

McCain is Apple, Obama is Nokia

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New Synovate research reveals impact of presidential candidates' brand strategies

Research revealed today from Synovate gives a remarkable insight into how the two candidates in this year's US presidential election have built their personal brands. In the study, conducted before the principal acute financial crisis and again afterwards, results show striking differences in the issues which connect each candidate with voters.

Barack Obama connects strongly with registered voters on four main issues: healthcare, the desire for change, the Iraq war and education. These four were the most important issues for just under 60% of voters prior to the financial crisis, and just over 60% afterwards. Among women this figure is even higher at nearly 70%.

The study also showed that Obama is resonating more strongly with voters on the economy, more than doubling his connection with voters on this issue, from 5.1% in Synovate's pre financial crisis survey to 10.6% in the post survey. Voters continue to rate McCain much lower on the economy, indicating that he is still not connecting with them on this issue.

In fact, John McCain does not have a strong connection to the electorate on any one specific issue. The highest connection he establishes is on the Iraq war, with only one in ten respondents citing this as the chief issue that they identify with McCain both before and after the financial crisis.

Ged Parton, CEO of Synovate's Brand & Communications practice, explains: "You can summarise these two brand strategies as 'you you you' and 'me me me'. Obama pins himself to a handful of key issues, and makes himself accountable to them, in much the same way that a brand like Nokia sells itself on its key service attributes. This is about what 'you' – the consumer or the voter – is encouraged to buy into. It centres around what he can do to make your life better.

"In contrast, McCain's approach to his own brand is to focus on the personal: himself, his experience, and his military background. This is a tricky strategy, used by brands like Diet Coke and Apple. It is characterised by a confidence to shout about who they are, rather than features or benefits. On the surface, it isn't the most obvious association, but, like McCain, these brands simply put out their stall and expect you to work out why you should like them.

"With Obama continuing to grow his lead in the polls, it looks like the 'you you you' approach is working with voters for now."

The study polled more than 1700 registered voters in total across the US in early and late September using Synovate eNation.

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