

Government shutdown shuts down political party brands

Survey finds both parties are being damaged by the stand-off

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By Robert Passikoff

As lawmakers forced the government to shut down for the first time in 17 years, as a market researcher I wondered how Americans see the political parties themselves? In less than 24 hours, the Democratic party saw its brand strength decrease by 9%, the Republicans brand by a bit more -- 16%.

Brand Keys used a statistically validated emotional brand engagement assessment to measure the political party brands. Its a combination of psychological inquiry and higher-order statistical analyses that fuses emotional and rational values dealing with how the electorate views their Ideal political party. We've used this model of engagement-ties-closely-to-behavior for every Presidential election since Bill Clinton (1992) and the metrics have predicted the winner in every election except 2000, when George W. Bush beat Al Gore by a razor-thin margin.

Brand engagement assessments, whether for pizza or political parties, measure what consumers think rather than what they say they think, and from a brand perspective provides an accurate read as to how consumers, or in the case of political parties and their candidates, the electorate, will behave. So we measured Democrats' and Republicans' concepts of the Ideal political party and compared the individual party brands to that ideal directly following the announcement of the shutdown.

Four Drivers of Brand Engagement

There are four engagement drivers that define the Ideal Political Party, and voters hold expectations for each driver. Not surprisingly, the order of the engagement drivers (and accompanying expectations) vary in terms of whats important to Democrats and Republicans, hence different party views and political brand affiliation. The drivers can be briefly described:

Action



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Does the party have a comprehensive, realistic, well-considered plan for solving the problems facing the country?

Compassion

Does the party care about all of the people?

Perception

Does the party have a deep understanding of the problems facing the county?

Resolve

Does the party have the strength and leadership to guide the country?

Democrats see their Ideal Political Party as follows:

1. Perception
2. Resolve
3. Compassion
4. Action

Republicans view their Ideal Political Party this way:

1. Resolve
2. Perception
3. Action
4. Compassion

For Democrats, the driver with the highest expectations is Compassion. For Republicans it is Action.

Brand Strength

Like consumer brands, we can calculate a Brand Strength measure, in this case the degree to which the political party is seen to meet or exceed expectations that Democrats and Republicans hold for their Ideal Political Party, with the Ideal calculated as 100%. The last time we took this measure was during the 2012 Presidential election, so it provides an up-to-date benchmark against which to measure how the U.S. Government to shut down affected Democrats and Republicans respective views of their political party brands.

Heres how things currently stand, with 253 registered Democrats evaluating the Democratic party and 267 registered Republicans (screened as being non-government workers) rating their party again, after the government shutdown:

| Year | Ideal Political Party | Democratic Party | Republican Party |
|------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 2012 | 100% | 83% | 77% |
| 2013 | 100% | 76% | 65% |

The Democratic party saw its brand strength decrease by 9%, the Republicans brand by a bit more, 16%.

Rule of Six

One brand engagement certainty we've seen play out over the years is the Engagement Rule of Six. That rule states where brands are stronger than competitors, consumers are six times more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt in uncertain circumstances, which we think is a pretty fair description of a Federal government shutdown.

Will Rogers noted, "I am not a member of any organized political party. I am a Democrat." That was 81 years ago, and Democrat or Republican, the sentiment is worth taking to heart. Because whether a political party or a consumer brand, if you are so disorganized that you are unable to meet customer expectations, you always lose in the marketplace or, as is likely in this case, the voting booth.

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