# 2016 Trent Three Minute Thesis: Cory Baldwin

**2 minutes, 59 seconds in length**

## The Marketing of the Prime Minister: ‘Uncle Louis’ and the Branding in Canadian Politics

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In the 1950s that was the face of Canadian politics. Louis St. Laurent was Prime Minister from 1948 to 1957. A stern, quiet lawyer with a temper, he had never had interest in public office or politics. But on the campaign trail, that man transformed into ‘Uncle Louis,’ the country’s genial grandfather. Through careful media manipulation and the marketing of that persona the Liberal Party was able to create the first mass media candidate. The first leader who mattered more than the party he represented. The Liberals needed no platform, no policy, no issues. They had Uncle Louis. At every campaign stop and media event, St. Laurent would be surrounded by happy, smiling children. That face with those kids became ubiquitous and indelibly associated with the Liberal brand. This was the first major step in the modernization and professionalization of campaigning that took place in the 1950s and 60s. But no one has told this story until now. The study of Canadian campaigning has ignored St. Laurent and forgotten Uncle Louis. Part of the reason for this is that no one has had the right conceptual tools for the job. My study uses the concepts of brand theory that have come out of British and American political science in the last 15 years. Brand theory demonstrates that voters care about more than policy. They care about who a candidate is, or at least who they pretent to be. Political marketers can manipulate cultural, social and psychological brand differentiators, like patriotic symbols, family values, optimism and hopefulness, as well as performance indicators, like trustworthiness or a record of achievement, to create and market a candidate that people are desperate to vote for. I’ve applied brand theory to political advertising, speeches and campaign, media coverage to show how Uncle Louis could win without substance and how the Liberals prided personality over policy. This sort of branding and personality politics is an ever present reality, even now. George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Justin Trudeau, and Donald Trump all used some of these same techniques, to create a public persona and personal brand that voters are eager to buy, no matter what their policies are, or even in spite of them. But ‘Uncle Louis’ was one of the first, and one of the greatest. For George Bush, the question was ‘which candidate do you want to have a beer with?’ For St. Laurent it was ‘Who do you trust with your kids?’ Thank you.