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For several decades candidate image studies have typically conceptualized and operationalized candidate images as source credibility traits or persona impressions. Candidate issue positions have been minimized in such research and excluded from the candidate image construct. Thus, candidate images have been treated as clusters of persona impressions only, implying that issue perceptions are unimportant in the formation of candidate images. Accordingly, a dichotomy emerged which split candidate image as candidate persona impressions from candidate issue positions, treating the latter as separate and independent determinants of vote. Later research indicated that candidate image content was largely unknown by voters, and some researchers argued that candidate images most likely include both issue and persona impressions. The dichotomy persisted, however, because of the assumption that voters process candidate persona impressions more than candidate issue positions perceptions and that these two types of perceptions are orthogonal. Employing panel data from a random sample of community members and applying correlational and structural equation modeling procedures, the researchers found that the data do not support the issue-persona dichotomy assumptions. Instead, they lend credence to a more cognitive view of candidate images. Such a view conceptualizes candidate images as integrated structures of issue perceptions, persona perceptions, and whatever other kinds of perceptions are important to particular voters in particular elections.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the results of a study intended to test a specific hypothesis and a research question related to the theoretical development of the candidate image construct in political communication. More specifically, it tests the long-standing assumption that there is a dichotomy between candidate issue positions and candidate persona impressions ("images"). This assumption has allowed researchers to presume that candidate images are composed only of candidate persona impressions.

A brief overview of research findings regarding voter decision-making shows the importance of testing the dichotomy of issue and persona perceptions of candidates. This background demonstrates that voter perceptions are important influences on voter decisions, that candidate issue positions and candidate persona impressions are both involved in voter perceptions, that voter evaluations of candidates change in various stages of a campaign, and that relative contributions of persona impressions and issue impressions can vary by candidates, voters, and elections.

While voting choice appears to be a simple decision, there are many independent variables that can act as determinants of the voting choice (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1971). A list of possible determinants can include group pressures, family political history, economic conditions, candidate images, and partisanship. According to research in political science, voting choice has long-term determinants such as party identification and ideology, as well as short-term determinants such as

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In his model of voter cognitive processing, Herstein (1985) argues that voter decision-making begins with information acquisition. The information may be sought out or simply encountered. According to Herstein (1985, p. 27), “this information may include each candidate’s position on important issues, past performance, physical appearance, and so forth.” Herstein observes that voters draw upon various combinations of stored information in their evaluations of candidates.

Neuman (1986, p. 148) notes “most political learning is fragmentary, that is, voters are not researching specific facts about elections, but are instead gathering bits and pieces of information during campaigns and forming a composite picture of the prominent issues and candidates.” Neuman argues that a decision in the voting booth has a wide range of causes. For example, some voters will forget who is running in certain elections and are reminded by names on the ballot in the voting booth. More involved voters invoke associations, images, and ideas they associate with the candidates. While some vote only for purposes of civic duty, others vote as the result of months of candidate evaluation and planning to vote. Voters, in general, are not motivated to collect many details about candidates and their issue positions (Neuman, 1986). Coupled with the fact that over 90% of Americans believe that it is a fundamental duty to vote, is the fact that many voting decisions are based on judgments made with few details.

Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau (1995) discovered that voting choices do not appear to be related to detailed knowledge about candidate issue positions and that most voters appear to have little knowledge about candidate policy positions. However, they also found that voters do respond to issue messages. While memory of candidate issue positions decays dramatically, memory for overall evaluations of candidates appears stable over time. Additionally, they found that campaign messages could influence candidate evaluations despite the fact that voters cannot recall what facts were in the messages. One of their most important conclusions is summarized as follows: “No matter how little voters may recall from the campaign, our evidence suggests that if attentive to campaign issues and events, they use this information to inform their candidate evaluations” (Lodge et al. 1995, p. 318).

Voting studies indicate that issues only affect vote choice when three conditions are met: 1) voters are informed and concerned about the issues; 2) candidates differ in their issue stands; and 3) voters are able to compare the candidates’ issue positions with their own (Flanigan & Zingale, 1998). Voting studies also indicate that when voters have opinions on issues, they show consistency between their issue positions and their vote choice (Flanigan & Zingale, 1994).

In the 1980 presidential election, candidate personalities had a weak effect on voting (Flanigan & Zingale, 1994; Shanks & Miller, 1985). Yet, in the 1984 election, personality considerations appear to have outweighed issue and policy considerations (Flanigan & Zingale, 1994; Shanks & Miller, 1985). In 1992, the strongest
factor affecting votes for or against George Bush was retrospective evaluation of his presidency (Flanigan & Zingale, 1994).

Past research indicates that partisanship, candidate knowledge, and issue knowledge all affect voter choices. However, we do not yet know the relative importance of these three determinants and it may be that such relative values among the three vary across voters. Even if a voter knows the issue positions of a candidate, he/she may consider political party or candidate persona to be more important (Corbett, 1991). Significantly, data analyses are rooted in theoretical orientations, a factor contributing to the confusing state of research findings about vote determinants and the role of candidate images in relation to them. As Flanigan and Zingale (1994, p. 187) argue, “the conflicting conclusions that are reached are largely a matter of the theoretical assumptions with which one starts.”

There are three competing views of what drives voting decisions that are pertinent to a consideration of the role of candidate issue positions. One view is that issues are important and perhaps are the most important determinants of vote choice. The second view assumes that issue positions are unimportant because voters place far more weight on other aspects of candidacies, such as candidates’ personal traits. The third view is that candidate issue positions and candidate characteristics are both important in voter information processing and decision-making.

The first view privileges retrospective evaluation of incumbents, economic conditions, and policy considerations as factors of voter decision-making. Holbrook (1994), for example, argues that macro-level variables such as performance of the economy and the record of the incumbent candidate (if there is one) are the most important determinants of the vote. Others in this school of thought assert that views about economy, ideology, and issues are important to voting choice (Alvarez & Nagler, 1995). Alvarez and Nagler, (1995, p. 716) argue “that ideology and issues have important roles in presidential elections is not in dispute.” Some researchers describe ideology as related to issues in such a way that it can be defined as a consistency among issue attitudes—what is known as issue constraint (Flanigan & Zingale, 1998).

The second view provides a basis for the issue-persona dichotomy. This view assumes that issues are not important in the process of candidate evaluation and final voting choices of voters. While issues may be perceived, they are minor in relation to the influence of candidate characteristics and personae (Funk, 1996; Hellweg, et al. 1989). Funk (1996, p. 102) argues, “Across more than twenty years of NES surveys in the United States, Miller and Miller found personal characteristics to have a greater relative impact on vote choice than did either issues or references to party affiliation of the candidate.”

In the third view, researchers suggest that issues appear less salient than other determinants such as ideology and retrospective evaluations (Flanigan & Zingale, 1994). With this view, it is feasible that candidate issue positions and candidate trait impressions vary in relative weight by voters and campaigns. It is feasible that there is mutual causality between trait perceptions (persona) and candidate issue positions. Such a view may entertain the possibility that candidate trait perceptions are caused by candidate issue position perceptions. Of course, causal testing is necessary to locate where and how such causality occurs, if it does.

The use of the candidate image construct in voting studies and political communication research has extended over thirty years (Hellweg, 1995; Hellweg, Dionisopou-
los & Kugler, 1989). For most of these years, there has been a lack of theoretical consensus regarding the nature and constitution of candidate images (Hellweg, 1995; Hellweg, et al. 1989).

Traditional operationalizations of the candidate image construct consist of eight or more dimensions of source credibility (Hellweg, et al. 1989). In most of the studies, college students have served as subjects. Generally, there has been a unitary assumption about the candidate images in any given campaign, meaning that the same criteria are used for evaluating both or all candidates (Hellweg, 1995). Traditional uses of the candidate image construct tend to conceptualize and operationalize images as only persona-based, because it is assumed that voters evaluate candidates more on the basis of candidate characteristics than on the basis of issue positions, and that the latter merely serve to create impressions of candidate characteristics (Hellweg, 1995).

Candidate images are formed incrementally over the course of a political campaign (Denton & Woodward, 1990). Many researchers assume that in this process, voter’s perceptions of candidate issue positions become perceptions of candidate characteristics (Graber, 1984). Louden (1994, p. 180), for example, argues that “voters’ inferential patterns move from issue to image evaluation.” This makes intuitive sense in light of the fact that voters are choosing between possible leaders and the qualities that give information about their leadership potential. It does not, however, account for the possibility that how people view candidates as people can also affect how they process candidate issue positions.

Some scholars have viewed candidate images as comprised only of persona impressions such as those that constitute source credibility. They measure issues separately if they measure them at all. Hellweg, et al. (1989) argue that research indicates that issue and image concerns are “two separate entities.” The rationale for the split appears to be that voters can more easily process messages about candidate personalities than about candidate issue positions. Johnston (1989, p. 380) defines image responses to political ads as “thoughts referring to a candidate’s character, personality, appearance or behavior.” If the ad had issue content, the voters responses to those messages would be left out of this construct that allegedly accounts for voter reactions to the TV spots.

Other scholars view a connection between images and issues such that issue perceptions become part of the candidate image components. Davis (1981), for example, states that issue-oriented messages may become part of images. Mendelsohn and O’Keefe (1976) argue that issue-related perceptions and candidate persona perceptions show strong interaction effects on voting choice. McDonald, Ostman, and Glynn (1988) argue, “there is conceptual confusion as to where images originate and reside” (p. 10). Along with Aden (1988), they argue that images and issues are not separate, but are part of the same construct. Press and Verburg (1988) refer to images as any type of subjective impressions that voters have of candidates. In finding that candidate-voter attitude homophily predicts candidate preference well, Andersen and Kibler (1978) note that voters engage in a process of candidate comparison and look for which candidate is closest to them in terms of personal qualities and issues. Newman (1994) indicates that Bill Clinton’s image development in 1992 was supported by his views about the economy and welfare. Flanigan and Zingale (1994, p. 173) also note how issue perceptions helped Bill Clinton get elected in 1992: “He was not viewed favorably in personality terms (for example, on traits
such as honesty and experience), but this perception was more than offset by positive comments about his views on a wide range of other issues."

In the 1996 presidential election, Bill Clinton ran as the incumbent against challengers Robert Dole and Ross Perot. Dole successfully portrayed himself as having better integrity than Clinton, but integrity was not what voters were most concerned about in this election (Flanigan & Zingale, 1998). In addition, Clinton benefited from positive perceptions regarding the handling of the economy and foreign policy (Flanigan & Zingale, 1998).

Newman (1994) explains that views about policies affect how voters evaluate candidates as leaders. Clinton’s statements about childhood immunizations, for example, could generate perceptions of a leader who cares about people. Levine (1995, p. 96) states, “We now believe that election results cannot be adequately explained without at least some reference to issues.”

Issues, persona impressions, and other information, constitute message inputs for voters, and the way that they are conceptualized affects how candidate image is used as a construct in political communication research. One reason candidate image research has such divergence in assumptions and constructs is that there has been a persistent dualism in defining the roles of candidate issue positions and candidate characteristics. This dualism bifurcates candidate issue positions from candidate persona impressions, and treats the latter as the totality of candidate images. Such a separation is defensible only if empirical data support it.

Kaid (1991, p. 148) notes “Image and issue are not necessarily dichotomous concepts.” Louden (1994) goes further and argues that the issue-image dichotomy is artificial and that stronger influences of persona factors over issues messages is a function of news media focus on candidate personalities in place of issues. Louden (1994, p. 171) suggests that the dichotomy is “artificial and misleading in that both the messages projected by the candidates and perceived by voters are, in fact, a complex blend of issue and images formation.” In other words, voters may process much more than persona impressions alone, but if those impressions appear to be less predictive than or subordinate to the persona impressions, researchers may neglect them.

While Kaid (1991) and Louden (1994) may be correct, many political communication scholars continue to assume that the conceptual and operational division of issues and persona impressions is valid. To sort out issues from persona impression in the process of candidate evaluation, the image-issue dichotomy has neglected the likelihood that issues and persona are interrelated and statistically associated.

The issue-persona dichotomy has stood as long as it has because voters appear to know more about candidates as persons than about the candidates’ issues positions (Corbett, 1991). With lower issue knowledge than candidate knowledge, it makes sense that issue knowledge would be less predictive of vote than candidate knowledge even if both were important determinants of vote. Still, issues are present as influences even if they appear less determining than persona impressions.

Louden (1994) argues that issues and images are related and are not as separable as previously thought. This argument does not completely refute the issue-persona dichotomy, however, since it can either integrate issue and person perceptions or maintain the conceptualization of image as persona perceptions. The latter is only possible by arguing that issues affect the formation of persona impressions and people vote on the basis of their persona impressions. A stronger challenge to the
dichotomy is found in a second argument, which says that the construct of image incorporates, or should incorporate, both issue (candidate issue positions) and persona (candidate persona impressions). This argument says that images are composites of both issue impressions and persona impressions (plus others), even if persona impressions are affected by issue impressions.

When looking at the issue-image or issue-personality dichotomy it is evident that the dichotomy is founded on a set of assumptions that remain untested, empirically, and that such a lack of testing has allowed the dichotomy to be challenged only at a conceptual level.

The assumptions of the dichotomy approach begin with the belief that voters are not inclined to pay attention to or process issues and candidate issue positions. It is also assumed that candidate traits are more important determinants of voting than issue stands. One reason for this is that people in everyday life make inferences and attributions about personality traits of the individuals they encounter. Most importantly, the issue-persona dichotomy rests on the assumption that candidate issue positions and candidate persona impressions are independent. In this study, the underpinning assumption supporting the issue-persona dichotomy is submitted to empirical testing. This is the assumption that candidate issue positions and candidate persona impressions are independent from each other as contributors to the formation of candidate images.

In relation to the two assumptions above, this study tests the empirical support for the issue-persona dichotomy by examining the empirical relationship between candidate issue positions and candidate persona perceptions. We wish to ascertain if the constructs are correlated. If candidate issue positions and candidate persona impressions are correlated, the proposition that they are independent and dichotomous is diminished as an empirically supportable statement.

H1: Issue items and persona items are significantly correlated.

If the issue and persona items are significantly correlated our logical next step is to examine the nature of those relationships, especially over time. The finding that the constructs are correlated over time that will further erode empirical support for the assumption of orthogonality that underpins the issue-personal dichotomy.

RQ1: Are the issue and persona items significantly correlated at two different time periods?

Method

Sample

Participants were 117 people who were randomly sampled from a Southwestern community of about 100,000 people. Participants were initially sampled using a random-digit dialing procedure from March 19–21, 1996. At that time 386 people were contacted by telephone. One hundred and ninety people participated in the survey at time one (50% response rate). The same participants were again contacted six months later, from September 17–19, 1996. One hundred and seventeen of the 190 people who participated at time one also participated at time two. Thirty-one (16%) of the people could not be reached because their phones were disconnected, 20 (11%) of the people refused to participate and 33 (17%) of the people could not be reached at home even after repeated attempts to speak with them over the three days of data collection. Therefore, 85% of the people with whom we were able to speak
agreed to participate in the study again at time two. Sixty-two percent of all of the people who participated at time one also participated at time two.

The research participants included 42 females and 75 males. The sample included 88 Anglo, 26 Hispanic, and 1 other subject. Three people refused to identify their ethnicity. In this sample, 52 were Democrats, 49 Republicans, and 8 identified themselves as belonging to some other political party. Nine people refused to respond to the question about political party.

Measures

This study employed question items which were reported in a national survey of American voters and which identified the candidate characteristics and issue that were of most concern to them. In November of 1995, the Times Mirror Poll (Voter anxiety dividing GOP, 1995) of public concerns revealed that the main issue concerns of the American public were health care reform, balancing the budget, crime, welfare reform, moral problems in the nation, education, and the economy. For presidential candidates, the survey revealed that American voters were looking for the following personal qualities in their next president: high ethical standards, compassion for average people, good judgment in crises, decisiveness, consistency on issues, and sincerity.

For the present study callers asked respondents to think about Clinton and Dole in relation to each persona and issue item. The persona items and the issue items were each combined into indexes. Alpha reliabilities were calculated for each candidate on each index. Reliabilities at time-one and time-two for the Clinton Issue index were .88 and .90 (respectively) and .85 and .90 for the Persona index. Reliabilities at time-one and time-two for the Dole Issue index were .90 and .89 (respectively) and .85 and .84 for the Persona index (see Appendix A to examine the individual items).

Results

We employed structural equation models estimated with LISREL 8.30 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1999) to test the hypothesis and answer the research question. The items in Appendix A are used to form candidate Persona and Issue factors, for both measurement periods. Table 1 lists the estimated correlations between the persona and issue factors for each candidate. As can be seen in Table 1, the indexes of candidate issue positions and candidate characteristics (persona) are significantly correlated for both candidates at both time-one and time-two. The significant correlations found between the issue indices and the persona indices support our hypothesis (H1), which states that issues and candidate persona are significantly correlated.

There is a strong relationship between Clinton issue perceptions and Clinton persona perceptions at time-one ($r = .94, p < .0001$), and at time-two ($r = .93, p < .0001$). There is also a strong relationship between Dole issue perceptions and Dole persona perceptions at time-one, ($r = .80, p < .0001$), and at time-two ($r = .83, p < .0001$). While the magnitudes of issue-persona correlations are slightly less for Dole than for Clinton, the same pattern exists, namely that candidate characteristics and candidate issue positions share substantial covariance, indicating that the variables are associated (Smith, 1988). For the association noted above for Clinton, for example, at time-one, issue and persona perceptions have 88% shared variance
TABLE 1
LISREL Estimates of Correlations Between Persona and Issue Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>t-Statistic</th>
<th>( \Delta \chi^2 ) Test (1 df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.940</td>
<td>35.99</td>
<td>134.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.925</td>
<td>37.00</td>
<td>138.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dole</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>16.81</td>
<td>77.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dole</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>19.16</td>
<td>87.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2
LISREL Estimates of Correlations Over Time
(Dole figures in upper diagonal, Clinton in lower)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Issues 1</th>
<th>Persona 1</th>
<th>Issues 2</th>
<th>Persona 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues 1</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.799</td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td>0.607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persona 1</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.544</td>
<td>0.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues 2</td>
<td>0.883</td>
<td>0.822</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persona 2</td>
<td>0.804</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>0.925</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\((r^2 = .88)\). For the associations noted for Dole at time-one, we see that issue and persona perceptions have 64% shared variance, \((r^2 = .64)\).

Statistical tests of the independence of the Issues and Persona factors can be performed with Lisrel 8.30 by fixing the correlation between the factors to zero, then inspecting the difference in \(\chi^2\) values. These tests indicate that it is exceedingly unlikely that the factors are orthogonal or fully independent, as every one produces a significant \(\chi^2\) difference \((p < .001)\), with one degree of freedom. In other words, the factors representing the Issues and Persona items are significantly related. The \(\chi^2\) difference values are provided in the far right column of Table 1.

Separate structural equation models were tested for Clinton and Dole. These models were tested using measurement models in LISREL, for each candidate. In this situation there are four latent factors—each with six observed measures—representing the Issues and Persona factors at two points in time. These models produce the correlations in Table 2. Figures for opinions related to Dole are listed in the upper diagonal, and those of Clinton are listed in the lower diagonal. Results provide additional support for the notion that the Issues and Persona items are highly correlated.

Note that the fit of these measurement models is quite poor: for the Clinton model \(\chi^2(246) = 530.37, \text{GFI} = 0.74, \text{CFI} = 0.86\) and for Dole \(\chi^2(246) = 456.88, \text{GFI} = 0.77, \text{CFI} = 0.87\). On the whole, the goodness-of-fit statistics suggest an inadequate fit between the model and the data, and there is likely a problem with the factor structure. Sources of this problem are either that the factors are not unidimensional or there is significant correlation between items in different factors. In this case the poor fit of the measurement models further demonstrates the high degree of dependence between items from different factors.

A final test of independence is offered by fixing the correlation between the Issues and Persona constructs to unity, which implies that the two factors are measuring identical constructs. This test is similar to the test of independence described earlier, except that it tests for complete dependence rather than independence between
components (i.e., when fixing the correlation to zero). Significant changes in $\chi^2$ values from the constrained to the unconstrained solutions are found in this case, but the changes in $\chi^2$ values are much smaller than those listed in Table 2. We believe these figures provide additional support for the hypothesis that Issue and Persona factors are not viewed independently by the sampled subjects (see Table 3). They also provide the answer to our research question. We asked if persona and issue items are correlated at two different times in the campaign. The answer is that they are and the correlations are both high and significant at both times measured.

In summary, our data analysis indicates that there is strong empirical support for the hypothesis that the Issues and Persona constructs are significantly correlated and therefore are not independent as assumed by those assumptions espousing an issue-persona dichotomy.

Discussion

The results reported here lessen the empirical support necessary to sustain the assumption that candidate issue positions and candidate persona impressions are independent. The assumption of an issue and persona dichotomy has led scholars to believe that candidate images involve only persona impressions. This study, by indicating that candidate issue positions and candidate persona impressions are highly correlated, suggests that both kinds of voter perceptions are likely to influence candidate image formation.

The diminution of empirical support for the validity of separating issues and personality impressions in the conceptualization of candidate images suggests that an inclusive and cognitive view of candidate images may constitute a more accurate view of how voters think about candidates and process campaign messages. Furthermore, candidate images may include various impressions about candidates concerning all of the characteristics in voter schemata that have been noted in political science studies. The totality of these impressions is likely to be a cognitive model of the candidate as a person and a leader. A great deal of research and theory has indicated that the way a political candidate is summarized in voters' minds is not based only on persona impressions, but also with impressions about leadership and suitability for office related to issue stands, efforts to relate to ordinary citizens' needs, and communication that addresses the most salient voter concerns.

Many candidate image studies appear to have assumed that because issue impressions account for less variance than persona impressions in regression equations that issue impressions are not important to the formation of candidate images. There is a fundamental error in assuming that whatever accounts for the most variance of a dependent variable makes one independent variable important to the
exclusion of all others. This is like confusing the process of memory with the most prevalent topic present in the memory. As a result issues and other components that, along with the more salient persona perceptions, make up candidate images and provide the cognitive bases for voting choices. Moreover, the sustained bifurcation of issue and persona perceptions has led researchers to neglect the ways in which messages affect multiple types of candidate image content and how various forms of content affect each other and are interrelated. A corrective to this situation is conceptualizing candidate images in a more open-ended and inclusive manner. This will require new or revised conceptual and operational definitions of candidate image as a construct used in political communication research.

Some Possible Directions

Future candidate image research needs to account for the possibility that while candidate characteristics are important, issue considerations are also important components of candidate images. A study of candidate images could make observations about how candidate persona perceptions affect candidate issue perceptions and vice versa. Positive perceptions about issue stands may positively affect persona perceptions. Likewise, positive perceptions about candidate personae may produce positive perceptions about issue positions. We believe that the only valid way to test these possible causal influences, however, is by designing a set of experiments in which voters receive treatments that alter their perceptions of candidate issues perceptions in order to test for changes in their candidate persona perceptions, while controlling possible intervening variables. The same could be done for manipulating persona impressions and examining any significant changes on candidate issue perceptions. These kinds of experiments would make an excellent follow-up line of research from this study, which has shown that the two types of voter impressions are intertwined.

For future candidate image measurement, this study suggests that political communication scholars should conceptualize and operationalize candidate images as cognitive representations that integrate candidate persona impressions and candidate issue impressions. A cognitive representation of a candidate contains whatever impressions are important to the voter. We know that the relative importance of issue perceptions and persona impressions can vary both by candidates and by campaigns. It could also prove fruitful to study how issues and persona impressions vary in importance by stage, or phase of an election campaign.

In addition to refuting the issue-persona dichotomy which has exiled candidate issue perceptions from candidate image operationalization in many studies, the analysis reported here provides some clarification of a disparate and confusing set of directions in the political communication literature regarding candidate images. First, we know that voters vote on the basis of a small amount of total information. The question arises as to whether or not they simply choose leaders on the basis of credibility traits. Our data, along with many other studies, indicate that voters will encounter and process many types of messages and these do not simply reduce to source credibility traits. Rather, voters are likely to reduce many issue and persona impressions into images of the candidates, not disregarding the issues, but rather using their perceptions of the candidates to think about the abilities of the candidates to deal with those issues. Second, studies have shown that voters process many types of messages and information about candidates but cannot recall much of this. This lack of recall must not be confused with how they have formed images of the
candidates through the processes of perception and cognition. Third, scholars have noted that there is confusion about how candidate images originate and what they contain. Our study suggests that voters process candidate images as cognitive representations of candidates influenced by at least persona perceptions and issue perceptions. Future research should examine what other types of perceptions influence the formation and content of candidate images. Fourth, many political communication scholars have saluted the notion that the dichotomy is most likely false, but go on to use it in their studies, probably because they lack empirical data to refute it. The present study provides that data. Finally, decades of disparate findings have shown that issues are important while others have shown that issues are not important and an explanation for the discrepancies has been lacking. The view of candidate images here as a composite representation formed by both issues and persona impressions can be used to reconcile the disparate findings. For example, issue salience will vary in importance not only by election, by candidate, but also by how researchers ask questions about issues.

Notes

1GFI refers to the "goodness of fit index and CFI refers to the "comparative fit index."

References


Appendix: Survey Question Items

Candidate Issue Items

1. Bill Clinton has good positions on health care reform.
2. Bill Clinton has good positions on the economy.
3. Bill Clinton has good positions on balancing the budget.
4. Bill Clinton has good positions on welfare reform.
5. Bill Clinton has good positions on education.
6. Bill Clinton has good positions on jobs.

1. Bob Dole has good positions on health care reform.
2. Bob Dole has good positions on the economy.
3. Bob Dole has good positions on balancing the budget.
4. Bob Dole has good positions on welfare reform.
5. Bob Dole has good positions on education.
6. Bob Dole has good positions on jobs.

Candidate characteristics (Persona) Items

1. Bill Clinton has high ethical standards.
2. Bill Clinton has compassion for average Americans.
3. Bill Clinton has good judgment in a crisis.
4. Bill Clinton is decisive.
5. Bill Clinton is sincere.
6. Bill Clinton is consistent on issues.

1. Bob Dole has high ethical standards.
2. Bob Dole has compassion for average Americans.
3. Bob Dole has good judgment in a crisis.
4. Bob Dole is decisive.
5. Bob Dole is sincere.
6. Bob Dole is consistent on issues.

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