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Is Trump Teflon? Most Say No as Brand Perception Takes a Hit

Lewd video has 'dramatically diminished added value for the Trump brand,' according to a new study



Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump outside the front door of Trump Tower in Manhattan. The Trump brand has taken a hit in the wake of the release of a video in which he made lewd comments about women.

PHOTO: REUTERS

By **ALEXANDRA BRUELL**

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A series of what typical politicians might consider faux pas have catapulted Donald Trump to become the Republican nominee for president, largely bolstering perception of his brand name along the way.

But the recent revelation of vulgar comments he made about women may send his brand over the edge, according to a new study by brand research firm Brand Keys.

Late Friday, the Washington Post published an “Access Hollywood” tape from 2005 in which Mr. Trump made lewd comments about women that many said amounted to discussing sexual assault. The video quickly sent the Trump camp into crisis mode when a number of Republicans withdrew support. House Speaker Paul Ryan is the latest, saying he won’t defend Mr. Trump or campaign with him.

In the time between the video’s release on Friday and Mr. Trump’s defense of his comments in Sunday’s televised debate against Hillary Clinton, Mrs. Clinton had jumped to an 11-point lead over Mr. Trump, up from 6 percentage points in September, according to a Wall Street Journal/NBC News survey taken Saturday and Sunday before the debate.

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But his perception among voters and the party establishment isn’t the only thing getting hit. Now, despite his tendency to use controversial statements to his advantage, “the

Trump brand had been negatively affected” by the tape, according to a Brand Keys poll of 1,536 registered voters across the country.

Before Mr. Trump entered the race, adding the Trump name to virtually any product or service increased its perceived value, according to Brand Keys.

In 2015, that “added value” was anywhere from 20% to 37%, depending on the category, said Robert Passikoff, Brand Keys founder and president, in a statement. “That’s a range enviable by any category or brand standards,” he said.

As of June 2016, when Mr. Trump was already the presumptive Republican nominee for president, the added value of the Trump brand in entertainment was as high as 43%.

But that added value has been significantly diminished since the video surfaced. The perceived added value in TV and entertainment, a category with which he’s closely associated after “The Apprentice,” fell 13 percentage points as of Oct. 9, while the value of the Trump brand dropped 8 percentage points in real estate and 6 percentage points in country clubs and golf clubs, according to Brand Keys.

“What we know for sure is that these brand engagement numbers correlate very highly with consumer behavior in the marketplace,” said Mr. Passikoff. As the Trump brand becomes more toxic, “consumers will be distancing themselves from Trump-branded products as well.”

If he loses the election, the impact on his brand could cause hotel room bookings to drop and golf course memberships to decline, said Larry Chiagouris, a marketing professor at Pace University’s Lubin School of Business, in an email.

Other branded products could either drop in price and value or be discontinued, and the value of licensing the brand could probably decline “substantially” and may not return to pre-campaign levels, he said.

“This is an election that he has to win to maintain the value in the Trump brand,” Mr. Chiagouris said. “There is more at stake in his universe than ego now...there are billions of dollars at stake.”

Not everyone thinks the video has the power to total the Trump brand.

“If that video surfaced with any other politician, executive, celebrity, brand, whatever—they’d be done,” said Deutsch North America CEO Mike Sheldon. “Trump’s [political] brand is Teflon-coated. If this was a political contest and not a reality show, he’d have evaporated 15 months ago.”

As for his personal brand and businesses, they’re not as tough, Mr. Sheldon said.

“As Trump, the business person, he should be more than a little worried,” he said. “Half the country is appalled. Win or lose, his personal brand and his properties are going to take a major hit.”

Write to Alexandra Bruell at alexandra.bruell@wsj.com

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