BRANDING THE PRESIDENCY
Trump and the New Politics of Representation

Julie Webber
Illinois State University

This article was prepared for the Critical Media Literacy Conference in Savannah, Georgia in 2016. The central argument of the article is that Donald Trump's candidacy emerges from a new strategy: branding. The author explores the decade prior to Trump's rise and his political forebears, as well as consults critical marketing and television studies to explain how Trump has been able to secure the nomination of the Republican Party despite having little institutional support. Instead, Trump's rise, like that of Sarah Palin and others can be attributed to the use of social media to brand their personalities as political outsiders to establishment politics.

How many Trump supporters does it take to change a light bulb?

> Look, we can change the light bulb. That I will tell you. We're changing it, okay? And I understand what you're saying, I hear it all the time. People call me and say 'Is the light bulb really dead?' That's what they are asking me; it's unbelievable. The light bulb is in big trouble, that I can tell you. But we are going to change it. You know, I don't get as much credit for this as I should—And I mean this—Years ago—YEARS ago! I said "We need to change this light bulb!" And now it's out! I couldn't have been more right, folks. And we will replace this bulb with the best bulb. The most bright, whitest light bulb you have seen. Oh, and we'll get the best—I know the best people, who are gonna screw this thing in. And then it's gonna be so bright, let me tell you, and people are gonna come from all around and go, "Oooh!" And they're going to say that it's the best light bulb they've ever seen—and I'm telling you right now, Mexico is going to be paying the electricity bill—I'm gonna make 'em.

At the home of Texas real-estate developer Kirk Rudy, President Obama told donors who paid as much as $33,400 to the Democratic National Committee that although he understands Sanders' appeal is based on his authenticity, he warned that a certain Texas politician was also considered quite authentic during his run for the White House, referring to former President George W. Bush.

• **Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to:** Julie Webber, jwebbe@ilstu.edu

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> According to the *Times*, Obama acknowledged that Clinton has failed to "excite" many parts of the Democratic base, as Sanders has, but argued that "being authentic did not necessarily translate into being a good president." (Quoted in Tesphaye, 2016)

> Trump found the flaw in the American deathstar. It doesn't know how to turn the cameras off, even when filming its own demise. (Taibbi, 2016)

In August of 2015, I went on a local television news show to discuss the republican primary. Of particular interest to the news anchor was the Trump candidacy. Myself and my peer, another political scientist from a local university, vehemently agreed that Trump would never make it far enough in the primary to threaten the presidency with his politics. How wrong were we? I realize I do not have a crystal ball. However, by any standard of political analysis, using standard measures of assessing representation against political attitudes and the general party structure and politics, most would have agreed at that time that Trump would get stuck somewhere around October, desperately trying to rejuvenate his image, after the media establishment had laid him to waste. This is not what happened. Furthermore, the more the media relied on media strategies aimed at discrediting Trump's politics, his inconsistencies on policy, his retreat from the GOP playbook, the more popular he became. Through the strategy of cultivating and protecting his brand, "Trump" he was able to discredit his adversaries who worked on an ideological model of policy proposals and rational argumentation. What helped Trump to ascend past all the—admittedly lame—members of his cohort was his media strategy, one that was only possible at this point in time in the form of branding. Without it, Trump would never have been able to get this far. Like a true Machiavellian, Trump found the fortune in the media architecture that would allow him to mobilize his own brand of media virtú.

To begin, I would like to lay out the architecture of the media in the postwar period, recent past and the immediate present (the past seven years leading up to today). Each has distinct political and economic conditions that allow for particular forms of audiences, and by extension, practices of citizenship. This has ramifications for how we see the breakdown of contemporary parties—both the Democrats and the Republicans—in this latest primary season. It also has an impact on how effective satire as criticism of political figures can possibly be in the contemporary period. Finally, it will show how we got to the point today: where "authenticity," broadly construed, becomes a central factor in whether or not a candidate wins votes. I know, you are scratching your head and wondering, "Just what do these people mean by authentic when they discuss Sarah Palin and Donald Trump?" It floored me too. When the Donald came along I decided to get to the bottom of it. What I will tell you by the end of this talk is that Trump is the first full-on instance of celebrity branding in American politics. What does this mean? It means he does not need ideological substance, he needs to seem authentic and authoritative. I will explain these toward the end. For now, I want to discuss how we got to political branding through the role media has played in politics in three periods: postwar, the period of polarization 1970 onward, and 9/11 until now. This will show us how Trump has been able to catapult himself through the party structure to win primaries [and the presidency]; all the while destroying established careers and networks along the way. Indeed, the media can not stop looking, (Trump is rather like a car crash) commenting and giving him all the free media he has successfully used to bolster his campaign. For example, "he has earned close to $2 billion worth of media attention, about twice the all-in price of the most expensive presidential campaigns in history. It is also twice the estimated $746 million that Hillary Clinton, the next best at earning media, took in" (Confessore & Yourish, 2016).

In my 2013 book, *The Cultural Set Up of Comedy*, I made the argument that social media played a large role in the dissemination

and understanding of politics through comedic performance and satire. What scholars call "infotainment" has largely replaced our traditional broad format news service. Gone is Walter Cronkite and the 6 o'clock news with its uniform message and consensus based audience. People watched the news together centered around a large object that looked much like the television on the cover of the book. People believed in these figures, cried when they cried, had differences of opinion, perhaps, but at the end of the day, they respected a well-established set of facts from which to interpret their ideological position. "Reality" was a believable performance. Television has been slowly replaced by online platforms (large ones such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat) and digital streaming media. In the prior era, known as "The Golden Age of Broadcast News," media reflected something that sociologist Richard Lachmann called the political era of "elite consensus." During this period, elites coordinated policy across industries (banking, finance, media, etc.) (Lachmann, 2014, pp. 203-207). Furthermore, there was a dual elite structure where local and national governmental elites could limit each other's attempts to use the policy process to leverage government for personal gain (Lachmann, 2014, pp. 198–199). Also, the banking structure was different. We hear lots of discussion about Glass-Steagall, as the last finger in the dike (so to speak), of financial regulation. The end of that legislation in the late 90s led to widespread mergers across many industries: finance, retail, media, telecommunications, utilities, et cetera. During the so-called "Golden Age of Broadcast News," (which far outlasted the era of "elite consensus,") people believed that the information they got from the news about politics told them something important about their lives as citizens, as Americans. Moreover, with the existence of strong governmental checks on corporations, as well as a large industrial union presence, gave them a sense that their votes for either party meant something, and that whomever won would promote the national interest, abroad and at home.

From the 1970s onward we can point to several factors that led to the extreme income inequality we witness today: the rise of the far right, mobilization of the Left on civil rights (instead of union activity), the end of the Cold War and predominance of market economy, and globalization in the form of competition to U.S. dominance. According to Pikkety and Saez, inequality in 2007 finally exceeded the peak achieved in 1929, and it continued to grow under President Obama (Lachmann 2014, p. 225). It did not hurt that the tax rate on high income went from 77% to 29% between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan. Something beyond the person we vote for in a president or even our national representatives has been undermining we might call national growth; that is, growth all Americans feel and experience at the personal level. It is not just Republicans, or the decline of an industrial economy, or women entering the workforce, or whatever excuse our presidential contenders give for why their party is not responsible. The fact is, they are all responsible, but they are all conditioned by forces beyond their control. Since the "elite consensus" began to break down there was no overarching check on firms that wanted to leverage the government for their own interests. In other words, the elite consensus on maintaining progressive government (a government that is focused on growing its economy, not just adding jobs) broke down, and born was the new figure in U.S. business and politics that Lachmann calls the "autarkic elite" (Lachmann, 2014, p. 220). These are the folks who not only buy legislation on both sides through campaign money, but also finance candidates to go into office at that state level to buy off parts of the state, to bankrupt whole sectors, in order to privatize them. The Kochs, Adelson, and others. In Illinois my own state, we have gone without a budget for 9 months because the governor refuses to settle with Democrats unless they limit the influence of unions, among other things. He has proposed a 31% reduction to higher education.

Without the budget funds, three of our publicly funded universities are ready to shut their doors. Same with Michigan, Indiana Ohio, Maine, Wisconsin, Kansas, and the list goes on and on. Samantha Bee recently composed a montage on her show comparing this to a rhinoceros emptying its bowels. Bee imagined it to be politicians and their relationship to the American people. Another commentator wrote, "I remember watching Bill Moyers' show a number of years ago when he had Gretchen Morgenson on, the chief financial reporter for *The New York Times*, and when she was asked whether or not Dodd-Frank had tackled the big stuff, she said, "No, absolutely not. It hasn't and we could likely have another financial crisis as a result." And when asked why, she said, "Because the banks have hundreds of lobbyists in Washington and the American people have none" (Winship, 2016). So, you see where Trump and Sanders have drawn their base of support from: all the folks who know now, definitively, that they are completely disenfranchised from government. Voting for an establishment candidate is always going to be voting for the status quo. How then, can one be a citizen? What constitutes an act of citizenship in a social media age?

But let us briefly return to that postwar consensus, narrated by the "Golden Age of Media," with folks like Johnny Carson to entertain us. Late night comedy during this period was not partisan: the idea was to entertain all Americans regardless of their political party affiliation before they fell off to sleep. If satire or irony was mobilized in comedy, most everyone was on the same page in interpreting it. This was because there was something called a "common culture"—a national culture forged through progressive government and protected by elites. This national culture was reinforced across three network broadcast systems that collected citizens as an aggregate audience for national culture (Spigel, 2004, p. 256). Mostly, what these comedians did on their shows was make fun of politicians' personalities or personal foibles, they did not enter the terrain of politics for fear of alienating audiences. The last of these was probably Jay Leno. Yet even where irony and satire that was political flourished, it was national in nature. This is what humor scholars call "traditional irony," a form that could still be critical of the status quo (and often was) without alienating segments of the public. This form isolates the earnest viewers' moral judgment of an issue. It makes its audience (usually print media audiences; that is, readers) witness the true nature of a political figure's ideology, cringe and rearrange their moral understanding of an issue or political event. It could lead to real change in public opinion. Traditional irony assumes a relatively common culture, not a diverse, globalized one.

We can place the date of the transition period to branding somewhere between the election of George W. Bush and 9/11. This period needs a name. Let us call it: dark times (Webber, 2013, pp. 13–20). This is the period I describe in the book, where most of the rapid changes in media took place: the rise of social media, increasing privatization, narrowcasting on television, disaster capitalism, environmental peril in the form of major disasters—hurricanes, tsunamis, poisoned water. Of course the figure who was there to make fun of the political classes' ineptitude at dealing with all of it was Jon Stewart. Stewart liked to downplay his achievements saying "To do what I do, all you need is a video recorder with a timer." But it was more than that. It was the way he put arguments together from different formats, spliced digital video and compiled them to show a trend or bias within the political establishment. Stewart was adept at maneuvering convergence culture.

After 9/11, Jon Stewart and political comedy took off, primarily because of the Bush administration and Bush's brand. This was the politician that Obama was referring to as "authentic" in our opening quote. As Weinstein and Weinstein argued, right after 9/11, it was the media that helped Bush salvage his presidency:

> With the Democrats in a mode of (passive and panicked) support, the media could not use them as front men but had to play the dual role of loyal opposition and nonpartisan rearticulator. In Bagehot's (n.d.) terms, they had to "gain authority" for the president, "raise the army," and George W. Bush had to (appear to) be equal to the task—so they gave him marching orders to overcome his image problem. Bush did not get a pass from the prestige papers; he got a rearticulation of his image. (Weinstein & Weinstein, 2002, p. 576)

The media helped Bush as he brought branding half way into the political establishment; people wanted to have a beer with him but he still managed to secure their votes by using the old party structure and appeasing the party's base. Bush also became adept at maneuvering convergence culture, with the help of the media. So, just what is convergence culture?

Under convergence culture, new media (digital streaming, media platforms, etc.) did not simply replace old media (television, radio), but rather learned to interact within a complex relationship that Henry Jenkins calls "convergence." *The Cultural Set Up of Comedy's* goal was to explain how convergence was (and is) impacting the relationship among media audiences, producers and content, and how political comedy was able to exploit this relationship for laughs—a far from easy understanding. As Jenkins writes, "there will be no magical black box that puts everything in order again" (Jenkins, 2008). The important thing to note here for our purposes is that convergence culture is not merely a technological phenomenon to be solved by some giant fleet of mergers or elite consensus through a shared platform. Rather, the breakdown is among the audience, or niche markets. The audience is now king. As my mentor used to always say in political philosophy lectures, "Humpty Dumpty cannot be put back together again," but politicians and other tech gurus throughout the 1990s believed they could. As an example of convergence culture's problematic nature, I presented several examples in the book. One, in particular, was about the workings of Breitbart media. The incident with Shirley Sherrod and Andrew Wiener come to mind. Breitbart would take a rumor going on in the "street" or real time, insert it into their web format news as evidence of a coming "scandal" (Webber, 2013, pp. 143–145). Major networks, desperate for the latest, breaking news, would cover it without sourcing the story (CNN, for example was caught on this many times). Once "remediated" from news to News, the object of the story, Wiener and Sherrod, suffered the consequences, Sherrod fired, Wiener finally hounded to confess. Jayson Harsin called this a "rumor bomb." Other examples include the masses of older audiences who ended up seeing *The Interview* (2014) in theaters after North Korean shadow groups threatened Sony with a cinema attack over the parody of Kim Jong Il that was featured in it. My aunt was one of the septuagenarians who attended its opening only to be shocked, confused and offended by the film's content. She heard about the film's plight through memes on Facebook and discussions on broadcast news as a First Amendment issue, and while she was ready to support the First Amendment, in her mind it meant defending something more substantial than a political parody. The best one, however, was when Jon Stewart had a Facebook debate with Bill O'Reilly and said, "My viewers can help your viewers get to the platform." Old media: television collides with new media: Facebook.

Out of convergence culture, a new form of irony emerges. Lisa Colleta called it Postmodern Irony (PM Irony) and she has little respect for it (Colletta, 2009). In PM Irony the viewer congratulates themselves for the small victory of putting together the media chain of associations. In a globalized media culture, where information and stories circulate (often unverified) without oversight or accompanying contextual information, often presented as "clickbait" through many types of media, are remediated. They collide to produce different interpretations of the same real time event. PM

Irony takes this situation and highlights it, makes fun of it, against the backdrop of an imagined authenticity that existed in the prior Golden Era. "Getting the joke," meant understanding the chain of associations between media that brought an event to the attention to the wider or dominant public. Rather than, "rearranging the viewer's moral sense of an issue," it mapped the trajectory of an issue in the mediascape. For this reason, it is funny, but not particularly effective. PM Irony parodied an environment, not issues or political figure's actions or ideologies. This era of PM Irony era ended in 2010, according to media scholars and Lachmann, when even the Tea Party revolution did not produce change in the overall functioning of the governing elites. Let us return to our autarkic elites for a moment, because their clothes were ripped off around this time. But it did not matter. There was no j'accuse moment. Rather, they became even more emboldened to enter politics and influence the governing structure as *Citizens United v. FEC* made corporate free speech the law of the land. It became clear, to quote Lachmann, that these elites "are, as individuals, allowed to loot their own firms as well as the state," and "they use their leverage over legislators and regulators to win privileges that can best be described as autarkic. Their real goal is not to shape the overall economy or to formulate policies or programs with national reach" (Lachmann, 2014, p. 220). We see evidence of this everywhere at the state level and the level of the firm. Why does almost every state have a policy to drug test welfare recipients? This goes under the heading of cutting government spending, but every state has learned that a minuscule number of people on welfare tested positive, costing much more to implement the drug program than to simply pay out the welfare assistance. The reason is that companies make money off the testing kits. Just as most educators in this room have witnessed the selling off public education over the last 20 years and the accelerated version of it over the last 10, this is autarkic elites "looting the state." The paradigmatic case of elites looting their own firms was first discovered in the Enron scandal. The banking industry was stripped bare with the crash of the housing market in 2008. So far, all we have been able to get from establishment political party candidates is the promise to keep things steady, meaning the status quo. So, people feel alienated from the political process but they also see very clearly that their representatives are too weak to challenge this structure, and even enthusiastically participate in it. As my former mentor once wrote, "it's the moral equivalent of a stroke, where the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing" (Weinstein, 1991, p. 220). This makes the fantasy of someone who "pulled himself up by his bootstraps" and has been demonstrating his business acumen—as an outsider to this process—in front of audiences for over 2 decades appealing. But Trump has not run on an ideological platform, right? He has no ideas. He gestures to the future. How has he managed to be so successful in this election? Through branding.

In *The Cultural Setup of Comedy*, I discussed a trend in American political and celebrity culture that now mimics the old idea of meritocracy (Lachmann, 2011; Webber, 2013, pp. 15–17). Now, when someone moves up in American culture, they use their inherited wealth to prove they are adept at carrying on successful management traditions, much like an apprentice. Under patrimonialism, nepotism, a strong element of American culture, gets a makeover: "wealthy CEO progeny are described as having worked hard to build fortunes they inherit alongside their parents, or their corporations are rebranded as new entities allowing them to mask the fact that they are built from inherited wealth." The two main vehicles for this have been inherited wealth (Trump) and office holding (Bush, Clinton, etc.).

Why Trump now? Crowdculture. It used to be that innovative ideas reached the marketplace through subcultures in real time spaces. Like Dick Hebdige's subcultures, they existed on the margins of society, using their alienation and/or artistic creativity to make novel

contribution to culture and ideology. They needed patrons (in Trump's case the Republican Party) to make a bridge for them to mass culture. This is no longer the case with social media. Rather, subcultures now exist on platforms as crowdcultures. Their ideas are immediately absorbed into the cultural environment. Trump can leverage his personal brand of politics directly to crowds already existing on media platforms. This is how he forms his base of support. As one commentator put it, "crowdculture converts an elite concern into a national social trauma that galvanizes a broad public challenge" (Holt, 2016, p.47). (e.g. MoveOn.org) Moreover, according to Holt, "brands only succeed when they appeal to the crowd-culture—that mass of digital natives ready and eager to share with their like-minded acquaintances. To win in social media, Holt argues, brands must target novel ideologies from within a specific interest group" (Hollis, 2016, n.p.). As we saw during just running up to the election, Trump's brand was mostly spread by crowds who supported his message about Hillary Clinton being a "crook." The "lock her up" meme and chant carried over past November 8 that even Trump was trying to back away from. These memes, as well as some so-called fake news stories were shared continuously in the days and weeks leading up to the election. This was also the case with "drain the swamp" with the concerns that neither party represents average Americans, yet the mainstream media carried on as if operating in a traditional election cycle. The closest they got was crudely naming Sanders and Trump as "populists" which was not really an adequate description of Trump, who, in the aftermath of the election set about vetting one of the wealthiest cabinets in history. The base of this support, this "crowd" was identified as the "Alt.right." Most importantly, though, has been the amount of money spent on online political spending. In 2012 it was $159 million, in 2016 it reached $1 billion (Chang & Masunaga, 2016). The tax bill proposed by the republican dominated House and Senate (as of December 2017) will make this cycle of autarky complete.

So the question remains: why Trump and not Someone Else? How did Trump invent himself and present himself as a personal savior to the U.S. public? Brand experts tell us there are several factors that allow this to happen. In 2012, Trump was largely treated as a joke himself. As one commentator put it, "what made him go from a carnival sideshow" in 2012 to what someone else referred to as the carnival barker in 2015? (Jones, 2016). Here is a definition: A barker is a person who attempts to attract patrons to entertainment events, such as a circus or funfair, by exhorting passing public,[1] describing attractions of show and emphasizing variety, novelty, beauty, or some other feature believed to incite listeners to attend entertainment. A barker may conduct a brief free show, introducing performers and describing acts to be given at the feature performance. Professional barkers strongly dislike the term and instead refer to themselves as "talkers." Trump's performances, which Camille Paglia has drawn attention to as "improvisations" veer more toward the "brief free show" as he constantly alluded to the feature performance (his presidency) *using reassuring words and phrases* (some favorites, "I'll take care of it. I'll take care of women"). In Bloomington, Illinois someone came up to him and mentioned the state of Illinois stand-off between the governor and the speaker of the house over the state's as-yet unresolved budget issues: Trump responded, "I know it's a mess. I'm gonna fix it." If you recall Taibbi's quote at the beginning about the Deathstar, the media coverage of Trump starts to make sense. As he further argued, "The more he insults the press, the more they cover him: He's pulling 33 times as much coverage on the major networks as his next-closest GOP competitor, and twice as much as Hillary" (Taibbi, 2016). Indeed. I want to talk briefly now about Trump's brand and how he markets it in this election taking advantage of marketing techniques, the chasm opened in the party establishment.

We might think of political parties as dinosaurs, like NBC, ABC, CBS, Coca Cola, or McDonald's. Or Macy's. I found understanding branding to be extremely vexing. Around 2008, I went into a Macy's department store. I had seen signs all the time in places like Macy's "Like us on FB." Why, I wondered, would I waste my time forging a social media relationship with Macy's? As any old, out of touch person would do, I asked my students. "Sometimes people do it to get discounts" Okay, I reasoned, but still, why does Macy's care about having a bunch of likes, what does it get them? It turns out, nothing. Branding only works with personalities, or novel ideas, like the preindustrial food model, (which, as Holt notes, undermines the fast food industry by following Chipotle's model of painting "an inspired vision of America returning to bucolic agricultural and food production traditions and reversing many problems in the dominant food system" (Holt, 2016, p. 48). Likewise, it is not going to work for an old department chain store modeling standardized clothing available throughout the country creating uniform style with sizing and tone set by the manufacturer, not the buyer. It might work for an online store that sends you clothes that fit your profile, like Stitchfix or other places. People want personalized service or access to a personality. This is branding. Furthermore, the direct object of the personal relationship is not an informed citizen, a person who sees themselves as one among others in a national community—no, the direct object is "YOU." Without a larger ideological vision in politics, we end up with possessive individualism and personality contests. That coherent ideological vision vanished during dark times. Certain politicians now brand themselves to take advantage of this environment.

BRAND POLITICIANS: THE OUTSIDER

Brand politicians are a new breed. They expose the institutional inertia and hypocrisy of the political parties. Their power lies in how they harness a new form of representational politics that directly inheres to our contemporary style of democracy. There are two, possibly three precursors to Trump in the political brand department: George W. Bush, Sarah Palin, and Rob Ford. We have already discussed Bush as half in, half out of the social media branding game, a direct product of the patrimonialism described by Lachman and explored in *The Cultural Set Up of Comedy.* Let us look briefly and Palin and Ford before turning to Trump.

Sarah Palin precedes Trump in the political field. We might call her a brand pioneer in politics. Palin's term as governor of Alaska also exhibited the outsider brand: taking on oil companies, refusing funds for the "bridge to no where" and generally going against the political establishment in Alaska. She would not forge her personality as a female brand until after she joined the McCain campaign for the vice presidency in 2008. Palin's trajectory is the opposite of Trump's: she used political office to establish her brand. While Trump has been building his commercial brand as a celebrity business executive for decades, his foray into politics at this time (he explored running as early as 1988, and ran in 2012) is relatively new and he did not fully decide until after 2010. Palin, on the other hand, ditched politics for her brand, given that it was so lucrative. You will notice how she jumped into the fray during the election to give her endorsement to Trump. The fact that she performed poorly in this act did not hurt her, it only seemed to backfire onto the media. In order to understand why she seems so Teflon-like, we have to explore how she's crafted her image in the media. First, she began in Alaska as a "maverick reformer." As Beail and Longworth (2012) argue,

> The underlying and not very subtle implication of the McCain/Palin approach is that as an outsider Palin would be a more legitimate representative of average people's interests than insiders who are often conceptualized as out of touch with "ordinary Americans." As

> an outsider, she is "just like us"—those of us who are not members of Congress, vice presidents or other high-profile office holders—often expressing the discontent and distrust of those who hold political office. (p. 47)

Once she quit office in 2009, Palin was free to use social media to really attract attention to her brand, while still based on an outsider, Tea Party movement connection.

One more important aspect of Palin is her controversial stance on violence. Recall the shooting of Gabriel Giffords and many others at a grocery store in Arizona by Jared Loughner. At the time, Palin was famous for having a map on her website that "targeted" certain politicians for Tea Party replacement, among them, Gabby Giffords, a Democrat. Palin's map featured crosshairs over each politicians' image, with a corresponding message: "Don't retreat, Instead—RELOAD," Some saw this as her "winking approval of violence," (Fisher, 2011). We will see Trump echo this strategy in his mocking of attendees at his rallies, his accusations that "Islamic terrorism" is to blame for mass shootings and more. More than any other figure, Trump has closely followed Palin's political playbook. Palin was, of course, forging this brand at the same time as Rob Ford, the mayor of Toronto known for his connection to average people.

Rob Ford, the former Toronto mayor, made headlines in 2013 when a video surfaced of him smoking crack, while in office. Ford's popularity was so strong that—even as he managed to bow out of a second term—he was reelected as city councilman while lying in a hospital bed. Known to have offered his constituents his personal phone number, and pledged to work against the dying brand of traditional Toronto politics, Ford successfully put himself front and center in politics through branding. As one commentator notes,

> Rob Ford has been described as an effective "populist." That is, representing the interest of ordinary people. He was called a "people-friendly" folksy guy and could fit in with any group, from those at the board of trade, rich contributors, the poor, even drug dealers. A "likable, funny and huggable fat guy" was another description. A local citizen told a beat reporter that he liked him because "he eats KFC and loves football." Rex Murphy of the CBC remarked that Ford seems to intimately relate to those who work long hours for small money, people who live tough lives in a hard time. Murphy continued by saying that Ford has the virtue of the common touch. Most politicians typically have a loyal base of supporters and the media typically describes these people as the "base." Not for Rob Ford, his base is called "Ford Nation" (McPherson, 2014).

When Trump began to rise to prominence in the media, shocked onlookers remembered Ford and made the connection. There will be others after him. The recent election of Rodrigo Duterte to the presidency of the Philippines also follows this strategy. He has called for average citizens to shoot drug dealers (he even said he would give them a medal) copying the take the law into your own hands strategy coveted by maverick outsiders like Palin and Trump. Though they have yet to call for direct killing, they do cite the Second Amendment often enough and encourage families taking care of themselves in the absence of effective government protection. In fact, part of their story is that average citizens should fear the government will disable their ability to effectively protect themselves, hence, the conceal carry laws popping up in states across the union. Trump's entry into politics is really the "canary in the coal mine" of our political reality. He beacons what is yet to come, just as Palin, half in (with McCain), half out, added her outsider status to the presidential process. That Trump made it—alone—to the nomination of the GOP. and even attracted the support of long time Republicans like Mitch McConnell and others, means that branding and the presidency will be linked long into our future. The fact that the media made the Sander's campaign disappear while helping Trump to the top, is a testimony to this fact. We need to understand how the media (including social media), using specific affec-

tive strategies alongside growing disenchantment with democracy created this new representational politics.

THE BRANDING OF THE PRESIDENCY

Media fragmentation authorizes brand membership as a form of civic participation. This participation is primarily based around consumption. In the case of Palin, consuming her on TLC (her reality show, *Sarah Palin's Alaska*), Fox News, or buying her book, luxuriating in her twitterverse, or following a fan site now constitutes an act of "citizenship" (Oulette, 2012, p. 188). As we noted before, for Ford this was being part of Ford Nation and for Trump, it means being a loyal supporter by attending his rallies, following him on twitter and Facebook and basically being in his crowd—a "Trumpeteer."

According to brand scholars, Trump has forged a sense of authenticity with his supporters (Moulard, Garrity, & Rice, 2015). It has many components. I will discuss a few in a moment. First, we have to explain how his style of authoritarianism draws them into his brand, while his authenticity keeps them and becomes their alibi for this support. One important aspect of Trump's rise to power is his ability to exhibit qualities that people with a predisposition to authoritarianism find comforting. According to, "social threat theory," people support authoritarian leaders out of fear of social change or the threat posed by outsiders (Stenner, 2005). This makes sense in the recent past. Not only do some sectors of the public fear changes posed to their identities as white and male and heterosexual, basically, that sector of the population that used to enjoy full representation by the "common culture." This is what is meant by the nebulous phrase: Make America Great Again. Which could also read as Make America Safe Again for White patriarchy. Thus, as Jodi Dean and others pointed out early in Trump's candidacy, he impressed certain audiences with his ability to "speak his mind" against what is perceived to be a politically correct culture (Dean, 2015). This sector of supporters will continue to outlast Trump as a voting block, the authors of this authoritarian study conclude. For now, Trump touts this aspect of his brand as much as possible, even if it means being compared to Hitler or Mussolini. As Trump said in an interview last with Maureen Dowd "he doesn't like invidious comparisons but he's "cool with being called an authoritarian" (Dowd, 2016). Of course he is!

But there is even more to this authoritarian attraction. The authors of the authoritarian study gave a parenting survey to respondents. The author of the survey, Stanley Feldman, put together four main questions:

1. Please tell me which one you think is more important for a child to have: independence or respect for elders?
2. Which trait is more important for a child to have: obedience or self-reliance?
3. Please tell me which one is more important for a child: to be considerate or well-behaved?
4. Please tell me again curiosity or good manners? (Quoted in Taub, 2016).

You can guess where the personality that has an affinity for authoritarian leadership comes down on these questions. In fact, a popular meme that circulated among crowds on Facebook read, "Donald Trump believes people should give their children an old fashioned spanking. Share if you agree." According to a midelection survey using this date, Trump had 52% of authoritarians support (Taub, 2016). Granted, it was not an overwhelming amount, simply a majority. However, this was enough to secure the Electoral College votes necessary to lift him to victory, in spite of losing the popular vote.

Once Trump's authoritarianism had drawn supporters in how did/does he keep them? The authenticity of his brand. Even after the election, Trump took to Twitter to defend his own reputation (e.g. brand) much to the consterna-

tion of Washington politicos, who hoped he would turn presidential once the election was decided in his favor. However, the techniques he used during the election to maintain his brand have nevertheless carried over into the presidency. I will discuss some of the techniques briefly. There are more than are covered here. I will discuss revulsion (Lowndes, 2016), candidness, and consistency (Moulard t al., 2015). These traits come from a few different articles looking at branding from different angles. I have chosen the aspects from each that I think best fits Trump's brand strategy and its relationship to certain American publics.

Let us start with revulsion or the ability to conjure up disgust. Trump always says outrageous things that border on being—and sometimes are—lies. However, he also strategically takes the opportunity to mention things about himself and others that violate hygienic taboos. Discussing people's bathroom habits or menstrual cycles, for example. With Fox News Anchor Megyn Kelly, he said "You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes. Blood coming out of her wherever"—over questions, she asked during the first Republican primary debate. Or, in commenting on Hillary Clinton's extended absence during a Democratic debate, "I know where she went—it's disgusting, I don't want to talk about it. No, it's too disgusting. Don't say it, it's disgusting." In these examples, not only does Trump violate taboos about speaking about other people's privacy, the way he states them drags his audience into the scenario with him, asking them to imagine a scene they're not supposed to witness or think about. They are evocative statements. As these scenes are of ones that often violate our society's sexist assumptions about femininity, they cause revulsion in them, this particular audience. In this way, Trump's strategy resembles that of right-wing radio hosts, like Rush Limbaugh, whose words conjure up images rather than convey actual ideas.

Candidness crosses over with revulsion. Trump delivers his revulsion as if it were candor. This makes people not respect him, but think he is authentic. He is willing to reveal his innermost thoughts, no matter how socially inappropriate they may be. Someone could write an excellent essay or thesis on the psychoanalytic dynamics behind this based on race and gender. Like Simon Cowell, Trump issues judgments on his competitors (in the debates) and on anyone who he perceives to be tarnishing his brand (*Saturday Night Live*). More specifically, Trump takes the set and scripts from *The Apprentice* with him everywhere he goes. In those moments when people who are not his fans see him embarrassing himself and the United States, he must imagine himself in that boardroom, issuing judgments. When Megyn Kelly asked him about sexist comments he had made over the years, she was asking for a mea culpa from him. Were he to give it, he would have damaged his brand. The best way for him to deal with it is to threaten her brand back, all the more impactful if he can display his sexism while doing it. Remember Palin's advice: don't retreat, reload.

Finally, and most importantly, consistency. In order for supporters to think of their brand personality as authentic it must remain consistent. Trump looks exactly the same. You can make fun of his hair, his orange toned skin, or his, ill-fitting suits, but the fact remains that he has refused to change any of this throughout the years. This is a lesson he must have learned from Hillary Clinton who had websites devoted to her various hairstyles. Trump took a page from the book of Clinton "Always get the hair right." He has been around forever. And so have his towers. They, like his signature hand move, sticking his finger up in the air, signify his phallic power alongside the subtle reminder that he has always been here. Another important indicator of Trump's popularity is the revelation that his speeches presume an audience who read at the fourth grade level.

CONCLUSION: HOW TO TAKE DOWN A BRAND

The online hacker group Anonymous announced its plan to attack Donald Trump—

the only way to take him down is to attack his brand through social media, as Anonymous does, but the clearest way to lose is by debating him, in the style of the traditional political party format. Trump's appeal rests on the images conjured by his words, not by policy ideas. This is why Rubio, Kasich, and Cruz all failed in their mission to surpass him in the primaries. This is why the GOP is constantly in a tailspin. This is McDonald's versus Chipotle (industrial "wholesome foods" model versus preindustrial fresh "healthy" foods—the preindustrial model is not severely damaged by Chipotle's E.coli scandal, but Chipotle, as a brand is. For the foreseeable future, we will have politicians using Trump and Palin's model to catapult themselves into the middle of the crisis of political leadership that was the party structure using brand techniques and social media. Recall our *New York Times* revelation that Obama begged donors not prefer Sanders because he was "authentic" and to go with Hillary because "she had the leadership qualities to make a good president." Reminding them that "authenticity" does not always pan out, with an indirect reference to George W. Bush. To go back to Anonymous, now apparently Trump supporters have formed a group called the Lion Guard, an homage to a similar group during Mussolini's reign whose slogan was, "Better to be a lion for a day than a lamb for eternity." All this real referencing to the Ides of March, Lions and Lambs—in March—was really disturbing, wasn't it? The group pledged "to search out for any Anti-M.A.G.A. [Make American Great Again] social media account that is planning to infiltrate, disrupt attack or otherwise do harm to Mr. Trump, at any Trump rally, or any Trump supporter" (Garofalo, 2016). We've also seen other media outlets attempt to damage Trump's brand. Fox and its affiliates have emphasized Trump's "unhealthy" relationship with Megyn Kelly, trying to make him out to be a media stalker. Whether or not that will turn his fans off or on remains to be seen. But one year after the election, is core base of supporters remain unswayed.

There have been three recent examples of prominent post *Daily Show* (former correspondents) attempting to take on Trump. In one case, Jon Oliver, he fully admits his simultaneous revulsion and admiration for Trump. The second is Samantha Bee, who confronted his supporters in a focus group. And the third is Larry Wilmore, who compared Trump to Mussolini on his *Nightly Report*. Larry Wilmore's show was canceled; Trump remains president. Jon Oliver attempted an entire segment exposing Trump's original name as "Drumpf" and starting a campaign to get people to buy hats he created in the United States (recall Trump's hats are made in China). We've witnessed Trump's persona before, it is a combination of insult comedy and male soap opera: part Andrew Dice Clay, part World Wrestling Federation wrestler. As Marco Rubio learned, there is no low that he will not stoop to in order to best his rivals. Trump does not direct his insults at his audience, but his rivals. One commentator noted that Oliver's clip was somewhat discredited by Trump's own reaction to it (he agreed). Samantha Bee held a focus group with Trump supporters, in exchange for hosting a party for them. While most of them tried to seem neutral ("I like Trump because he cares about our country, He's really just an old school racist") one went for the jugular, Trump style: "You're just a trickle down media whore" he said to Bee, who smartly responded back demonstrating her knowledge of porn genres. In both, Trump and his supporters proved themselves adept at slinging the mud back at their critics, especially in ways that critics did not expect. Finally, Larry Wilmore noted Trump's penchant for "resting smug face" a parody of "resting bitch face" an accusation often hurled at ambitious women. He then showed side-by-side portraits of Mussolini and Trump each doing their own version of the face. Trump's portrait looked like he was kind of dopey at the same time. One wonders if Wilmore got the gig at the White House Correspondents' dinner because of his effective criticisms of Trump. Even President Obama went on the circuit, visiting Jimmy Fal-

lon's show and emphatically declaring that "orange is not the new black." Attempts at comedy will now be less effective at embarrassing political candidates who brand their image and sell their personalities. They do not have to worry about actual authenticity just its seemliness. This new era will be a tense foreshadowing on Americans' relationship to authority and the presidency, a position we consider to be the provenance of a heroic individual. Comedy, as a weapon of critique, has fragmented into its niche mockings, available as a style, consumed on demand. Comedy is largely ineffective at correcting politics.

However, at the end of the day, Stewart and all of his protégés on *The Daily Show* were a part of the convergence culture mediascape that Trump has been trying to surpass. What it will take to bring him down is nothing less than the political equivalent of a listeria epidemic. Branding, however, will survive and make its impact on the presidency. It's a new feature of democracy.

NOTES

1. http://skiptucker.blogspot.com/2016/03/how-many-trump-supporters-does-it-take_5.html
2. *King of the Hill* went off the air in 2010 and has been hailed as the last bipartisan comedy show, capable of bridging the culture divide. One commentator wrote, "Its characters embodied all of the desires, needs, and contradictions that make up the universal human experience, undermining assumptions about "red" and "blue" culture in the process." It also did not make fun of poorer conservatives. Matt Bai writing for the NYT claimed "Rather than parodying red-state the show subtly explored the ways in which conservative Americans were struggling with their nation's rapid transformation. But more than that, it imbued all of its characters with a rich humanity that made their foibles deeply sympathetic."

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