

The image features large, bold, red letters 'I' and 'Q' in the background. The 'I' is a simple, thick vertical bar with horizontal caps at the top and bottom. The 'Q' is a thick, curved shape that starts high on the right and curves downwards and to the left, ending in a small tail at the bottom right. The letters are set against a white background.

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**Recapping the Campaign Trail**  
Interbrand IQ: The Political Issue

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Election 2012 kicked off in Spring 2011 with formal announcements from nine GOP candidates running in the primaries and President Obama's formal reelection campaign declaration. Each candidate represented a personal brand and some of these brands were stronger than others. Jon Huntsman, a centrist GOP candidate, former governor of Utah and ambassador to China, used the slogan "Country First." His anti-negativity platform and fiscally conservative messaging scored points, but his moderate stance on climate change and civil unions didn't resonate with the party. He suspended his campaign in January after coming in third in New Hampshire. Fiscal and social conservatives, dubbed "Tea Party favorites," included Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry and Herman Cain who each campaigned on platforms calling for fiscal responsibility, free markets and constitutionally limited government. Their messaging also included positions on social issues such as reproductive choices and marriage rights. Bachmann, who founded the Tea Party caucus in the house, was an early favorite in this party within a party, garnering interest as a relatable candidate. Her brand was weakened, though, by frequent gaffes. She suspended her campaign in January after a shortage of funds and a sixth place finish in the Iowa Caucus. Governor of Texas Rick Perry ran on a platform of "Make Us Great Again," but his brand was weakened by a poor performance in a fall 2011 primary debate. Also voters felt his illegal immigrant tuition position in Texas was off message for the party. Perry suspended his campaign in January after poor finishes in Iowa and New Hampshire. Herman Cain built a brand with underdog and straight shooter appeal. Cain's slogan "Lets Get Real," song "I am America" and simple policy messaging, such as his 9-9-9 tax plan, helped his brand gain traction. An alleged affair and sexual harassment allegations derailed momentum. Cain suspended his campaign in December 2011 before the primary contests. Ron Paul, an established libertarian brand, also had appeal for Tea Party voters. Paul's campaign slogan, "Restore America Now," aligned with Tea Party values, however, his messaging on issues such as legalizing drugs, reducing aid to Israel and cuts to Defense weakened his brand appeal among the base. Yet Paul remained in the race longer than anyone other than Mitt Romney. Election 2012 kicked off in Spring 2011 with formal announcements from nine GOP candidates running in the primaries and President Obama's formal reelection campaign declaration. Each candidate represented a personal brand and some of these brands were stronger than others. Jon Huntsman, a centrist GOP candidate, former governor of Utah and ambassador to China, used the slogan "Country First." His anti-negativity platform and fiscally conservative messaging scored points, but his moderate stance on climate change and civil unions didn't resonate with the party. He suspended his campaign in January after coming in third in New Hampshire. Fiscal and social conservatives, dubbed "Tea Party favorites," included

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Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House in the 1990s, gained after others fell from grace. Gingrich attempted to sway a broad audience with, “Unleash the American people; rebuild the America we love.” Yet, his brand could not overcome negative perceptions tied to house ethics sanctions, alleged lobbying activities and a colorful personal life. His verbose approach also lacked appeal and relatability.

Rick Santorum surged from the bottom with the rallying cry “The Courage to Fight for America.” Santorum won over the Tea Party with conservative social and fiscal positions, beating Mitt Romney in the Iowa Caucus by 34 votes. He struggled, though, to appeal to moderates and women. In April, with depleted funds and a hospitalized daughter, Santorum suspended his campaign.

Throughout the entirety of his campaign, Mitt Romney struggled with a perception problem around consistency and relatability. He was seen as the front-runner even before announcing his candidacy, but left his party dissatisfied for much of the election cycle. His slogan, “Believe in America,” did little to differentiate him and much of his messaging focused on attacking President Obama. While accusations his plans were vague persisted, ads with CEO testimonials touting his financial leadership added value to the Romney brand.

After clinching the GOP nomination, Romney had the opportunity to bolster his brand with the selection of a strong runningmate. Romney chose to make his brand more appealing to the far right, whom he had yet to win over, by selecting Paul Ryan, whose fiscal policies align with Tea Party positions.

The GOP celebrated the Romney-Ryan ticket at the Republican National Convention in August 2012. Shortly after the convention, Romney’s now-infamous “47%” comment leaked. Romney’s comments, calling almost half of Americans subsidy dependent victims, damaged efforts to build a relatable brand. Unanswered calls for more tax return information also diminished the sense of his brand’s authenticity.

President Obama, whose re-election campaign had yet to take off in earnest, and VP Joe Biden, were equally celebrated at the Democratic National Convention. Speakers included former President Bill Clinton, who praised Obama’s record, challenging the gap between policy accomplishments and public perception

of the first term. The convention success led to a bump in the polls for Obama.

President Obama, in what many saw as a very tight race, built on his 2008 “Hope” slogan with a more actionable campaign promise: “Forward.” The president still had to overcome a perception gap and messaging from the Romney camp spotlighting the still lagging economy. However, improved financial news late in the campaign season helped boost the Obama brand’s authenticity.

With consistent messaging and a steadfast strategy of speaking first about his wife and daughters and then on a tactical level about issues and plans in clear language, President Obama strengthened the relatable brand he had created for himself. He remained persistent in his stances on tax cuts and job creation.

Obama’s disconnected demeanor in the first debate was inconsistent for a president known for his warm, everyman candor, and caused him to lose the moderate lead he had held against Romney. Romney’s “binders full of women” comment in the second debate helped reverse Obama’s downward trend. At the close of the third and final debate the two were polling head-to-head.

The turning point may have occurred as late as the week before the election. When Hurricane Sandy hit the northeast, President Obama paused his campaign and headed to the hardest hit communities. Meanwhile, Romney lost relevance and understanding because of previous threats to cut FEMA funding.

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, a favorite amongst the GOP who had spoken at the Republican convention, publicly praised Obama for his handling of the disaster, increasing the President’s relevance and understanding. By the weekend before the election, Obama had made up for his polling gap by almost all accounts.

This campaign season was arguably about undecided voters and an electorate dissatisfied with the two major party brands. Following its election loss, the Republican Party in particular will need to realign its brand. President Obama has his work cut out for him in maintaining his brand’s authenticity and avoiding perception gaps in a way he did not in his first term.

