main players in the political communication context: political elites, the media, and the public. The next section offers an explanation for each of these antecedents.

### Antecedents to Voter-Based Party Equity

Party Induced Antecedents. Recall from the discussion in chapter 2 that brand identity refers to “the unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to

create or maintain” (Aaker, 1996, p. 68). The brand identity construct is closely associated to party induced antecedents for they too reflect messages that a party controls and communicates about itself. In Duncan and Moriarty’s (1999) “integration triangle” - a model used to explain the movement of brand messages from marketers to media and to consumers - such messages are referred to as *planned messages*. Planned messages are part of the larger political party marketing mix which consists of the political *product* – classified by Wring (2002) as party image, leader image, and manifesto (sets of issues and policy positions that parties and candidates support), *promotion* - information from the party/candidate that circulates in the media and among voters; it can be paid (e.g., political advertising) or free (e.g., publicity), *place* - the effort of “getting the vote out” and the distribution of campaign messages at a grassroots level, and *price* - the cost of voting to the voter (Wring, 2002).

Advertising messages are one of the most important ways through which political candidates communicate to voters. Ads are commonly thought of as 30 second TV spots, but political advertising includes other types of campaign communication such as direct mail and candidate websites (Puopollo, 2001). The importance of the Internet in political campaigning, in particular, increased substantially from the 2000 to the 2004 presidential campaign (Weaver and Drew, 2001, Drew and Weaver, 2006) and the trend is expected to continue. Given the newness of this trend, however, research on the effects of political campaigning in the Internet are few, however, findings indicate that exposure to campaign messages via the web do influence voter attitudes toward candidates (Hansen and Benoit, 2005; Kaid, 2003).

Context Induced Antecedents. In Henneberg's (2002) conceptualization of political marketing, there are two primary electoral players: political contestants (parties and candidates) and eligible voters. The media (newspapers, magazines, TV news programs, radio talk shows, etc) are viewed as intermediaries in exchanges between political elites and voters (see table 4.1 below). Within the realm of party equity's context induced antecedents, the media are seen as primary actors given their key role in filtering and communicating party-related information to voters (Roberts and McCombs, 1994). Context induced antecedents also entail the production and communication of party-related information that is uncontrolled and unpaid for by political parties (i.e., *unplanned messages*). Further, context induced antecedents are especially important in light of research findings, such as Druckman's (2001) on framing effects, that suggest individuals are more likely to trust a message when they perceive the source of the message as unbiased. As a general rule, advertising and other types of marketing communication (i.e., *planned messages*) provide inherently biased information designed to increase the short and long-term profitability (in the case of politics, "political capital") for the sponsor of the message.

**Table 4.1 Players and Exchanges of the Political Market**

Primary players	Political parties, candidates, and voters
Secondary players	The media, political activists, interest groups, donors, opposition
Currency of primary exchange	The vote
Currencies of secondary exchanges	Donations, volunteering, unplanned messages (e.g., word of mouth, news stories, op-eds, blogs)



Experience Induced Antecedents. Experience induced antecedents refer to voters' direct experience with a party (e.g., via volunteering) and/or party candidates (e.g., attending a campaign rally) and voters' life experiences which help shape one's view of the world, including that of political parties. This variable encompasses classic findings in political behavior studies (Campbell et al. 1960) that point to the importance of early life experiences as key determinants of one's political views.

Our tendency is to perceive information obtained through direct experience as more credible than information acquired via the mass media or from other secondary sources (Duncan and Moriarty, 1997). Hence, experience induced antecedents are believed to play a crucial role in the development and shaping of voters' views of political parties. Next, we take a look at the most important components constituting these views: party awareness and associations. They are the drivers of voter-based party equity.

#### Voter-Based Party Equity: The Components of Party Knowledge

Party Awareness. Brand awareness is defined as “the strength of a brand's presence in the mind of the consumer” (Ross, 2006, p. 30)<sup>4</sup>. Brand awareness is the stepping-stone from which brand associations are formed. Here, the concept is changed to fit the context of political parties and referred to as party awareness. It can be said that most American voters display high levels of party awareness as reflected in their ability to recognize and recall the two major parties in the American political system: the Republican and the Democratic Parties. Party recognition refers to one's ability to

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<sup>4</sup> Aaker's (1996) definition of brand awareness is also provided on Table 2.2 in chapter 2.

recognize the name of a political party upon seeing it. Party recall refers to one's ability to name a party when asked to remember names of political parties in general. In political systems where the number of political parties is large, party awareness levels probably do not fair as high as in the United States.

Party Associations. Brand associations are the main drivers of brand equity. Brand associations encompass the thoughts and feelings that arise in the minds of consumers as a result of a brand being recalled (Keller, 1993). Translated to fit the context of political parties, *party associations* form the entirety of the perceptions (thoughts and feelings) that come to a voter's mind when a party name is retrieved from memory and recalled; for example, as a result of a voter being exposed to a political ad by a candidate from a party the voter can identify.

Recall from the discussion on brand equity models in chapter 2 that Keller (1993) classifies brand associations according to their level of abstraction as, attributes, benefits, and attitudes. It is argued here that this categorization can be applied to party associations. Here is an explanation of how party associations divided into attributes, benefits, and attitudes fit the context of political parties: party attributes reflect functional characteristics of political parties which include a party's role in the political system and services provided to party members, constituents, and the general public (Wring, 2002). Party attributes also include ideas voters have about a party that go beyond a party's functional characteristics, such as party personality and the stereotypical image voters have of party members and politicians. Party benefits refer to the personal value voters attach to a political party or what voters believe a political

party can do for them. Finally, party-related attitudes reflect a voter's overall evaluations (attitudes) of a party and its candidates.

It is believed here, as it is elsewhere (Biel, 1992; Capella et al. 2001), that beliefs and attitudes affect behavior. In a voter-based party equity model, party awareness and associations are believed to impact a number of voting behavior outcomes. Some of the most important are addressed in the section below regarding the outcomes of the model.

### The Role of Party Loyalty and Political Knowledge

Party Loyalty. As we saw in chapter 3, party identification (party ID) is an important determinant of voting behavior. Party ID also plays a role in how and to what extent people are persuaded by political messages (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944). Research indicates that individuals are more likely to attend to messages with which they agree and to ignore or dismiss messages otherwise (Klapper, 1960; Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield, 1949). When highly involved (party loyal individuals are presumed to respond in a more involved manner to political messages than other individuals) with the message's content, people are more likely to pay attention to the message, but less likely to be persuaded (Zaller, 1992) – in essence, highly involved individuals are more likely to counter-argue when a message goes against what they already believe (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Therefore, the voter-based model of party equity predicts that those who are loyal to a party are less likely to be persuaded by a candidate's message from an opposing party, regardless of message content. In essence, the model predicts that the equity political parties hold for loyal

voters is polarized – highly positive towards the party to which they are loyal and highly negative towards opposing parties. Hence, to party loyal individuals, what a candidate says or does (the content of a political message) is of little consequence. What matters is the political party affiliation of message's source, which serves as the most important cue to party loyal individuals as to whether the message source and the message itself are credible or not. Hence, the model presumes that party knowledge is built and solidified in the direction of a person's loyalty (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) In the branding literature, loyalty is treated as both a determinant of brand equity and as an outcome of brand equity. To depict this in the model, party loyalty is drawn to the right side of party knowledge, closer to the outcomes of party equity (see figure 4.1 above); that is, party loyalty is both an influence on how information from, about, or related to a political party is processed and an outcome of party equity in that party loyalty can be strengthened or weakened depending on how the information received is processed.

Political Knowledge. In Zaller's (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample model, individuals form and express political opinions through a process that consists of four basic axioms: reception, resistance, accessibility, and response. Political awareness – i.e., knowledge political matters - figures as an important component in the process in that, depending on their level of political knowledge, individuals are more or less likely to receive and accept political information. Those who are highly politically aware tend to be exposed more often to political messages than individuals with low political knowledge (the logic is of course that the highly aware tend to be more interested in politics and thus exposed to more political information). However, individuals with

high political awareness are harder to persuade than those with low awareness. In essence, cognitive engagement with a message, as studies using the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion also point out (see Petty, Priester, and Brinol, 2002, for a review), leads to counter-arguing if the message is contradictory to what an individual already knows or if cues in the message lead one to infer that the message may not be credible.

Political interest is also an integral part of what and how much one knows about political parties. Therefore we expect those who know more about political matters to respond differently than the less politically knowledgeable to messages from, about, or related to a political party. To depict this (see figure 4.1 above) we draw an arrow from the political knowledge box toward the dashed lines surrounding the two elements that constitute party knowledge: party awareness<sup>5</sup> and party associations. Furthermore, political knowledge is drawn to the left side of party knowledge, closer to its antecedents – this is to indicate that political knowledge has a special relationship to the antecedents to party knowledge – based on Zaller’s RAS model, we conceptualize that those with higher levels of political knowledge are more likely to be exposed to the antecedents of voter-based party equity; that is, messages from, about, or related to a political party.

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that party awareness and political knowledge are entirely different concepts. We chose to keep the same terms used in the literature to refer to these two concepts.

### Outcomes of Voter-Based Party Equity

Voter-based party equity is linked to a variety of outcomes. They include the consequences stemming from voters' awareness of and associations to a political party. The model of a voter-based party equity hypothesizes that party awareness and associations impact several important voting behavior outcomes, such as voters' attitudes toward a party and party candidates, voting preference, party loyalty<sup>6</sup>, party participation (volunteering), willingness to make donations to a party or party candidates, beliefs related to a party's issue-handling reputation, party personality, etc. Keller (2001) organizes brand equity outcomes in pyramid form to outline the sequence of outcomes leading to ever stronger levels of brand equity; beginning with brand salience (i.e., brand awareness) and ending with consumer-brand resonance (i.e., brand loyalty). With respect to party equity, outcomes can be organized according to dependent variables specified by several theoretical models including agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1973) - salience, reasoned-action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) – behavioral intention, receive-accept-sample model (Zaller, 1992) and the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984) - persuasion, and brand-consumer relationships (Fournier, 1998) – loyalty. These theoretical models ascribe special roles to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, some of which have been mentioned above (e.g., attitudes toward a party/candidate, voting preference, party-related beliefs (e.g., issue-ownership), belief salience, and party loyalty). The next chapter specifies the role

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<sup>6</sup> Mirroring Aaker's (1996) brand equity model, party loyalty is considered to be both an element of party knowledge and a party equity outcome,. Like Aaker, we believe loyalty to be a crucial construct; particularly in the political context, where partisanship and partisanship strength (i.e., party loyalty) bears a direct effect on the manner in which individuals responds to political messages (Chang, 2003; Franz and Ridout, 2005).

of these theoretical constructs in the context of voter-based party equity more clearly and offers hypotheses with which to test them.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Testing the Model

*Party Equity: the added value an entity yields by being associated to a particular political party*

As it has been argued throughout this dissertation, political parties, like brands, can be construed as symbols that embody multiple meanings. In the voter-based party equity model, the sum of these meanings is referred to as party knowledge and formed by a confluence of two main factors, party awareness and party associations. Meaning is at the core of our conceptualization of parties as brands and of party equity; that is, we assume that, like brands, party-related meanings have inherent value given that, for example, voters have been found to use what they know about political parties to make inferences about (Rahn, 1993) and evaluations of (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994) political candidates. Party awareness and associations can be explained through associative link models that describe how knowledge is stored in and retrieved from the brain (Anderson, 1983; Wyer and Srull, 1989). Fitting with these models, party knowledge would be described as bits of information voters possess about or in relation to a political party. Associative link models view semantic memory or knowledge as consisting of sets of nodes and links. A node is a bit of information stored in the brain. Links connect various nodes at differing strengths so that when a node is activated, other nodes connected to the activated node are retrieved; the order of activation depending on the strength of association between the nodes. For example, when the



node “Democratic Party” is activated in the mind of a voter, a node standing for “Bill Clinton,” if strongly associated with the “Democratic Party” node, might be subsequently activated. Node activation is conducted through a process Collins and Loftus (1975) call “spreading activation.” The extent of spreading activation depends on node associations and the strength between these associations. Associative link theories ascertain that what and how information nodes are stored in these associative-link networks affects the manner in which individuals subsequently decode and store information.

Accordingly, one of the key assumptions around which the voter-based party equity model is built is that what people know about a party (i.e., a person’s cognitive representation of a political party, including one’s attitudes regarding the party) has value and that this value – called party equity – affects the manner in which voters respond to messages about or related to a political party. This notion is embedded in the very definition of brand equity, which Keller (1993) defines as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of a brand” (1993, p. 1). Translated to fit the political party context, equity would be the differential effect of party knowledge (i.e., awareness, loyalty, and associations) on voter response to the marketing of a party. The voter-based party equity model stretches this definition to include voters’ responses to any type of message about or related to a political party, be it from the party itself (e.g., marketing/campaign messages), the media (e.g., news), or from direct voter experience (please refer to figure 5.1 for an overview of party equity’s antecedents).

In chapter 3, we saw that research on issue-ownership suggests that people's beliefs concerning a party's issue handling abilities affect the manner in which individuals respond to political messages (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994). Research findings also suggest that election results tend to favor parties whose associations match the issues voters find to be the most important (Petrocik, Benoit, Hansen, 2003). Furthermore, survey data indicates that it is advantageous for candidates to display personality traits "owned" by the opposing party in addition to traits owned by one's own party (Hayes, 2005). The idea that these findings reinforce is that what voters know about a political party affects, among other voting behavioral outcomes, how voters respond to political messages.

Recall that the basic assumption behind the idea of parties-as-brands is that political parties are entities of meaning. Meaning, as conceptualized in the branding literature, adds value to products in that it affects a company's efforts at marketing them. We assume the same is true for political parties. Literature on party image (Rahn, 1993; Philpot, 2007) and issue and trait ownership (Petrocik, 1992; Hayes, 2005) indicates that individuals hold stable and specific associations to the Democratic and Republican parties. Because we are studying party equity in the context of the American political system, we assume equity for each of these parties as a given. The task of our study is then to examine the kinds of meaning that yield less or more equity to each one of the parties. In the present study, we test the equity related to the meaning voters associate to the Republican and Democratic parties in the context of party personality. The concept of party personality is the subject of the next section.

### Sources of Party Equity: The Role of Party Personality

The proposed model views political parties as bundles of meaning that help shape how voters process, retrieve, and store political information. It presupposes that voters' cognitive representations of a political party (what is called here party knowledge) filter voter response to messages from, about, or related to a political party. Such cognitive representations make up the value or equity that parties possess among voters. While the research question addresses whether such conceptualization does indeed apply to the context of political parties, subsequent and more sophisticated hypotheses intended to test the model's assertions should attempt to address the specific roles played by different components of party knowledge on equity outcomes. It is proposed here that we begin by examining the role of party personality.

Based on brand equity models, the model of voter-based party equity proposes that equity emerges from mainly three factors: voters' awareness or familiarity with a political party and party associations. In the context of brands, Keller (1993) classifies associations in terms of the attributes, benefits, and attitudes consumers have/perceive in relation to a brand. Among the associations classified under the rubric of attributes there figures one of the most widely studied topics in branding research: brand personality.

Like other types of attributes, personality is a source of equity for brands. Numerous studies have delved into whether consumers perceive brands to have human-like traits, whether such traits can be organized into a stable set of trait dimensions, a so-called "brand personality" (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 1985, 2000), and the role of a

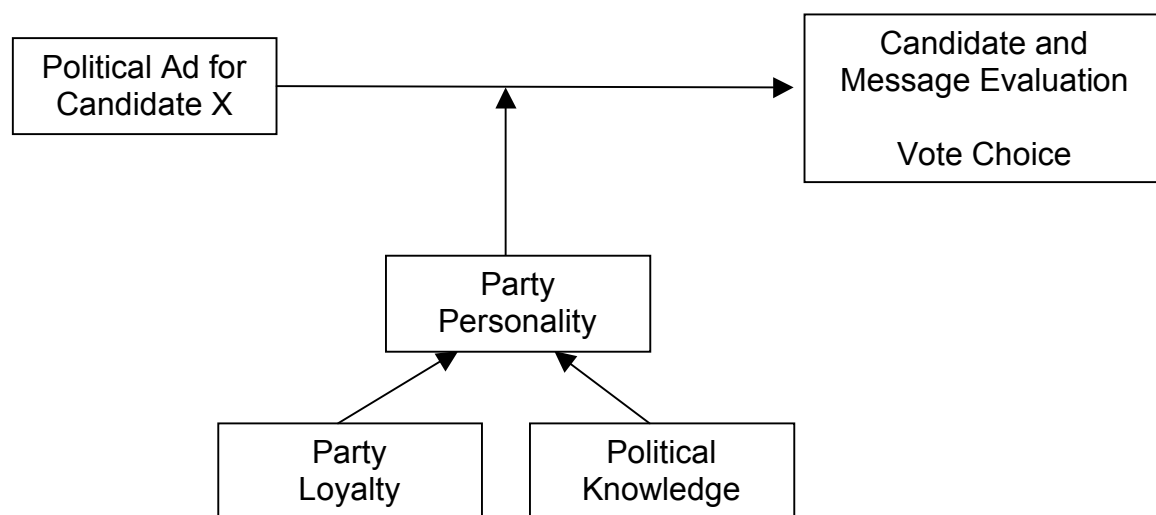
brand's perceived personality traits in building and maintaining brand equity. Research findings suggest that consumers do indeed perceive brands as holders of human-like traits; traits such as adventurous, independent, creative, funny, tough, etc. (Aaker, 1997; Wee, 2004). Furthermore, based on studies of human personality and findings from her own research, Aaker (1997) found brand personality to be a construct consisting of 5 broad trait dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. In addition, brand personality has been found to figure prominently in how consumers perceive brands as well as in consumers' feelings toward brands and in consumer-brand relationships (Aaker, Fournier, and Adam, 2004; Freling and Forbes, 2005).

To date, no study has examined whether the concept of personality can be applied to political parties. In his trait-ownership theory, Hayes (2005) argues that the public perceives and even comes to expect political candidates to display traits based on candidate party affiliation. Hayes' findings suggest that Republican candidates are more often associated with traits such as "moral" and "strong leader" and Democratic candidates with traits such as "compassionate" and "empathic." Trait-ownership theory implies that political parties do possess personality-like traits and that voters' perceptions of these traits affect the manner in which voters respond to political candidates. It is argued here that party personality is the confluence of personality traits a party "owns" or the set of traits politicians associated with the party are expected to display and possess. In addition, we assume that party personality is an integral part of the equity political parties possess such that party equity emerges in part from public

perceptions of the traits that constitute a party's personality. Another assumption is that messages which reinforce a party's personality traits, like messages that reinforce a party's reputation with respect to its candidates' ability to deal with certain issues rather than others (issue-ownership), yield more favorable party equity outcomes (e.g., more positive ad and candidate attitudes) than messages that feature personality traits less closely associated with the party.

Below (Figure 5.1) is a simplified and testable version of the voter-based model of party equity. It isolates the mediating role of party personality - as a specific aspect of party knowledge – on the impact of a political ad (planned message) on party equity outcomes such as candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and voting intention. The model predicts that people's commonly held views with respect to the personality of a political party will affect their response to a political ad.

**Figure 5.1 Simplified Model of Voter-Based Party Equity**



## Testing the Effects of Party Personality on Party Equity in the Context of Campaign Messages

The model of voter-based party equity ascertains that what voters know about a political party - including voter perceptions of a party's personality - affects the manner in which voters respond to information from, about, or related to a political party. That is why the model is divided into three components; the assumption is that its intermediary component, party knowledge (composed of party awareness and associations), plays a mediating role in the relationship between party equity's antecedents and outcomes.

The model specifies three antecedents to party equity: party induced (planned messages), context induced (unplanned messages), and experience induced (party-related information gathered by voters from direct experience). These antecedents are believed to affect several party equity outcomes including voting preference, voter attitudes toward parties and candidates and willingness to donate to a political campaign. Research findings suggest, however, that effects of exposure to information, be it from information gathered from direct experience or through a mediated message, depend on the schema one possesses regarding the content of the information to which one has been exposed (Allison and Uhl, 1964; Braun, 1999).

Recall that the theoretical underpinnings of the voter-based party equity model rest on associative link theory. The theory states that the manner in which information is organized in the brain (as schema or associative-link structures) affects how we retrieve, decode, and store information. That is, associative link models would suggest

that what one knows about a party works as a standard of comparison when encountering party-related information. Hence, a complete test of the proposed model would entail examining the impact on party equity outcomes of at least one of party equity's antecedents in the context of voters' party knowledge. This could be accomplished, for instance, by testing the impact on party equity outcomes, such as voting preference and attitude towards the candidate, of political ads featuring messages that are either congruent or incongruent with voter perceptions of a party's personality traits.

Research examining the effects of incongruence between what ads communicate about a brand and people's perception of a brand reveal interesting findings. Dahlen et al. (2005) found that, when compared to responses to brand knowledge-congruent ads, incongruent ads obtained lower scores for ratings of ad attitude and ad credibility. Alternatively, they found that brand knowledge-ad incongruence led to more positive brand attitude ratings. The authors' explanation for this seeming inconsistency in the findings was that individuals try to fit new brand information within the context of their established brand knowledge or to dismiss new information as invalid when it cannot be reconciled with existing knowledge. That is why brand knowledge-incongruent ads yield lower attitude and credibility scores than congruent ads. On the other hand, incongruent ads draw more attention to themselves thereby making the brand more salient in the minds of viewers. Consistent with research findings that suggest familiar brands are automatically more positively evaluated than unfamiliar ones (Holden and

Vanhuele, 1999; Janiszewski, 1993), Dahlen et al. (2005) found that being aware of a brand engenders more positive brand attitudes among viewers.

Although no study addressing the effects of party knowledge-ad congruence has yet been conducted, research findings suggest that perceptions of political parties affect voter response to political messages. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) compared the effects of political ads featuring an issue of ownership of a candidate's own party to ads featuring issues of ownership of the opposing party – e.g., an ad for a Democratic candidate about unemployment (Democratic-owned issue) vs. an ad for the same candidate about crime (Republican-owned issue). Although no results were reported for ad attitude and party attitude scores, other measures suggest that voters respond more favorably to ads that confirm voters' notions of party issue-ownership.

Survey data from the 1988 presidential race between Michael Dukakis and George H. W. Bush led Norpoth and Buchanan (1992) to contend that it is futile for candidates to try to trespass into opposing party's issue ownership territory: "voters tend to rely too much on party stereotypes to notice such attempts (at issue-trespassing) and attention to the campaign does little to mitigate that tendency" (p.87). This finding corroborates with previously mentioned evidence from consumer advertising research which suggests that when exposed to a message that contradicts existing brand knowledge, consumers are likely to dismiss the incoming message and to stick to already-held perceptions of the brand (Dahlen et al. 2005).

Thus, a more sophisticated test of the voter-based party equity model's assumptions can be conducted through the application of insights from the theories of issue and trait



ownership. More specifically, this test could build on previous research findings on issue-ownership (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; Norpoth and Buchanan, 1992) and on the theoretical underpinnings of trait-ownership (Hayes, 2005) to test the effects of party personality congruent vs. incongruent political messages on several party equity outcomes (i.e., message evaluation, candidate evaluation, and voting preference). The assumption to be tested here is that party knowledge does not uniformly affect the manner in which individuals respond to political messages; that is, certain types of party knowledge hold potential for more positive equity than others. Like Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994), it is assumed here that messages featuring “bits of knowledge” that are congruent with respect to a party’s image (or ownership) yield more favorable results for political candidates than messages that are congruent with the reputation of the opposing party. The following hypothesis is offered to test this assumption in the specific context of party personality:

*H1: Exposure to a political message that is congruent with the personality traits of the message’s sponsoring candidate’s party will lead to significantly different outcomes than exposure to a party-personality incongruent message.*

Individual differences can also affect responses to ads that contradict voters’ views of political parties. For instance, research suggests that voter response to political messages depend on variables such as the strength of one’s partisanship or party loyalty (Kaid, 1997). These findings parallel the voter-based party equity model, which assumes that people’s level of loyalty towards a party affects their responses to political messages such that the mediating role of party knowledge is felt less among those who

display low levels of party loyalty. Chang (2003) found evidence that independents and partisans respond differently to political advertisements in that the independents in his study remained largely unaffected while partisans became more polarized as a result of being exposed to political ads.

The influence of party loyalty on party equity outcomes could be predicted through the use of persuasive communication models, such as Zaller's (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample model and Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (1984) (see chapter 4). These models could be used to predict that political messages yield considerably different reactions from individuals who feel strongly about a political party than from "moderates" or those who describe themselves as not-loyal to any particular political party.

The voter-based model of party equity assigns a special role to party loyalty and assumes that party loyalty to have a moderating impact on people's responses to party/party-related messages. Based on this assumption and on the abovementioned findings, the following hypotheses are offered regarding the role of party loyalty on party personality-message congruence:

*H2a: Exposure to a political message, regardless of party personality congruence, will lead to more favorable outcomes among party loyal individuals if the message's sponsoring candidate's party ID is the same as the party with which party loyal individuals identify.*

*H2b: Exposure to a political message, regardless of party personality congruence, will lead to less favorable outcomes among party loyal individuals if the message's sponsoring candidate's party ID is not the same as the party with which party loyal individuals identify.*

Like we have seen in chapter 4, political knowledge (i.e., factual knowledge about political matters) is also an important individual-level difference variable that influences individuals' responses to political messages (Zaller, 1992, Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams, 2004). Zaller's (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample model suggests that the least politically knowledgeable are more likely to change their political positions as a result of exposure to political messages – precisely because those individuals have a limited amount of political information with which filter message content. Likewise, Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams (2004) found political knowledge to be an important moderator of the impact of political ads on persuasion and information seeking, such that political ads had the greatest persuasive impact among the least politically knowledgeable participants. We predict then that the least politically knowledgeable will be more persuaded as a result of being exposed to a political message than that the most politically knowledgeable, however, we hypothesize that effects among the most politically knowledgeable will fluctuate as result of exposure to messages that are congruent vs. in congruent with the party personality of the message's sponsoring candidate, whereas among the least politically knowledgeable effects will not be significantly different with respect to exposure to party personality congruent versus incongruent messages. This hypothesis is based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984) and classic psychological theories such as Balance Theory (Heider, 1958), Cognitive Consistency (Abelson, 1968), and Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1957) which suggest that dissonant information, or information that goes against one's existing cognitive

structure or knowledge, leads to counter-arguing and the need for adjusting information to what one already knows. Hence, we hypothesize that those who are most politically knowledgeable - and who therefore possess more knowledge about political matters – will react in a markedly different manner to messages that are congruent vs. incongruent with a candidate’s party’s personality, whereas party personality congruence/incongruence will not affect those least politically knowledgeable because those individuals do not possess enough information about political matters upon which to base their responses to political messages<sup>7</sup>.

To summarize, we predict that the least politically knowledgeable will be generally more persuaded as a result of being exposed to a political message (Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams, 2004; Zaller, 1992) but will remain largely unaffected with respect to the congruence/incongruence of the personality traits flaunted by a candidate in a political message and the personality traits “owned” by the candidate’s party. Hence, we predict congruent vs. incongruent party personality messages will lead to similar responses among least politically knowledgeable individuals (H3a). We hypothesize, however, that the most politically knowledgeable will respond differently to messages that are party personality congruent versus incongruent (H3b).

*H3a: In comparison to exposure to a party personality congruent message, exposure to a party personality incongruent message will not lead to significantly different outcomes among the least politically knowledgeable.*

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<sup>7</sup> That is why we predict congruent vs. incongruent party personality messages will lead to similar responses among least politically knowledgeable individuals but not among the most politically knowledgeable.

*H3b: In comparison to exposure to a party personality congruent message, exposure to a party personality incongruent message will lead to significantly different outcomes among the most politically knowledgeable.*

## **CHAPTER 6.**

### **Method**

Two pretests and a main study were conducted to address the central research question and test the hypotheses offered in chapter 5 (please refer to Table 6.1 below for a summary of the research question and hypotheses). The hypotheses deal with the specific role of party equity on people's responses to campaign messages. One aspect of party equity will be tested in regards to its impact on specific outcomes (i.e., message evaluation, candidate evaluation, and vote choice): party personality (a type of party association). It is hypothesized that a political message featuring content that is congruent with the personality traits of the featured candidate's party will yield more favorable responses from participants than messages that are incongruent (H1). We will also test the role of two moderating variables. First, we test the hypothesis that participants' party loyalty plays a moderating role on the impact of the political message on people's evaluations of the message, the candidate, and vote choice, in that the effects from exposure to a message featuring content that is congruent versus incongruent with a message's sponsoring candidate's party will be different for participants who are party loyal than for participants who are not party loyal (see H2a and H2b below). Second, we address the moderating role of political knowledge on people's responses to messages that are congruent versus incongruent with the personality traits of the sponsoring candidate's party (see H3a and H3b below).

**Table 6.1 Summary of Research Question and Hypotheses**

H1: Exposure to a political message that is congruent with the personality traits of the message's sponsoring candidate's party will lead to significantly different outcomes than exposure to a party-personality incongruent message.
H2a: Exposure to a political message, regardless of party personality congruence, will lead to more favorable outcomes among party loyal individuals if the message's sponsoring candidate's party ID is the same as the party with which party loyal individuals identify.
H2b: Exposure to a political message, regardless of party personality congruence, will lead to less favorable outcomes among party loyal individuals if the message's sponsoring candidate's party ID is not the same as the party with which party loyal individuals identify.
H3a: In comparison to exposure to a party personality congruent message, exposure to a party personality incongruent message will not lead to significantly different outcomes among the least politically knowledgeable.
H3b: In comparison to exposure to a party personality congruent message, exposure to a party personality incongruent message will lead to significantly different outcomes among the most politically knowledgeable.

The voter-based model of party equity was tested in the following manner: individuals were randomly exposed to a web-based message from a political candidate featuring content that was either congruent with personality traits commonly related to the candidate's own party or congruent with traits commonly related to a competing party. In the present study these two messages were developed to reflect either a Democratic and a Republican Party personality. We measured people's responses to exposure to a Democratic Party personality message featuring a candidate with Democratic Party personality traits that was designated as a Democrat, Republican, or

as an Independent or to a Republican Party personality message featuring a candidate with Republican Party personality traits that was designated as a Democrat, Republican, or as an Independent.

Messages featuring an Independent candidate were included for the sake of drawing comparisons among candidate party ID treatments since no control group was used in the design. We did not use a control group because the outcomes of party equity tested were about exposure to a specific candidate and message. This meant that participants would not have been able to answer specific questions about the candidate and message without being exposed to them. Instead, we included an Independent candidate in the treatments as a benchmark for comparisons, although no hypotheses were drawn about the impact of candidates with no party ID on party equity outcomes.

Party loyalty, another component of the model, was tested with respect to its impact on people's responses to party personality congruent versus incongruent messages. The role of people's level of political knowledge was also tested. We expected party loyalty to moderate the effect of congruence between a candidate's party ID and a candidate's party personality traits so that participants who are party loyal would respond differently than those who are not party loyal to exposure to the same political message. The same pattern was expected to occur among the most versus the least politically knowledgeable participants.

Two pretests and a main study were used to address the research question and hypotheses. The pretests were used to build and to test the treatments and measurements that were to be used in the main study (please see Table 6.2 below for a



summary of the steps and goals of pretests one and two and of the main study). The next section addresses these pretests, including the steps involved in conducting each of them and their purpose.

### Pretests

Results from pretests one and two were used as aids in the development of valid experimental treatment conditions for the main study. In the context of the proposed hypotheses, these conditions consisted of two messages; one featuring a candidate who reflected the personality traits “owned” by the Democratic Party and another message featuring a candidate that reflected traits “owned” by the Republican Party. In pretest one, we set out to find what personality traits individuals most strongly associate with each political party. Pretest two tested the messages that were to be used in the main study to ensure that participants would perceived the messages to be communicating either Democratic or Republican Party personality traits. Pretest two also assessed participant’s message comprehension, candidate trait perceptions, and recall of the message’s sponsoring candidate’s party ID. Next, we turn to a more detailed explanation of each of the pretests (please refer to Table 6.2 below for an overview of the purpose and method of the pretests and main study).

**Table 6.2 Overview of Pretests and Main Study**

Stage and Purpose	Method	N
<i>Pretest One: Assessment and Selection of Party Personality Traits</i>		
Purpose: Assess and select traits that individuals associate most strongly with the Republican and Democratic parties		
1. Trait generation Compile pool of traits from those most typically associated with the Republican and Democratic parties (Hays, 2005) as well as traits found in the brand personality literature (Aaker, 1997)	Literature Review	n.a.
2. Assessment of party personality traits Determine what traits are most strongly associated with the Republican and Democratic parties	Survey	119
3. Selection of party personality traits Select traits most strongly associated with the Republican and Democratic parties. Republican trait-congruent and Democratic-trait congruent political messages will be developed around these traits (see description of pretest 2 below)	Evaluation	n.a.
<i>Pretest Two: Development and Testing of Party Personality Congruent Messages</i>		
Purpose: Develop and test political messages individuals perceive as typical of the Republican Party personality versus the Democratic Party personality.		
1. Testing for perceived party personality-message congruence Participants asked to rate the traits they perceive in the candidates featured in the Democratic and Republican Party personality message conditions. Candidate trait ratings have to be congruent with the party personality the message is supposed to communicate.	Survey	220
2. Testing for message comprehension, candidate trait perceptions, and recall of message's sponsoring candidate's party ID  Test messages that have been selected for use in the main study. Ask questions about message comprehension, candidate trait perceptions, and recall of the message's sponsoring candidate's party ID.	Survey	Same participants as above
<i>Main Study: Addressing the main research question and hypotheses</i>		
Purpose: Address main research question and test hypotheses.		
1. Assess the effects of Republican personality and Democratic personality messages featuring candidates with different party IDs on three dependent outcomes: candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice	Survey	590
2. Manipulation check Determine whether participants could recall the party ID of the candidate featured in the message (Republican, Democratic, or Independent)	Survey	Same participants as above

### *Pretest One*

Design: Pretest one consisted of three phases. In phase 1 (see Table 6.2 above), personality traits were compiled from the literature on party trait ownership (Hayes, 2005) and brand personality (Aaker, 1997). In phase 2, we assessed the extent to which individuals perceived the traits compiled in phase 1, traits such as “compassionate,” “family-oriented,” “empathetic” and “traditional” (please refer to the appendix for the complete list of traits), to be associated with the Republican and Democratic parties.

Procedure: Participants were asked to rate, on a scale ranging from extremely descriptive (5) to not descriptive at all (1), how descriptive a specific trait was of the Republican and the Democratic parties. We asked participants to think about each political party then rate it in terms of how well they believed each of personality trait fit in with their overall impressions of the party (for the list of traits used and specific question wordings please see the appendix).

Participants: Participants in phase 2 (N=119) consisted of a convenience sample of undergraduate, graduate and former graduate advertising students from the University of Texas at Austin contacted via email to participate in the pretest. We chose to ask a convenience sample of participants about Republican and Democratic Party personality traits because party-related stereotypes regarding concepts such as issue-ownership and trait-ownership have been found to be stable across individual characteristics (Benoit

and Hansen, 2004; Hayes, 2005; Petrocik, 1992); that is, the Republican Party is perceived by individuals of different ages and socio-cultural backgrounds as having ownership over issues such as taxes, size of government, and crime whereas the Democratic Party is perceived as having “ownership” over issues such as minority rights, healthcare, and unemployment. We believed the same pattern would hold true for party personality trait perceptions.

Data analysis: we analyzed the results gathered in phase 2 by assessing the frequency with which participants assigned each of the traits to the Republican and Democratic parties and whether significant differences emerged with respect to trait ratings given to each of the parties. Our goal was to select the personality traits most frequently associated with the Republican and Democratic parties as well as the traits that received the widest gap in ratings when rated as most descriptively Republican versus most descriptively Democratic. T-tests were conducted to draw comparisons between trait ratings. Messages used in the different treatment conditions of the main study were developed around traits selected as most descriptive of each party.

### *Pretest Two*

Design: In pretest two, messages that reflected Republican and Democratic personality traits were developed and tested. Messages consisted of a campaign webpage for a fictitious candidate. We did not develop campaign messages for

candidates running for specific local political offices because our sample of participants spanned across the United States. We also did not create messages for high-level political races such as the US senate or the presidency because the use of fictitious candidates would have been too obvious. Hence, in order to minimize participants' suspicion over the plausibility or believability of the message, we chose to develop a campaign message for a political candidate running for an office simply described as "Congress".

Treatments: Two webpages were created: one featuring a campaign message for a candidate whose portrayal and description fit typical Democratic personality traits and another featuring a candidate whose portrayal and description fit typical Republican personality traits (please see the Appendices B and C for webpage samples).

Participants: After messages were developed, they were tested among a sample of 220 University of Texas undergraduates recruited via email to participate in a web-based survey. The purpose of this phase of the study was to assess whether messages reflected the hypothesized party personality conditions. Hence, participants were exposed to a message featuring a candidate described in terms of either Republican or Democratic Party personality traits and asked to rate the traits they perceived as most descriptive of the candidate. Candidate trait ratings had to be congruent with the party personality that the message was supposed to communicate. That is how the suitability of the messages to be used in the main study was evaluated.

The secondary purpose of pretest two was to assess participants' message and measurement items' comprehension. Hence, we tested the items purported to measure two of the study's independent variables (party loyalty and political knowledge) and its dependent variables (candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice).

Data analysis: Frequency distributions of each rated traits were analyzed. Traits rated as most descriptive of the candidates were recorded. Our goal was to assess whether participants perceived each candidate – one featured in the Democratic personality message condition and another in the Republican personality message condition - in terms of traits typical of the Democratic and the Republican Party personality. Messages selected for use in the main study were the ones that in fact communicated the party personalities they were purported to.

### Main Study

The overarching purpose of the main study was to assess party equity in the context of participants' responses to political messages that fulfilled or challenged party-related associations. For this study, we assessed the role of party related associations on party equity outcomes in the narrower context of party personality traits.

### *Design*

The study consisted of a between-subjects survey based experimental design. It was used to test the hypotheses regarding the effect of party personality (H1), party loyalty

(H2a and H2b), and political knowledge (H3a and H3b) on three dependent variables: candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice.

In order to minimize the influence of extraneous factors and maximize our ability to draw causal inferences about the impact of hypothesized independent variables on dependent outcomes, participants were randomly assigned to one of six treatment conditions (Message with candidate featuring Republican Party personality traits with Republican, Democratic, or Independent party ID or message with candidate featuring Democratic Party personality traits with Republican, Democratic, or Independent party ID). Also in order to achieve a greater level of control over treatment conditions and outcomes, political campaign messages were developed especially for the experiment and featured fictitious political candidates.

Political messages in the Republican and Democratic Party personality message conditions featured personality traits strongly associated with either one of the parties. In the Republican Party personality message condition, Republican Party personality traits were associated with a candidate featured as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent. In the Democratic Party personality message condition, Democratic Party personality traits were associated with a candidate featured as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of these six treatments conditions. Figure 6.1 below provides a visual representation of the design used in the study.

**Figure 6.1 Design of the Main Study (N=590).**

<i>Party Personality Traits To Be Emphasized in the Message</i>					
<u>Candidate Epitomizing Republican Party Personality Traits</u>			<u>Candidate Epitomizing Democratic Party Personality Traits</u>		
Democratic Candidate (N=97)	Independent Candidate (N=119)	Republican Candidate (N=94)	Democratic Candidate (N=100)	Independent Candidate (N=87)	Republican Candidate (N=93)

### *Participants*

590 participants were recruited from the University of Texas Department of Advertising's Virtual Consumer Research Group to participate in the Web-based experiment. The Virtual Consumer Research Group is an academic, not-for-profit research group focused on understanding consumers. The panel is an opt-in, informed consent, privacy protected "subject pool" for Web-based research experiments and surveys. Most participants were white, female, married, 25 or older, and college educated. 34% of the participants were Democratic while 30% were Republican. In terms of political ideology, 38% of participants were liberal, 25% moderate and 35% conservative. Due to randomization of assignments to treatment conditions, individual characteristics were evenly distributed across treatments. Table 6.3b below shows the distribution of participants across treatments by participants' gender, party ID, and political ideology.



**Table 6.3a: Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the Main Study**

<b>Gender</b>		
	Female	58%
	Male	36%
<b>Race</b>		
	Anglo	79%
	African American	3%
	Hispanic American	5%
	American Asian	2%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
	Single	16%
	Married	60%
	Divorced	7%
<b>Age</b>		
	Under 25	.2%
	25 to 35	18%
	35 to 45	24%
	45 to 60	33%
<b>Education</b>		
	High School or Equivalent	8%
	College graduate	31%
	Master's degree or higher	34%
<b>Household Income</b>		
	Under \$30,000	11%
	\$30,000-\$50,000	18%
	\$50,000-\$75,000	19%
	\$75,000 and above	42%
<b>Party Identification</b>		
	Democrat	34%
	Republican	30%
	Independent	24%
<b>Political Ideology</b>		
	Liberal	38%
	Moderate	25%
	Conservative	35%

**Table 6.3b: Distribution of Participants Across Treatments By Gender, Party ID, and Political Ideology.**

	Gender		Party ID			Political Ideology		
	Female	Male	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
<b>Treatment Condition</b>								
Democratic Party Personality, Democratic Candidate (N=100)	61%	39%	34%	28%	26%	40%	24%	36%
Democratic Party Personality, Republican Candidate (N=93)	62%	38%	33%	31%	25%	32%	31%	37%
Democratic Party Personality, Independent Candidate (N=87)	56%	44%	33%	36%	24%	34%	27%	39%
Republican Party Personality, Democratic Candidate (N=97)	64%	36%	30%	33%	26%	39%	18%	43%
Republican Party Personality, Republican Candidate (N=94)	56%	44%	40%	27%	25%	39%	28%	33%
Republican Party Personality, Independent Candidate (N=119)	67%	33%	37%	30%	24%	46%	24%	30%
<b>All conditions</b>	61%	39%	35%	31%	25%	39%	25%	36%

### *Stimuli*

Participants were exposed to one of six experimental conditions (please see Figure 6.1 above for summary of the design). The stimuli consisted of 2 messages: one featuring a candidate that fit Republican Party personality traits and another featuring a candidate that fit Democratic Party personality traits. In each of these two conditions, candidate party ID was manipulated so that participants saw a message for a Republican, Democrat, or an Independent candidate (please see Appendices B and C for message samples).

Since few studies have explored how political messages work in an online environment, the proposed study consisted of political messages delivered through

webpages (please see discussion on online political campaigning in chapter 4). Messages within each party personality condition (Republican personality or Democratic personality) were identical except with respect to the party ID of the candidate. Participants were exposed to only one message among six possible message treatment conditions.

Although analyses were not run contrasting the effects of exposure to the Republican versus the Democratic Party personality message (analysis were run contrasting the effects of exposure within each message condition), each message condition was designed to be as similar as possible. The typical Republican and Democratic candidates featured in each message differed in age (to portray a core difference in how each party's personality was perceived – Democratic Party as “young” and “contemporary.” Republican Party as “old” and “traditional”) but both were white and featured wearing glasses, a dark suit, white shirt and tie against a neutral background. Only the face and chest of each candidate were shown in the picture. In addition, each message contained an almost equal amount of words (160 words in the Democratic Party personality message and 161 words in the Republican Party personality message). The name of the candidate was the same in the two messages - “Robert Gardner” – graphics, fonts, picture size and every other aspect regarding the look of the messages was kept the same. Pictures of the two candidates were of public domain and taken from the official website of Germany's Christian Democratic Union Party (CDU) to minimize the possibility that participants in the study were already familiar with the candidates shown in the ad. A graphic designer

was hired to retouch the pictures to make them look as presentable and well-executed as possible.

### *Procedure*

The Web-based experimental treatments consisted of two messages, one featuring a candidate typical of a Republican Party personality and another featuring a candidate typical of a Democratic Party personality (please see pretest one above for description of how party personality traits selected). Participants were randomly assigned to one of six treatment conditions (please see study design in Figure 6.1 above), asked to read the contents of the message to which they were assigned, and answer questions about the candidate featured in the message, the message itself, and the participants' political views and demographic information.

### *Cover Story and Manipulation Check*

To guard against “experimental demand” participants were diverted from the real purpose of the study and told that the study was concerned with how effectively political information could be communicated via the web (please see the Appendix A for the main study's introductory page).

To ensure that the manipulation regarding candidate party ID was successful, participants were asked if they could recall the party ID of the candidate featured in the message.

### *Independent Variables*

Party personality traits featured in the message: this independent variable has two levels: a message featuring a candidate portrayed and described in terms of typical Republican Party personality traits and a message featuring a candidate portrayed and described in terms of typical Democratic Party personality traits (please see Appendices B and C for message samples). This variable was designed as a between-subjects factor in that participants were randomly assigned and exposed to only one of the two message conditions.

Candidate party ID: Treatment conditions featured a candidate affiliated with the Republican Party, the Democratic Party or a candidate running as an Independent. A manipulation check was conducted after message exposure to ensure that participants were able to tell whether the candidate whose message they saw was a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent.

Party loyalty: Subject's party loyalty was assessed through feeling thermometer questions probing how warm or cold they felt towards the Republican and the Democratic parties. Responses in the top 25% for each thermometer were coded as high in party affect and used as a proxy for party loyalty. The variable was then correlated with measures of party closeness, party ID, political ideology and voting record (all above  $r=.5$ ) which captured party loyalty with respect to two dimensions, a behavioral dimension which measured participants' voting history and an attitudinal dimension

which assessed participants' party ID and party closeness (Day, 1969; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978).

Political Knowledge: political knowledge was assessed through an index composed of 11 items taken from Matthews and Prothro (1966) and Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams (2004). Factor analysis produced one factor with eigenvalue above 1 (eigenvalue = 3.08) that was used to form the index. The index had a satisfactory Chronbach's reliability  $\alpha$  value assessed at .72. Question items used to assess political knowledge tested participants' general political institutional knowledge such as how long a United States senator serves in one term, which party holds a majority in the US House of Representatives, how many members there are in the United States supreme court and knowledge about conservative and liberal stances on an issue (please refer to the Appendix for a sample of the questions used). Participants were tested for accuracy and each correct answer given was assigned a score of 1. Answers were summed across the 11 items. Although Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams (2004) divided their sample of participants among the least and most politically knowledgeable by dividing scores by the median of the distribution scale, in our sample most participants scored fairly high in the political knowledge scale so that splitting the sample at the median would not reflect substantial differences in terms of participants' political knowledge. To avoid this problem participants who scored in the top 25% were classified as most politically knowledgeable while those in the bottom 25% were classified as least politically knowledgeable. This resulted in an even split of

127 participants classified as least politically knowledgeable and 120 classified as most politically knowledgeable. 191 participants fell in the range of moderate political knowledge, between the bottom and top 25% of political knowledge scores.

**Table 6.4: Questions Used for Measuring Independent Variables**

<p><b>Party Feeling Thermometer Questions</b></p> <p>Using the Feeling Thermometer, how would you rate your feelings towards the Republican (Democratic) Party? Ratings between 50 and 100 mean that you feel favorable and warm towards the Republican (Democratic) Party. Ratings between 0 and 50 mean that you feel unfavorable and cold.</p>
<p><b>Political knowledge Questions</b></p> <p>Do you happen to know how long a United States Senator serves for one term (how many years?)</p> <p>About how long a term do state governors serve?</p> <p>What political party currently holds control over the US House of Representatives?</p> <p>What political party currently holds control over the US Senate?</p> <p>Who currently holds the post of White House Press Secretary?</p> <p>Do you happen to know how many members there are on the United States Supreme Court? How many?</p> <p>Who currently holds the post of US Secretary of Defense?</p> <p>Some people feel that the government should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on his or her own. Where would you place Rudy Giuliani (John Edwards, most conservatives, most liberals) on this scale?</p>

### *Dependent Variables*

Message Evaluation: Measured with three 7-point bipolar adjective pairs adopted from Chang (2003): like/dislike, persuasive/not persuasive, credible/not credible. Factor analysis of the items produced one factor with eigenvalue higher than 1 (eigenvalue=2.70). A message evaluation index (Chronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ) was created from the answers to the three above-mentioned items. Answers were summed and averaged and final scores were used to assess the effects of the message treatments.

Candidate Evaluation: Measured with three 7-point bipolar adjective pairs adopted from Chang (2003), like/dislike, persuasive/not persuasive, credible/not credible and additional items - hones/dishonest, strong/weak, active/passive and warm/cold. Factor analysis of the items produced one factor with eigenvalue higher than 1 (eigenvalue=3.50). A candidate evaluation index (Chronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ) was subsequently created from the answers to the seven above-mentioned items. Answers were summed and averaged and final scores were used to assess the effects of the treatments on candidate evaluation (please see the Appendix for a review of the question wordings for each of the index items).

Vote choice: Measured with a 7-point scale of likelihood to vote for the candidate (Chang, 2003).



**Table 6.5: Questions Used for Measuring Dependent Outcomes of Party Equity**

<p><b>Candidate Evaluation Question Items</b></p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "Cold" and 7 "Warm", how would you rate Gardner?</p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, 0 being "Passive" and 7 "Active", how would you rate Gardner?</p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "Honest" and 7 "Dishonest", how would you rate him?</p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "Strong" and 7 being "Weak", how would you rate him?</p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "Unpersuasive" and 7 "Persuasive", how would you rate him?</p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "I disliked Robert Gardner" and 7 "I liked Robert Gardner", how would you rate your feelings towards him?</p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "Robert Gardner was not credible" and 7 "Robert Gardner was credible", how would you rate him?</p>
<p><b>Message Evaluation Question Items</b></p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "I disliked his message" and 7 "I liked his message", please select the button that best describes your general feelings and impressions about Gardner's message.</p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "His message was not credible" and 7 "His message was credible", please select the button that best describes your general feelings and impressions about Gardner's message.</p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 0 being "His message was not persuasive" and 7 "His message was persuasive", please select the button that best describes your general feelings and impressions about Gardner's message.</p>
<p><b>Vote Choice Question</b></p> <p>On a scale from 0 to 7, with 7 being "Very likely" and 0 "Not likely at all", how likely would you be to vote for Robert Gardner as opposed to the candidate from the competing party?</p>

### *Data Analysis*

Randomization of participants across treatment conditions was successful at minimizing the effect of any one extraneous variable on the dependent outcomes. For this reason, we performed MANOVA to assess the effects of the hypothesized effects of the independent variables on candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice. MANOVA tests were conducted to compare participants' reactions within each condition to exposure to messages sponsored by a Republican, Democratic, or an Independent candidate. That is, in order not to confound the results and test the hypotheses accurately we compared participants' reactions within each of the two party personality message conditions and not across message conditions.

Hence, MANOVA was performed separately for each of the two message conditions (Republican Party personality candidate and Democratic Party personality candidate) to gauge the effects of party ID differences with the message condition on the three dependent variables: candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice.

We also performed planned comparisons between different party ID treatments (Republican versus Democratic, Republican versus Independent, and Democratic versus Independent) whenever significant effects due to party ID treatment differences on the dependent variables were found.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Results

#### Pretest One

The purpose of pretest one was to reveal the kinds of personality traits that are more commonly thought of as Republican or Democratic. Respondents were asked to rate the Republican and Democratic parties according to how well they thought each trait within a list of 39 personality traits fit in with their impressions of the parties. Trait ratings ranged from 1 as “not descriptive” and 5 as “extremely descriptive” of each party. Traits rated at 3.5 or above are listed below in tables 7A and 7B. Traits such as “concerned,” “open,” “contemporary,” “outgoing,” “young,” “empathetic,” and “compassionate” were rated as most descriptive of the Democratic Party personality. “Traditional,” “upper-class,” “old,” “family-oriented,” “proud,” and “masculine” were among traits rated as most descriptive of the Republican Party personality.

**Table 7A: Personality Traits Rated as Most Descriptive of the Democratic Party**

<b>Trait</b>	<b>Mean Score (N= 111)</b>
Concerned	3.97
Open	3.93
Contemporary	3.93
Determined	3.90
Outgoing	3.89
Young	3.88
Spirited	3.84
Empathetic	3.81
Compassionate	3.80
Knowledgeable	3.75

Scores ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being less descriptive and 5 being more descriptive of the political party.

**Table 7B: Personality Traits Rated as Most Descriptive of the Republican Party**

<b>Trait</b>	<b>Mean Score (N=108)</b>
Traditional	4.36
Upper-class	4.27
Determined	4.05
Old	4.04
Proud	4.30
Masculine	3.88
Family-oriented	3.84
Tough	3.62
Successful	3.60
Leader	3.50

Scores ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being less descriptive and 5 being more descriptive of the political party.

According to Plummer (2000) brand personality differences are only meaningful when personality trait comparisons can be drawn between two or more brands. Hence, by comparing how participants rated each party across different personality traits, we can get a better idea as to how well a trait is thought to describe a party in contrast to another. This gets us closer to forming a profile of the kinds of personality traits people relate more to the Democratic versus the Republican Party.

To do this, we ran a series of paired samples t-tests to compare the mean scores that parties obtained for the each of the top ten Republican and Democratic personality traits. Results indicated that each party has distinct ownership of specific traits. All t-tests were significant, except for the trait “knowledgeable,” at the  $p < .001$  level. Please see table below for results.

As we can see from the results displayed on table 7C, “young,” “open,” “contemporary,” “empathetic,” “compassionate,” “outgoing,” and “concerned” were

found to be the personality traits that differentiated the Democratic Party the most from the Republican party. “Traditional,” “upper-class,” “old,” “masculine,” “tough,” and “family-oriented” were found to be the personality traits that differentiated the Republican Party the most from the Democratic Party.

**Table 7C: Paired Samples T-test for Democratic and Republican Party Personality Traits**

<b>Traits</b>	<b>Mean Difference (Republican score minus Democratic Score)</b>	<b>t value</b>
<i>Most Descriptive Democratic Traits</i>		
Concerned	-0.9	-6.63***
Open	-1.76	-12.71***
Contemporary	-1.45	-9.78***
Outgoing	-0.87	-7.31***
Young	-1.75	-13.34***
Spirited	-0.67	-6.27***
Empathetic	-1.13	-7.9***
Compassionate	-1.16	-7.37***
Knowledgeable	-0.37	-2.68**
<i>Most Descriptive Republican Traits</i>		
Traditional	1.90	14.07***
Upper-class	1.38	11.71***
Determined	0.15	1.55***
Old	1.47	10.31***
Proud	.60	5.52***
Masculine	.76	6.34***
Family-oriented	.56	4.05***
Tough	.58	4.16***

\*\*\*p < .0001, \*\*p < .01

Scores ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being less descriptive and 5 being more descriptive of the political party.

### Pretest Two

Based on the findings from pretest one, a political campaign message epitomizing the Democratic Party personality and another epitomizing the Republican Party personality were created (please see Appendices B and C for samples of the messages). To test whether the messages in fact communicated Democratic or Republican personality traits, individuals were asked to read either one of the campaign messages and rank the candidate sponsor of the message according to how well participants thought personality traits used in pretest one were descriptive of the candidate. Results revealed that each of the messages was successful at communicating core Democratic (“compassionate,” “empathetic,” “open”) and Republican party personality traits (“traditional,” “small-town,” “upper-class”). Tables 7D and 7E below show the mean scores for top ranked traits for each one of the two party personality message conditions. Traits that epitomize each party personality did not overlap in the ratings between the two messages. That is, in terms of core Republican and Democratic traits, each message communicated the traits that it purported to while avoiding to communicate core traits owned by the opposing party. Hence, the Democratic Party personality message communicated core Democratic Party personality traits such as “open,” “compassionate,” and “empathetic” while avoiding to communicate core Republican traits such as “traditional,” “upper-class,” and “family-oriented.” The same pattern was true for the Republican Party personality message.

**Table 7D: Perceptions of candidate traits - Democratic Party Personality Message**

<b>Trait</b>	<b>Mean Score (N=53)</b>
Hard-working	4.13
Compassionate	3.89
Successful	3.83
Empathetic	3.71
Inspiring	3.70
Leader	3.66
Proud	3.58
Moral	3.58
Open	3.53

Scores ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being less descriptive and 5 being more descriptive of the candidate. Only top-ranked traits listed.

**Table 7E: Perceptions of candidate traits - Republican Party Personality Message**

<b>Trait</b>	<b>Mean Score (N=55)</b>
Traditional	4.46
Religious	4.44
Moral	3.96
Small-town	3.94
Hard-working	3.74
Upper-class	3.73
Leader	3.71
Successful	3.67
Proud	3.60

Scores ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being less descriptive and 5 being more descriptive of the candidate. Only top-ranked traits listed

### Main Study

Two messages were tested (see pretest two section above for detailed explanation about how treatment messages were developed) on participants who saw either a message featuring a candidate whose characteristics matched Democratic Party personality traits or a message featuring a candidate whose characteristics matched Republican Party personality traits. Each message was then manipulated to feature the candidate assigned as a Democrat, Republican, or an Independent. This resulted in six

different treatment conditions: 2 (Democratic Party personality message, Republican Party personality message) x 3 (Democratic candidate, Republican candidate, Independent candidate). Participants were assigned to only one of the six treatment conditions.

Message type had a significant effect on candidate and message evaluations (see figure 7.1 below). The message featuring Democratic Party personality traits obtained more favorable ratings in candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice than the message featuring Republican Party personality characteristics.

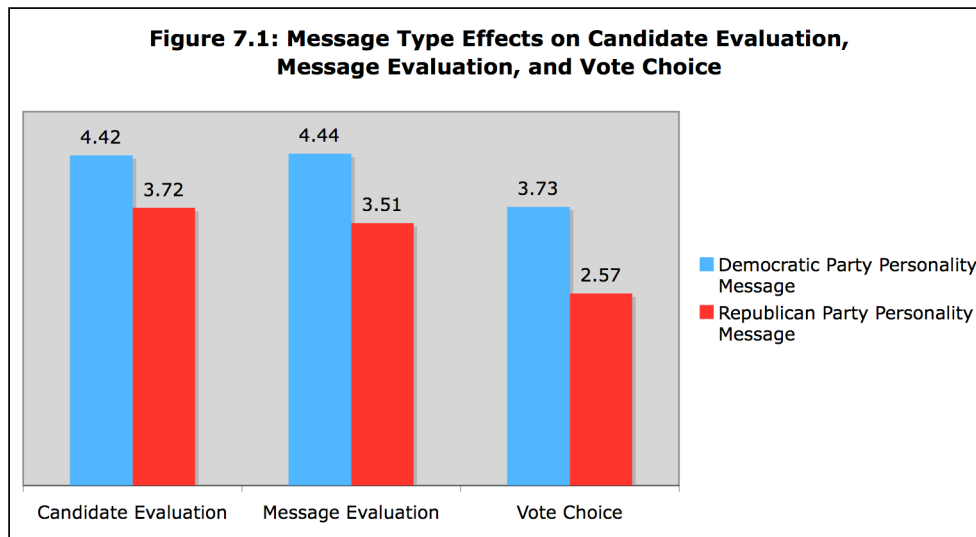
**Table 7.1: Message type effects on candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice**

	<i>Democratic Party Personality Message</i>		<i>Republican Party Personality Message</i>		T
	Mean	N	Mean	N	
<b>Candidate Evaluation</b>	4.42	267	3.72	296	6.38***
<b>Message Evaluation</b>	4.44	272	3.51	301	6.63***
<b>Vote Choice</b>	3.73	274	2.57	301	6.42***

\*\*\*p<.0001

Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.





Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

### ***Results Pertaining to Hypothesis 1***

Hypothesis 1 stated that exposure to a political message that is congruent with the personality characteristics of the message’s sponsoring candidate would lead to significantly different responses than exposure to a party personality-incongruent message. This means that we expected there would be a difference in people’s responses to the same political message<sup>8</sup> when assigned to a candidate that was a Republican, Democrat, or an Independent. With the exception of candidate evaluations in the Republican Party personality condition, ANOVA results showed that differences in candidate party ID did not affect candidate evaluations, message evaluation, and vote choice significantly (please refer to tables 7.2 below).

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<sup>8</sup> As discussed in chapter six, the only difference between messages within each message type (Democratic or Republican Party personality) were the political parties assigned to the candidate.

### *Results Found in Democratic Party Personality Condition*

Within exposure to the message featuring a political candidate epitomizing Democratic Party personality traits, ANOVA results showed that participants did not rate the candidate differently based on candidate party ID differences. That is, candidate evaluation, message evaluation and vote choice ratings did not differ on the basis of candidate party ID so that Democratic, Republican, and Independent candidates under the Democratic Party personality condition were evaluated similarly. Take candidate evaluation ratings for example. Participants' mean ratings for the Democratic, Republican, and Independent candidates were, respectively, 4.42, 4.36, and 4.50; hardly real score differences. The same pattern was true for the other two dependent variables, message evaluation and vote choice.

These results go against what was predicted in H1 and therefore fail to support the hypothesis.

**Table 7.2: The effects of candidate party ID differences on candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice**

	<i>Candidate Evaluation</i>	<i>Message Evaluation</i>	<i>Vote Choice</i>
<b>Democratic Party Personality Condition</b>			
Democratic Candidate (Congruent)	4.42 (N=95)	4.41 (N=95)	3.79 (N=96)
Republican Candidate (Incongruent)	4.36 (N=90)	4.48 (N=93)	3.76 (N=93)
Independent Candidate	4.50 (N=82)	4.42 (N=84)	3.62 (N=85)
<b>Republican Party Personality Condition</b>			
Democratic Candidate (Incongruent)	3.57** (N=90)	3.39 (N=95)	2.71 (N=94)
Republican Candidate (Congruent)	4.09** (N=92)	3.78 (N=93)	2.70 (N=92)
Independent Candidate	3.54** (N=114)	3.38 (N=113)	2.37 (N=115)

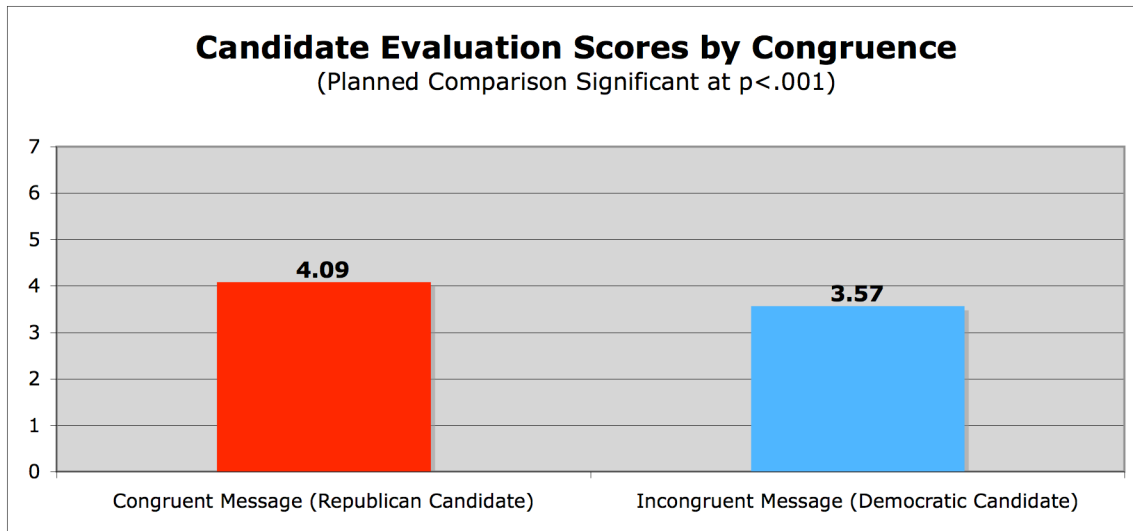
\*\*p<.01 (F=5.16, 1)

Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

### *Results Found in Republican Party Personality Condition*

Candidate evaluations by participants in the Republican Party personality message condition were the exception (please see table 7.2 above). With respect to candidate evaluation as the dependent outcome, ANOVA results showed that differences in candidate party ID affected responses significantly. Participants in the Republican Party personality message condition evaluated the Republican candidate more favorably than the Democratic or Independent candidates (F=5.16, 1, 296, p<.01).

**Figure 7.2: Candidate Evaluation Scores by Party Personality Congruence**



Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

Planned comparisons were conducted and significant differences were found between Republican versus Democratic candidate evaluation scores:  $t=2.64$ , 293,  $p<.001$  (see figure 7.2 above), and between Republican versus Independent candidate evaluation scores:  $t=2.94$ , 293,  $p<.001$ . No significant differences were found between scores from participants exposed to messages from Democratic versus Independent candidates. These findings provide partial support for H1 since the congruent message (Republican Party personality featuring Republican candidate) yielded significantly different results than the incongruent message (Republican party personality featuring Democratic candidate).

However, with respect to message evaluation and vote choice, no significant differences were found on the basis of exposure to messages featuring candidates with

different party IDs. Therefore, in the context of the Republican Party personality message condition, we found that results only provide partial support for H1.

### ***Results Pertaining to Hypotheses 2a and 2b***

Hypotheses 2a and 2b dealt with the role of party loyalty in people's responses to party personality congruent and incongruent messages. Please note that in the context of this study, congruence meant that candidate party ID and party personality traits emphasized in the message were matched, such that a Republican Party personality message featuring a Republican candidate and a Democratic Party personality message featuring a Democratic candidate are congruent and a Republican Party personality message featuring a Democratic candidate and a Democratic Party personality message featuring a Republican candidate are incongruent. We hypothesized in H2a and H2b that the effects of party personality congruence would be moderated by party loyalty. We expected party loyal participants to respond more positively to a candidate from their party, regardless of what party personality traits were emphasized in the message - or in other words, regardless of party personality congruence.

Party loyalty towards the Republican and Democratic parties affected responses in both party personality message conditions. We found that exposure to an identical message assigned to candidates from different parties yielded significantly different results for party loyal individuals. The direction of party loyal participants' responses matched the hypotheses: favorable ratings toward candidates whose party ID matched the loyalty of the participant (thereby providing support for H2a), unfavorable ratings

toward candidates whose party ID did not match the loyalty of the participant (thereby providing support for H2b).

*Results Found in Republican Party Personality Condition*

In the Republican Party personality message condition, those loyal to the Democratic Party rated the Democratic candidate more favorably than the Republican candidate (using MANOVA, an interaction between candidate party ID and Democratic Party Loyalty was found significant at  $p < .05$  for candidate and message evaluations and at  $p < .001$  for vote choice – please refer to table 7.3a and figures 7.3a and 7.3b below). Differences in candidate evaluation and message evaluation from participants loyal to the Democratic Party were more pronounced between the Democratic and Independent candidate party ID treatments. Therefore we found that, for Democratic Party loyal participants, the party loyalty effect emerged in ratings for both types of candidate opponents – those affiliated with the Republican Party and Independent.

**Table 7.3a: Democratic Party Loyalty and Effects in Both Party Personality Message Conditions**

		N	<i>Candidate Evaluation</i>	<i>Message Evaluation</i>	<i>Vote Choice</i>
<b>Democratic Party Personality Condition</b>					
	Democratic Candidate (Congruent)	24	5.11 <sup>o</sup>	5.50*	5.71***
	Republican Candidate (Incongruent)	26	4.46 <sup>o</sup>	4.54*	3.31***
	Independent Candidate	26	4.99 <sup>o</sup>	5.26*	4.69***
<b>Republican Party Personality Condition</b>					
	Democratic Candidate (Incongruent)	16	4.01*	3.79*	3.69***
	Republican Candidate (Congruent)	27	3.64*	3.18*	1.11***
	Independent Candidate	27	3.05*	2.59*	1.33***

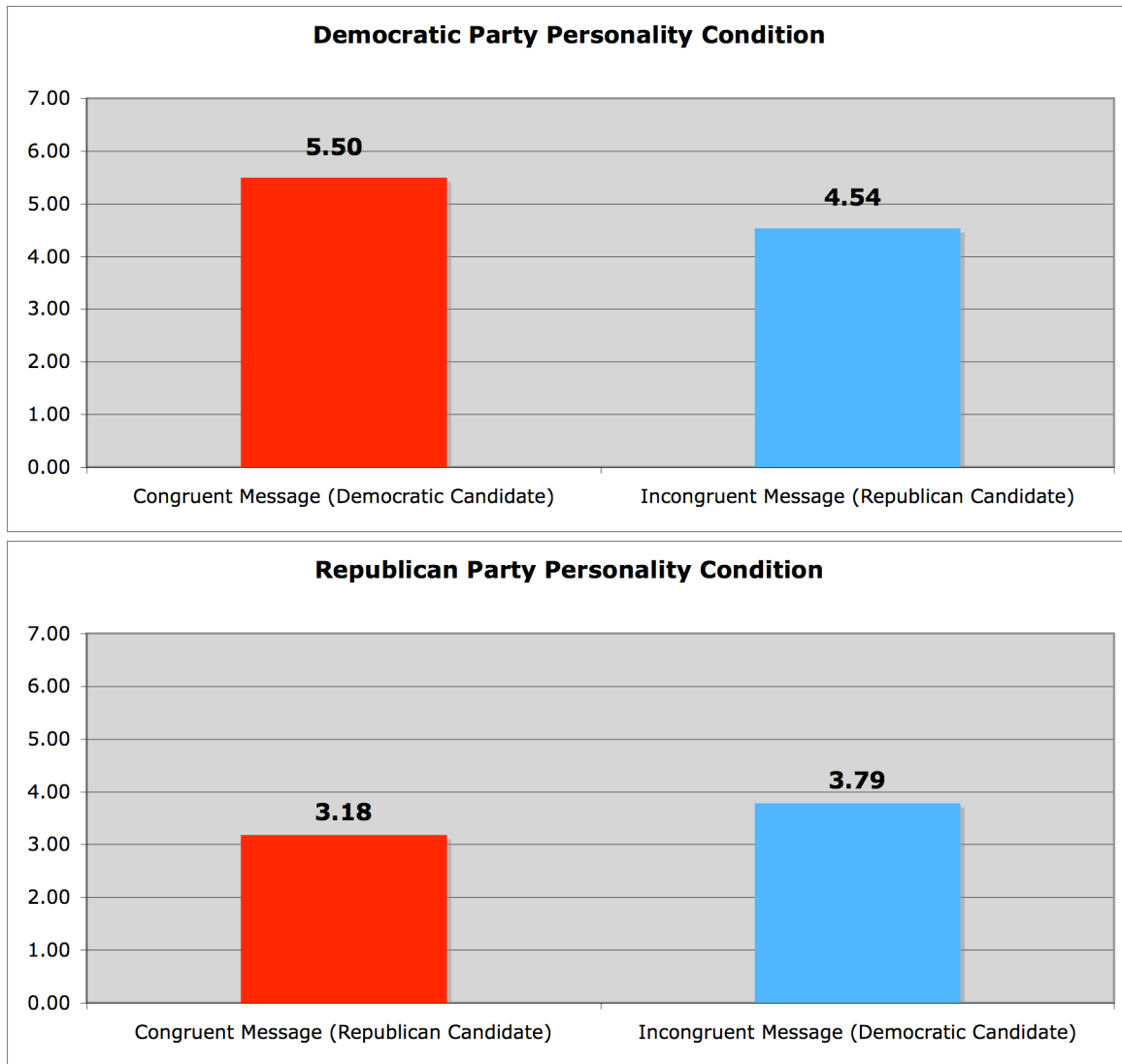
<sup>o</sup> p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Democratic Party Personality Condition: candidate evaluation F=3.58,1; message evaluation F=6.20,1; vote choice F=20.96,1.

Republican Party Personality Condition: candidate evaluation F=5.56,1; message evaluation F=5.28,1; vote choice F=23.36,1.

Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

**Figures 7.3a and 7.3b: Comparing Message Evaluation Scores by Message Congruence for Democratic Party Loyal Participants \***



All score differences significant at  $*p < .05$   
 Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

Republican loyal participants, as Hypothesis 2a predicted, rated the Republican candidate more positively than the Democratic candidate (please see table 7.3b below). However, the effect was not as strong as among Democratic party loyal participants since among Republican loyal participants we found significant interactions between



party loyalty and candidate party ID ( $p < .05$ ,  $F=3.07, 1, 48$ ) only for message evaluation and vote choice. Among Republican Party loyal participants, the difference in ratings for vote choice between Republican and other candidates was more pronounced than for message evaluation meaning that Republican loyal participants were very unlikely to demonstrate an inclination for choosing to vote for the candidate when he was said to be a Democrat or an Independent, even when these candidates communicated a conservative, Republican personality message ( $p < .001$ ,  $F= 29.43, 1, 48$ ) (please refer to table 7.3b and figures 7.3c and 7.3d below).

**Table 7.3b: Republican Party Loyalty and Effects in Both Party Personality Message Conditions**

	N	<i>Candidate Evaluation</i>	<i>Message Evaluation</i>	<i>Vote Choice</i>
<b>Democratic Party Personality Condition</b>				
Democratic Candidate (Congruent)	23	4.32	4.04*	2.39***
Republican Candidate (Incongruent)	27	4.55	4.96*	4.67***
Independent Candidate	25	4.45	4.32*	3.32***
<b>Republican Party Personality Condition</b>				
Democratic Candidate (Incongruent)	26	4.03	3.85°	2.08***
Republican Candidate (Congruent)	24	4.76	5.02°	4.67***
Independent Candidate	28	4.20	4.56°	3.82***

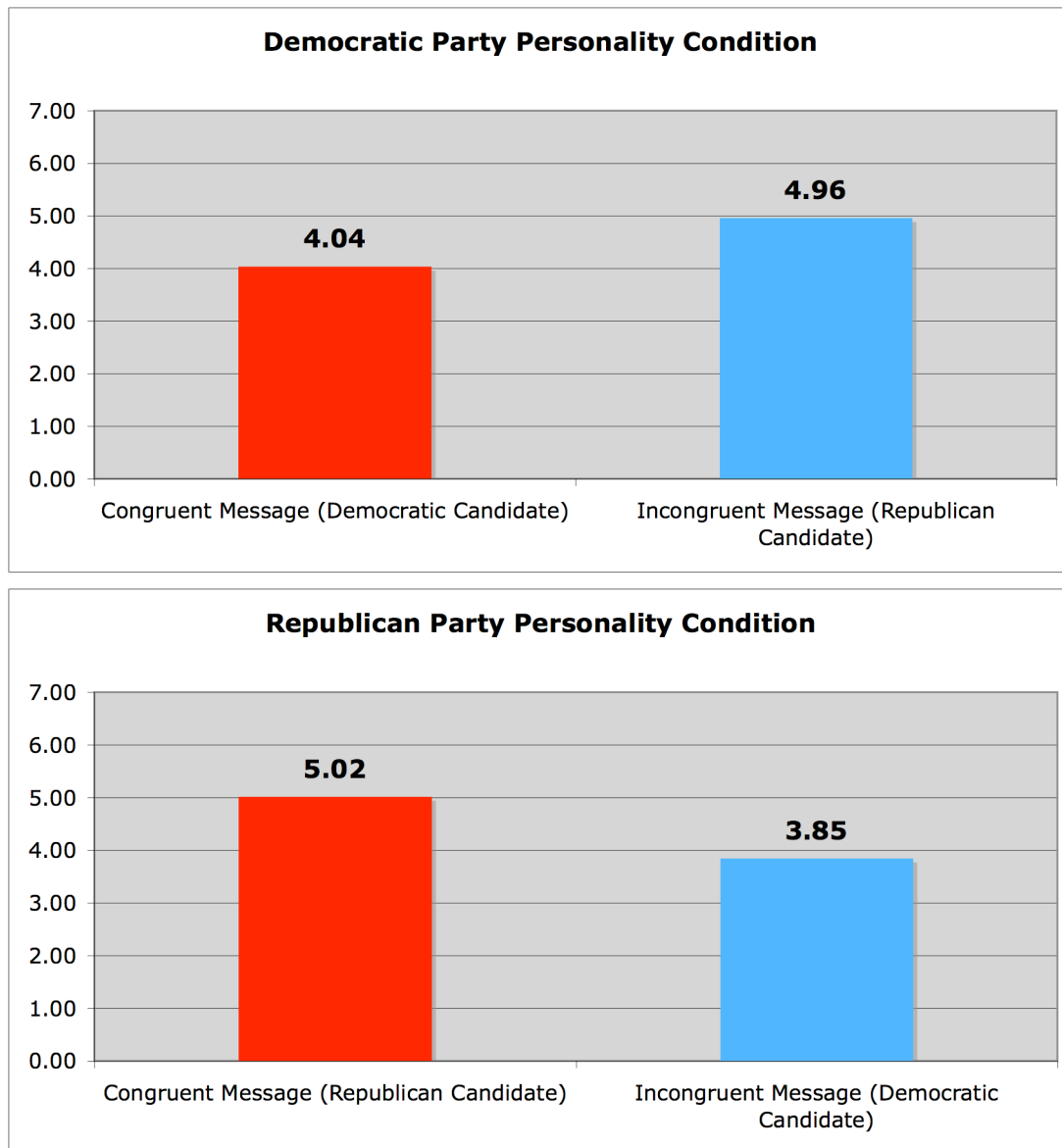
°  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Democratic Party Personality Condition: message evaluation  $F=6.46, 1$ ; vote choice  $F=25.79, 1$ .

Republican Party Personality Condition: message evaluation  $F=3.07, 1$ ; vote choice  $F=29.43, 1$ .

Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

**Figures 7.3c and 7.3d: Comparing Message Evaluation Scores by Message Congruence for Republican Party Loyal Participants\***



\*Score differences significant at  $p < .05$  for Democratic Party Personality condition and at  $p < .10$  for Republican Party Personality condition

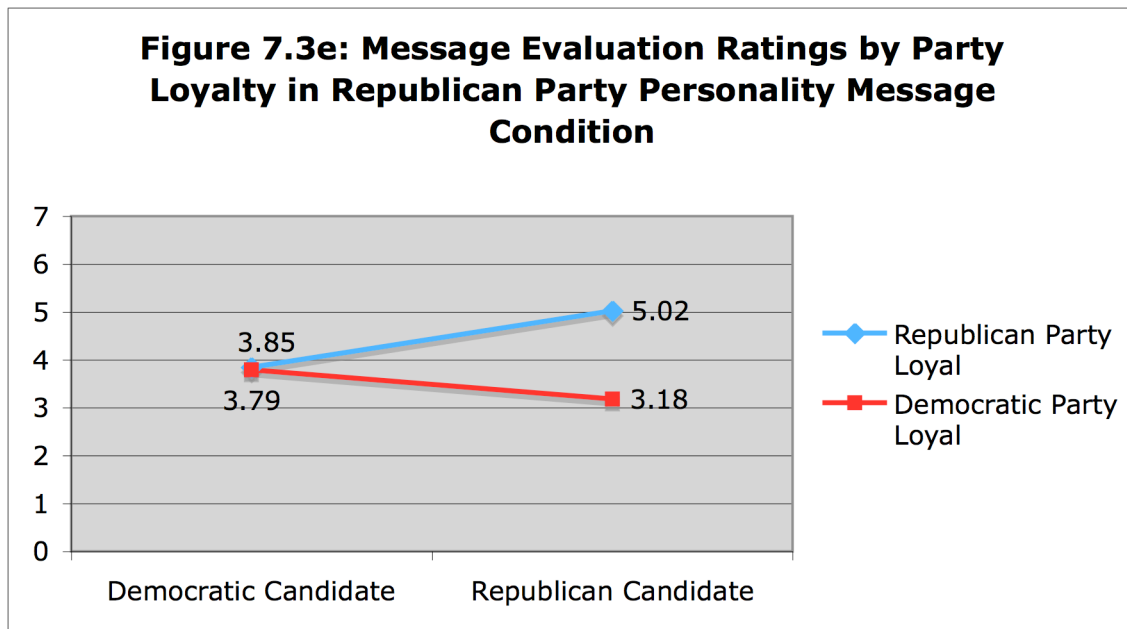
Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

Similarly, Democratic Party loyal participants in the Republican Party personality message condition still rated the Democratic higher than the Republican candidate, in

spite of the candidate being described in terms of Republican Party personality traits. In fact, Democratic Party loyal participants demonstrated a stronger tendency to rate their own party candidate more favorably than Republican Party loyal participants demonstrated rating their party candidate since, unlike Republican Party loyal participant ratings, ratings from Democratic Party loyals indicated significant interactions between party loyalty and candidate party ID differences across all three dependent variables – candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice. For candidate evaluation and message evaluation, interactions were significant at  $p < .05$  ( $F=5.56, 1, 43$  and  $F=5.28, 1, 43$ , for candidate and message evaluation, respectively). For vote choice ratings were significant at  $p < .001$  ( $F=23, 1, 43$ ). Interactions between Republican party loyalty and differences in candidate party ID were only significant for vote choice ( $p < .001, F=29.43, 1$ ) and message evaluation ( $p < .10, F=3.07, 1$ ).

Figure 7.3e shows the interaction effect of Republican and Democratic party loyalty and candidate party ID conditions on message evaluation to illustrate the overall trend found in the Republican Party personality message condition: that ratings go up or down according to whether there existed a match or a mismatch between the party ID of the candidate featured in the message and the party loyalty of the participant.

**Illustrated Interaction Between Party Loyalty and Candidate Party ID Treatments (Dependent Outcome: Message Evaluation)**



Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

*Results Found in Democratic Party Personality Condition*

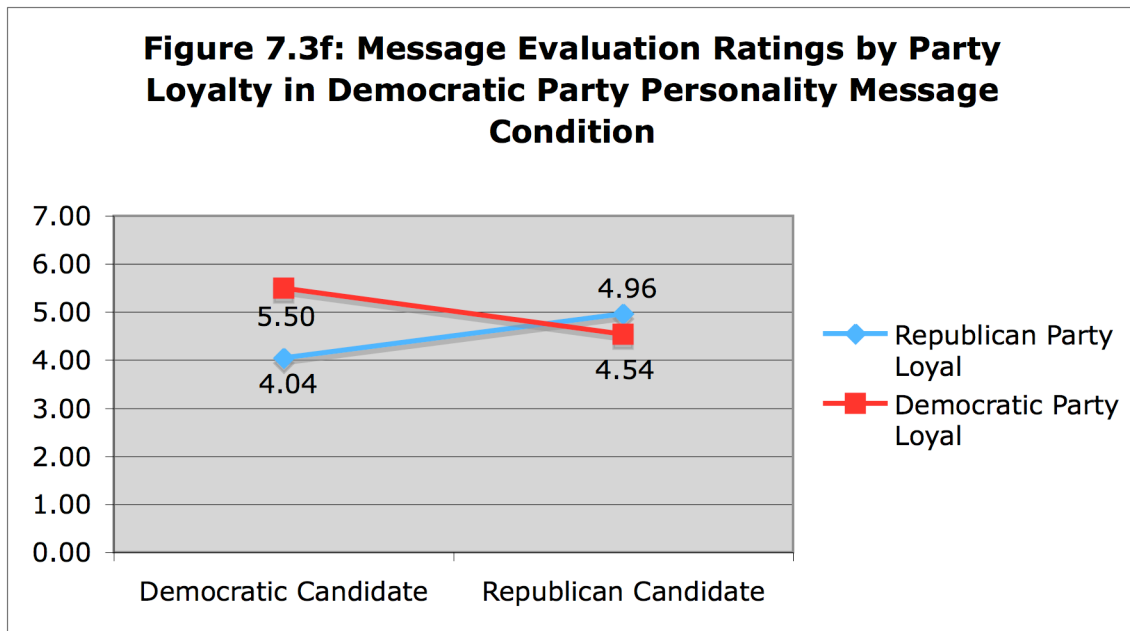
By running MANOVA tests, we found the same pattern in the Democratic Party personality message condition. That is, both Republican and Democratic Party loyal participants favored the candidate that matched their party loyalty. Similar to the pattern found in the Republican Party personality message condition, for Democratic Party loyal participants the effect of party loyalty was stronger, meaning that they rated the candidate that matched their party loyalty (the Democrat) more favorably than Republican Party loyal participants rated the candidate that matched their loyalty (the Republican candidate) (please see tables 7.3a and 7.3b above). Interactions between candidate party ID and Democratic Party loyalty were significant at  $p < .10$  for candidate

evaluation ( $F=3.58, 1, 50$ ), at  $p < .05$  for message evaluation ( $F=6.20, 1, 50$ ) and at  $p < .001$  for vote choice ( $F=20.96, 1, 50$ ).

For those loyal to the Republican Party, ratings on message evaluation and vote choice were significantly more favorable towards the Republican candidate. Interactions between Republican Party loyalty and candidate party ID were significant at  $p < .05$  ( $F=6.46, 1, 50$ ) and  $p < .001$  ( $F=25.79, 1, 50$ ) for message evaluation and vote choice, respectively (please refer to table 7.3d and figure 7.3e).

Figure 7.3f below shows the interaction effect of Republican and Democratic party loyalty on message evaluation to illustrate the overall trend present in the results found in the Democratic Party personality message condition. Like the trend found in the Republican Party personality message condition, ratings went up or down according to whether there existed a match or a mismatch between the party ID of the candidate featured in the message and the party loyalty of the participant.

**Illustrated Interaction Between Party Loyalty and Candidate Party ID Treatments (Dependent Outcome: Message Evaluation)**



Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

In contrast to party loyal participants, non-party loyal participants responded evenly to candidates from different parties in both the Republican and Democratic Party personality message conditions. Hence, no significant differences in candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice ratings were found for candidates with different party IDs in each of the two party personality message conditions.

***Results Pertaining to Hypotheses 3a and 3b***

Hypothesis 3a stated that the least politically knowledgeable among participants would not be responsive to changes in party personality-candidate party ID congruence, that is, we predicted that their response to the same message would be not be significantly different when the candidate was a Democratic versus a Republican. H3b

stated, on the other hand, that the most politically knowledgeable would respond differently to the same message sponsored by a Democratic versus a Republican candidate. The hypotheses were stated in terms of congruence. In the study, the Democratic Party personality message featuring a Democratic candidate and the Republican Party personality message featuring a Republican candidate are considered party personality congruent.

MANOVA results revealed no interaction between political knowledge and candidate party ID treatments within each of the two party personality message conditions. This means that both the least and most aware responded similarly within each of the two message conditions, whether the candidate whose message participants were exposed was a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent.

**Table 7.4a: Effects Among the Least Politically Knowledgeable in Both Party Personality Message Conditions**

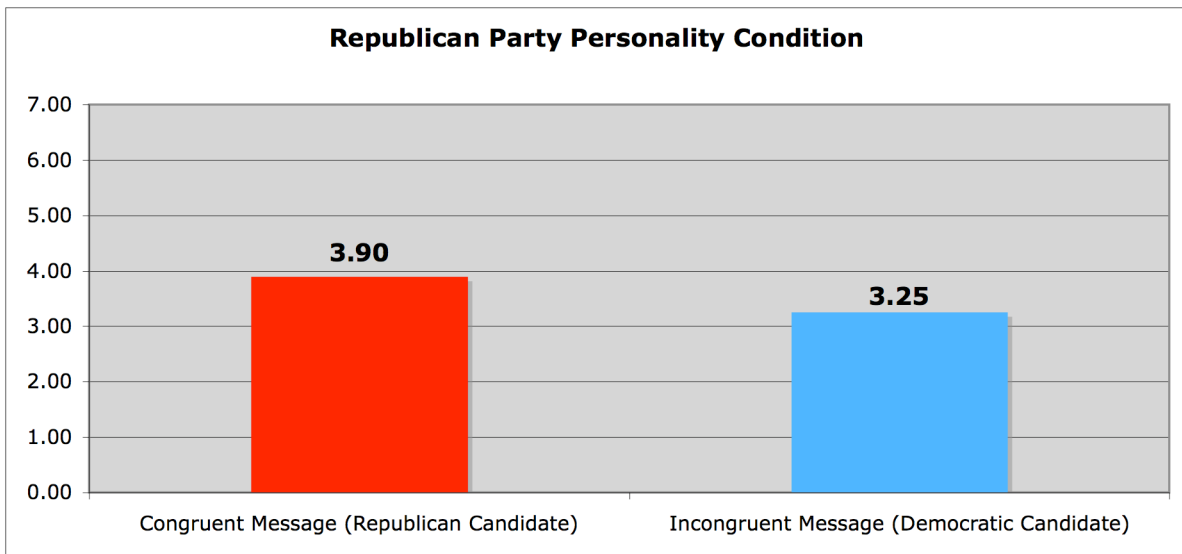
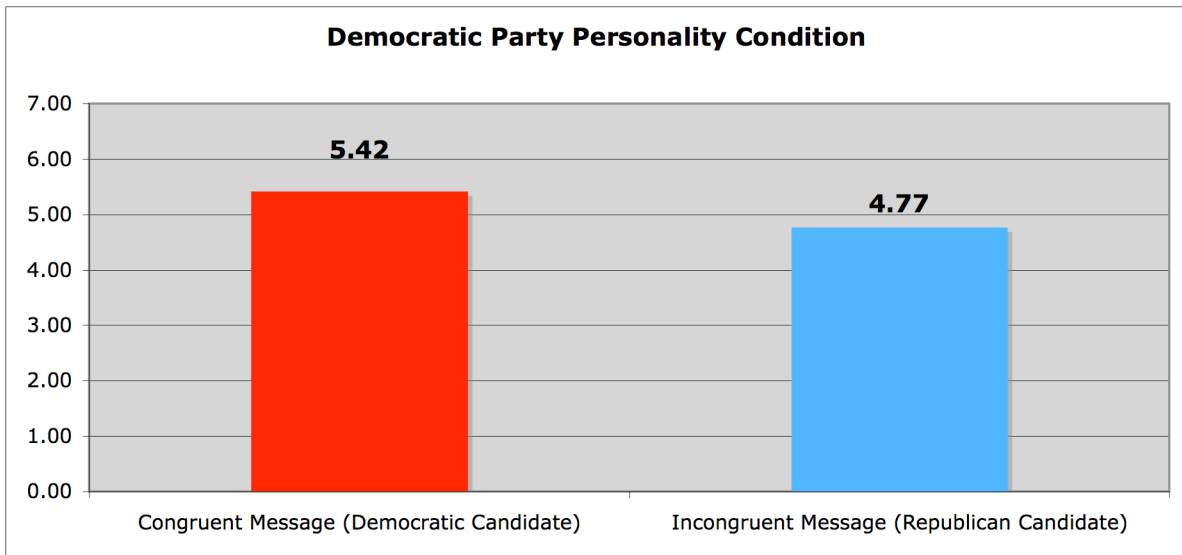
	N	<i>Candidate Evaluation</i>	<i>Message Evaluation</i>	<i>Vote Choice</i>
<b>Democratic Party Personality Condition</b>				
Democratic Candidate (Congruent)	19	4.95	5.42	4.68
Republican Candidate (Incongruent)	22	4.25	4.77	4.05
Independent Candidate	14	4.83	4.71	4.00
<b>Republican Party Personality Condition</b>				
Democratic Candidate (Incongruent)	22	3.42	3.25	2.95
Republican Candidate (Congruent)	21	4.29	3.90	2.48
Independent Candidate	20	3.78	3.72	3.10

No significant interactions were found between differences in candidate party ID and political knowledge in terms of how participants rated candidates/messages.

Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.



**Figures 7.4a and 7.4b: Comparing Message Evaluation Scores by Message Congruence for Least Politically Knowledgeable Participants**



Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

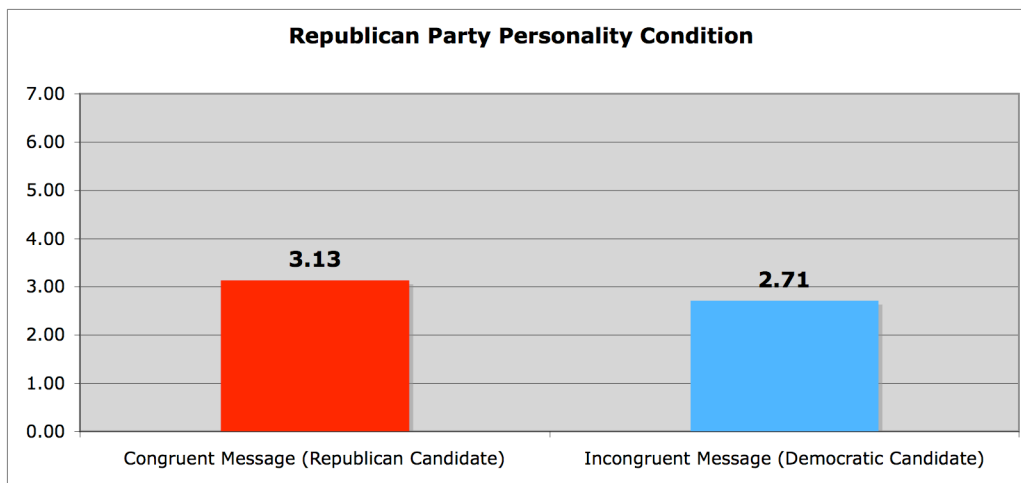
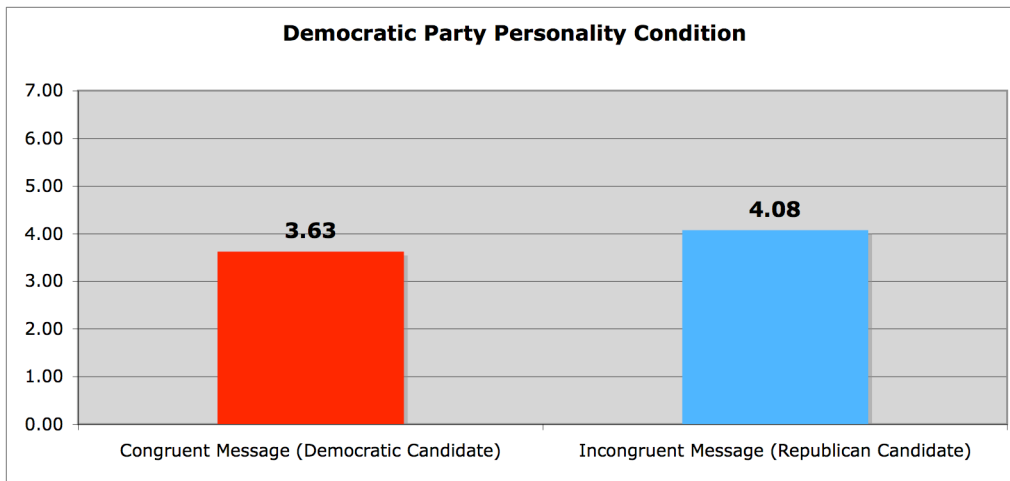
**Table 7.4b: Effects Among the Most Politically Knowledgeable in Both Party Personality Message Conditions**

	N	<i>Candidate Evaluation</i>	<i>Message Evaluation</i>	<i>Vote Choice</i>
<b>Democratic Party Personality Condition</b>				
Democratic Candidate (Congruent)	19	3.88	3.63	3.21
Republican Candidate (Incongruent)	19	4.24	4.08	3.68
Independent Candidate	13	4.71	4.54	3.31
<b>Republican Party Personality Condition</b>				
Democratic Candidate (Incongruent)	22	3.19	2.71	1.64
Republican Candidate (Congruent)	20	3.66	3.13	2.00
Independent Candidate	22	3.32	3.03	1.64

No significant interactions were found between differences in candidate party ID and political knowledge in terms of how participants rated candidates/messages.

Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

**Figures 7.4c and 7.4d: Comparing Message Evaluation Scores by Message Congruence for Most Politically Knowledgeable Participants**



Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

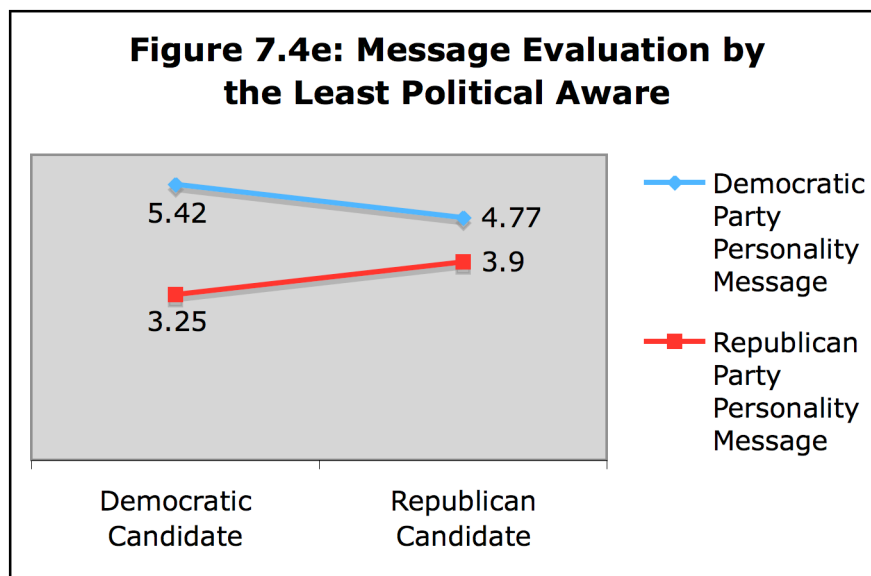
Although no significant interactions between candidate party ID and political knowledge were found, the direction of the findings revealed an interesting trend in how the most politically knowledgeable and the least politically knowledgeable rated candidates across treatments. The most aware tended to rate all candidates, in both message conditions, lower than the least aware. ANOVA revealed this difference to be

significant in the Democratic Party personality message condition at  $p < .01$  for message evaluation ( $F=6.03, 2, 201$ ) and at  $p < .10$  for vote choice ( $F=2.58, 2, 201$ ).

In the Republican Party message condition difference in ratings between the most and least politically knowledgeable were found significant at  $p < .10$  for candidate evaluation ( $F=2.97, 2, 226$ ), at  $p < .05$  for message evaluation ( $F=3.38, 2, 234$ ) and  $p < .01$  for vote choice ( $F=5.20, 2, 235$ ). These differences also reveal a tendency for the most politically knowledgeable to rate candidates less favorably than the least politically knowledgeable.

Interestingly, under the Democratic Party personality message condition, the most politically knowledgeable responded more favorably when the candidate was a Republican versus a Democrat (see figures 7.4c and 7.4d above). As an overall trend, the least aware showed more favorability, on the other hand, towards candidates whose message matched the personality traits of their party (please see to figures 7.4a and 7.4b above). Although not significant, the least politically knowledgeable rated the Republican candidate more favorably (mean=3.90) than the Democratic candidate (mean=3.25) in the Republican Party personality message condition and the Democratic candidate (mean=5.42) more favorably than the Republican candidate (mean=4.77) in the Democratic Party personality message condition. These findings point towards the presence of different trends in how the most and least politically knowledgeable responded to political messages. Furthermore, as predicted in H3a and H3b, the findings hint towards the possibility that political parties matter in different ways to both the least and most politically knowledgeable.

Although the direction of the findings pointed towards candidate party ID playing a role in the way the least politically knowledgeable rated candidates and messages, no significant differences were found in terms of how the least politically knowledgeable rated candidates of different party IDs within each one of the two party personality message conditions. Hence, we conclude that H3a was supported.

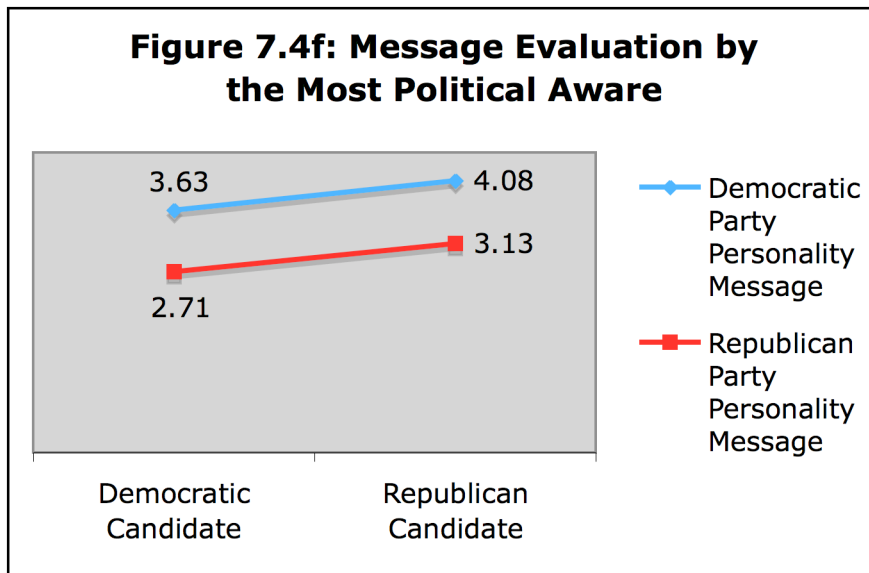


The graph shows an overall trend although no significant interaction was found between political knowledge and differences in candidate party ID on message evaluation as a dependent outcome. Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

On the other hand, given that MANOVA results revealed no significant interaction between political knowledge and candidate party ID in the two party personality message conditions, H3b was not supported. This means that we found no significant differences in terms of how the most aware responded to the same party personality message when assigned to candidates from different parties.

However, as an overall trend, we found that the most aware rated the Republican candidate more favorably in both the Republican and Democratic Party personality

message conditions. This means that the most politically knowledgeable tended to rate party personality “trespassing,” more favorably for Republican than for Democratic candidates. Figure 7.4f illustrates this trend (please see figure below)



The graph shows an overall trend although no significant interaction was found between political knowledge and differences in candidate party ID on message evaluation as a dependent outcome. Scores ranged from 0 to 7, with 0 being less favorable and 7 being more favorable towards the candidate/message.

## **CHAPTER 8.**

### **Discussion**

Based on Keller's (1993) proposed test of brand equity we hypothesized that different effects would emerge from exposure to identical political messages sponsored by candidates from different political parties. Recall that the concept of party equity as it has been proposed in this dissertation stems from the notion that political parties, like brands, work as synthesizers of meaning so that when individuals are encountered with information about an otherwise unknown candidate from a known political party, they will use information they know about the political party to make inferences about the candidate.

A model was proposed that specifies how party equity works in the context of political communication. Party equity is said to be the value that a party has with respect to the level of party awareness and the strength, valence, and number of party-related associations that an individual possesses. In a communications context, equity is manifested through the effect of party awareness and associations (the two components of party equity) on people's responses to political messages.

**Table 8.1: Summary of Hypotheses and Findings**

**Overall Findings of the Study**

The effect of party personality congruence on party equity outcomes was found to be different for the Republican and Democratic parties. Party loyalty was found to trump the effects of party personality congruence. No moderating effect was found for political knowledge although the direction of the findings warrants further investigation.

<b>H1</b>	Exposure to a political message that is congruent with the personality traits of the message's sponsoring candidate's party will lead to significantly different outcomes than exposure to a party-personality incongruent message.	<p><i>Congruence did not affect</i> responses in <b>Democratic Party Personality Condition</b> thereby failing to support hypothesis 1. Having a Democratic Party Personality did not give an advantage to the Democratic candidate nor did it harm evaluations of competing party candidates.</p> <p><i>Congruence partially affected</i> responses in <b>Republican Party Personality Condition</b> thereby partially supporting hypothesis 1. Having a Republican Party Personality was advantageous to the Republican candidate</p>
<b>H2a</b>	Exposure to a political message, regardless of party personality congruence, will lead to more favorable outcomes among party loyal individuals if the message's sponsoring candidate's party ID is the same as the party with which party loyal individuals identify.	<p><i>Congruence did not affect</i> responses among party loyal participants. H2a and H2b were supported.</p>
<b>H2b</b>	Exposure to a political message, regardless of party personality congruence, will lead to less favorable outcomes among party loyal individuals if the message's sponsoring candidate's party ID is not the same as the party with which party loyal individuals identify.	
<b>H3a</b>	In comparison to exposure to a party personality congruent message, exposure to a party personality incongruent message will not lead to significantly different outcomes among the least politically knowledgeable.	<p><i>Congruence did not affect</i> responses of the least politically knowledgeable. Therefore Hypothesis 3a was supported. Direction of the findings indicated more favorable ratings towards congruent versus incongruent messages.</p>
<b>H3b</b>	In comparison to exposure to a party personality congruent message, exposure to a party personality incongruent message will lead to significantly different outcomes among the most politically knowledgeable.	<p><i>Congruence did not affect</i> responses of the most politically knowledgeable. Hypothesis 3b was not supported. Direction of the findings indicated more favorable ratings towards Republican candidates. In comparison to the least knowledgeable, the most politically knowledgeable also gave lower ratings to candidates across treatments.</p>



We tested three types of hypotheses drawn from key elements of the voter-based model of party equity, namely party-induced messages (political messages created from sources within the party itself), party associations (studied here in the context of party personality), and party equity outcomes (three were examined in the study: candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice).

Hypothesis 1 dealt with whether party equity effects would emerge from exposure to an identical political campaign message assigned to candidates from different parties, hypotheses 2a and 2b addressed the moderating role of party loyalty, and hypotheses 3a and 3b dealt with the moderating role of political knowledge on party equity effects.

Messages that defined a candidate in terms of Democratic Party personality traits and another candidate in terms of Republican Party personality traits were developed and the expectation was that individuals would react differently to messages that were congruent versus incongruent with party personality stereotypes. Although participants reacted in a markedly different manner to the two party personality messages tested, favoring the Democratic Party personality message to the Republican, differences in the way participants responded to candidates within each of the two party personality message conditions were not significant. This meant that participants generally reacted to the message itself and to its content, but not to differences in candidate party ID. More accurately, we can say that party personality congruence did not affect individual's responses in the Democratic Party Personality condition - having a Democratic personality

did not give an advantage to the Democratic candidate nor did it harm evaluations of Republican and Independent candidates.

We expected the effects of party equity to appear in both party personality message conditions, since both messages were tailored to communicate candidates in light of strongly associated Democratic Party personality and Republican Party personality traits, individuals exposed to the Democratic Party personality message differed little in terms of their candidate evaluation, message evaluation, and vote choice when the candidate sponsor of the message was a Democrat, a Republican, or an Independent. The fact that responses were not markedly different across candidate party IDs in the Democratic Party personality message condition might mean that participants were open to the idea of a Democratic, Republican, or an Independent candidate described as “open,” “empathetic,” “compassionate,” and other Democratic-owned traits.

According to Philpot (2007), political parties can succeed in altering their party images when voters perceive the new party image as different from the old: “when people recognize that a party has changed in some way, they will adjust their perceptions of the party to correspond with the party’s projected image” (2007, p. 4). As a result of the success of George W. Bush’s focus on “compassionate conservatism” as a theme of his 2000 and 2004 presidential campaigns, the Republican Party could have gained some ground – that is to say, some *party equity* - in its ability to cast its candidates as more open and compassionate than the stereotypical Republican Party personality image. That

might account for part of the reason why respondents were as favorable toward a Republican candidate communicating Democratic personality traits as toward a Democratic candidate.

Although findings within the Democratic Party personality condition fail to support H1, results from the Republican Party personality message condition provide partial support for the hypothesis. In this condition, participants evaluated the Republican candidate more favorably than the Democratic candidate, thus supporting the prediction made in H1 that there would be significant differences in the manner in which individuals responded to a party personality congruent (Republican candidate with a Republican Party personality message) versus incongruent (Democratic candidate with a Republican Party personality message) message. Although differences in ratings between candidate party ID treatments were small, they are poignant especially when interpreted in conjunction with findings from the Democratic Party personality message condition: while the Republican candidate was rated as favorably as the Democratic candidate in the Democratic personality message condition, in the Republican Party personality condition the Republican was rated more favorably than the Democratic candidate; that is, when described in terms of typical Republican Party personality traits such as “traditional,” “tough,” and “business-oriented,” “leader.” Thus, our findings indicate that having a Republican personality was more advantageous for Republican than for Democratic or Independent candidates.

While considering the limits to generalization, especially in the context of an experimental study, if we were to generalize these results we could say that Republican candidates appeared to have an advantage over Democratic candidates in that participants were more open to a Republican candidate being described in terms of Democratic personality traits but less so to a Democratic candidate being described in terms of Republican personality traits. This potential gap in Democratic candidates' ability to trespass into Republican Party personality territory might exacerbate the "issue ownership" disadvantage that the Democratic Party is believed to possess since the distribution of issues of concern to voters during political campaigns (especially in races for high level political offices such as the presidency) often tilts in favor of the Republican Party (Benoit et al. 2004).

Let's now examine the findings pertaining to party loyalty. Hypotheses 2a and 2b predicted that party loyalty would moderate the effects of party equity such that those who are party loyal would react more strongly on the basis of candidate party identification and therefore favor candidates that matched their party loyalty and disfavor candidates from competing parties – irrespective of whether the candidates communicated a Republican or a Democratic Party personality message.

The results supported the predictions made in H2a and H2b. We found significant interactions between candidate party ID treatments and party loyalty on the three party equity outcomes examined (candidate evaluation, message

evaluation, and vote choice). That is to say that differences in candidate party ID affected the manner in which party loyal participants rated the candidates – although the messages to which participants were exposed were identical in every other way.

This finding corroborates with literature on brand equity, which states that equity is a function of the number, strength, and valence of brand-related associations. Equity occurs when individuals are “familiar with the brand” and hold “favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory” (Keller, 1993, p.1). These results provide support for the party equity concept and lead us to conclude that loyalty is an integral part of the equity political parties possess, just as loyalty plays a crucial role in the building and maintenance of equity of branded products. (Aaker, 1991)

Recall from chapter two that unlike Keller’s model of brand equity, which treats brand loyalty as an equity outcome, Aaker includes loyalty as an element of brand equity itself, as a precursor, we might say, of the value that brands provide to consumers. According to Petrocik (1992), party reputations are also built partially upon the characteristics of a party’s constituents; that is, on the characteristics of a party’s loyal “base.” Party loyalty in this sense seems to be both an integral element and an outcome of party equity.

The findings on party loyalty help us to address the extent to which party personality congruence yields equity for political parties. We found that party equity depends on the party itself, as in the case of results pertaining to the

Republican Party in H1, which appears to have stronger party equity than the Democratic Party. In terms of party loyalty itself, we found that loyalty plays a key role in how political parties affect individuals' responses to political messages.

Political knowledge was the second moderating variable investigated by the study. Hypotheses 3a and 3b were developed based on Zaller's (1992) Receive, Accept, Sample model and Petty and Cacioppo's (1984) Elaboration Likelihood model. H3a and H3b predicted that the most and least politically knowledgeable would differ in terms of how they would respond to messages that were congruent versus incongruent with a candidate's party personality. We expected the least politically knowledgeable to be unaffected by differences in candidate party ID while the most politically knowledgeable to be sensitive to these differences.

Although we found no significant differences in how the least politically knowledgeable responded to a political message featuring candidates from different parties, the same was true of the most politically knowledgeable. However, the most politically knowledgeable gave significantly lower ratings than the least aware to candidates across message conditions. Although the most aware did not show reactance (Brehm, 1966) towards messages that violated party personality stereotypes, they did show greater skepticism by rating candidates lower in comparison to less politically aware participants. This finding is in line with Zaller's RAS model, which predicts that in comparison to the least

politically knowledgeable, the most knowledgeable are more skeptical about political messages.

The fact that results did not show that the most politically knowledgeable reacted negatively towards messages that went against party personality stereotypes, and instead gave lower ratings than the less political knowledgeable to all candidates. Agger, Goldstein, and Pearl (1961) define political cynicism as “the extent to which people hold politicians and politics in disrepute, the extent to which these words symbolize something negative rather than positive” (1961, p. 477). Although research does not point to a direct relationship between political knowledge and political cynicism, the findings from this study might indicate that, in the context of political campaigns, those who possess high political knowledge - and therefore are more likely to be exposed to political messages (Zaller, 1992) - develop a sort of “old news” attitude with respect to how candidates present themselves. This may lead the most politically knowledgeable to be unsurprised or unmoved by seeing a candidate portrayed in ways that go against party personality stereotypes.

Our main conclusion with respect to this study’s overarching goal is that party personality congruence can affect how people respond to political messages but that it does not play an even role across different political messages, parties, or even individuals. Some messages might communicate the essence of a party better than others and therefore be perceived as more persuasive and credible, some parties might hold stronger control over certain symbols or personality traits and

therefore have the potential to communicate them to the public more effectively than other parties, some individuals might be more passionate about a party than others and this might color their interpretations of political messages, and some people might be more easily persuaded than others by virtue of the amount of political knowledge or awareness they possess.

All in all this study indicates that the different meanings attached to political parties play a significant role in how individuals respond to political messages and should be the subject of further study. In the next chapter, we will go over the study's limitations and address avenues that future research in the area of party equity might take to address these limitations.



## CHAPTER 9.

### Directions for Future Research and Study Limitations

While this study shows that party personality congruence yields different equity outcomes for the Republican and Democratic parties, it is not without some limitations. The goal of this chapter is to examine these and to offer ideas about how future research can address them. Suggestions for future research lying beyond the scope of this dissertation are also included in the chapter.

Based on Lasswell's (1964) classic question regarding the elements of persuasive communication - "who says what to whom and how?" - we will organize the discussion on the study's limitations by dividing them among those related to the study's participants or *receivers* of the message, the candidates or *sources* of the message and the *message* treatments used, the *medium* or channel used to deliver the messages and the *context* in which participants received the treatment messages.

Regarding the study's participants, a major limitation is that there was little diversity among them with respect to race, level of education and political interest: most participants were Anglo, highly educated individuals whose level of political interest was fairly high. Research indicates that differences in race, education, income, party ID, level of political interest and other individual differences affect how people respond to political messages (Chang, 2003; Philpot, 2007; Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams, 2004; Zaller, 1992). Moreover, as the present study points out, individual differences seem to shape the effect of party equity on people's responses to political messages.

According to Philpot's (2007) model of party image change, changes in party image depend on three main factors: the issue-handling reputations parties have built over time, the image parties have among different groups of voters, and the information voters acquire about political parties from the media. For instance, Philpot (2007) found that responses to Bush's "compassionate conservative" message were not the same among white and black voters; voters whose image of the Republican Party and its candidates was markedly different. Future studies should include a larger sample of individuals from ethnic minorities as well as from groups of people holding different political views to help provide further insights on how party equity works among groups with diverse political views and attitudes.

Perhaps due to a self-selection bias, political interest was high among those who chose to participate in the study. On a scale from 0 to 7, where 0 meant "not interested at all" and 7 meant "extremely interested," 60% of participants rated their level of interest in politics at 5 or above. This fact alone may have influenced the study's findings - especially in light of the fact that our results suggested that the most politically knowledgeable reacted differently from the least knowledgeable to messages upholding versus going against party personality stereotypes. Hence, we'd expect that a more diverse sample, one that included individuals who were less interested in politics, would lead to further insights about the effects of party equity on selected party equity outcomes. Future studies should address the moderating role of political interest directly.

We suspect that party equity effects might have been stronger and in the direction of Hypothesis 1 - which predicted that participants would respond more favorably to messages that upheld versus went against party personality stereotypes - if levels of political knowledge among participants were lower. If we take political knowledge as a proxy for political knowledge, our findings point out that the least politically interested might have responded more favorably to party personality congruent versus incongruent messages<sup>9</sup>.

Political interest can be related to a well-researched construct in the communication effects literature: involvement. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) predicts that individuals who are less involved with the messages to which they are exposed (i.e., who lack motivation and/or ability to process messages) are more likely to use peripheral message cues. Given that this study focused on the effects of wide-spread, easily associated party-related stereotypes concerning party personality traits, we should have expected that those who were less knowledgeable and therefore probably less interested in politics would respond to party personality congruence as a peripheral cue and therefore be more sensitive to differences in party personality congruence. The fact that we failed to find significant differences in how individuals responded to party personality congruent versus incongruent messages might mean that study participants - who were for the most part highly interested in politics – processed test messages centrally (i.e. without the use of peripheral cues) and therefore discounted the peripheral cue role of party personality congruence. If that is true, and future studies

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<sup>9</sup> Responses by the least politically knowledgeable followed this pattern.

should investigate this possibility, then a candidate's association with a particular party might generate stronger equity among individuals who are less involved or interested in politics.

According to Popkin (1991), individuals tend to use shortcuts to process information from political messages: most people do not take in consideration every element of a message nor do people process the message in a cognitively effortful manner. Like Popkin's, our basic assumption with respect to party equity is that people tend to rely on party-related stereotypes to process information from, about, or related to a political party. The fact that participants were highly interested in politics might have kept them from relying on party personality stereotypes to process the messages. Instead, participants might have processed the messages effortfully (in ELM terminology, centrally rather than peripherally) and judged candidates on the merits of their messages rather than on the basis of their party ID. Hence, we recommend that future studies directly address the role of political knowledge and message involvement on party equity outcomes.

The next set of limitations relates to the *source* and the content of the *messages* used in the treatments. For the sake of attaining greater control over the experimental treatments, the study was built around messages from fictitious political candidates. Based on the fact that the outcome of their candidate ratings was of little consequence, this might have led participants to rate the fictitious candidates differently than participants would have otherwise rated a real political candidate. However, this "low involvement" bias might not have been as problematic for this study since, as discussed

above, level of political knowledge was high among the study's participants. A general high level of interest in politics might have served as a buffer protecting the study's findings from the biasing effect of low involvement.

Future studies should explore the effects of party equity in the context of known versus unknown or fictitious politicians. Remember that as *corporate* brands, political parties have a symbiotic relationship to its *product* brands, its politicians. Future studies should explore party equity in the context of known candidate-brands and unknown ones. How does party equity affect the outcome of messages from different types of political candidates? How do voters respond to a message from an unknown Republican candidate versus a Rudy Giuliani message? Does the effect change for different political parties? We recommend future studies to explore the ramifications of these and related questions.

Other limitations included the use of web-based messages and the lack of control over participants' message viewing environment. Political campaigning online is an established phenomenon although studies gauging its effects are few. Therefore, the fact that web-based messages were used to test party equity effects is a definite strength of the study. We feel, however, it is also a weakness since we know little about how individuals react to web-based messages versus, for instance, TV or newspaper political messages. In other words, we are not sure about the effect that basing the study on web-based political messages, especially as a first test of party equity effects, had on the outcomes of the study. Therefore, we recommend future studies to explore medium-related differences in party equity effects.

Other limitations regarding the content of the message treatments include the fact that we only tested the effects of one Democratic and one Republican personality message. Future studies could be designed to gauge the effects of Democratic and Republican personality messages featuring different traits to address questions such as: what traits epitomize the Democratic and Republican personalities for voters as they are exposed to political campaign messages from Democratic and Republican candidates? What party personality traits resonate more/less among voters?

The goal of experiments is to minimize the effect of extraneous variables so that outcomes resulting from the experiment's treatments can be isolated and causal relationships established. That is why we see it as a limitation the fact that participants had control over the time and place in which they read the messages and responded to the questions pertaining to the message treatments. We recommend future studies to expose participants to messages in an experimental setting that is both controlled and realistic (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994). This would lead to more externally valid and generalizable results regarding party equity effects (Carmines and Zeller, 1979).

An additional category regarding the limitations of the study pertains to measurement issues. We feel that different measures (especially measures that would have potentially given us more insights as to the effect of individual differences on party equity) could have been used. In particular, measures of involvement and of political cynicism could have helped to make clearer some of the study's findings. We recommend future studies to include these measures so that the effects of important individuals differences on party equity outcomes can be assessed.

## Future Studies: The Role of Party Equity in the Context of Political Communication

### Effects

Brands provide value and meaning to consumers that go beyond the functional benefits of the products that brands represent. Brands are able to communicate a vision and provide consumers with what Russell Belk (1988) calls “bundles of meaning.” Political parties can be construed as brands in that they too are providers of bundles of meaning. Political parties synthesize a wide array of information and experience for voters. A political party – like a brand – can help voters simplify information about issues, candidates, and political campaigns and influence the way voters respond to political messages. We call *party equity* the value – positive or negative – yielded from what and how much voters know about a political party. We proposed a model of how party equity works and found evidence that suggests that party equity influences the manner in which voters respond to political campaign messages.

This dissertation contributes to the political communication and marketing literatures by introducing the idea of party equity, developing a model for how party equity works, and offering findings that help us understand more about party equity’s role in how people respond to political messages. Future studies should test new hypotheses based upon, but not limited to, the recommendations made above regarding the role of receivers, sources, content, channels and message contexts on the outcomes of party equity.

## Conclusion

### *Political Parties As Brands and the Role of Party Equity in Political Campaigns*

This dissertation is based on the idea that, in the political context, political parties serve the function of brands. This is because political parties encompass and synthesize meaning for voters who use information they know about political parties to make inferences about political candidates and messages. As Popkin (1992) and others have argued (Downs, 1957; Petrocik, 1992; Philpot, 2007), individuals tend to use party knowledge as heuristics for evaluating political candidates.

This dissertation contributes to the political behavior and communication literatures by unifying the many insights about how different facets of party knowledge – be them about issues, traits, or attitudes – affect voter behavior under one roof: that is, under the idea that political parties serve as brands for voters and that, as such, all kinds of meaning (including feelings) associated with a political party affect the manner in which voters respond to messages from, about, or related to the party.

Another contribution made by this dissertation lies in the idea that the meanings people attach to political parties have inherent value. As such, we introduced the concept of brand equity to the context of political parties and defined *party equity* as the added value an entity (e.g., a candidate or a political institution) yields by being associated to a particular political party.

Lastly, this dissertation contributes to the political behavior and communication literatures by addressing the effect of a never-before tested construct: party personality. Hayes (2005) developed the idea that political parties have ownership over different



personality traits in the minds of the public. Ours was a first attempt at testing whether people react differently to messages that are congruent versus incongruent with party personality stereotypes. We found that participants exposed to a message whose sponsoring candidate was presented in terms of Democratic party personality traits responded similarly to the candidate and his message irrespective of the candidate's party ID, whereas participants exposed to a message whose sponsoring candidate was presented in terms of Republican party personality traits responded more favorably to the candidate and his message when the candidate's party ID was Republican. In addition, we found that party loyalty but not political knowledge moderated the effects of party personality congruence on party equity outcomes. We conclude that party personality characteristics yield different equity for candidates associated with different political parties.

## **Appendix A**

### *Main Study – Introductory Page*

**Robert Gardner** intends to run for the US House of Representatives next year. He and his team of advisors have developed a webpage to introduce Gardner and his core values to prospective voters.

Click on “Next” below to get to Gardner’s webpage.

**Please read his webpage carefully.**

After reviewing it click on “Next” at the bottom of his page. You’ll be taken to questions about Gardner and his campaign’s webpage.

We are interested in your reactions and overall impressions of Gardner and his message.

Thank you for participating!

## Appendix B

*Message of Candidate Epitomizing Democratic Party Personality Traits*

*Treatment 1: Democratic Party ID*

★ **Robert Gardner** ★

***Democrat for Congress***



### Robert's Core Values

***Compassion and Openness: Dedication to the Community***

Robert Gardner was born in 1972 to a working class family in Brooklyn, New York. Growing up Robert learned the values of compassion and openness and developed his conviction that all Americans deserve an equal opportunity to succeed and be heard.

A proud product of public schools, Robert became the first person in his family to attend college. He worked his way through New York State University where he graduated with high honors. He later earned a law degree with honors from New York University.

Robert is a passionate advocate and spokesman for minority rights and the former Director of the Center on Poverty, Work, and Opportunity at the University of New York.

As a member of New York's city council, Robert dedicated his tenure to representing families and children. In the spring of 2005, Robert won the city's "Humanitarian Award" in recognition of his charitable endeavors.

Robert's highest commitment is to improve the lives of people in our community.

*Treatment 2: Republican Party ID*

★ **Robert Gardner** ★

*Republican for Congress*



**Robert's Core Values**

***Compassion and Openness: Dedication to the Community***

Robert Gardner was born in 1972 to a working class family in Brooklyn, New York. Growing up Robert learned the values of compassion and openness and developed his conviction that all Americans deserve an equal opportunity to succeed and be heard.

A proud product of public schools, Robert became the first person in his family to attend college. He worked his way through New York State University where he graduated with high honors. He later earned a law degree with honors from New York University.

Robert is a passionate advocate and spokesman for minority rights and the former Director

of the Center on Poverty, Work, and Opportunity at the University of New York.

As a member of New York's city council, Robert dedicated his tenure to representing families and children. In the spring of 2005, Robert won the city's "Humanitarian Award" in recognition of his charitable endeavors.

Robert's highest commitment is to improve the lives of people in our community.

*Treatment 3: Independent Candidate*

★ **Robert Gardner** ★

*Independent for Congress*



**Robert's Core Values**

***Compassion and Openness: Dedication to the Community***

Robert Gardner was born in 1972 to a working class family in Brooklyn, New York. Growing up Robert learned the values of compassion and openness and developed his conviction that all Americans deserve an equal opportunity to succeed and be heard.

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Robert's highest commitment is to improve the lives of people in our community.

## Appendix C

*Message of Candidate Epitomizing Republican Party Personality Traits*

*Treatment 1: Democratic Party ID*

★ **Robert Gardner** ★

***Democrat for Congress***



### Gardner's Core Values

#### ***Strength and Leadership for the Future***

Robert Gardner was born in 1944 in Charleston, South Carolina and raised in Wilbert, South Carolina, a small town in the Upcountry. There Gardner learned the values of hard work and perseverance and developed his conviction that a strong America is one based on the traditional American principles of personal responsibility and strong families.

Faith is central to Gardner's life and has been a source of inspiration for his support of local church-based initiatives. He helped to establish the "Churches Unite" initiative designed to create a dialogue and cooperation between churches in our community and our local government.

In addition, Robert Gardner has been widely recognized for his leadership and accomplishments as a public servant and in private enterprise. In the spring of 2005, Robert won the city's "Business Leader Award" in recognition of his endeavors as a businessman and community leader.

Gardner is committed to working toward strengthening American families and educating America on the critical issues facing our society.

*Treatment 2: Republican Party ID*

★ **Robert Gardner** ★

*Republican for Congress*



**Gardner's Core Values**

***Strength and Leadership for the Future***

Robert Gardner was born in 1944 in Charleston, South Carolina and raised in Wilbert, South Carolina, a small town in the Upcountry. There Gardner learned the values of hard work and perseverance and developed his conviction that a strong America is one based on the traditional American principles of personal responsibility and strong families.



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Gardner is committed to working toward strengthening American families and educating America on the critical issues facing our society.

### *Treatment 3: Independent Candidate*

## ★ **Robert Gardner** ★

### *Independent for Congress*



#### Gardner's Core Values

##### ***Strength and Leadership for the Future***

Robert Gardner was born in 1944 in Charleston, South Carolina and raised in Wilbert, South Carolina, a small town in the Upcountry. There Gardner learned the values of hard work and perseverance and developed his conviction that a strong America is one based on the traditional American principles of personal responsibility and strong families.

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## **Appendix D**

### **Personality Traits Used in Pretest One**

Knowledgeable, Real, Tough, Daring, Compassionate, Inspiring, Cool, Feminine, Wholesome, Outdoorsy, Warm, Cheerful, Young, Risk-taker, Traditional, Contemporary, Charming, Empathetic, Upper class, Dependable, Unique, Small-town, Family oriented, Moral, Old, Determined, Leader, Hard-working, Proud, Concerned, Outgoing, Open, Masculine, Imaginative, Smooth, Down-to-earth, Sentimental, Spirited, Successful

### **Personality Traits Used in Pretest Two**

Moral, Religious, Traditional, Successful, Hard Working, Leader, Tough, Charming, Inspiring, Compassionate, Empathetic, Small-town, Cool, Proud, Contemporary, Open, Upper-class

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