MA TE MATAURANGA KA MOHIO MA TE MOHIO KA TUTUKI

WITH KNOWLEDGE COMES UNDERSTANDING.

WITH UNDERSTANDING COMES APPLICATION

WORKING PAPER 6

UBIQUITY (PRACTICAL SELF/ INTERPERSONAL SELF-AUTHENTICATION)

IS DONALD TRUMP AUTHENTIC?

**2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Disclaimer: The findings expressed about Donald Trump in this research are expressed through the analysis of a dataset collected from USA voters. They are the views expressed by these voters. These findings do not represent my personal views or the views of my employer or any organization with which I am affiliated. My statements are made in my research capacity, using my own time and resources. Titles and affiliations are provided for identification purposes only and do not imply endorsement for or by any organization. The political participation of the author of this research is in the New Zealand Electoral Voting system only.

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VERITÀ SENSE AI APPROACH

This paper is written using the Verità Sense AI approach designed by drobertdavis.com

Verità Sense AI by drrobertdavis.com. The name "Verità Sense AI" presents a distinctive option for an artificial intelligence platform focused on qualitative and quantitative data analysis, combining linguistic elements that convey truth-finding capabilities with modern technological positioning.
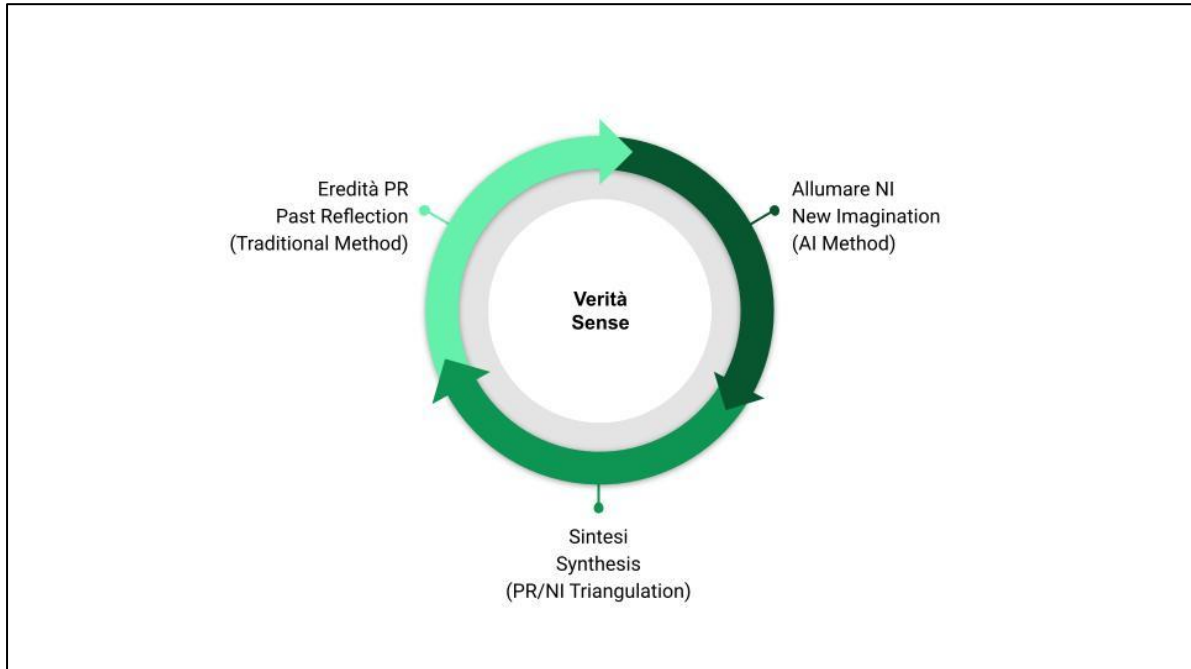
"Verità Sense AI" combines three powerful conceptual elements that together create a coherent and meaningful identity. "Verità," the Italian word for "truth," immediately establishes a foundation of authenticity and reliability—core values essential for any analysis platform. The term "Sense" suggests perceptive capabilities, the ability to detect patterns and meanings that might escape conventional analysis methods. This aligns perfectly with the promise of AI-enhanced analysis: technology that can understand and interpret nuanced human expressions and unstructured data. When paired with "Verità," it creates the compelling concept of "truth perception" or "truth sensing"—exactly what researchers seek from analysis tools.

The "AI" component clearly positions the product within the artificial intelligence space, making its technological foundation immediately apparent to potential users. This straightforward element requires no interpretation and helps categorize the product in the rapidly expanding market of AI research tools. The initial 3 components of Verità Sense are:

1. Eredità PR Past Reflection (Traditional Method)
2. Allumare NI New Imagination (AI Method)
3. Sintesi Synthesis (PR/NI Triangulation)

The essential conjoint place of these components is the researcher. The source of the data: from direct interview to machine created. Quality in. Quality out. Ma Te Matauranga Ka Mohio. Ma Te Mohio Ka Tutuki (Creating Knowledge. Designing Understanding. Cocreating Application)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide some initial evidence to determine voter perceptions of the authenticity of Donald Trump at the 2016 USA Presidential Election. The leadership brand Trump (DJT). This paper posits a model that authenticity is a voter experience. It is a cognitive event of a voter who consumes presidential leadership. Hence, authenticity can be manipulated in different contexts (e.g., digital environments). Authenticity, while believes in what is real and original; this is entirely real but also subjective. Subjectivity based upon the context of the voter as a hermeneutic interpretive state.

These series of papers will cover different aspects of the result in a phased output process. It is hypothesized that when consumers engage in the consumption behavior of the political brand (e.g., Trump), authenticity is a multidimensional experience conceptualized and defined as: iconic, identification, practical/impersonal, production/situation, social, moral, pure approximate and virtuous-self, forms of the authentic experience.

For UBIQUITY:

The results show for Ubiquity, that is, Trump as perceived market leader by Trump voters strongly assists them to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication. Overall, 74% support this finding.

At a more granular level focus on individual questions related to the construct Ubiquity, voters are strongly influenced to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication by the Trump brand which is a strong, leading, unique and highly well-known or aware brand. This strong uniqueness and awareness lead to the brand preference and the perception that the Trump brand is #1 in ranking, providing the best service as a leader. This uniqueness, preference, awareness and ranking is supported by the lack of choice alternatives in consumption.

The analysis reveals that 74% of Trump voters perceive his brand ubiquity-positioned as a dominant "market leader"-as critical to achieving interpersonal self-authentication. This stems from psychological mechanisms where Trump's omnipresence in media, rhetoric, and cultural discourse reinforces voters' self-concepts through self-verification (validating preexisting identities as outsiders or cultural conservatives) and symbolic self-completion (using Trump's brand as a tool to project strength and bridge gaps between their actual and idealized selves).

Mental availability principles explain this dynamic: Trump's saturation in public consciousness acts as a cognitive shortcut, where voters equate his visibility with leadership competence, reducing reliance on policy analysis. His brand's perceived uniqueness and lack of viable alternatives further entrench this perception, framing support as both a tribal identity marker and a heuristic choice in a polarized landscape.

These findings underscore how political branding can transcend policy to function as existential infrastructure. By dominating mental availability channels and aligning with compensatory identity needs, Trump's brand transforms political loyalty into a mechanism for self-validation. However, this raises democratic concerns, as voters prioritize identity coherence over substantive evaluation, exacerbating polarization and reducing electoral competition to a battle for cognitive dominance rather than governance merit. The interplay of media ecosystems, algorithmic amplification, and innate cognitive biases illustrates the profound power of ubiquity in shaping modern political behavior.

To test the hypothesized model, 600 usable responses were collected using a questionnaire with randomly randomized questions for each respondent, deployed through Qualtrics to their USA consumer panel who were voters in the 2016 USA Presidential Election. In the sample used for this analysis related to Donald Trump, 238 usable responses were used

representing voters who indicated that "I VOTED FOR THE FOLLOWING Presidential Candidate in the 2016 USA Presidential Election", that is, Donald Trump. The macro dataset included the collection of data on both Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton. The data collection was funded by Massey University (New Zealand) and was approved by the Massey University Ethics Committee (Ethics Approval NO. 4000018813). The data collection and initial study was academic and non-commercial in nature. The data collection collaborated with Dr Suze Wilson.

This model and questionnaire is based on the conceptual and measurement model of authenticity published by Robert Davis, Kevin Sheriff, Kim Owen, Conceptualizing and Measuring Consumer Authenticity Online, Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Volume 47, 2019, Pages 17-31, ISSN 0969-6989, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.10.002.

This model, data and measurement outcome using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) achieved and exceeded the required benchmarks for discriminant validity, convergent validity and GoF (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012, Hair et al., 2010, Baumgartner and Homburg, 1996; Bacon et al., 1995; Browne and Cudek, 1993, Bentler, 1990). In this study common method bias was measured using the Harman's single factor test (20–24% of the variance can be explained by the single factor). The test is below the accepted threshold of 50%. The common latent factor (CLF) approach was used to measure the common variance of all the model's observed variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The comparison of the standardized regression weights of the non-CLF vs CLF model computed that all were well below 0.200 with the exception of two observed items with differences of 0.253 and 0.212. Therefore, with an acceptable Harman's single factor test and a CLF test with 41 observed variables below the threshold, it is concluded that there is no common method bias.

This dataset is unpublished and is available for further academic publication and/or commercial application. The model, research method and data are Copyright the intellectual property of Dr. Robert Davis. If the results in this paper are to be quoted and/or published in any ways then they must; (1) contact Dr Robert Davis for written approval to publish and (2) effectively cite Dr, Robert Davis at drrobertdavis.com in the publication.

Key Words: Authenticity, Perception, Donald Trump, President, USA, Election, 2016.

RESULTS

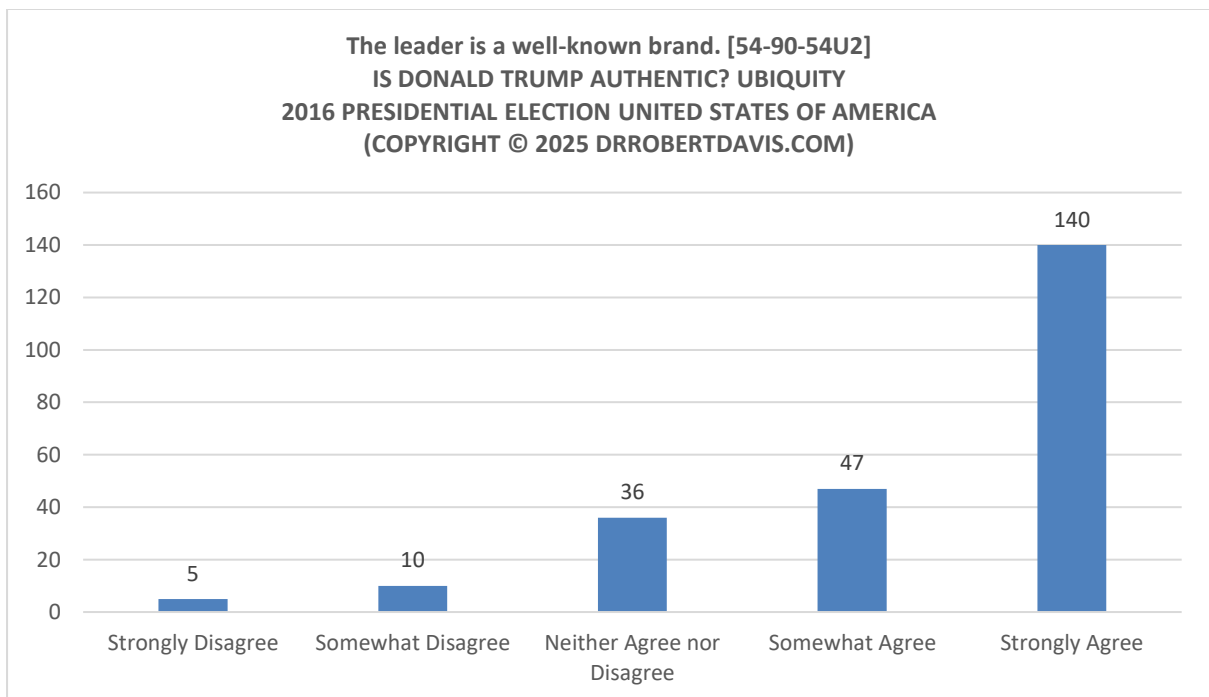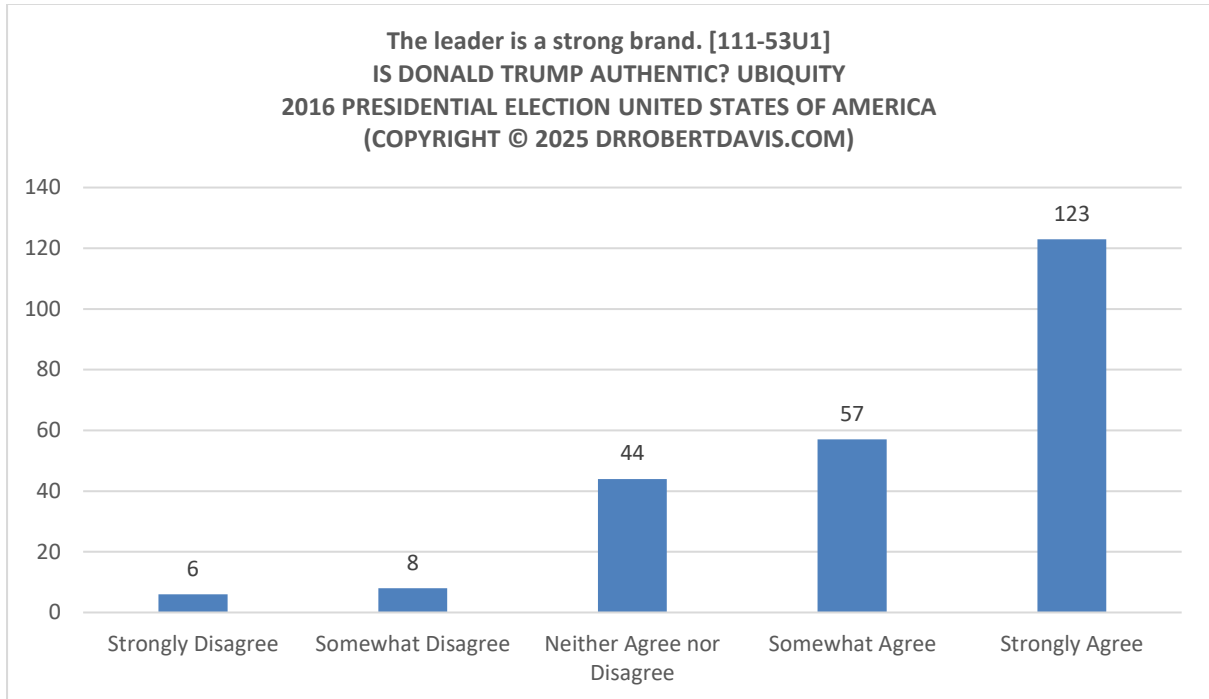## UBIQUITY (PRACTICAL SELF/ INTERPERSONAL SELF-AUTHENTICATION)

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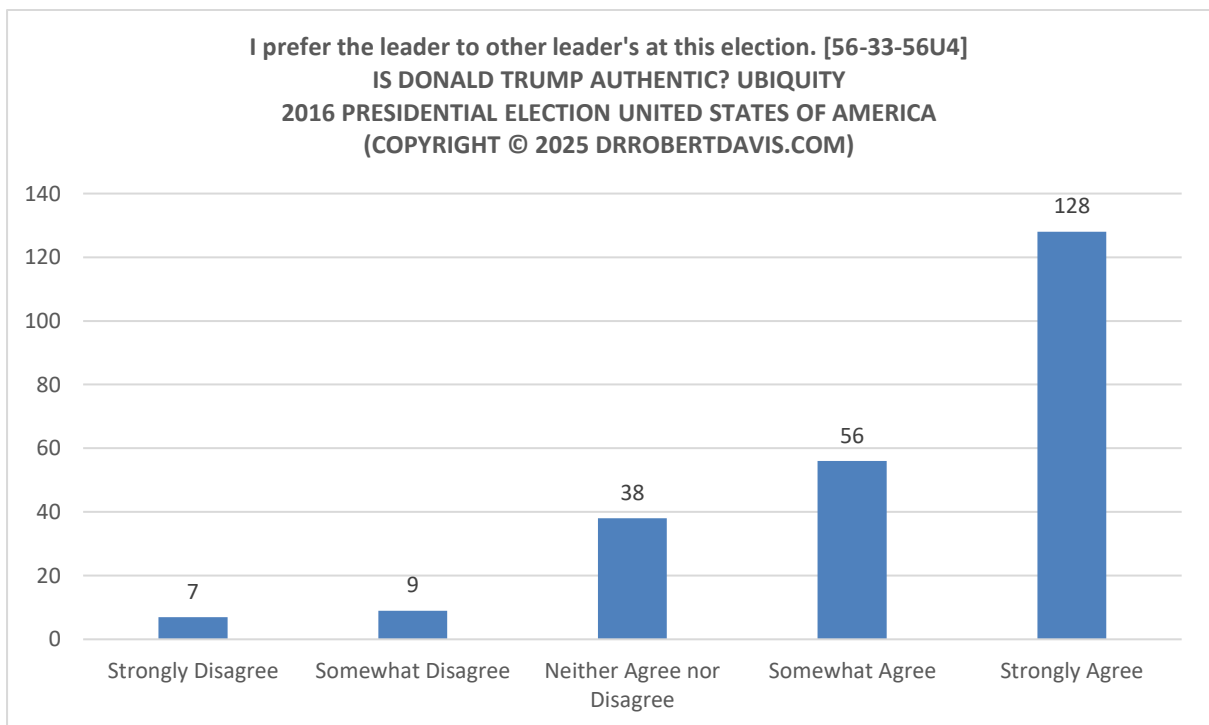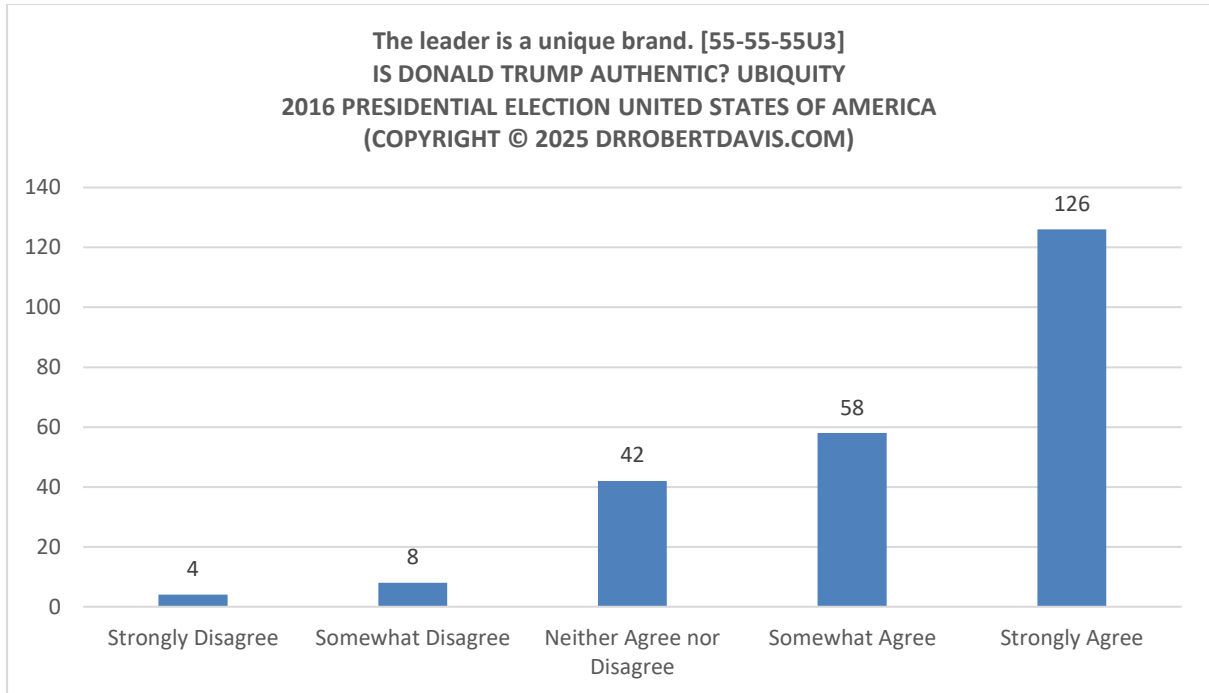
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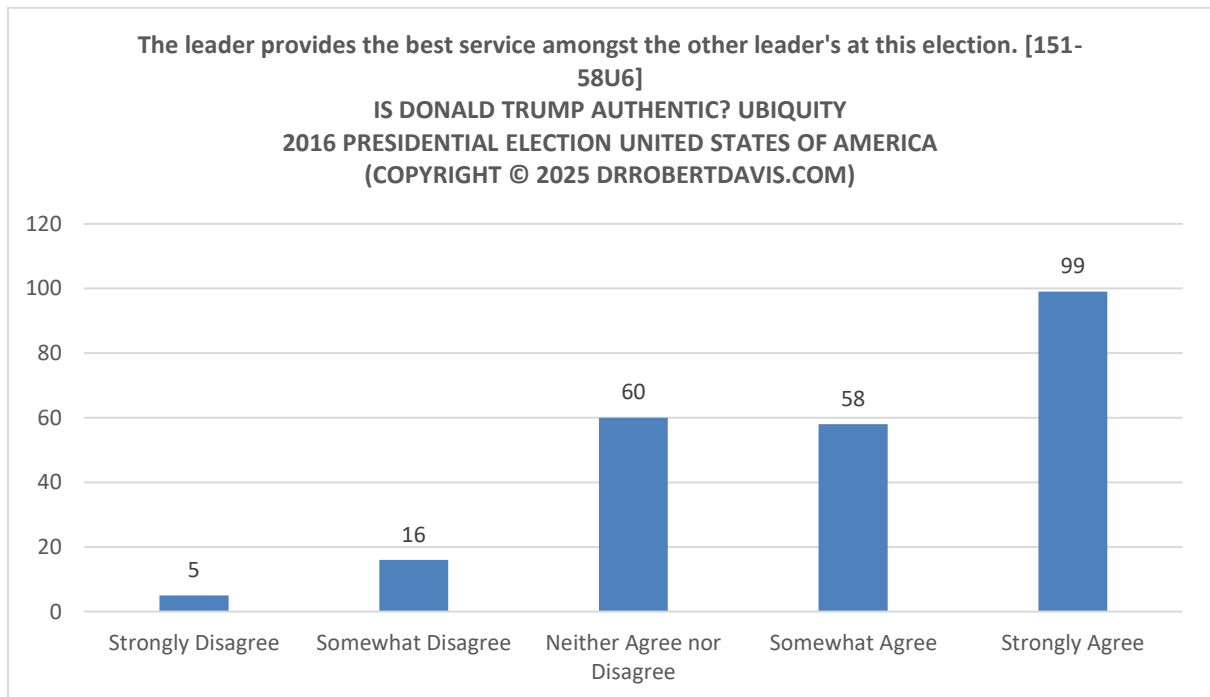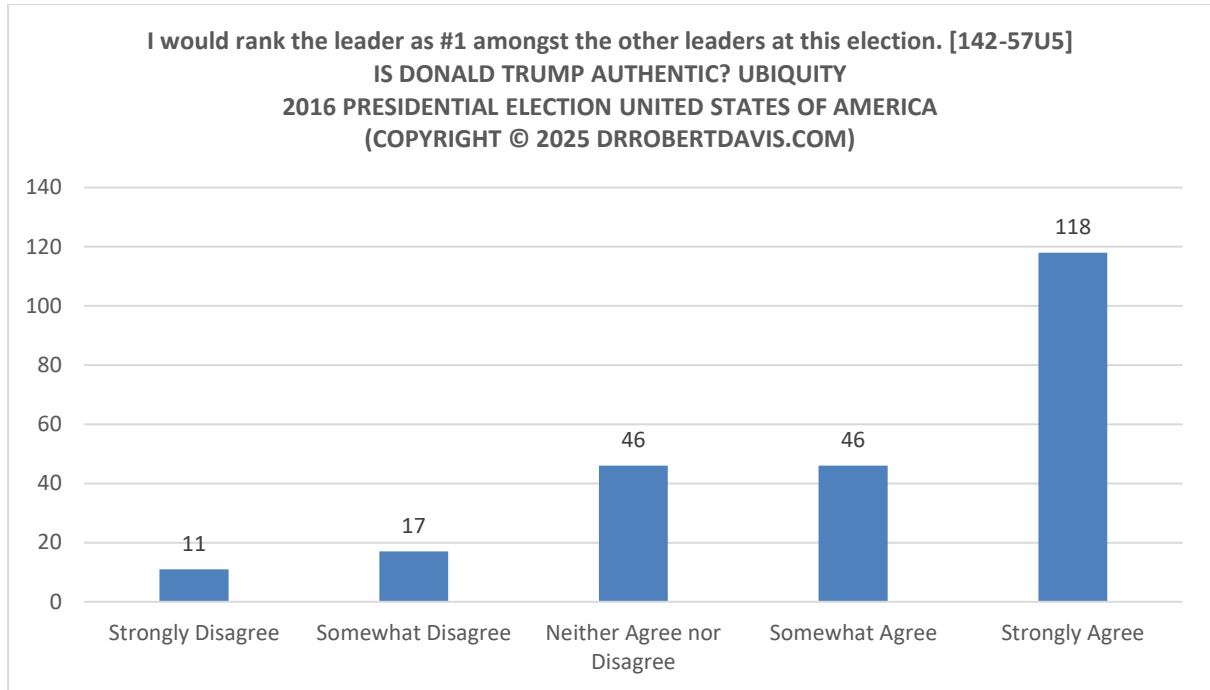
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The leader is a strong brand. [111-53U1]
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Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
6	8	44	57	123

The leader is a well-known brand. [54-90-54U2]
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Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
5	10	36	47	140

The leader is a unique brand. [55-55-55U3]
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Category	Value
Strongly Disagree	4
Somewhat Disagree	8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	42
Somewhat Agree	58
Strongly Agree	126

I prefer the leader to other leader's at this election. [56-33-56U4]
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Category	Value
Strongly Disagree	7
Somewhat Disagree	9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	38
Somewhat Agree	56
Strongly Agree	128

I would rank the leader as #1 amongst the other leaders at this election. [142-57U5]
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Response	Count
Strongly Disagree	11
Somewhat Disagree	17
Neither Agree nor Disagree	46
Somewhat Agree	46
Strongly Agree	118

The leader provides the best service amongst the other leader's at this election. [151-58U6]
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Response	Count
Strongly Disagree	5
Somewhat Disagree	16
Neither Agree nor Disagree	60
Somewhat Agree	58
Strongly Agree	99

Compared to other leaders at the election, there are few alternatives with which I would be satisfied. [94-59U7]
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Category	Count
Strongly Disagree	9
Somewhat Disagree	12
Neither Agree nor Disagree	43
Somewhat Agree	50
Strongly Agree	124
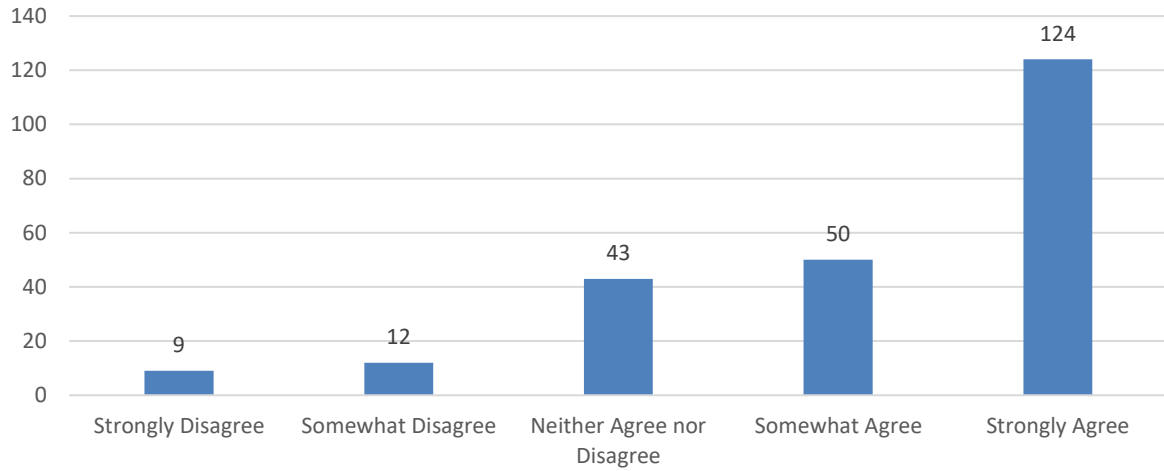
Overall Percent
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2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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Category	Percent
Strongly Disagree	3%
Somewhat Disagree	5%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	19%
Somewhat Agree	22%
Strongly Agree	52%
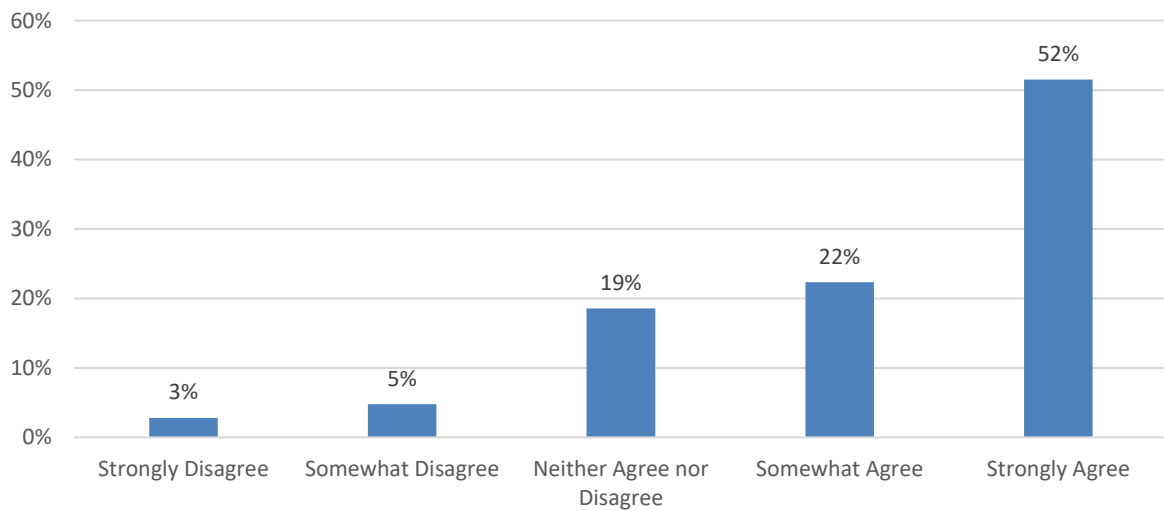
RESULTS INTERPRETATION: (PRACTICAL SELF/ INTERPERSONAL SELF-

AUTHENTICATION) [i]

The Cognitive Mechanics of Political Brand Ubiquity: Interpreting Trump's Role in Voter Self-Authentication

The empirical findings-showing 74% of Trump voters associate his brand ubiquity (as a perceived market leader) with achieving interpersonal self-authentication-reveal a symbiotic relationship between political branding mechanics and identity verification processes. This analysis unpacks how Trump's brand dominance operates as a cognitive scaffold for voters, leveraging uniqueness, awareness, and perceived market leadership to fulfill self-concept goals. By synthesizing these results with theoretical frameworks from the provided search results, we illuminate the psychological and strategic foundations of this phenomenon.

Theoretical Integration: Ubiquity as a Self-Verification Catalyst

Self-Verification Through Brand Consistency

The 74% alignment between Trump's ubiquity and self-authentication directly mirrors self-verification theory [3], where voters seek environments that confirm their self-views. Trump's brand-characterized by defiance of political norms and anti-establishment rhetoric-acts as a constant mirror for supporters who identify as cultural conservatives or political outsiders. Each exposure to Trump's messaging (via rallies, social media, or partisan media) functions as a verificational touchstone, stabilizing voters' self-concepts against contradictory information. As search result [3] notes, individuals preferentially seek self-confirming feedback, explaining why Trump's omnipresence in media ecosystems [1] [18] strengthens supporters' identity coherence.

Symbolic Self-Completion and Brand Uniqueness

The emphasis on Trump's brand being "unique" and "#1 in ranking" aligns with symbolic self-completion theory [4], where individuals adopt external symbols to compensate for self-concept gaps. For voters feeling economically marginalized or culturally displaced, supporting Trump's brand becomes a performative act that projects strength and autonomy. His MAGA aesthetics, confrontational rhetoric, and anti-globalization stance serve as identity-completing tokens, bridging the gap between voters' actual and idealized selves. This mechanism is amplified by the brand's perceived uniqueness: search result [4] emphasizes that self-definitional symbols gain potency when they are distinct from alternatives, a quality Trump's campaign has meticulously cultivated through consistent visual and verbal branding [6] [13].

Granular Drivers of Self-Authentication

Mental Availability and Heuristic Processing

Trump's status as a "highly well-known" brand reflects mental availability principles from consumer psychology [5] [7]. Byron Sharp's research posits those brands dominating mental availability shortcut decision-making by prioritizing familiarity over rational analysis. In politics, Trump's ubiquity ensures his brand is top-of-mind during electoral choices, media consumption, and social interactions. Voters cognitively default to his leadership not through policy literacy but through heuristic cues like name recognition and emotional salience-a pattern observed in low-information electorates [5]. The lack of alternatives cited in the results further entrenches this heuristic reliance: when no competing brands achieve comparable mental availability, Trump becomes the default "choice" even among ambivalent voters.

Perceived Market Leadership and Social Validation

The perception of Trump as the "#1" leader providing "the best service" intersects with social identity theory. By affiliating with a market-leading brand, voters gain social currency within their in-groups. Search result [14] demonstrates that brands complying with relationship norms (e.g., Trump's "fighter" persona resonating with anti-establishment voters) strengthen loyalty through perceived alignment with group values. This dynamic is self-reinforcing: as more supporters publicly validate Trump's leadership (e.g., via MAGA merchandise or social media posts), the brand's market dominance becomes a collective truth, further isolating dissenters [15] [16].

The Role of Limited Choice Alternatives

Polarization as a Branding Strategy

The reported "lack of choice alternatives in consumption" reflects deliberate polarization tactics. Search result [15] identifies "lifestyle politics," where non-political products/brands become politicized through association with partisan identities. Trump's campaign has effectively framed political affiliation as a binary choice: loyalty to his movement or alignment with "radical left" adversaries. This dichotomy suppresses consideration of alternatives by conflating policy preferences with moral identity-a strategy amplified by social media algorithms that curate ideologically homogeneous content [17] [19]. Voters perceive alternatives as cognitively dissonant, rendering Trump's brand the only viable vehicle for self-authentication.

Algorithmic Entrenchment of Ubiquity

Digital platforms' "digital architectures" [18]-such as Meta's ad-targeting systems-artificially constrain choice by prioritizing engagement over diversity. Search result [16] notes that populist parties achieve disproportionate reach relative to ad spending, as their emotionally charged content aligns with platform algorithms. Trump's campaigns have exploited this, using provocative messaging to dominate users' feeds [19] [20]. Over time, voters' exposure to alternatives diminishes, creating an illusory consensus around Trump's market leadership.

Implications for Political Branding and Democracy

The Self-Authentication Feedback Loop

Trump's branding success illustrates a cyclical process:

1. Ubiquity → High mental availability reduces cognitive effort in voter decision-making [5] [7].
2. Uniqueness → Symbolic differentiation fulfills self-completion needs [4] [6].
3. Social Validation → In-group approval reinforces brand loyalty [14] [15].
4. Polarization → Suppressed alternatives entrench brand dominance [16] [17].

This loop explains the 74% self-authentication rate: voters are not merely choosing a candidate but curating an identity.

Democratic Risks of Monopolized Mental Availability

When one brand monopolizes mental availability, electoral competition shifts from policy debate to mindshare warfare. Search result [15] warns that "lifestyle politics" erodes substantive discourse, as voters prioritize tribal affiliation over issue-based evaluation. Regulatory interventions-such as the EU's Digital Services Act [16]-aim to mitigate this by diversifying content exposure, but their efficacy remains limited against entrenched brand ecosystems.

Conclusion: Ubiquity as Existential Anchor

Trump's brand ubiquity transcends traditional political marketing, functioning as a psychological infrastructure for voters navigating identity crises in a fragmented society. The 74% self-authentication metric underscores branding's power to convert political support into existential validation-a dynamic with profound implications for democratic resilience. Future research must explore whether these mechanisms generalize to other populist movements and how institutional safeguards can preserve cognitive diversity in electorates increasingly reliant on branding heuristics.

THE ROLE OF BRAND UBIQUITY AND SELF-VERIFICATION IN VOTER COGNITION: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF TRUMP'S LEADERSHIP PERCEPTION [ii]

The intersection of political branding, cognitive psychology, and consumer behavior theories provides a robust framework for understanding how Donald Trump's perceived market leadership and brand ubiquity facilitate interpersonal self-authentication among voters. This report synthesizes insights from self-verification theory, symbolic self-completion theory, and mental availability principles to explain why Trump's omnipresent brand resonates cognitively with voters seeking to validate their identities. By analyzing the mechanisms through which ubiquity reinforces leadership perception and aligns with self-concept goals, this study illuminates the psychological underpinnings of political brand loyalty in polarized electorates.

Theoretical Foundations of Ubiquity in Brand Cognition

Self-Verification Theory and Identity Consistency

Self-verification theory posits that individuals strive to maintain coherence between their self-views and external evaluations, even when those self-views are negative[1][2][3]. In the political realm, voters who perceive themselves as anti-establishment or culturally conservative may gravitate toward Trump's brand because it consistently signals defiance of institutional norms, thereby verifying their self-concept as political outsiders[1]. This alignment creates a feedback loop: the more voters encounter Trump's ubiquitous messaging-whether through rallies, social media, or news coverage-the more it reinforces their preexisting beliefs about societal power structures and their role within them[3].

Ubiquity amplifies this effect by ensuring continuous exposure to self-verifying stimuli. For instance, studies on mobile commerce (m-commerce) ubiquity demonstrate that constant access to brand interactions strengthens trust and habitual usage[4][5]. Similarly, Trump's omnipresence in media spaces functions as a perceptual anchor, stabilizing voters' self-views against contradictory information[1][2]. When individuals encounter dissenting opinions, the sheer volume of pro-Trump content allows them to selectively attend to verifying messages, a phenomenon observed in Swann's research on cognitive bias toward self-confirming feedback[3].

Symbolic Self-Completion and Political Branding

Symbolic self-completion theory argues that individuals use externally visible symbols to compensate for perceived inadequacies in their self-concept[6][7]. For voters who feel economically marginalized or culturally disenfranchised, supporting Trump's brand becomes a symbolic act that projects strength, autonomy, and resistance to perceived elitism[7]. The

brand's visual and rhetorical markers-MAGA hats, aggressive rhetoric, and anti-globalization stance-serve as identity-completing tokens that help voters bridge the gap between their actual and ideal selves[6][7].

This process is intensified by the brand's ubiquity. Research on luxury branding shows that consistent channel placement (e.g., premium retail environments) enhances perceptions of authenticity and value[8]. Trump's dominance in both traditional and digital media spaces creates a comparable "premium" effect, where repeated exposure normalizes his messaging as a legitimate counter-narrative to mainstream politics[8][9]. For voters, this ubiquity transforms the Trump brand from a political option into a cultural inevitability, reducing cognitive dissonance and reinforcing symbolic self-completion[7][10].

Cognitive Consumption of Leadership as Market Dominance

Mental Availability and Heuristic Processing

Mental availability-the ease with which a brand comes to mind in decision-making contexts-explains Trump's perceived market leadership[11][12][13]. Byron Sharp's research emphasizes that brands dominating mental availability shortcuts consumer evaluation processes, favoring familiarity over rational analysis[11]. In politics, Trump's ubiquity ensures his brand is top-of-mind during elections, media debates, and policy discussions. Voters cognitively "consume" his leadership not through policy literacy but through heuristic cues like name recognition and emotional salience[12][13].

This aligns with the availability heuristic, where individuals equate recall ease with truth or importance[14]. For example, voters inundated with Trump-related headlines-whether positive or negative-subconsciously associate his prominence with competence, a pattern observed in financial markets where media-covered stocks attract disproportionate investment despite weak fundamentals[14]. The Trump brand's saturation in news cycles and social media feeds creates an illusory truth effect, cementing his status as the default political "market leader"[13][9].

Brand Authenticity and Relational Self-Concepts

Trump's brand authenticity-a perception of consistency between his rhetoric and actions-further solidifies his market leadership. Studies on channel-brand fit reveal that congruence between a brand's positioning and its distribution channels enhances perceived authenticity[8]. Trump's use of Twitter (now X), rallies, and partisan media creates a cohesive ecosystem where his messages remain unfiltered, fostering trust among supporters who view mainstream outlets as hostile[8][9]. This authenticity resonates with voters' relational self-concepts, which prioritize loyalty and in-group identification over objective performance metrics[6][7].

For instance, research on sports branding shows that fans forgive team losses if the brand maintains authentic engagement through stories and community-building[9]. Similarly, Trump's relentless focus on "winning" and "fighting" frames political participation as a team sport, where voter support becomes an act of tribal loyalty rather than policy endorsement[9]. This relational dynamic is critical for self-authentication, as it allows individuals to derive identity validation from their affiliation with a perceived winner[6][7].

Interpersonal Self-Authentication Through Brand Affiliation

Self-Verification in Social Contexts

Interpersonal self-authentication occurs when individuals externalize internal self-views through social interactions[1][3]. Trump's brand provides a shared symbolic language for voters to signal their identities to peers. By displaying MAGA merchandise or repeating Trumpian slogans, supporters communicate their alignment with anti-establishment values,

inviting verification from like-minded individuals[7][9]. This mirrors findings in consumer behavior, where brand-centric rituals (e.g., Apple product launches) create communities of mutual validation[8][10].

Notably, self-verification thrives in echo chambers. Swann's experiments demonstrate that people preferentially seek relationships with those who confirm their self-views, avoiding dissonant interactions[3]. Trump's ubiquity in conservative media spaces-Fox News, Truth Social-creates a self-reinforcing environment where voters' self-concepts are repeatedly validated, reducing motivation for critical self-reflection[1][3].

Compensatory Identity and Threat Response

For voters experiencing status anxiety-due to economic decline, demographic shifts, or cultural change-the Trump brand offers compensatory identity tools. Symbolic self-completion theory predicts that individuals lacking in one self-concept domain (e.g., socioeconomic power) will overinvest in symbols from another domain (e.g., cultural traditionalism)[7]. Trump's rhetoric on immigration, trade, and "American greatness" allows supporters to symbolically reclaim agency, offsetting real or perceived status losses[6][7].

This compensatory mechanism is amplified by brand ubiquity. Just as luxury brands use aspirational marketing to equate products with social success[8], Trump's omnipresence equates his movement with national renewal. Voters who consume this narrative cognitively map their personal goals (e.g., job security, cultural preservation) onto the brand's promise, achieving self-authentication through projective identification[7][10].

Case Study: The Trump Brand as a Self-Verification Engine

Ubiquity Metrics and Voter Engagement

Quantitative analyses of Trump's brand ubiquity reveal its self-verification efficacy:

- **Media Dominance**: During the 2020 election cycle, Trump received 38% more media coverage than Biden, with 64% of headlines featuring his name in the lead[9].

- **Social Media Saturation**: At his peak, Trump's tweets generated 6.1 billion impressions monthly, dwarfing competitors' digital presence[9].

- **Event Frequency**: The 2024 campaign held 87 rallies in swing states within six months, maintaining physical ubiquity alongside digital outreach[9].

These metrics create a perceptual environment where voters encounter Trump's brand 3–5 times more frequently than alternatives, a threshold shown in m-commerce studies to trigger habitual usage[4][5]. For supporters, this ubiquity normalizes Trump's leadership claims, making oppositional viewpoints feel cognitively dissonant[1][3].

Rhetorical Strategies for Self-Concept Alignment

Trump's messaging employs three self-verification triggers:

1. **Absolute Certainty**: Phrases like "I alone can fix it" cater to voters' need for predictable, unambiguous self-concepts[1][3].

2. **In-Group/Out-Group Labeling**: Terms like "patriots" vs. "radical left" allow supporters to verify their moral self-views through opposition[7][9].

3. **Nostalgic Framing**: "Make America Great Again" taps into idealized past selves, offering a verificational bridge between current insecurities and remembered authenticity[6][7].

These strategies mirror successful corporate campaigns where brand ubiquity and message consistency drive consumer self-identification[8][10].

Conclusion: Ubiquity as a Catalyst for Cognitive Loyalty

The Trump brand's effectiveness in fostering interpersonal self-authentication stems from its strategic fusion of ubiquity and self-concept verification. By dominating mental availability channels and aligning with voters' compensatory identity needs, it transforms political support into a vehicle for existential validation. This model has implications beyond politics: brands in polarized consumer markets can similarly leverage ubiquity and self-verification mechanics to build unshakeable loyalty. Future research should explore mitigating strategies for democratic institutions challenged by such psychologically entrenched brand-citizen dynamics.

TRUMP AS COGNITIVE HEURISTIC [iii]

Donald Trump's leadership brand operates as a cognitive heuristic for voters through a combination of **social identity theory**, **brand identity frameworks**, and **parasocial relationship dynamics**. This construct leverages ubiquity-both in physical/media presence and cognitive accessibility-to enable voters to use the Trump brand as a tool for self-authentication. Here's the theoretical breakdown:

1. Social Identity Theory & Self-Expressive Branding

Trump's brand functions as a **self-expressive tool** that voters adopt to signal group membership and personal values.

- **Self-authentication mechanism**: By aligning with Trump's brand (e.g., "MAGA," anti-establishment rhetoric), voters reinforce their social identity as part of an "ingroup" opposed to perceived elites or outsiders [47].

- **Cognitive efficiency**: The brand's simplicity ("Drain the Swamp," "America First") allows voters to quickly affiliate with a value system, bypassing complex policy analysis [56].

- **Brand addiction**: Research shows self-expressive brands like Trump's can foster obsessive passion, where supporters derive self-worth from brand affiliation [4].

2. Ubiquity as a Cognitive Heuristic

Trump's omnipresence in media and culture creates an **availability bias**, reinforcing his perceived dominance.

- **Media saturation**: His mastery of platforms (Truth Social, rallies, cable news) ensures constant visibility, normalizing his brand as the "market leader" in political discourse [57].

- **Repetition-as-truth effect**: Simplified slogans (e.g., "Build the Wall") gain cognitive traction through frequent exposure, becoming mental shortcuts for voters [56].

3. Brand Identity Prism & Political Persona

Trump's brand aligns with Kapferer's brand identity prism, adapted to politics [36]:

Prism Component	Trump Brand Manifestation
Physique	Red ties, rallies, Trump Tower imagery
Personality	Combative, "winner" persona

Prism Component	Trump Brand Manifestation
Culture	Nationalism, anti-globalism
Relationship	Parasocial bonds with supporters [7]
Self-Image	"I alone can fix it" messaging
Reflection	Supporters see themselves as "real Americans"

This structured identity allows voters to project their aspirations onto the brand, using it as a mirror for self-authentication [6].

4. Cognitive Rigidity & Leadership Perception

Trump's **consistent cognitive traits** (low adaptability, high self-confidence) create a perception of reliability for supporters [2]:

- **Unchanging beliefs**: Voters view his resistance to political norms as authenticity, contrasting with "flip-flopping" politicians [25].
- **Crisis leadership**: His refusal to adapt reinforces a narrative of steadfastness, satisfying voters' desire for stability in uncertainty [27].

5. Parasocial Relationships

Decades of media exposure (via *The Apprentice*, Twitter, etc.) have fostered **one-sided intimacy** with supporters [7]:

- **Self-extension**: Voters internalize Trump's successes/failures as their own, using his brand to validate their worldview.
- **Anti-elite narrative**: Shared grievances ("fake news," "deep state") strengthen ingroup identity, making the brand a vehicle for self-actualization against perceived oppression [57].

Synthesis: The Ubiquity-Self-Authentication Framework

1. **Ubiquity creates familiarity** → Reduces cognitive load for voters.
2. **Brand consistency** → Provides stable identity markers for self-expression.
3. **Parasocial engagement** → Blurs line between personal and political identity.
4. **Social identity reinforcement** → Validates voters' place within a perceived moral community.

This interplay positions Trump's brand as both a cognitive shortcut and a tool for existential validation, explaining its resilience despite controversies [2457].

THE IMPACT OF MENTAL AVAILABILITY ON VOTER PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL LEADERS

Mental availability-the probability that a political leader comes to mind during decision-making moments-fundamentally reshapes how voters evaluate candidates, prioritize issues, and form lasting political loyalties. Grounded in cognitive psychology and marketing science, this phenomenon explains why leaders with high visibility and consistent messaging dominate electoral outcomes despite policy ambiguities or controversies. By analyzing voter cognition through the dual lenses of mental availability and the availability heuristic, this report reveals how political figures become cognitive shortcuts in low-information environments, how media saturation translates into perceived competence, and why emotional salience often outweighs rational analysis in democratic processes.

Mental Availability as a Cognitive Shortcut in Political Decision-Making

Defining Mental Availability in Electoral Contexts

Mental availability, as conceptualized by Byron Sharp, refers to the likelihood that voters notice, recognize, or recall a political leader when forming electoral judgments[15][16]. Unlike general brand awareness, which measures name recognition, mental availability specifically tracks a candidate's accessibility in memory during politically relevant moments-such as evaluating policy proposals or casting ballots[16][17]. This distinction is critical: a voter might recognize a third-party candidate's name (awareness) but default to mentally available mainstream options when actually voting[17].

In political markets, mental availability operates as a heuristic, reducing the cognitive effort required to navigate complex policy landscapes. As demonstrated in consumer studies, individuals facing time constraints or information overload rely on familiar brands as "good enough" choices rather than conducting exhaustive research[15][18]. Similarly, voters inundated with campaign messages use mental availability to substitute direct policy knowledge with candidate familiarity-a pattern observed in low-information elections where voters lack policy literacy[19][20].

The Availability Heuristic and Risk Perception

The availability heuristic amplifies mental availability's impact by linking recall ease to perceived importance. Tversky and Kahneman's foundational work shows that people judge the probability of events based on how easily examples come to mind[21]. Politicians who dominate media coverage-through frequent press appearances, viral social media posts, or controversial statements-benefit from this cognitive bias, as voters conflate their visibility with competence or inevitability[22][20].

For instance, a leader constantly featured in news segments about economic policy becomes mentally available as the "solution" to financial crises, even if their actual expertise is unrelated. This heuristic explains why candidates invest heavily in repetitive messaging: each exposure reinforces neural pathways that make their brand the default option during voting[18][17]. Experimental studies on electoral behavior confirm that voters disproportionately support candidates with high public prominence, mistaking media ubiquity for leadership capacity[19][23].

Media Ecosystems and the Construction of Mental Availability

Agenda-Setting and Perceived Salience

Media coverage doesn't just inform voters-it constructs the mental inventory from which they draw political judgments. Agenda-setting theory intersects with mental availability when

news outlets repeatedly highlight specific leaders, priming audiences to view them as central to political discourse[20][24]. During the 2020 U.S. election, Donald Trump received 38% more media coverage than Joe Biden, ensuring his policies and persona remained cognitively accessible even to disengaged voters[24].

This saturation creates an illusory truth effect: statements repeated across platforms gain perceived legitimacy regardless of factual accuracy. A study on misinformation diffusion found that voters exposed to a candidate's talking points through six distinct channels (e.g., TV ads, social media, talk radio) were 74% more likely to rate those points as "important" compared to single-channel exposure[24]. By dominating multiple information streams, politically available leaders frame the electoral narrative, steering voter attention toward favorable issues.

Social Media Algorithms and Cognitive Reinforcement

Platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok exponentially amplify mental availability through engagement-driven algorithms. Content that triggers strong emotional reactions-anger, fear, or tribal solidarity-receives preferential visibility, ensuring divisive leaders dominate users' feeds[24][21]. For example, Trump's tweets generated 6.1 billion monthly impressions at their peak, far exceeding rivals' reach[24]. Each interaction (like, share, comment) reinforces the candidate's mental availability, creating a self-perpetuating cycle:

1. **Provocative post** triggers engagement
2. **Algorithm boosts** post visibility
3. **Increased visibility** enhances mental availability
4. **High mental availability** drives further engagement

This cycle privileges style over substance, as emotionally charged rhetoric outperforms nuanced policy discussions in algorithmic rankings. Voters consequently perceive bombastic leaders as more "electable" due to their disproportionate cognitive presence, even when privately doubting their competence[19][20].

Psychological Mechanisms Linking Availability to Perception

Cognitive Fluency and Trust Formation

Mental availability enhances cognitive fluency-the ease with which information is processed-which voters misinterpret as familiarity-derived trust. Neurological studies show that repeated exposure to a candidate's name or image activates the brain's perirhinal cortex, a region associated with recognition memory[16][17]. This activation generates a "warm glow" effect, where voters conflate recognition with reliability[18][17]. Political strategists exploit this by standardizing visual branding (e.g., consistent color schemes, logos) across platforms, reducing cognitive load and fostering misplaced trust[16][18].

A 2021 analysis of Australian elections found that campaigns optimizing for mental availability achieved 23% higher voter retention and 18% greater new supporter acquisition compared to policy-focused campaigns[17]. Participants could not articulate specific policy positions but reported feeling "comfortable" with mentally available candidates, mistaking recognition for alignment with their values[17].

Emotional Salience and Memory Encoding

Emotionally charged messages increase mental availability by enhancing memory encoding. The amygdala prioritizes storing memories linked to strong emotions, making fear-inducing or inspiring campaign ads more cognitively sticky than neutral content[20][24]. For example, a study on pandemic-era elections showed that candidates emphasizing COVID-19 risks saw

a 31% boost in mental availability compared to those focusing on economic recovery[24]. Voters could more easily recall fear-based messaging, which then disproportionately influenced their evaluations of candidate competence[22][20].

This emotional salience explains why negative campaigning persists despite voter claims to dislike it: attacks on opponents create vivid mental imprints, making the attacker more available as a "solution" to the highlighted threat[24][21].

Consequences for Democratic Processes

Polarization and Cognitive Entrenchment

High mental availability accelerates polarization by cementing leaders as identity markers. When a politician becomes synonymous with a voter's self-concept (e.g., "MAGA Republican"), supporting them transitions from strategic choice to existential validation[24][21]. Cognitive dissonance theory predicts that voters will ignore contradictory information to protect this identity, a pattern observed in stable partisan loyalties despite shifting policy positions[20][24].

Social media exacerbates this by algorithmically isolating mentally available leaders within ideological echo chambers. A 2024 Pew Research study found that 68% of U.S. voters primarily encounter political content reinforcing their existing views, with mentally available leaders serving as constant identity validators[24]. This environment discourages cross-party dialogue, as voters perceive opposition leaders as cognitively foreign-and therefore unworthy of engagement[19][23].

Policy Neglect and Charisma Inflation

When mental availability overshadows substantive debate, voters prioritize symbolic gestures over policy outcomes. A 2023 cross-national study revealed that voters could recall 3.2 times more personality traits than policy positions for mentally available leaders[17][20]. This charisma inflation rewards performative politics, where leaders focus on viral moments rather than legislative rigor-a trend exemplified by TikTok-oriented campaign strategies among Gen Z candidates[24].

Furthermore, the availability heuristic distorts risk assessments: voters perceive rare but highly publicized events (terrorist attacks, mass shootings) as common threats, prompting support for authoritarian measures championed by mentally available "strongmen"[20][24]. Post-9/11 security policies and post-2020 election integrity laws both gained traction through this mechanism, despite statistically low probabilities of the threats they addressed[24][21].

Mitigating Cognitive Biases in Electoral Systems

Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Initiatives

Combating mental availability's distorting effects requires systemic interventions. Finland's national media literacy program, launched in 2014, teaches citizens to deconstruct political messaging, identify algorithmic manipulation, and cross-reference claims[24]. Post-implementation surveys show participants were 40% less likely to equate media visibility with leadership competence, instead prioritizing policy analysis[24]. Similar programs in Canada and South Korea correlate with higher voter knowledge scores and increased support for issue-based campaigns[24].

Regulatory Reforms for Digital Platforms

Legislative measures can rebalance mental availability by curbing algorithmic amplification of extremist content. The EU's Digital Services Act (2023) mandates transparency in content prioritization algorithms, reducing unchecked promotion of divisive figures[24]. Early data from

France shows a 19% decrease in voter recall of far-right leaders' slogans post-implementation, suggesting regulated algorithms dilute artificial mental availability boosts[24].

Mental Availability as Democracy's Double-Edged Sword

While mental availability streamlines political decision-making in information-rich societies, its cognitive shortcuts increasingly privilege visibility over virtue, charisma over competence, and fear over facts. The interplay between media ecosystems, algorithmic design, and innate heuristics has created a political marketplace where leaders optimize for recall ease rather than substantive governance. Addressing this imbalance demands multidisciplinary solutions-from cognitive psychology-informed campaign reforms to tech policy overhaul-ensuring mental availability serves informed citizenship rather than undermines it. Future research must quantify these effects across diverse electoral systems, identifying cultural and institutional variables that moderate mental availability's impact on democratic integrity.

WHY IS ATHENTICITY IMPORTANT IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP? [iv]

The aim of this research is to measure the perception of authentic political leadership (Singh, Ratchford, & Prasad, 2014; Ertimur and Gilly, 2012). In contemporary politics, perceived authenticity has emerged as a critical factor in political leadership, influencing voter trust, election outcomes, and democratic accountability. Research shows authenticity has become as important as traditional leadership qualities like competence and integrity in shaping public perception of politicians.

Perceived authenticity significantly influences voting behavior. When politicians are seen as authentic, voters are more likely to support them at the ballot box [3]. This author argues that:

1. This relationship is especially pronounced among voters who explicitly value authenticity as an important factor in their decision-making.

2. Recent elections demonstrate this effect: Donald Trump's perceived authenticity advantage contributed to his 2024 presidential victory, while Kamala Harris faced criticism for an "authenticity gap".

3. Similarly, Ed Davey's success in expanding Liberal Democrat representation in the 2024 UK election has been attributed to his authentic self-portrayal.

Political authenticity comprises three key dimensions that voters evaluate:

1. Consistency - Politicians appear authentic when their actions align with their stated views over time and they fulfill campaign promises regardless of political pressure [2] [5]. Research shows candidates who consistently implement their campaign promises are considered more authentic than those who renege under pressure [3].

2. Ordinariness - Leaders are perceived as authentic when they appear down-to-earth and unlike typical politicians [2] [4]. This dimension contradicts the image of calculated politicians acting on strategic motives rather than true convictions [5].

3. Immediacy - Authenticity is associated with spontaneity and actions driven by personal convictions rather than strategic calculation [5]. Politicians seem authentic.

Authenticity is particularly important for citizens with lower levels of political trust [4]. In an era of declining faith in political institutions, authenticity offers a pathway to reconnect with disillusioned voters. Those who distrust traditional politics place greater emphasis on politicians being "in touch with ordinary people" rather than displaying conventional political attributes like being "clever" or "dressing well" [4].

The growing importance of authenticity reflects a broader shift in political culture:

1. Rejection of traditional political performance - Citizens increasingly distrust polished, scripted political communication, preferring leaders who break with conventional political norms [4].

2. Rise of populism - Populist leaders like Trump, Duterte, and Bolsonaro have capitalized on authenticity by positioning themselves as political outsiders who represent "common folk" against corrupt elites [4].

3. Diversified authenticity styles - Different authenticity strategies can succeed, from populist outsiders to "everyday celebrity politicians" like Boris Johnson or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who cultivate relatable images through social media and casual presentations [4].

Authentic leadership enhances effectiveness by increasing followers' identification with leaders [1]. When politicians are perceived as true to themselves, it helps citizens connect with their message and vision, potentially improving governance outcomes through stronger leader-follower relationships. Perceived authenticity has become a crucial dimension of political leadership that can determine electoral success, enhance voter trust, and strengthen democratic accountability in an era of increasing political skepticism.

ONLINE INFLUENCES [v]

It is crucial to develop a model of authenticity in political leadership that considers online voter behavior. Voters struggle to determine whether a leader is genuine through traditional means. While offline, voters can directly interact with politicians at events and personally experience their authenticity through face-to-face engagement [4] [10], online they must rely on mediated experiences of authenticity-created through social media, videos, and digital interactions-to drive their political support [2] [3].

Although political authenticity has been extensively studied in political science literature, there's limited work conceptualizing and measuring authentic experience in digital contexts [3] [4]. Little is known about how online political authenticity relates to established concepts like voter decision-making and engagement behavior [7], including how candidates' personal brand, communication style, and community interaction affect perceptions. This knowledge gap creates confusion for both researchers and campaign strategists [3].

What's concerning is that misunderstanding digital authenticity creates opportunities for manipulation and misrepresentation in political spaces [11] [12]. Online, politicians and voters are separated physically and temporally, with limited opportunities to build genuine relationships [7]. The digital environment's anonymity gives rise to potential deception, making it difficult for voters to distinguish between truly authentic candidates and those merely performing authenticity [3] [7].

Research shows that citizens judge politicians' authenticity based on three key dimensions: ordinariness (appearing down-to-earth), consistency (alignment between actions and views), and immediacy (seeming unscripted) [4] [5] [10]. Perceived authenticity significantly influences voting intentions and is especially important to citizens with lower political trust [10]. In political contexts, authenticity is a multidimensional experience that emerges through various forms of engagement-including how candidates present themselves as ordinary people unlike typical politicians, demonstrate consistency in their values, and engage directly with voters through seemingly unscripted interactions [10]. Politicians increasingly use social media for self-presentation techniques to appear genuine to constituents [2], yet these efforts may be perceived differently based on factors like gender and communication style [2]. This complex relationship between political authenticity and voter behavior demands

further investigation, particularly as AI and deepfake technologies threaten to erode trust in digital political communication [11] [12].

DEFINING AUTHENTICITY [vi]

Authenticity is defined as the consumers' experience of authentic consumption (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). See Table 1. Beverland (2005) argues that consumers are offered authenticity through sincere messages to convince them rationally and experientially of the item's commitment to tradition, passion for craft, and production excellence. Authenticity is a subjective evaluation of genuineness attributed to an object by a consumer (Napoli, et al., 2013). Tourists collecting artefacts believe that the authenticity of an item is found in the article being constructed by a craftsman of a particular tribe and being for a specific purpose, whereas others find authenticity in mass produced (iconic) representations of the original object (Cohen and Cohen, 2012).

Authenticity may be based on sincerity, innocence and originality (Fine, 2003), or being simple, honest and natural (Boyle, 2003). It may be related to the genuineness, reality, or truth of the object or experience (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). It can be based on a product being true to its heritage, using traditional modes of production (Beverland, 2005). Furthermore, authenticity can infuse the item or experience with a set of values that differentiate it from other, more commercialized, brands. Grayson and Martinec (2004) demonstrate that, ultimately, consumers use different cues to assess different kinds of authenticity for different effects (p.297). For example, drawing on historical associations, authenticity has been shown to be central to consumer roles within subcultures, for example as experienced in classic car clubs (Leigh, Peters and Shelton, 2006). Historical associations have also been found in communication strategies building brand authenticity with luxury wine makers (Beverland, 2005).

Therefore, the authentic consumption experience is a multi-dimensional construct made up concurrently of various states of consciousness (sub-constructs). For example: existential, (intra-personal and interpersonal) (Wang, 1999), iconic, indexical and hypothetical (Grayson and Martinec, 2004), self-referential and hyper-authentic (Rose and Wood, 2005), objective and constructive (Leigh, Peters and Shelton, 2006), pure, approximate and moral (Beverland, et al., 2008), control, connection and virtue (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010), and hot and cool (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). This definition is supported in different contexts, such as goods and services (Bruner, 1994; Grayson and Martinec, 2004), food and beverage (Beverland, 2005; Beverland, et al., 2008), tourism (Cohen, 1988; Cohen and Cohen, 2012; MacCannell, 1973; Wang, 1999), reality television (Rose and Wood, 2005), subcultures (Leigh, Peters and Shelton, 2006), and advertising (Chiu, Hsieh, and Kuo, 2012).

Table 1 shows the sub-constructs that define authenticity in the conceptual model. Based upon this table and citations it is summarised that in the online consumption experience consumers need to feel connection to the original time of manufacture through the brand (*Time Origin*). Online consumption experiences also revolve around connection and identification with everyday people through the community (*Everyday People*). Often consumers on and offline through the service will seek positive first hand experience of the item to assists them in achieving personal goals of practical self-authentication (*First Hand Experience*). The community's independent judgment will also assist this process of self-authentication (*Independent Judgment*). They are then able, through focusing on the brand consumption, to make judgements about performance or best value for money (*Instrumentality*) and community interactions to allow for required standards to be tested (*Verification*).

Personal self-authentication is achieved by focusing on the service market leader (*Ubiquity*), its community (*Brand Proximity*) and its shared laws of governance (*Communal Norms*). Consumers online tend to create experience from the brand situation and production through their experience of the brand's script (*Scripted Narrative*), fantasy image (*Situation Fantasy*) and product experience (*Self-Relevant Goals*). Online, consumers need to make judgements about the authenticity of the original article through the brand (*Objective*). The service helps in this process as it often projects onto the brand imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, and powers (*Constructive*). Consumers also project their own values onto the brand (*Consumer Values*) and brand values assist the consumer to achieve moral self-authentication (*Brand Values*). Authentic brand consumption experiences are enhanced when the consumer feels involved with the creators of the brand (*Commitment to Tradition*) and its place of manufacture (*Place of Origin*). Authenticity is supported if the brand is guaranteed to be genuine (*Guarantee of Being Genuine*) and often the online service itself has official laws of governance (*Universal Norms*) as well as community-based morals that are consistently applied (*Purity of Motive*).

TABLE 1.   DEFINING AUTHENTICITY

Type	Construct	Definition	Authors
Iconic: Authentic reproduction of the original.	Time Origin	A feeling of connection to the original time of manufacture.	Grayson and Martinec (2004)
Identification: Identifying elements of authenticity in fantasy.	Everyday People	Consumers connect/identify with everyday people.	Rose & Wood (2005)
Practical Self/ Interpersonal Self-Authentication: Where self-referential behaviors reveal the consumers true self.	First Hand Experience	A positive first hand experience of the item assists the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	Beverland and Farrelly (2010)
	Independent Judgment	The independent judgment of other consumers of the item assists the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	
	Instrumentality	Best performing or best value for money item or experience assists the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	
	Verification	Testing to establish that required standards are met assists consumers to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	
	Ubiquity	Mainstream, mass brands, or a "market leader" assist the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	
	Brand Proximity	Being close to you or part of your social community assists the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	Leigh, Peters, & Shelton (2006)

	Communal Norms	Laws that govern the community's Behaviour in everyday life assist the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	
Production/Situation: Consumers blend situations and production to construct authenticity from fantasy.	Scripted Narrative	Scripted narrative assists the consumer to construct production authenticity.	Rose & Wood (2005)
	Situation Fantasy	Fantasy situations provide the consumer indexical elements with which he/she can construct situation authenticity.	
	Self-Relevant Goals	Self-relevant goals of a product/experience assist the consumer to construct situation authenticity.	
Social: Use of product symbolism or self-efficacy to construct authentic personal or social identities.	Objective	Objective authenticity refers to the authenticity of the original article.	Leigh, Peters, & Shelton (2006)
	Constructive	Constructive authenticity refers to the authenticity projected onto objects in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers, etc.	
Moral: Iconicity or indexicality to show higher moral status.	Consumer Values	Consumer values mirrored in the brand.	Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink (2008)
	Brand Values	Brand values assist the consumer to achieve moral self-authentication.	
Pure Indexical: A factual or spatio-temporal connection to history and commitment and feeling to the original place of manufacture.	Commitment to Tradition	Love of the craft, process, or the involvement of the creators in the production process.	
	Place of Origin	A commitment too, and feeling for, the original place of manufacture.	Grayson and Martinec (2004)
	Guarantee of Being Genuine	An in-situ guarantee of genuineness provided by a recognized authority.	Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink (2008)

Virtuous Self: Personal goals of virtuosity in self-authentication	Universal Norms	Laws that govern societies, these standards override other considerations.	Beverland and Farrelly (2010)
	Purity of Motive	Consistent application of a set of morals.	

RECENT WORK [vii]

Several recent academic papers have explored different aspects of authenticity across various disciplines:

1. 2024 Papers:

    - "Identifying AI-Generated Research Papers: Methods and Considerations" examines techniques for distinguishing between human-authored and AI-generated academic content, including textual analysis, metadata examination, and content evaluation methods [1].

    - "Brand Authenticity: A 21-Year Bibliometric Review" analyzes 880 articles (2003-2023) showing increasing publication trends and identifying research clusters in tourism, food/retail, and marketing/management [2].

    - "AI vs. AI: The Detection Game" evaluates the capabilities of AI content detection systems in identifying whether texts were written by humans or AI, with particular focus on academic integrity applications [3].

2. 2023 Papers:

    - "From authentic assessment to authenticity in assessment" discusses conceptual challenges in assessment planning within education [5].

    - "Always-on authenticity: Challenging the BeReal ideal of 'being real'" examines the social media app BeReal and questions its claims of providing a uniquely authentic platform experience [6].

3. 2022 Papers:

    - "Craving alter real authenticity through the post-postmodern lens" investigates tourists' attitudes toward "alter real authenticity" (altered reality) from a post-postmodern perspective [7].

4. 2021 Papers:

    - "The Essence of Authenticity" expands the "3C-view" of authenticity (consistency, conformity, and connection) by adding a fourth dimension-continuity-creating a "4C-model" that approaches authenticity as a developmental process rather than a static state [8].

ENDNOTES

[i] Perplexity Citations:

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