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Donald Trump and the Branding of the American Presidency

The President of Segments

Kenneth M. Cosgrove

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For LaDonna, Jerry, Amy and Paul Sullivan.

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Hampton Falls New Hampshire

Ken Cosgrove

INTRODUCTION

This book argues that the way in which Donald Trump used branding, social media, targeting, and customer data to win show how one marketer with an excellent brand story and understanding of social media took on the political establishment, won and turned American politics on its ear in the process. Trump used sticky branding to build a brand that connected with the target audience and seemed to be everywhere, all the time. He is an accomplished marketer and brand builder who has sold everything from real estate to wine and a celebrity who has starred in his own reality tv show as well as appearing as himself on the World Wrestling Entertainment broadcasts. Trump built a political brand and excelled at the use of social media to build a sticky, omnipresent brand, something that his predecessor Barack Obama did not do. Trump is a marketer first and a politician second. He is always selling but his proclivity to improvise rather than following rules and norms is significantly different than what Americans had seen from recent Presidents. He is not somebody who has tried to unite the country but has instead focused relentlessly on delivering on his brand promises and keeping his customers happy. This book will look at the ways in which Donald Trump built a sticky brand and pursued brand omnipresence to win the Presidency and then try to govern in the social media age. We've never had a President like him before but the techniques that he used to win could work for a wide variety of candidates thus Donald Trump's election doesn't signal the end of our democracy as his critics have claimed, it really signals that

the dominance of elite gatekeepers have waned and the chance for more ideological diversity in the political system has appeared. The Trump era will be remembered as a time in which branding, targeting, segmentation, and political marketing were dominant meaning social consensus and unity proved to be elusive thus showing the limits of political marketing to achieve domestic tranquility.

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CHAPTER 1

Donald Trump and the Branding of the American Presidency

Abstract This introduces the book Donald Trump and the Branding of the American Presidency. It discusses the Trump brand value proposition, targeted audiences, the types of segmentation Trump has used during his campaign and in office, and introduces the concepts of brand omnipresence and sticky branding. Donald Trump represents something different in American politics: a politician who developed a multi-platform commercial and celebrity brand and then applied it to politics. Trump shows how a modern political branding and marketing campaign works in the social media age and how to achieve brand omnipresence. By generating continual attention brand omnipresence can be achieved even in an overcrowded political marketplace. Trump gained a tactical advantage because most of his contemporaries in both parties were not using branding in a fashion similar to the way in which Trump was using it.

Keyword Donald Trump · Hillary Clinton · Ronald Reagan · Republican Party · Presidency · Branding · Presidential Election of 2016 · Presidential Election of 2020 · Political branding

Donald Trump's election and administration showed the strengths of branding.

The Trump era shows the importance of keeping brand promises. Trump rode emotional, personal, and sticky branding to electoral success in 2016. Trump's strategy of being everywhere, all the time kept audiences across the political spectrum engaged. The Trump era showed how a political brand can become omnipresent and build deep loyalty using direct-to-consumer marketing. The Trump campaign succeeded in 2016 by aiming its brand at specific audiences in just the right number of places. President Trump continued marketing by remaining active on Twitter, by appearing in targeted conservative media, and by regularly engaging with the White House Press Corps. These activities helped make the Trump brand omnipresent and remind voters that brand promises made by candidate Trump were being kept by President Trump. While Trump lost in 2020, he did so despite attracting more votes than he had gotten in 2016. This is evidence that the brand strategy Trump adopted builds deep loyalty and elevated levels of customer engagement.

Political branding offers considerable benefits to politicians who use it effectively but considerable risk to those who do not. Trump ran on the promise of being a strong manager and promised meaningful systemic change yet when the worst public health crisis in a century appeared and set off a series of other crises, Trump's management abilities did not seem to live up to his brand promise. The brand's potency can vary by the user's strategic situation, customer experiences with the branded products, and market conditions. Donald Trump's brand was very potent in 2016. He ran in an open-seat election held at the end of eight years of Democratic control of the White House. He faced an opponent in Hillary Clinton whom Republicans had spent years branding negatively. His brand was less potent in 2020 because he was running as an incumbent meaning the voters had tried the Trump political product once and now, he was trying to get them to buy it again. Incumbent President Trump now had a record to defend and was charged with leading the country's response to COVID. He was faced with a different kind of candidate in Joe Biden than he had faced in Hillary Clinton. Biden could present himself as a working-class hero in a way Hillary Clinton could not have and Biden could stress his empathetic personal traits as a contrast to Donald Trump's more acerbic persona. Despite changed strategic and market conditions, Trump stuck to his core brand, brand emotions, and products. That it almost worked shows the upside of political branding and that he lost

shows its downsides. Trump generated significant repeat business and attracted new customers to the party in a time of economic and social upheaval. Trump's 2020 difficulties show how important it is for political brands to be nimble and reposition in response to the emergence of a crisis that changes customer concerns. The world changed in the Spring of 2020, but Donald Trump did not. Had he made a few emotive and substantive adjustments, he well might have won reelection.

The Trump brand attracted new constituencies to the GOP but also repelled many of its established supporters. Trump alienated a host of public figures, public and private institutions and kept his political opponents engaged throughout his time on the national stage. Trump lost voters that Republicans often win in bigger numbers than the working-class supporters he attracted. He faced unstinting opposition from a host of prominent institutions and individuals, many of which had traditionally been apolitical or less overtly political and kept his opponents engaged throughout his term. This produced a continual sense of disquiet and, eventually, exhaustion in the electorate. It meant that his opponents were willing to turn to a candidate who was much older and perceived to be more moderate than they to defeat him, Joe Biden.

The Trump era shows that branding, brand style, segmentation, and policy choices combine to shape the behavior and public perceptions of a Presidency. This period shows how branding turns complex policy discussions into emotional stories around which political identities are built. This era shows that the marketing imperative of building a brand in which promises made must be kept and the product must work as advertised poses significant problems for the functioning of the political system and the health of the democracy. The Trump experience further shows that the pursuit of brand omnipresence comes with the downside risk that the audience might grow tired of the brand. The Trump experience shows that the ethics of the marketer matter a great deal. An emotive sticky brand that is omnipresent when combined with segmented media might lead to things like a candidate's supporters refusing to accept the legitimate outcome of an election or, as we saw, storming the US Capitol on behalf of their candidate.

The branding imperative encourages partisan polarization in government and in the country. Branding's incentives make policymaking through the traditional process based on compromise and consensus building more difficult. The brand's imperatives have ushered in an era in which policy has come to be made through executive orders, agency

rulemaking processes, interesting legislative devices like reconciliation, and judicial rulings. Americans have learned more about the rules of the Senate filibuster and legislative process in general than prior generations had felt the need to know because of the imperative parties have to stand by their brands. All this results from the need for brand promises made to be kept for the marketer to keep credibility with their customers. Trump's brand promises differentiated from his primary challengers in 2016, from other Republicans, and from the Washington Establishment during his time on the national stage. His branding made him stand out in a crowded marketplace, built deep customer loyalty and also made both him and his opponents dig in thus precluding compromise and consensus policies. His frequent out-of-the-mainstream statements were part of his brand. Trump said and did things that positioned him as being a disruptive insurgent in Washington and in a country that he argued, did too many things for elites but too little for average Americans. He sold himself as an outsider who entered politics to save the country from an incestuous elite that had led it to the brink of ruin. The relentless opposition he faced from Democrats and some Republicans, some federal bureaucrats and judges, academics, and other members of the elite helped Trump prove the truth in his brand promise to his target audiences even if a lot of the rest of the country found them to be unconvincing.

Donald Trump is a branded individual because of his long years of commercial and celebrity activity. He was vulnerable to attacks because he was proposing meaningful change to a considerable number of policies that many people supported, because they threatened a liberal policy regime and narrative history that no Republican had really made much of a dent in and because Trump's brand values lacked empathy and compassion. President Trump was easy to attack because of his own traits and behaviors because he had no experience in elective office at any level never mind the national level meaning he had a long learning curve once in office about the ways in which Washington worked and what the public expected of a President. His decisions and behavior were things that more seasoned politicians would have either engaged in privately or not at all. His frequent direct-to-consumer communication, his use of social media, and his sparring with journalists and political opponents reduced the majesty of the Presidency but kept himself in the public eye thus achieving brand omnipresence. Other administrations might have sought to communicate directly with the public via radio or television, shaped the media narrative, or dominated news cycles.

This country had never had a President who was always trying to sell and close or whose thoughts were as accessible to the average citizen, while he was in the White House, before Donald Trump arrived there. Building the Trump brand depended on this kind of omnipresence regardless of what impact this had on the institution of the Presidency. Trump's strategy of building an omnipresent, sticky, brand meant that he had to be at the center of everything all the time. The strategy was a social media age attempt to make Trump stand out in a crowded marketplace, show how brand promises made were being kept and make sure his followers knew what he was up to daily. The result was to deepen the relationship between them and the Trump brand. Trump's supporters loved to hear his thoughts and his examples of how he was trying to deliver. Those who were not his supporters either grew wearier or angrier and more engaged as the Trump era unfolded. Trump did not fit the traditional image of the President and did not always use the full power of the office to promote his Presidency. Instead, he stuck to his personalist, nationalist sticky branding. His failure to adjust did not redound to his benefit when he ran for reelection because, after four years in office, the problems facing the country were his in a way that they had not been when he was a challenger.

Trump stayed true to his brand emotions, sticky brand, and omnipresence strategy during the COVID crisis. In some ways, this was a missed opportunity for him to have built social consensus. Trump's strategy led to him being overexposed, unable to leverage the kinds of marketing opportunities that the Presidency usually offers to its occupant and turned him into the face of a bungled response to a pandemic. Trump inadvertently made himself into the face of the crisis by holding regular press briefings while remaining in the White House. It was a strategy like the one Jimmy Carter had used to manage the Iranian hostage crisis and it produced similarly negative results. Unlike Carter, Trump intended to make himself the center of everything. Thus, a major problem with the omnipresence strategy is that it can depend on events beyond the user's control as happened when COVID appeared in the United States. The American Government would have struggled to respond to COVID because of the structure of the system and the population's values. Structurally, the national government and the President do not have the kinds of power that a lot of Americans think they do or that leaders in more unitary systems of government really have. Trump could not have taken some of the actions that were being urged on him like implementing

a universal mask mandate and a nationwide lockdown because America's federalist system limited his ability to do so but his branding said he could do otherwise. His promise of strong, effective management was called into question by his erratic media appearances, by his Administration's decision to defund the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness, and his seeming lack of understanding that the national government would be well served to cooperate with instead of competing with state governments in managing the crisis. Donald Trump was not responsible for the structure of the US Government, how it can limit Presidential power, or the important powers it reserves to the states. Donald Trump was not the only American President who decided to invest in the military to the exclusion of other priorities like public health infrastructure. Generations of American politicians had defined security in military terms and Trump was stuck with the results during the pandemic. The United States lacked the public health infrastructure to mount the immediate response to COVID-19 that countries that had recent severe experiences with viruses could mount. The political system's structure made it impossible to mount the kind of response that a unitary system like the United Kingdom or New Zealand could mount. Instead, he could do some things, governors could do others and Trump's interest in coordinating with any of them seemed to vary over time. Trump did not have the resources or the system that would have allowed him to resolve the pandemic himself, but his branding put him squarely at the center of it meaning that it set him up to fail. Donald Trump's omnipresent sticky branding strategy helped him get attention as an insurgent candidate. Once in office, he and the brand strategy ran headlong into the symbolic realities of holding the office of President and the substantive constraints that exist on that office's power.¹

These strategies can build loyalty for the politician's brand with the target audience and awareness of it among potential targets. They also are a way to keep the brand at the center of a crowded marketplace and show progress on a regular basis. The way in which Trump used them meant that they built deep loyalty in a few segments not broad social consensus. Despite being impeached twice, refusing to accept the results of the 2020 election, likely costing the GOP a Senate majority by telling his supporters in Georgia that the election process was so corrupt that their votes wouldn't count in two post-2020 general election runoff contests, running a marketing campaign for weeks in advance of and speaking at a rally that likely contributed to civil unrest on January 6, 2021, then

not attending the inauguration of his successor, Donald Trump's brand is so strong that he is considered a contender to run again in 2024 or play a major role in deciding who will be the GOP standard bearer in that contest and many Republicans consider the Biden Presidency to be illegitimate because of Trump's baseless electoral fraud claims. This is a testament to the power of the techniques that he used to build his political brand.

Despite his marketing and branding chops, Trump had a steep learning curve in the White House. He struggled to organize White House and opted for a lean management approach that, while common in the corporate world, had not really been tried in government before. He had little sense of how to deal with Congress or how to manage the bureaucracy as Schier and Eberly (2017) note. Trump's Administration had been hobbled from the get-go because he left many people who had served in the Obama Administration temporarily in positions of power and they caused him no end of grief. As Trump aide David Bossie put it: "This is the one regret of the president, and I agree with him. That if the president had come in and fired all the Obama holdovers, every single one of them, President Trump's job would be a lot easier to do."² He seemed to care more about marketing his brand than governing the country. Beyond his core campaign promises that could be dealt with via executive orders, his Administration outsourced a lot of the things to Congress and lobbyists who epitomized the swamp his campaign promised to drain.³ These tendencies were on full display during the COVID-19 pandemic. While Trump held regular and long news briefings for marketing purposes, the actual American response was outsourced to a task force headed by the Vice-President and state governors.

Like Ronald Reagan, Donald Trump was a marketer in the White House. He emphasized different personal traits and skills than Americans normally expected from Presidents. One of the key traits that Americans should consider in electing a marketer in chief is the brand personality that person brings to the Oval Office. Reagan and Trump had significant policy differences. Reagan was a fiscal conservative while Trump did not seem to care about the national balance sheet. Reagan was a foreign policy globalist while Trump was a nationalist. They shared a view that federal programs benefitted the few at the expense of the many. The difference was that Ronald Reagan was a professed admirer of Franklin Roosevelt and presented his program as a corrective to those of subsequent liberal Democrats. These liberals had spent too much money, raised taxes too

much, and gave too much power to the federal government. Trump was running against the entire system and elites in both parties.

Trump and Reagan shared a critique of Democrats yet did so using different brand personalities and emotions. Reagan presented himself as optimistic and forward-looking while Trump presented himself as angry and yearning for a great lost past America. Reagan, whose Make America Great Again, branding Donald Trump directly copied presented himself as the restoration of American values, economics, and strength as Donald Trump tried to do.⁴ Further, Ronald Reagan had a more traditional White House media and marketing operation something Donald Trump absolutely eschewed in favor of a more hands-on approach. Reagan was an outsider and an insurgent but was also an experienced politician having governed California and, as a result, had a sense of what could be done in office. Reagan did not overpromise as wildly as Trump did in some key areas like getting Mexico to pay for his wall. Emotively, Reagan's brand values were more optimistic than angry and more humorous than sarcastic. Where Reagan, like Barack Obama, would use humor, a regretful tone, or a sense that nobody in their right mind could argue with his point, Trump bombastically argued that his opponents were stupid, subversive, or both for opposing his ideas. Trump told much more of a charged emotive story than did Reagan because in the age of Trump there is much more environmental noise and a clearer ability to segment the audience than existed in the Reagan years.

Trump differed from Reagan in that he had been directly involved in his marketing and media relations operations. Trump had no experience in office and took pride in speaking his mind. As he told CPAC in 2019, "I'm not on script."⁵ The Trump White House was, outside of its first flurries of executive orders, unable to take advantage of the communicative strategies Presidents usually use to build Congressional and public support for their ideas. Instead, it stuck to its core brand and audiences. Trump lacked message discipline around building a theme of the day or week but instead bounced from topic to topic but always selling the Trump brand story. This was a strategy for building brand omnipresence not passing specific legislation or promoting specific policies. Trump's constant activity and pugnacity helped to build brand awareness, omnipresence, and loyalty in the target audiences even if it did not lead to a lot of legislative successes. The emphasis on brand meant it focused on keeping promises, telling emotionally engaging stories, and visually showing people what is being done on their behalf. Omnipresence

demands constant motion to generate attention hence the constant flurry of activity to keep up with the relentless pace and noise of the social media world. Trump did so and created an environment in which there was no escaping the Trump brand. The goal of creating omnipresence meant that the Trump brand was everywhere all the time and the country revolved around it. Trump, like Bill Clinton, has an aura of scandal and immoral behavior around him and like the Clintons in office, Trump has pushed forward rather than giving in to critics.⁶ Given that Trump saw Clinton as his role model for managing a scandal, it should not be surprising that during the House Impeachment proceedings his Administration fought requests for documents, witnesses, and subpoenas at every turn. Unlike Clinton, there would be no apology for most of his behavior, instead, Trump hit back at his opponents. In the one case he did apologize, Trump launched an effective attack the same weekend against his opponent.

Trump often pointed out the number of brand promises that he kept during his term. At press events and rallies he would stand behind a podium or in front of signage that read “Promises Made, Promises Kept.” Trump’s focus on appealing to his targeted segments exemplifies the sticky branding strategy that Miller, 2015, outlines. Miller’s sticky branding strategy has 12.5 principles including positioning to win by developing a simple, clear selling proposition, a focus on niche markets in which the marketer can win over time, being authentically different in terms of the visuals of the brand and the experiences provided by it, brand omnipresence, an emphasis on big goals and bold actions and pride in being able to serve (Miller 2015). Donald Trump’s campaigns and administration followed these principles. One place the sticky branding strategy is implemented is in the way in which Trump used language (Adams 2017). Another was in the way he identified underserved audiences in the political marketplace and turned it out including in states that most observers had counted in the pro-Clinton category (Pollack and Schweikart 2017).

Trump, like most marketers, focused on his best customers and still has high approval ratings with them. Trump said and did things that deviated from the civility Americans expect their Presidents to display in the office. As the 2018 midterm election and 2020 Presidential results showed, adopting such a focused strategy has downsides. First, Trump’s working-class brand personality only resonates favorably within a few segments. Second, the power of the Trump brand is directly proportional to the situations in which it is placed. Trump and his advisors struggled with how to

approach a contest with Bernie Sanders because Sanders is also emotive, talks about issues of concern to average Americans, and has a highly authentic brand persona⁷ Sanders, as Adams (2017) notes, used many of the same persuasive and pre-persuasive strategies in his campaigns that Trump employed in his. Trump opined that running against a different candidate, like Michael Bloomberg might be easier: “Frankly, I would rather run against Bloomberg than Bernie Sanders, because Sanders has real followers, whether you like them or not, whether you agree with them or not,” Trump said. “I happen to think it’s terrible what says. But he has followers.”⁸ Like Trump, Bernie had built an emotive brand and deep loyalty to it among a sizable number of Americans. Trump’s brand might not have been as effective in a direct contest against Sanders because this head-to-head matchup would not have provided the direct contrast between Trump and the establishment that worked so well for him with his target audiences. Trump’s analysis is seen through the lens of marketing and the number of customers a given competitor or policy alternative might have and this is in keeping with the way he approached his campaign and administration.⁹

What Trump did not count on was running against a candidate who could pitch working-class voters like Sanders could while appealing to a cross-section of upper-income voters and could credibly claim that he was in no way like Donald Trump: Joe Biden. Biden’s campaign message amounted to saying that he was a decent, civil, and empathetic person—the embodiment of the anti-Donald Trump. A case in point is provided by their public approaches to COVID. Biden promised to “follow the science” around the virus, personally wore a mask, downsized his campaign events, and regularly practiced social distancing. Donald Trump did none of these things. Biden’s appeal worked because Trump had repelled so many opponents but also because Biden’s offering of more empathy and competence fit changed market conditions better than Trump’s offering.¹⁰

Donald Trump was not a unifying figure. A steady drizzle of accusations about his business and personal behavior served to produce a political death of a thousand cuts. Trump was the stationary target and became the subject of a steady stream of opposition attacks that negatively redefine the target’s public image.¹¹ The impact of this constant trickle of negativity is clearly shown in a December 2019 Suffolk University poll that found an eleven point gender gap in terms of Trump’s favorability along gender lines with men being much more positive about him than

women, a yawning partisan gap of eighty two points in terms of favorability between Democrats and Republicans, a nine-point difference in regional support between Trump's best performing area (the South—the only region in which Trump had a positive ratio of favorable to unfavorable evaluations) and his worst (the Northeast where he was underwater by seventeen points), a stark racial divide with Trump enjoying a slight majority of white support (51 points) while performing in the single digits with African Americans (8 points) and a huge skew toward older audiences with Trump's best performing segment being people in the 50–64-year-old age range (53% favorable) and his worst-performing segment being those between ages 18 and 34 (31% favorable)¹².

The voters knew more about Donald Trump by 2020 than they did in 2016 and they had seen his performance during the pandemic up close and personally because the omnipresence strategy kept Trump on TV regularly for extended periods of time. The voters had a much clearer picture of who he was than they might have had in 2016. Prior to COVID, President Trump often pointed to the findings of the Russia investigation, claimed there was a deep state conspiracy against him, railed against his impeachment, called out jurists with whom he disagreed, and demonized his opponents in both parties and in Congress to explain why there had been so much disquiet during his first term. He crowed about his tax cut policy, the way in which the economy was performing, and the amount of money he spent on a border wall. By 2020, the problems of the country and the world were Trump's meaning that his solutions and results were the central issues of the election. Thus, Trump started 2020 in a more difficult strategic position than he faced as a challenger in many respects. That COVID dramatically changed the political marketplace in a few short weeks did him no favors.

Trump seemed most interested in showing he had kept brand promises on the economy and trying to run for reelection by using media availabilities as surrogate rallies rather than coordinating an Executive Branch response himself. As Brad Parscale noted after the election, Trump could have adopted a more empathetic tone as Americans suffered through 2020 but his tone instead remained constant.¹³ Trump ran on his core brand in the Fall campaign. He added in the promise of a miracle vaccine rollout that would end the pandemic quicker than was thought at the time. While the miracle vaccine did appear, it did so after the election. Trump was promising something to the voters they could not see and

that many experts thought could not be delivered as fast as it eventually was. The 2020 Biden campaign wisely used Trump's omnipresence strategy against him by practicing the political equivalent of the rope a dope boxing strategy in which it stayed out of the way while Trump flailed away against the crises besetting the country.

In addition to playing up his accomplishments, the Trump campaign tried to make his opponents into the unacceptable alternative just as Barack Obama had done to Mitt Romney.¹⁴ The Democratic primary field was filled with progressive candidates, most of whom were positioned left of the general population on many issues, meaning it looked like Trump would have a lot of material to work with once they finished beating each other up. For example, half of the independent voters at the time thought that the Democrats have gone too far to the left and these are the voters that often decide elections.¹⁵ Trump tried to build fellowship between Biden and the progressives once Biden clinched the Democratic nomination by highlighting what a Biden win would mean for the economy especially around 401 (k) performance, taxes, and spending.

Trump was not afraid to use issues of class, race, and ideology as part of his marketing efforts. He would sometimes use all three at once. For example, during July 2019, he attempted to make four leftist first-term female members of Congress of color into the face of the Democratic Party. By doing this, Trump attempted to differentiate between his nationalistic branding, his traditional values pitch, and his free market economic focus from socialism with a visible minority face. Creating a contrast between Democrats and Republicans around socialism and capitalism plus another between traditional values and liberalism has worked for Republicans for several decades, Trump's injection of race and national origin might have fit with his brand and pleased his core audiences, but it also allowed his opponents to present him as a racist thus raising the discomfort level with him the key swing voters blocks had about him.¹⁶

The strength of Trump's brand raised questions in both parties about what their products, brands, and target audiences should be. Trump's direct-to-consumer marketing campaign showed how social media has weakened the party as an organization and elite media's ability to screen out candidates and ideas. The weakening of the gatekeepers as the expansion of the diversity of candidates indicates that, far from indicating the death of American democracy, Donald Trump's election indicates its revitalization is underway. Like most of his predecessors, Donald Trump used the media as a foil. He went further by accusing them of being "fake

news” instead of simply complaining about their bias against Republicans as his recent predecessors had done. This was an effort to delegitimize the media to clear the field to allow Trump to disseminate an unmediated brand narrative to his customers. Not surprisingly, his media coverage has been negative outside of conservative circles even though he regularly schmoozed with the journalists he complained about.¹⁷ His fights with the media were a way to show that he was keeping his promise of disruption because he was taking on Washington elite journalists himself. They were also key to the omnipresence strategy because the media just could not stop covering him. People might have loved or hated him, but they could not stop watching him. The Trump White House did not run the White House media and marketing operation that Americans have grown accustomed to over the last century. Instead, he was his own unscripted marketing operation meaning that he said and did things that fit his brand well but were not factually accurate. He regularly got into one-on-one fights with journalists. His stories and confrontations were intended to attract attention for his brand and help it to stand out in a crowded, overstimulated, marketplace. Trump’s White House media operation was all about keeping attention to his brand and selling its wares. That Trump was impeached was probable given the way in which he sought to change so many things and the way in which he continuously activated his opponents.

Not surprisingly, more ideological, and more intellectually and racially diverse candidates are seeking office and ideas once dismissed out of hand are gaining thoughtful consideration as the gatekeepers have lost some of their control over the nomination and election processes. Trump showed that there are significant numbers of people who feel disengaged from politics and if they can be engaged by a candidate that could be a path to victory. Two examples from the 2018 electoral cycle are Democratic Members of Congress Ayanna Pressley and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez both of whom similarly targeted intermittent and new voters, used niche media and door knocks to reach them, presented them with emotionally branded appeals, turned them out, and won elections that most observers thought they would have difficulty winning.¹⁸ Bernie Sanders used similar rhetoric in the 2020 Democratic primaries as Sullivan (2020) notes Senator Sanders picks: “his target group, demonizes it, and relentlessly attacks. Sound familiar? Replace billionaires with illegal immigrants and throw in a huge helping of the ‘mainstream media is unfair to me,’ and you have a perfect match.”¹⁹

Like Trump, these candidates told emotionally engaging stories to specific audiences that might not have been targeted by earlier campaigns. These stories contain attractive propositions that are simple on their face. They present voters with commonsense solutions to national problems. In fact, these solutions would usually be difficult to pass into law and then be complicated to implement as policy or they have other impacts that are not contained in the story. Just as was the case for the Wall in the 2016 Trump campaign, it is easy to float ideas for free college, tax reform, Medicare for all, or a Green New Deal as aspirational stories or brands. It is harder to present them in terms of policies when one must present the total cost, how it is paid for, who pays for it and through what mechanisms, what effects it might have that were not intended, and what kinds of cost control mechanisms will have to be put into place to make them work. All of this was shown by the public reaction to the detailed Medicare for All Plan that Senator Elizabeth Warren floated in the Fall of 2019. It went from being a centerpiece of her campaign in November 2019 to something she barely spoke about by January 2020.²⁰ Emotional branding tells people a much simpler, clearer story than the murky world of politics and policy ever could. It does so without producing winners or losers and costs or benefits that the actual policymaking process produces. Emotional branding says that a candidate's proposal will be better for most people, someone else will pay for it and there will be no unintended consequences or cost containment mechanisms while the real political world produces a starkly different reality. Candidates can get elected doing what Donald Trump did but unless they are better prepared for life in government and develop an ability to present their brand aspects and policy proposals in a way that produces unity, they will face the same struggles that Donald Trump encountered in office and in seeking reelection.

Trump's success with an emotive omnipresent sticky brand as a challenger and failure as an incumbent show that people might be willing to try something once, but a politically branded product has to deliver like any other product delivers. If it does not, it will not generate repeat business. In 2016, Trump's disruptive branding was effective because he was a challenger offering a break from the status quo. In 2020, Trump represented a status quo that was facing major challenges. Once in office, Trump seldom reached out to any but his loyal customers an approach that as a governing philosophy was not conducive to dealing