

Political Branding: Political Candidates Positioning Based on Inter-object Associative Affinity Index

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Abstract

The article presents the conception of positioning politicians, based on a three-stage approach to political branding. The main assumption is that a politician's image is conceptualized as consisting of a node (e.g. her or his name) in memory to which a variety of associations are linked. These associations must be shared with other rival candidates as well as with an ideal candidate – understood as a model and standard of comparison while developing detailed marketing strategies. The first stage of branding, candidates' positioning, focuses on such affinity between political objects. At the second stage mutual relationships between particular elements (positive and negative; common and distinctive), of which a politician's image consists, are defined. The third level of political branding links the results of positioning to voters' decisions. This conception is presented in relations to Polish presidential candidates in the 2005 election.

Politicians are in the business of selling hope to people. This hope is related to convincing people that it is this particular politician or political party that guarantees, as Lloyd (2005) puts it, successful management of national security, social stability and economic growth on behalf of the electorate. From this perspective the major challenge to the political marketing is to connect a politician's words, actions and vision into a realistic transformation of the electorate's dreams and aspirations (Newman, 1994).

The political arena is very diverse. It consists of groups of various interests, likings, preferences, and lifestyles. More efficient and successful political campaigns need to accommodate this diversity by creating strategies for various market segments. There are issue-oriented voters but there are also voters influenced by the candidate's personal charm. The politicians often face a difficult task then: they have to build a voting coalition based on and reflecting a certain compromise among various social groups. This requires a lot of skill on the part of the candidate in creating a cognitive map of different opinions, emotions, or

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interests. Then the candidate has to assign them to particular groups and refer to such a map while constructing his information messages in order to establish the foundations of the agreement between various voter groups and the candidate.

A successful political campaign should then utilize the knowledge of the structure of the political brand (e.g. candidate, party) in order to develop competitive advantage and win support of as many voter segments as possible. The paper will then first focus on the issues related to political branding and show the differences between this process and consumer branding. Then it will present the positioning of political objects using the method of multidimensional scaling and based on the affinity between them as well as its extended framework of Tversky's (1977) contrast model of similarity. Their application valued will be tested against voter decision forecasts in the Polish presidential elections in 2005.

Political Branding

A brand is a multidimensional construct, involving the blending of functional and emotional values to match consumers' performance and psychosocial needs. A brand can be defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler, 1991, p.442). One of the goals of branding is to make a brand unique on dimensions that are both relevant and welcomed by consumers. Success in a market depends on effective brand differentiation, based on the identification, internalization and communication of unique brand values that are both pertinent to and desired by consumers (de Chernatony, 2001). Therefore, it is important then to understand the content and structure of brand knowledge because they influence what comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a brand. Consumer brand knowledge relates to the cognitive representation of the brand. Consistent with an associative network memory model, brand knowledge is conceptualized as consisting of a brand node in memory to which a variety of associations are linked (Keller, 1993; 2003).

One of the prevailing conceptualizations of memory structure in psychology is the associative network memory model developed by Anderson (1983). According to it, semantic memory or knowledge consists of a set of nodes and links. Nodes are stored pieces of information connected by links that vary in strength. A spreading activation process from node to node determines the extent of retrieval in memory. A node becomes a potential source of activation for other nodes either when external information is being encoded or when internal information is retrieved from long-term memory. Activation can spread from this

node to other linked nodes in memory. When the activation of another node exceeds some threshold level, the information contained in that node is recalled. Thus, the strength of association between the activated node and all linked nodes determines the extent of spreading activation and the particular information that can be retrieved from memory (in reference to a person's memory see e.g. Hastie and Park, 1986; Srull and Wyer, 1989)

The brand knowledge encoded in memory has two main dimensions: brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1993). Brand awareness is related to the strength of the brand node or trace in memory, as reflected by consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions. It plays an important role in consumer decision-making because it increases the likelihood that the brand will be a member of the consideration set for purchase. Furthermore, brand awareness affects consumer choice also by influencing the formation and strength of brand associations in the brand image. Therefore, a necessary condition for the creation of a brand image is that a brand node be established in memory, and the nature of that brand node affect how easily different kinds of information can become attached to the brand in memory.

Brand image means then perceptions of brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. Brand associations are the other informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers (Keller, 1993). These associations differ according to how favorably they are evaluated. The success of a marketing program is reflected in the creation of favorable brand associations, that is, consumers believe the brand has attributes and benefits that satisfy their needs and wants such that a positive overall brand attitude is formed.

It seems then that also in the case of political market one may assume that political brands have an associative structure characteristic for cognitive schemata and are subject to the psychological laws of categorization (see Cwalina and Falkowski, in press; Cwalina, Falkowski and Newman, 2008). However, one should remember that politics deals with a person (or group of individuals – party), not a product (O'Shaughnessy, 1987). In other words, political marketing is mainly concerned with people and their relationship with each other, whereas mainstream marketing is often concerned with people's interaction with products. Therefore, attitude and impression formation in reference to political brands has also a number of characteristics distinguishing it from consumer brands. The results of a series of experiments conducted by Hampson, John and Goldberg (1986) suggest that category membership is more fuzzy with persons than in the domain of natural objects. It means that for instance the category "politician" is more blurred or less unequivocal than the category "soft drink." There are many more features a politician is characterized by and the

associations with them are less predictable than those with the category of products. Then Menon and Johar (1997) demonstrated that judgments related to nonsocial product experiences trigger processes that are different from those established for social stimuli. Product experiences are inherently less ambiguous than personal experiences, thereby entailing more concrete and less self-referent processing. Judgments of social stimuli (e.g. person, party) are likely to depend on inferred, abstract information (e.g. traits), whereas judgments of nonsocial stimuli (e.g. products) are likely to depend on concrete attributes. Thus, in turn, leads to the manifestation of positivity effects (tendency to recall positive experiences from past rather than negative ones) in personal but not product experiences. Menon and Johar (1997) suggest then that consumer researchers need to be cautious in applying person memory literature to product memory. The results of Lastovicka and Bonfield's research (1982) suggest that although consumer is likely to hold attitudes towards stands on familiar social and political issues, attitudes are less likely to be held towards familiar branded products. According to them the reason for it is the fact that, in general, consumer products are less involving than social issues.

The above differences suggest that identifying political brands with consumer brands may lead to errors if marketing knowledge is directly applied for politics. It does not mean, though, that there are no similarities between these two concepts but that they stress the specificity of human reactions to political objects as opposed to consumer goods. Bearing these limitations in minds one may assume – as de Chernatony and White (2002) stress – that a political party or candidate can consider itself as a brand, to be developed to offer societal and emotional values to an electorate as part of its appeal (see Smith, 2001). Therefore, political candidates can build their brands effectively in a way which strikes the appropriate balance between the ideological (voter-driving) and populist (voter-driven) strategies (Reeves, de Chernatony and Carrigan, 2006). These two dimensions, as Henneberg (2006) demonstrates, constitute the specific strategic posture a political party or candidate holds and their behavior on the political marketplace: the relationship builder (high in market-driving and high in market-driven), the convinced ideologist (high/low), the tactical populist (low/high), and the political lightweight (low/low).

In the case of the political brand one can also distinguish its two basic aspects: brand awareness and brand image (see Cwalina and Falkowski, in press). Their marketing importance is analogous to the consumer market, however, particularly with image – one has to redefine it. Establishing identity of political brand involves creating its salience. Developing deep, broad political brand awareness should ensure identification of the brand

with the voter and an association with specific voter needs. For instance, the category “Party P” brings to mind, in the first place, its leader and leads to forming particular, often different attitudes toward the party; it will not happen if the leader is not accessible in memory (see e.g. Schwarz and Bless, 1992). Then, the category “Polish presidential candidate in 2005” is associated mainly with the candidate who wins the elections then.

A politician’s image consists of how people perceive him based on his characteristics, leadership potential, and surrounding messages which are conveyed through the mass media and by word-of-mouth in everyday communication with friends and family. The term “candidate image” means creating a particular type of representation for a particular purpose (e.g. voting), which, by evoking associations, provides the object with additional values (e.g. socio-psychological, ethical or personality) and thus contributes to the emotional reception of the object (Cwalina, Falkowski and Kaid, 2000; Cwalina, Falkowski and Newman, in press; Falkowski and Cwalina, 1999). The values by which the constructed object is enriched may never be reflected in his “real” features – it is enough if they have a certain meaning for the receiver. However, in order for such an image to be reliable and for the candidate to be efficient in his actions he needs a balanced personality and oratorical skills.

The most important issue about any image is selecting those features that will lay foundations for further actions. Such characteristics include personality features which can refer to people’s beliefs connected with human nature (especially integrity and competence) or be a consequence of social demand in a given moment of time and particular socio-political situation when the campaign is conducted (Cwalina and Falkowski, 2007). They are the core around which peripheral features are placed. They are less relevant for the voters but important for the “psychological realism” of candidate image (Cwalina, Falkowski and Newman, 2008). Furthermore, an important element of forming a candidate’s image is the array of issues that he should address. For example, based on data from U.S. senatorial race, Schoenwald (1987) stated that an improved voter perception on the devotes-time-to-education candidate attribute can translate into a better reading on caring about the little guy, caring about children, caring about state problems, and being generally more humane (see also Peterson, 2005).

Voter segmentation and candidate positioning

The major challenge for marketing campaign is the candidates’ realization that they are not in a position to appeal to all voters of every persuasion. This means that the candidate must break down the electorate into segments or groupings and then create a campaign

platform that appeals to these targets. The process of dividing the whole electorate into many different groups is called voter segmentation (Baines, 1999; Baines, Worcester, Jarrett and Mortimore, 2003). The goal of segmentation is to recognize and assess voter needs or characteristics, which become the foundation for defining the profile of the voters in order to plan efficient communication with them. In other words, marketing planning aims at identification and creation of competitive advantage, and, in the case of politics, its goal is to determine how to generate and retain public support for party/candidate policies and programs (Baines, Harris and Lewis, 2002).

After identifying voting segments, one needs to define the candidate's position in each of them in the multi-level process of positioning. It is a process of establishing and managing the images, perceptions, and associations that the consumer applies to product based on the values and beliefs associated with it. It refers to creating the optimal location in the minds of existing and potential customers so that they think of the brand in the "right way" (Keller, 1999). Every product has some sort of position – whether intended or not – which are based upon consumer perceptions, which, in turn, may or may not reflect reality. A position is effectively built by communicating a consistent message to consumers about the product and where it fits into the market. Brand positioning required thoughtful analysis of competitors and consumers to determine the desired image for the brand to maximize its chances for success.

In political marketing candidate (political brand) positioning consists in assessing the candidate's and his opponents' strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities a particular campaign offers (Kotler and Kotler, 1999). The key elements here include: 1) creating an image of the candidate emphasizing his particular personality features and 2) his developing and presenting a position on the country's economic and social issues. These elements may be used for positioning politicians, as Smith (2005) puts it: *via policies on issues* or *via image and emotional positioning* or based on the model of "political triangle" proposed by przez Worcester and Baines (2004). According to him, the key to understanding the decision-making process of voters, especially those who might "float", is an unambiguous analysis of the three interacting aspects and their relative importance: voters' attitudes to the parties (party image), their leaders (candidate image) and their policies on the issues facing the country.

Multidimensional Scaling Techniques in Positioning Political Objects

Although a number of different approaches and methodologies for political brand positioning are possible, the method used most often for it is multidimensional scaling techniques (MDS). While MDS techniques can operate on a variety of types of data (e.g. similarities, dissimilarities, distances or proximities) they have a common set of objectives. They are to produce a representation of the relationships between objects (e.g. brands), and/or between variables (e.g. brand attributes), and/or between evaluators of the objects or variables (e.g. voters or consumers) (Hooley, 1980). The relationships discovered are used to build a picture of brand images in the minds of consumers/voters and an indication of particular individual product requirements. MDS techniques seek to represent these relationships in the geometrical relations among points in the spatial configuration (Shepard, 1961; Wilkes, 1977). A spatial representation has a number practical advantages (Doyle, 1975). First, the attributes most significant to consumers can be portrayed. Second, brands may be evaluated along these attribute dimensions and their relative strengths and weaknesses considered. Third, the extent of competition between brands can be seen together with the nature of their similarities and differences. Fourth, preferred positions in the perceptual space may be suggested and opportunities for new brands and promotional strategy communicated.

Frequently a brand space is assumed to be adequate to account for important aspects of the respondents' perceptions. However, it may also include the differences in their preferences. They are taken into account by considering each respondent's ideal brand (e.g. ideal presidential candidate) to have unique location in the common brand space, and by recognizing that different respondents may weight dimensions uniquely (Johnson, 1971). Including such a point of maximum preference in spatial configuration of political brands also provides information about the relationships between the actual political object and the ideal one. The closer a given candidate (or party) gets to such a point, the more preferred he is. Such a map of preferences can also be of very practical use, since it allows one to precisely define the strategy of re-positioning a given brands to bring it closer to voters' expectations.

In political objects positioning it is important to define the number and names of particular dimensions, which will help to understand voter preferences better, i.e. to specify the criteria of candidate perception and judgment. For candidate and party positioning on the voter market the obtained spaces were most often two-dimensional, with the following attributes: liberal-conservative vs. anti-pro administration (U.S. presidential election in 1968; Johnson, 1971), Republican (pro-Nixon) vs. Democratic (pro-McGovern) (U.S. presidential election in 1972; Shikiar, 1976), liberal-conservative vs. passive-active leadership (U.S.

presidential election in 2000; Fiedler and Maxwell, 2000), values (left-right) vs. interests (liberal-prosocial) (Polish parliamentary election in 1997; Żukowski, 1997) and left-right vs. libertarian-authoritarian (UK general election in 2005; Smith, 2005). However, the results were also more complex. In the research on the perception of twenty prominent American politicians conducted in 1971, Sherman and Ross (1972) obtained seven dimensions: hawk-dove vs. power within party vs. acceptability as presidential candidate vs. representativeness and lack of prejudice vs. liberal-conservative within party vs. attractiveness vs. Wallace. In turn, Forgas, Kagan and Frey (1977) in a cross-cultural research on cognitive representation of political personalities conducted in Great Britain and West Germany defined the following three-dimensional spaces: in British sample – political potency vs. evaluation vs. intelligence and in German sample – conservatism vs. evaluation vs. political potency. In the study conducted four weeks before the first free elections in Hungary in 1990, Forgas, Laszlo, Siklaki and Moylan (1995) there were the following dimensions: evaluation vs. conservatism vs. rural-urban.

Methods of Measuring the Similarities between Objects

MDS techniques can operate on a variety of different types of data; the type of data used most frequently is data pointing to the similarities (in more or less general dimensions) between some objects. There are several widely accepted methods of measuring similarity, including the following: classification, substitution, scaling, judgment of relationship, semantic differential and associations (Miller, 1967; Szalay and Bryson, 1974, Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum, 1957). Grouping or classification consists in asking the subject to group objects as they seem to fit together. Usually the subjects receive cards, each carrying different word (object), and are asked to sort the cards into group of similar objects. The substitution method is based on the rationale that diverse context in which a particular word (object) can be used, closely depend on its meaning (category). The greater the variety of context in which a word can be used, the broader its meaning. The more than two words can be used in the same contexts, the more similar their meanings. The subjects receive sentence with one or more words printed in capital letters, e.g. “John Smith is a PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.” Their task is to substitute the capitalized phrase with others from a given list. In similarity scaling or judgments task, subjects are asked to present their judgment on a measuring scale (e.g. 5-, 7-point), deciding to what extent particular objects are similar. This task is done separately for every object pair. In judgment of relationship the choice objects are presented in a circular arrangement and the subjects are instructed to consider the object in the center in

relation to objects surrounding it, placing 1 after the object most closely related etc. Semantic differential is the most popular and widely used method designed to empirical study of similarity of objects. The core idea is to describe object by asking subjects to rate it on a set of scales. They are marked by polar adjectives (e.g. good-bad) and each scale is divided into seven units representing intensity grades.

Associative overlap technique is a non-directive analytic technique. It was developed by Szalay and his colleagues (Szalay and Bryson, 1973; 1974; Szalay and Deese, 1978). This measure is based on verbal associations and it expresses the degree of similarity between objects (words, persons, groups) based on the number of similar responses (associations) they elicit in common. The data collection relied on the use of continued verbal association task. In this task, the stimulus objects are presented on separate pages and each subject generates as many response words as she or he can in one minute. Verbal associations collected in this way provide empirical data necessary for the assessment of basic units (nodes) of cognitive organization. This procedure was among others used for the following measurement: psychosocial distance towards American Blacks and Whites (Szalay and Bryson, 1973), subjective meanings of culture between American and Chinese (Chow, Inn and Szalay, 1987), cultural and ideological belief systems of Americans, Iranians, Koreans, Lebanese and other overseas groups (Szalay, 1984), and also in consumer research on consumer goods (Kleine and Kernan, 1988; 1991).

The results of the comparative research conducted by Szalay and Bryson (1974) and related to the six methods of measuring similarity between objects described above, suggest that all of them except semantic differential provide similar results. Semantic differential is rather used for measuring attitudes toward objects, whereas all the others refer to structural, associative similarity between them.

Associative Affinity and Dominance Indexes

Using continued verbal association task for political objects seems to be the most valid methods for meeting the structure and judgment of political as well as consumer brands criteria (Keller, 1993); it also operationalizes memory structure and is thus compatible with Anderson's associative network memory model (1983). Furthermore, it allows one to calculate intra-object dominance scores and inter-object associative affinity index and their application for positioning politicians.

Data produced by the continued association task requires preparation prior to analysis. Its result is a list, for each stimulus object (e.g. brand), of associations, and their dominance

scores. Szalay and Deese (1978, see also Szalay and Bryson, 1973) assumed that the power of the recalled association is proportional to the sequence in which it is mentioned. If it is recalled as first, then it is more characteristic (it creates a stronger and more accessible node in memory) for a given object than if it was recalled as second, third or the following. The fundamental problems relates then to the characteristic of this diminishing function of the power of association. Based on a number of studies Szalay and Deese (1978) determined that the scores for the following associations should be assigned in the following way: 6 to the first response produced by a subject, 5 to the second response, 4 to the third response, 3 to the fourth through seventh responses, 2 to the eighth and ninth response, and 1 to each subsequent response. Dominance scores for common responses for each of the objects are then summed across subjects.

The next step in the data analysis is calculating inter-object associative affinity indexes for each pair of the objects. Affinity refers to the degree to which persons see relations of any sort between any two stimuli and is thus analogous to meaning similarity. Kleine and Kernan (1988), developing the operationalization model proposed by Szalay and Deese (1978), suggested that affinity index is the amount of overlap between two response lists (i.e. the number of meaning elements two objects have in common). Calculation of this index involves then summing dominance scores across overlapping elements across stimuli (objects). This total is then divided by the sum of the total dominance scores of the objects being compared. The resulting index value is the proportion of the combined total dominance scores accounted for by the affinity relations. The index has a theoretic range of zero to one and increases in value as inter-object affinity increases.

A detailed procedure of using associative affinity indexes in politicians' positioning will be presented on the basis of a study of Polish presidential election in 2005.

Candidates' Positioning: Polish Presidential Election in 2005

The empirical research was conducted in June 2007 in Warsaw and in two surrounding small towns, according to the procedure of continued verbal association task. Subjects were asked to generate as many response words (associations) as they could do in one minute for six political objects: four Polish presidential candidates in 2005 roku – Andrzej Lepper (leader of populist, agrarian party *Self Defense*), Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz (candidate of left-wing *Democratic Left Alliance*; he withdrew from the elections during the campaign), Lech Kaczyński (candidate of right-wing *Law and Justice*; the current president), Donald Tusk

(leader of liberal party *Civic Platform*), Aleksander Kwaśniewski (left-wing politician) stepping down from office, and ideal Polish presidential candidate (IC).

Furthermore, the subjects filled out a questionnaire including questions about their sociological profile (gender, age, education, place of living, occupation), ideological self-identification (left-wing – center – right-wing) and the degree of their interest in politics (very interested-not interested at all). They were also asked to specify the moment of making their political decision (before campaign, during campaign or in last minute) and specify the candidate they voted for during the first round of presidential elections in 2005 and in the second round (Kaczyński vs. Tusk vs. nonvoting).

Seventy adults (34 women and 36 men) between 22-82 years ($M=36$, $SD=14,4$) participated in the study. Half of the respondents had a higher education, and half of them had either secondary or vocational or elementary education. Most of them declared their interest in politics ($n=50$) and no one stated that he or she did not care about it. As far as ideological orientation are concerned, 61,4% defined it as centrist, 30% as right-wing and 8,6% as right-wing. Furthermore, 60% of the respondents stated that they had made the decision about who to support long before the beginning of the campaign and 20% each – that either during the campaign or in the last moment.

The positioning of these six political objects was performed separately for two *a priori* established voters' segments: those with and without higher education.

Inter-candidate Associative Affinity Index

On the basis of the associations generated by the respondents for each of the six political objects, dominance scores were calculated first, separately for the characteristics mentioned for each of them. Table 1 presents a sample list of associations together with their dominance scores for Lech Kaczyński among voters with higher education.

Table 1. Associations and Dominance Scores for Lech Kaczyński

Associations for Lech Kaczyński	Dominance scores
characteristic sayings	84
not good looking	77
unprofessional	52
honest	43
believing Christian	41
twin	38
ill-mannered	37
intolerant	36
'duck'	19

disagreeable	19
backward	18
bossy	14
conservative	12
obstinate	12
full of complexes	12
fierce	12
envious	11
spud	10
superiority complex	10
revengeful	10
speech impediment	10
nervous	9
introvert	9
huffy	8
Total dominance score	926

The next step was to calculate inter-object associative affinity indexes for each object pair following the procedure developed by Kleine and Kernan (1988). The affinity index for each pair of stimulus politicians among voters with higher and lower education separately is presented in Table 2 and 3, accordingly.

Table 2. Inter-politicians Affinity Index Values among Voters with Higher Education

	Lepper	Cimoszewicz	Kaczyński	Tusk	Kwaśniewski	Ideal Candidate
Lepper	866					
Cimoszewicz	0,163	528				
Kaczyński	0,049	0,072	926			
Tusk	0,007	0,171	0,080	764		
Kwaśniewski	0,189	0,511	0,109	0,287	800	
Ideal Candidate	0,067	0,414	0,201	0,341	0,552	951

Note: Main diagonal values are the total dominance scores for a particular politician

Table 3. Inter-politicians Affinity Index Values among Voters with Lower Education

	Lepper	Cimoszewicz	Kaczyński	Tusk	Kwaśniewski	Ideal Candidate
Lepper	645					
Cimoszewicz	0,226	473				
Kaczyński	0,214	0,189	608			
Tusk	0,141	0,241	0,203	556		
Kwaśniewski	0,173	0,339	0,196	0,244	566	
Ideal Candidate	0,228	0,440	0,422	0,390	0,354	721

Note: Main diagonal values are the total dominance scores for a particular politician

These indices were the input data to multidimensional scaling program MINISSA.

Candidates' Positioning: Multidimensional Scaling Procedure

In both groups two-dimensional spaces were obtained (higher education: Guttman-Lingoes's alienation=0,001; Kruskal's stress=0,0006; less educated: Guttman-Lingoes's alienation=0,03; Kruskal's stress=0,02). They are presented by Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Positioning of Politicians among Voters with Higher Education

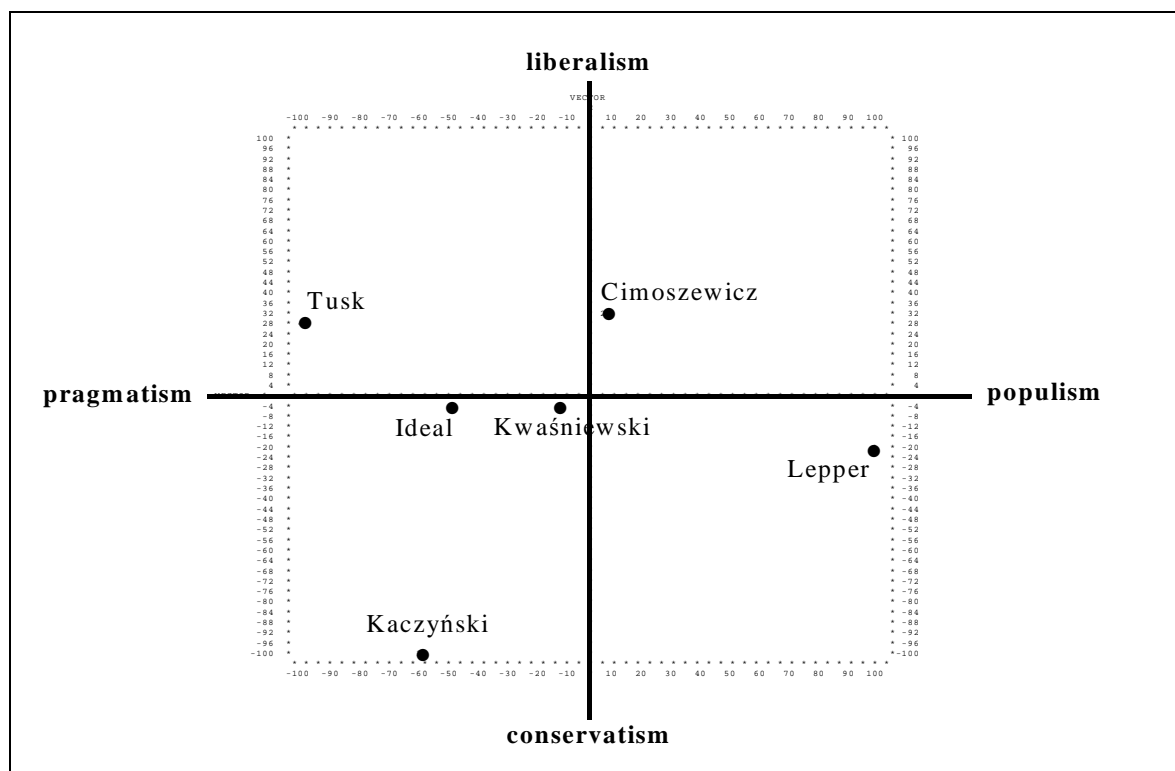
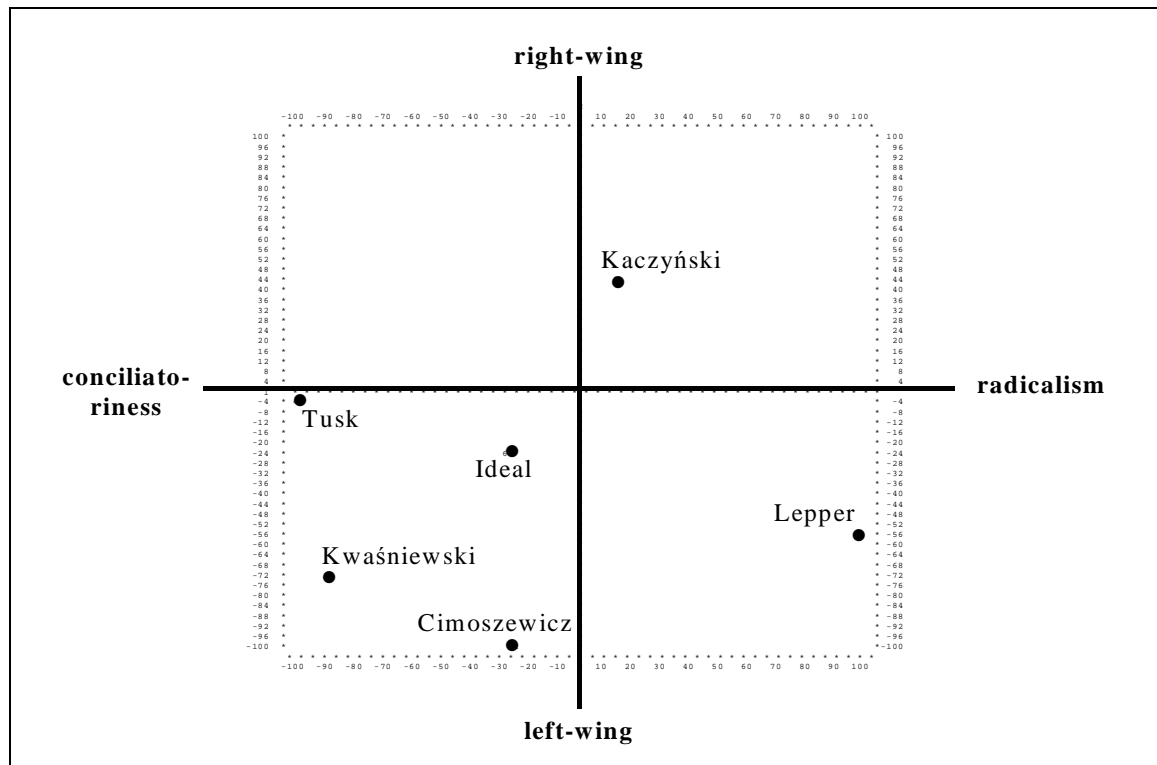


Figure 2. Positioning of Politicians among Voters with Lower Education



As expected, perceptual maps of Polish presidential election market in 2005 among voters with and without higher education are different. It means, that each of these groups perceives the political scene and the actors there in different categories. This is mainly related to the complexity of these categories resulting, for instance, from the knowledge and the set of concepts that voters with different levels of education possess as well as their socio-economic status (see Baines *et al.*, 2003; Conover and Feldman, 1984).

In the case of voters with higher education the perception of particular candidates and preferences towards them (the distance from the ideal candidate) is determined by latent dimensions, which can be defined as: liberalism (economic and social/moral) vs. conservatism (attachment to tradition and religious values) and pragmatism-populism. The ideal candidate is perceived as a rather liberal and pragmatic politician.

Voters with lower education understand the election scene in more general and less precise categories: left-wing vs. right-wing (post-communism resentment) and conciliatoriness vs. radicalism. It seems that in this case the dimensions reflect to a large extent media frames related to covering political events and not a more detailed analysis of the meaning of these descriptive categories (see Lau and Schlesinger, 2005). In this group the ideal candidate is defined as a rather left-wing and conciliatory politician.

Using the MDS technique for the positioning of politicians in Polish presidential elections in 2005 provides important directions about developing political strategies for particular real candidates. From this perspective their goal should be such re-positioning that

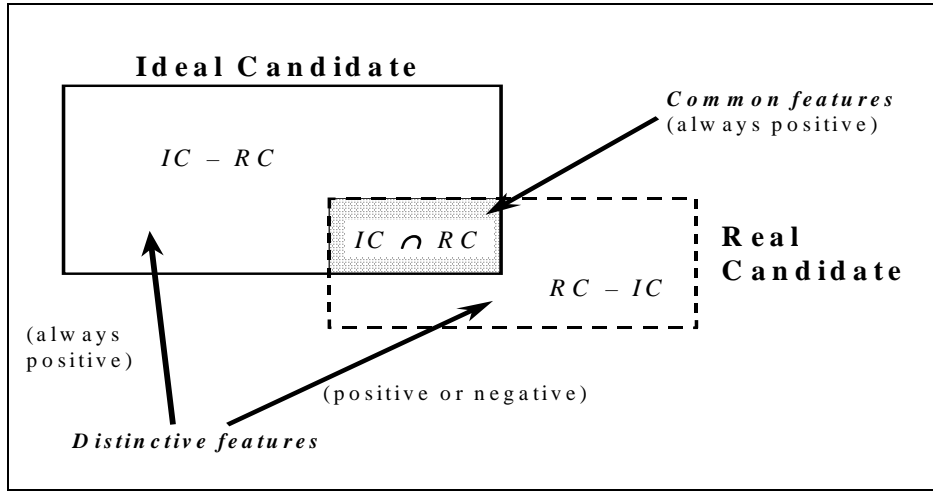
would bring them closer to the point corresponding to the ideal candidate. Then, depending on the voter segment (with or without higher education) the point of maximum preference is defined differently.

Candidates' Positioning: Contrast Model of Similarity

The analysis of associations on which inter-candidate associative affinity index is based shows that the index does not include their valence, since common features may be both positive (and only positive when a real politician is compared with an ideal candidate) and negative. In this way the results of positioning reflect certain perceptual latent dimensions that are common for all the politicians but do not reflect signs of particular attributes associated with images of particular politicians. Marketing strategies developed on the basis of this, by operating in these dimensions, do not allow one to manage a politician's image more precisely by highlighting positive features (shared with the ideal candidate) and eliminating unwanted associations (decreasing dissimilarity with the ideal candidate). It seems necessary therefore to develop and supplement positioning based on inter-candidate associative affinity and with other elements also including the valence of particular associations.

Such a development is possible based on Tversky's contrast model of similarity (1977). According to him, a similarity between two objects does not depend only on their *common features*, but also on *distinctive features*, which are characteristic only for each of the compared objects. Therefore, this similarity increases with addition of common features and/or deletion of distinctive features (i.e. features that belong to one object but not to the other). A schematic illustration of the contrast model of similarity in reference to real and ideal political candidates is presented by Figure 3.

Figure 3. A graphical illustration of the relation between ideal and real candidates



An ideal candidate (IC) is characterized exclusively by positive features. From the marketing perspective his image is a model and standard of comparison for each of the politicians running in the elections (RC's). Therefore, their strategic goal is to form their image in such a way that it overlaps the most with the ideal candidate. In this case common features are always positive and it is them that are crucial for forming voter preferences. In turn, the area defining the differences between the ideal and real politicians may include both positive and negative features. They reduce the similarity between these two objects. However, one should emphasise that in this case positive and negative features perform different functions in building a candidate's image. Negative features are always unfavorable and reduce the probability one voting for a particular politician, whereas positive features, as peripheral characteristics of his image, seem to enrich it. For the voter they can constitute additional reasons why to support the politician. (see Cwalina, Falkowski and Newman, 2008; Rahn, Krosnick and Breuning, 1994).

The contrast model of similarity shows then that in order to increase one's similarity to the ideal candidate, each real politician should try to broaden the area they share by addition of common features and/or by reducing the area including distinctive features by, above all, removing certain negative associations. The following formula expresses the similarity formed in such a way (Tversky, 1997):

$$s(RC, IC) = F(RC \cap IC, RC - IC, IC - RC)$$

The similarity of real candidate (RC) to ideal candidate (IC) is a function F of three arguments: $RC \cap IC$, the features that are common to both RC and IC; $RC - IC$, the features that belong to RC but not to IC; $IC - RC$, the features that belong to IC but not to RC.

According to the contrast model of similarity one can predict that the larger the distance between real and ideal candidates, the more negative features and the fewer positive

features are associated with the first ones. To test this hypothesis, all the associations generated by the respondents were divided into positive and negative ones, separately for each subject and each politician. Then, the means of both types of features and an indicator of general positive associations/positivity of associations was calculated for each of the candidates by dividing the average number of positive associations by the average number of negative associations.. If the value of the indicator is higher than “1” it means positive perception of a politician, if it is lower than “1” – negative perception and if it is equal to “1” – neutral. Then the correlation between these indicators and the distances of particular politicians from the ideal candidate was calculated, based on the results of MDS. The analysis was performed across all subjects.

The obtained Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient equaled -0.86 ($p < 0.01$). As predicted, its value and sign suggest that the higher one’s positive association with the candidate as related to negative associations, the shorter the distance between the real candidate and ideal candidate. Furthermore, negative associations increase this distance significantly ($\rho = 0.66$, $p < 0.05$), and positive ones bring those objects closer to one another ($\rho = -0.93$, $p < 0.001$).

It confirms the fact that political branding cannot be only limited to searching for general similarity dimensions between a particular candidate’s image and the a ideal candidate but that it has to be developed by more details valence association analyses on which the image is based.

Positive and Negative Associations as a Predictors of Voters’ Decisions

The contrast model of similarity shows that particular political candidates can be compared not only against the ideal candidate but also against each other. In this way, negative associations related to one politician can simultaneously reduce preferences toward him and strengthen the support for his rival. It means that a political candidate’s image should be referred to (at least) two standards of comparison: ideal candidate and main competitor.

Hierarchical logit regression was performed to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was the support during the second round of presidential elections in Poland in 2005 for Kaczyński vs. Tusk (0 vs.1). Before the analysis was conducted, all the independent variables were rescaled on a 0-1 range and some of them were introduced to the equation as a dummy variables (see Cohen, 1968). In the first model only control variables were introduced: gender (0 – man, 1 – woman), age, education (0 – lower, 1 – higher), interest in politics, left-wing ideological self-identification (1 – left-wing, 0 – the others), centrist

ideological self-identification (1 – centrist, 0 – the others), pre-campaign voting decision (1 – pre-campaign, 0 – the others), last minute voting decision (1 – last minute, 0 – the others). The following variables were introduced in the second step: positive and negative associations related to Kaczyński and Tusk. The obtained results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Predictors of voting decision (Kaczyński vs. Tusk). Hierarchical logit regression results

	Model 1	Model 2
Gender (woman)	.09 (.08)	.18^b (.08)
Age	-.04 (.28)	-.12 (.26)
Education (higher)	.20^b (.10)	.10 (.12)
Interest in politics	-.05 (.11)	-.03 (.10)
Left-wing ideological self-identification	.54^c (.19)	.57^c (.17)
Center ideological self-identification	.56^c (.11)	.51^c (.10)
Pre-campaign decision	-.24^a (.11)	-.17^a (.11)
Last minute decision	-.25 (.14)	-.15 (.14)
Kaczyński – positive associations		-.83^b (.37)
Kaczyński – negative associations		.41^b (.20)
Tusk – positive associations		.31^a (.20)
Tusk – negative associations		-.15 (.48)
χ^2 (df _{model1} =7; df _{model2} =11)	47.52; p<.001	55.20; p<.001
pseudo-R ²	.60	.65

Note: Coefficients are logit estimates. Bolded coefficients are significant at: ^a p=0.1; ^b p<0,05; ^c p<0,01. Standard errors appear in parentheses coefficient estimates

Introducing positive and negative associations indexes for Kaczyński and Tusk increased significantly the accounted for variance of the respondents' voting decisions (pseudo-R₁²=0,6 and pseudo-R₂²=0,65, F_(4, 49)=17.51, p<0.01; see Cohen, 1968).

With both models important predictors of voting for Tusk were to be left-wing and centrist voters' ideological self-identifications and making a decision in the course of campaign, but not in the very last moment before it was finished. Furthermore, after adding up the variables related to the associations with Tusk and Kaczyński, the important predictor of preferences for Tusk, which was higher education, became insignificant and what did become significant was the voters' gender. He was given more support by women.

The associations related to both politicians had also significant influence on the voting. The support for Tusk was increasing as positive associations with him were increasing

and negative associations with Kaczyński were increasing. It would decrease when Kaczyński evoked positive reactions of the voters.

This analysis supplemented, to some extent, the results of positioning candidates based on inter-candidate associative affinity index and contrast model of similarity which were presented above. It provides directions about planning marketing strategies based both on the voters' characteristics and their way of understanding the election scene and the perception of politicians' image. These conclusions are valid for both positive and negative campaigns, whose goal is to weaken the image of the competitor.

Final Remarks

The presented conception of positioning politicians is based on a three-stage approach to political branding. Its main assumption is that a politician's image is conceptualized as consisting of a node (e.g. her or his name) in memory to which a variety of associations are linked. These associations may be shared with other rival candidates as well as with ideal candidate – which is understood as a model and standard of comparison while developing detailed marketing campaigns. The first stage of branding, candidates' positioning, focuses on such common features perceived in various voter segments. Its results allow one to prepare an outline of a campaign, but in order to prepare a successful campaign one needs to define more precisely the mutual relationships between particular elements (positive and negative) of which a politician's image consists.

Such additional information may be obtained based on contrast model of similarity. According to the model, this similarity between objects increases with addition of common features and/or deletion of distinctive features (i.e. features that belong to one object but not to the other). The model allows one to define mutual relationships between the perception of particular politicians and their reference to an ideal candidate and suggests that political branding cannot only be limited to seeking general similarity dimensions between the image of a particular candidate and the ideal candidate, but must be supplemented by more detailed association valence analyses that the image is based on. The third stage of political branding is the need to relate it to voters' decisions. Thanks to it, it is possible to define the relative power of particular voter preference indicators and develop a strategy that will include them.

The results of the presented analyses show that it is not only the strengthening of politicians' positive features but also neutralizing the negative ones that contributes to his higher expected quality. One should remember, however, that creating the candidate image is "translating" the characteristics into behaviors that illustrate them or are perceived as if they

did. In politics, an image is created through the use of visual impressions that are communicated by the candidate's physical presence, media appearances, and experiences and record as a political leader as that information is integrated in the minds of citizens. A candidate's image is also affected by endorsements of highly visible people in the country who support him.

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