

January 2010

Because I Said So: A Functional Theory Analysis of Evidence in Political TV Spots


Jayne R. Henson

University of Missouri, jrh8y3@mail.missouri.edu

William L. Benoit

Ohio University, benoitw@ohio.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/speaker-gavel>

 Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Broadcast and Video Studies Commons](#), and the [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Henson, J., & Benoit, W. (2010). Because I Said So: A Functional Theory Analysis of Evidence in Political TV Spots. *Speaker & Gavel*, 47, 1-15.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Speaker & Gavel* by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Because I Said So A Functional Theory Analysis of Evidence in Political TV Spots

Jayne R. Henson
William L. Benoit

Abstract

This study examines presidential general election television advertising (1952-2004), primary advertising (1952-2008), and non-presidential advertising from 2002 (gubernatorial, U.S. Senate, U.S. House) to understand the use of evidence (statements for which sources are provided) in such campaign messages. 8% of the themes in these spots were supported by evidence (that is, identified a source for a claim). However, the longitudinal presidential data suggests that evidence in advertising was rare until the 1990s, when Bill Clinton in particular employed a great deal of evidence in his spots. Although the appeals across all ads were mainly positive (70% of the themes in these ads were acclaims), evidence disproportionately supported attacks (65% of the utterances with evidence were attacks). No consistent topic evidence emerged for use of evidence in these ads (a tendency to use evidence to support policy in general presidential ads, and to support character in senate ads). Candidates in this sample used newspapers most frequently as sources of evidence, followed by governmental reports and statements from one's opponent, voting record, and other sources.

Key Terms: political campaigns, television spots, evidence, presidential, Senate, House, gubernatorial, functions, topics

Introduction

Television advertising in political campaigns is the most prominent medium of communication between the candidate and the voter (Kaid, 2004, p. 157). One reason why scholars focus on advertising is the sheer amount of money spent on campaigns (Benoit, 2007), which allows for the creation of multiple ads which are aired repeatedly. Advertisements are also scripted, so politicians have the opportunity to frame their messages to audiences. Political ads are also relatively short and require little effort on the part of the audience in order to pay attention.

Researchers have investigated several aspects of television advertising. For example, they have studied the types of news coverage of political ads and effects on voter opinions (Min, 2002), political ads and learning (Zhao & Chaffee, 1995), and political ads and agenda-setting effects (Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2007). The influence of positive and negative advertising is one of the largest areas of research into political advertising (Allen & Burrell, 2002; Ansolabere & Iyengar, 1994; Ansolabere & Iyengar, 1999; Lau, Sigelman, Held-

man, & Babbitt, 1999; Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007). One aspect which has been relatively overlooked has been the use of evidence in televised political advertising.

Evidence usage in messages increases credibility of the message and the source (O'Keefe, 1998). Very few studies on political campaigns and evidence usage have been conducted. Researchers have used content analysis to examine the types of statements evidence is used to support in television advertisements (Geer, 2006) and the amount of evidence usage and likelihood of the vote intention in debates (Levasseur & Dean, 1996). More extensive research is needed to determine trends in evidence usage over time and by level of office. This study reports a content analysis of evidence in presidential and non-presidential political advertisements. The following sections will describe literature on political ads and the importance of evidence usage, the theoretical framework for the study, the method, report results, and discuss the implications of findings.

Literature Review

Several researchers investigate political TV spots; for example, books on this topic include Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), Benoit (1999), Biocca (1991a, 1991b), Diamond and Bates (1993), Jamieson (1996) Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991, 1997), Kaid and Johnston (2001), Kern (1989), Nelson and Boynton (1997), Schultz (2004), Thurber, Nelson, and Dulio (2000), and West (2001); see also Kaid (2004) and Loudon (2007). Researchers have investigated the functions and topics of presidential advertising (e.g., Benoit, 1999; Kaid & Johnston, 2001) as well as non-presidential advertising (e.g., Airne & Benoit, 2005; Brazeal & Benoit, 2006). Issue ownership (Petrocik, 1996) patterns in presidential (Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2003-2004) and non-presidential (Benoit & Airne, 2005) TV spots have also received scholarly attention. Kaid and Johnston (2001) have analyzed visual aspects of political ads. Nelson and Boynton (1997) analyze image and music in political spots.

Within political advertising research, one variable that is frequently measured is perceived credibility (Hellweg, King, & Williams, 1988). Researchers have found that higher perceived credibility of a candidate positively predicts vote intention (Yoon, Pinkleton, & Yo, 2005). Moreover, higher perceived credibility is significantly related to believability (Teven, 2008). In order for advertisements to be effective, citizens must believe that the statements that are made are, at least, somewhat truthful. To increase the effectiveness of political messages, candidates may choose to use evidence to support the claims they make in advertisements. The study of evidence in argumentation has a long history. O'Keefe (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of the effects of evidence in persuasive messages: Evidence increased both credibility of the source and persuasiveness of the message. Thus, inclusion of evidence in persuasive messages significantly increases the effectiveness of those messages, and it enhances the perceived credibility of the source.

However, researchers continue to debate the definition of "evidence." Comparisons between studies that have utilized different definitions have found vary-

ing results for the influence of evidence (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003). Geer (2006) examined the use of information (statistics, statements with references, and quotations) in presidential advertising, reporting that information was used more often to support attacks than acclaims, and policy rather than character. Levasseur and Dean (1996) analyze evidence in nine of the presidential debates from 1960-1988. They used McCroskey's (1967) definition of evidence. McCroskey distinguishes factual information (which can include descriptive statements, concrete examples, and statistics) from *evidence*, which he defines as statements for which sources are provided (cf. McCroskey, 1967). But due to the limitations of the debate format, Levasseur and Dean (1996) included candidate statements that were specific and verifiable. These researchers found a negative correlation between use of evidence and persuasiveness and no correlation between type of evidence usage and persuasiveness. However, Reinard's (1998) research grouped studies based on operationalizations of evidence and his meta-analysis "showed an average effect size for testimonial assertion evidence effects on attitude of an r ranging from .234 to .258. These results appeared to be consistent main effects" (p. 83; see also Reinard, 1988 for a review of the literature). Therefore, when researchers account for differences in definitions of evidence, significant effects can be demonstrated. As the previous study illustrates, testimonial evidence, the type used in this investigation, has been shown to have a significant effect on attitude (Reinard, 1998).

Politicians in electoral contests want to appear credible. Given the potential to impact credibility, politicians may choose to include evidence to further chances of election victory. This study concerns the use of evidence in political advertisements. Specifically, we investigate the types of sources that are used to support candidate claims, what types of claims are most often supported, and the frequency of sources used. The next section will provide a theoretical framework for this study and propose research questions.

Theoretical Framework

The Functional Theory of Campaign Discourse (Benoit, 1999; 2007) stipulates that in order to win elections, candidates seek to appear preferable to other candidates. Functional theory posits three types of messages that candidates use to appear preferable: acclaims, attacks, and defenses. Acclaims are positive statements made to highlight the qualities or good deeds of candidates. Attacks point out the weakness of opponents. For this reason, candidates only make acclaiming statements about themselves and only attack their opponents or the opponent's party. Citizens generally report that they dislike "mudslinging" (Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975), so attacks are generally the second most common function. Defenses are statements that refute an attack made by another candidate. Defenses are least common for three reasons. First, candidates must repeat an attack made by opponent; this might reinforce the weakness of the opponent in the minds of voters. Researchers have found that negative information is more salient (Bradley, Angelini, & Lee, 2007), and refutational statements are only marginally effective (Weaver-Lariscy & Tickham, 1999). Second, defenses may take the candidate off message. Finally, voters may perceive that a candidate is

being reactive, rather than proactive. Research has established that presidential and non-presidential candidates tend to use significantly more acclaims than attacks, and that defenses are the least common function (Benoit, 2007).

Functional Theory further posits that candidates discuss two topics in their campaign messages: policy and character. Policy means governmental action, often called issues in the literature. Character, sometimes referred to as image, describes the candidates' personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals. Some studies have argued that there is little difference in the use of character and policy statements (Payne & Baukus, 1988); however, the vast majority of research suggests that candidates focus on policy more than character (Airne & Benoit, 2005; Benoit, 2007; Cooper & Knotts, 2004). Benoit (2003) argues that presidential candidates discuss policy more than character because voters consistently state that policy is more influential in their vote decisions; he also reports that presidential candidates who win elections tend to address policy more, and character less, than losers. Candidates may be aware of the potential persuasiveness of evidence noted earlier and so they may include evidence in their campaign messages in hopes of increasing the effectiveness of their messages. However, we do not know much about the use of evidence to support functions and topics of political campaign discourse.

This exploratory study investigates the use of evidence in televised political campaign advertisements. We ask the following four questions regarding the use of evidence:

RQ1: What percentage of ad themes contained supporting evidence?

RQ2: What functions are supported with evidence?

RQ3: What topics are supported with evidence?

RQ4: What types of sources were used most frequently for supporting evidence?

Method

This study utilized the Functional Theory of Campaign Discourse to content analyze general election television advertisements from presidential candidates (primary, 1952-2008; general, 1952-2004) and non-presidential political ads (gubernatorial and congressional) in the 2002 Midterm Elections – adding analysis of evidence to the typical Functional method.

Sample

Television advertisements from congressional candidates in the 2002 mid-term elections, and from presidential candidates 1952-2008, comprised the sample. Because no repository has the population of television spots, a convenience sample was employed. The sample of 1057 general election presidential TV spots is described in Benoit (1999) and Benoit et al. (2003, 2007). The presidential primary TV spot sample from 1952-2004 is described in Benoit (1999; Benoit et al. 2003, 2007) and includes 269 presidential primary spots from the 2008 campaign through May 2008, a total of 1436 ads. Texts of non-presidential

television spots were obtained from the *National Journal* webpage (www.NationalJournal.com). Furthermore, television ads in Arizona, Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio and C-SPAN were video-taped from television programming and transcribed.¹ This yielded a sample of 492 gubernatorial, 174 U.S. House, and 85 U.S. Senate ads from the 2002 elections – for a total of 3244 political TV spots.

Procedure

Coding required four steps. First, the spots were analyzed using the procedures developed for Functional Theory (Benoit, 2007). Ads were unitized into themes, which is roughly synonymous with claim, utterance, argument, or statement (themes can be part of a sentence or multiple sentences). Second, each theme were categorized by function: acclaim, attack, or defense. Acclaims are positive statements about the candidate, attacks are criticisms of an opponent, and defenses are refutations of an opponent's attack. Third, themes were coded for topic, either policy or character. Finally, themes with evidence were identified and the source of evidence was recorded (newspaper/tv news, governmental report, opponent, voting record, and other). Evidence consisted of direct quotations or paraphrases and may or may not include statistics (notice that, unlike Geer, we considered identification of a source to be a defining characteristic of evidence, so statistics provided without a source were *not* considered evidence in this study). Intercoder reliability was calculated using Cohen's (1960) κ , which corrects for agreement by chance. Approximately 10% of texts were used for calculation. The *kappa* for function was .95, .74 for topic, and .97 for source. Landis and Koch (1977) explain that κ values of 0.81-1.00 represent "almost perfect" agreement among coders. Coding procedures produce frequency data, so *chi-square* was used for statistical analysis.

Results

The first research question asked what percentage of TV spot themes employed evidence. Overall, 8% of the themes in this sample were supported by evidence (as defined here, cited a source). For instance, Bob Riley was a candidate for Alabama governor in 2002. One of his ads argued that "Since Don Siegelman was elected, he's given them [his friends and big campaign contributors] over \$900 million of our tax money in thousands of sweetheart deals and no-bid contracts (headline on screen: 'Millions awarded in no-bid state contracts' – *Birmingham News*)." This utterance offers a newspaper headline to support its claim. Another example of the use of evidence in a political ad occurred in Jimmie Lou Fisher's spot: "Huckabee even put a 'bed tax' on our nursing home patients" (Source: Act 635, House Bill 1274, March 9, 2001)." Fisher employed his opponent's voting record as evidence for this attack. So, evidence was presented for 8% of the themes in this sample of political television spots (this figure derived from Table 1).

Table 1. Function of Themes in Political TV Spots

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses	Total
Presidential General (1952-2004)				
No Evidence	3372 (64%)	1920 (37%)	60 (1%)	5352
Evidence	90 (17%)	414 (80%)	11 (2%)	515
Total	3462 (59%)	2334 (40%)	71 (1%)	5867
Presidential Primary (1952-2008)				
No Evidence	5235 (74%)	1770 (25%)	56 (1%)	7061
Evidence	148 (65%)	80 (35%)	0	228
Total	5383 (74%)	1850 (25%)	56 (1%)	7289
Gubernatorial				
No Evidence	1960 (79%)	522 (21%)	6 (0.2%)	2488
Evidence	135 (35%)	243 (64%)	4 (1%)	382
Total	2095 (73%)	765 (27%)	10 (0.3%)	2870
U.S. Senate				
No Evidence	821 (91%)	81 (9%)	0	902
Evidence	62 (40%)	89 (60%)	2 (.01)	153
Total	883 (83%)	170 (17%)	(%)	1053
U.S. House				
No Evidence	688 (87%)	102 (13%)	0	790
Evidence	34 (26%)	93 (72%)	2 (2%)	131
Total	722 (79%)	195 (21%)	2 (0.2%)	919

Evidence versus no evidence, acclaims versus attacks: Presidential general χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 402.39, $p < .0001$, $\phi = .26$; Presidential primary χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 11.19, $p < .001$, $\phi = .04$; Gubernatorial χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 313.24, $p < .0001$, $\phi = .33$; U.S. Senate χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 234.8, $p < .0001$, $\phi = .46$; U.S. House χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 237.74, $p < .0001$, $\phi = .51$.

Research question two concerned the functions supported by evidence. Political television ads were mainly positive (70% of the total themes were acclaims). However, the themes which were supported with source citations were mainly negative: 65% of the themes supported with evidence were attacks. An illustration of an acclaim based on evidence occurred in Rod Blagojevich's campaign for Illinois governor: "In congress, he's protected Medicare [on screen: Source: House Vote #2362, 6/29/00, HR 4657, 10/10/98]." This statement used his voting record as support for his acclaim. In the Iowa gubernatorial campaign, Tom Vilsack argued that "Steve Sukup says [Doug] Gross has shown

a consistent pattern of blurring the truth [on screen: Steve Sukup: Gross has shown a ‘consistent pattern of blurring the truth’ – *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 5/15/02].” This ad used a quotation from a newspaper to support this criticism. Janet Napolitano provided evidence to support her use of defense as she denied an attack in the Arizona governor’s contest: “The *Arizona Republic* calls Matt Salmon’s attack on Janet Napolitano on taxes not true [on screen: the *Arizona Republic*: Ad unfair to Napolitano pro-Salmon assertions stretch and distort the truth].” This quotation refutes the attack from her opponent. Overall, there was a significant difference between the function of statements supported by evidence with statements without evidence (defenses excluded): $\chi^2 [1, n = 17858] = 956.9, p < .0001, \phi = .23$.

The third research question concerned topic of utterances which employed evidence. Here, no pattern emerged: Themes in general presidential ads with evidence were more likely to concern policy than character; themes with evidence in senate ads were more likely to be about character than policy, and there was no difference in topic between themes with evidence and without evidence in presidential primary spots, gubernatorial spots, or U.S. House spots. In the Georgia gubernatorial race, for instance, Roy Barnes argued that “Roy Barnes used George Bush’s Texas education reform plan as a model in Georgia for higher standards and accountability [headline on screen: ‘Bush backs Barnes’s education plan,’ May 9, 2000, Cox Newspapers].” An education reform plan clearly illustrates discussion of policy. In contrast, an example of evidence used to support character came in an ad from Bill McBride in the 2002 Florida governor’s race: “The *Palm Beach Post* praised his character [on screen: ‘character,’ *Palm Beach Post*].” A *chi-square* reveals no significant difference in topic: $\chi^2 [1, n = 17858] = 0.27, ns$; these data are derived from Table 2). Given the sample size, this test is very powerful: The power of a *chi-square* with $df = 1$ and $n = 1000$ to detect small, medium, and large effects is .82, .99 .99 respectively (Cohen, 1988).

Table 2. Topics of Themes in Political TV Spot

	Policy	Character
Presidential General 1952-2004		
No Evidence	3251 (61%)	2041 (39%)
Evidence	339 (67%)	165 (33%)
Total	3590 (62%)	2206 (38%)
Presidential Primary 1952-2008		
No Evidence	3839 (55%)	3166 (45%)
Evidence	135 (59%)	93 (41%)
Total	3974 (55%)	3259 (45%)
Gubernatorial		
No Evidence	1416 (57%)	1066 (43%)

Evidence	204 (54%)	174 (46%)
Total	1620 (57%)	1240 (43%)
U.S. Senate		
No Evidence	680 (75%)	220 (25%)
Evidence	80 (52%)	73 (48%)
Total	760 (72%)	293 (18%)
U.S. House		
No Evidence	399 (51%)	391 (49%)
Evidence	61 (48%)	66 (52%)
Total	460 (50%)	457 (50%)

Evidence versus no evidence, policy versus character: Presidential general χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 6.62, $p < .05$, $\phi = .03$; Presidential primary χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 1.73, *ns*; Gubernatorial χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 1.27, *ns*; U.S. Senate χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 35.25, $p < .0001$, $\phi = .18$; U.S. House χ^2 ($df = 1$) = 0.27, *ns*.

Finally, the fourth research question investigated the type of evidence employed by these politicians. Overall, 61% of the themes supported by evidence were from newspapers, 11% from government reports and from opponents, 9% from voting records, and 8% from other sources. A *chi-square goodness of fit* test confirms that these categories did not occur with the same frequency in these data (χ^2 [$df = 4$, $n = 1324$] = 1382.08, $p < .0001$). For instance, Jill Long Thompson, running for Congress, told viewers that “Jill voted no to all new taxes [on screen: *Washington Times*, 11/12/90].” This shows how newspapers can be the source of evidence employed in TV spots. Tim Carden attacked his opponent for campaign contributions and votes:

Ferguson took hundreds of thousands from drug and insurance companies, then he opposed real prescription drug reform and a patient’s bill of rights [on screen: Congressman Ferguson took \$140,000 from drug companies, \$110,000 from insurance companies – FEC Reports; Congressman Ferguson voted “NO” prescription drug coverage – HR 4954, vote #281, 6/28/02; Congressman Ferguson voted “NO” patients bill of rights – HR 2563, vote #331, 8/2/01].

This illustrates evidence from government reports (FEC) and voting records. Mark Shriver’s congressional campaign used evidence from an “other” source: “Elect a proven fighter for people [on screen: ‘a proven fighter for people’ – AFL-CIO].” Scott Garrett, running for the House in 2002, said that “Anne Summers’ plan, raise the retirement age, make people work longer, and change benefits for retirees. Anne Summers: ‘We need to talk about raising age, changing benefits’ [Anne Summers, 10/1/02 AARP debate].” This claim employed a statement from the opponent to attack that opponent.

Table 3. Sources of Evidence in Political TV Spots

	Newspaper	Government Report	Opponent	Voting Record	Other
President Gen.	259 (50%)	91 (18%)	90 (17%)	44 (9%)	31 (6%)
President Pri.	158 (69%)	7 (3%)	24 (10%)	9 (4%)	31 (14%)
Gubernatorial	282 (74%)	27 (7%)	16 (4%)	29 (8%)	28 (7%)
U.S. Senate	38 (57%)	11 (16%)	9 (13%)	4 (6%)	5 (6%)
U.S. House	68 (52%)	12 (9%)	7 (5%)	29 (22%)	15 (11%)
Total	805 (61%)	148 (11%)	146 (11%)	115 (9%)	110 (8%)

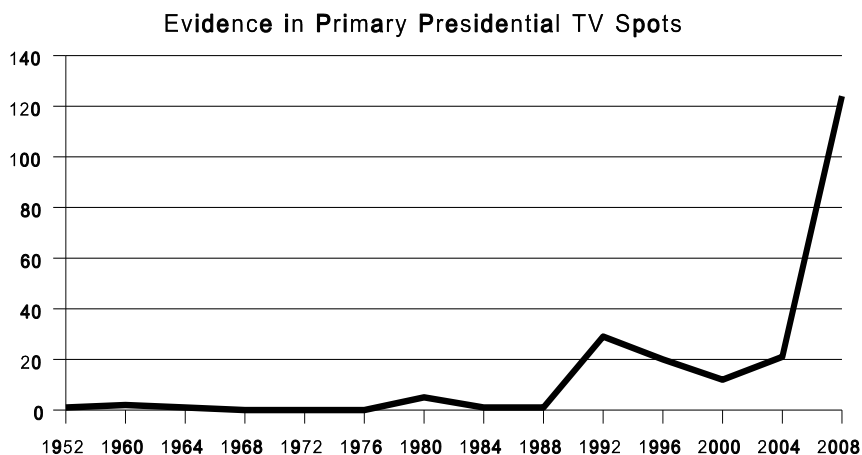
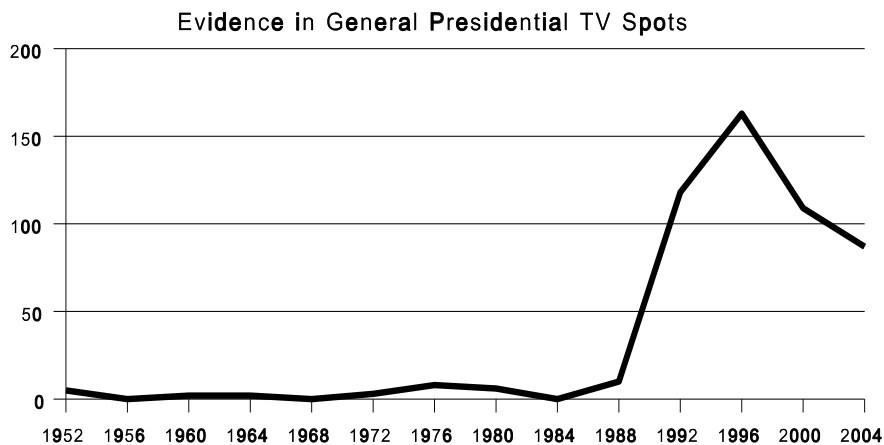
Discussion

We now have data about the use of evidence in American political television spots. 8% of the themes in these political ads were supported by some form of evidence (that is, provided a source for the claim). However, Figure 1 makes it clear that evidence was only an occasional component of presidential TV advertisements until 1992 – and most of the evidence ads in 1992 and 1996 were from one candidate, Bill Clinton. In general ads, Clinton had 117 instances of evidence in 1992 (his opponent, the first President Bush, used 1) and 134 instances of evidence in 1996 (his opponent, Bob Dole, used 29); in primary ads, Clinton had 20 instances of evidence in 1992 compared with Pat Buchanan 9, which were all quotations from President Bush; “Read my lips”). In fact, Clinton produced 49% of the evidence in this sample of presidential general TV spots. The largest amount of evidence prior to 1992 had been in the year 1988, when candidates used a combined total of 10 pieces of evidence in their TV spots (the peak in frequency of evidence use in primary ads before 1992 was 5 instances of evidence in the year 1980). The use of evidence was less frequent in 2000 and 2004 than in the Clinton years, but they clearly did not drop back to pre-1992 levels (109 instances of evidence in 2000 and 87 in 2004). It is clear that Clinton revolutionized at least one aspect of television advertising, the use of large amounts of evidence in presidential TV spots. This suggests that the figure of 8% of themes in presidential ads that are supported by evidence, the mean from 1952-2004, is a low estimate for contemporary political advertising.

It is impossible to know for certain why Clinton used so much evidence. However, it appears likely that it was in part a response to the attacks on his character in both the 1992 primary and general campaign (attacks which continued in the 1996 general election campaign). For example, in the 1992 Democratic primary, Paul Tsongas ran an ad which declared “Some people will say anything to be elected President [‘I want desperately to be your President,’ Bill Clinton, *New York Magazine*, 1/20/92]. Now, Bill Clinton is distorting Paul Tsongas’s record on Social Security, trying to scare people.” Of course, Pat Buchanan contested the Republican nomination, arguing that Bush broke his dramatic “Read my lips: No new taxes” promise from his 1988 Acceptance Address, so the presence of harsh character attacks cannot by itself explain Clin-

ton’s heavy reliance on evidence. Perhaps the frequent use of evidence was also related to the idea that Clinton was a “policy wonk” (someone who had a grasp of the details of policy) who had many facts at his command and was happy to use them in his ads.

Figure 1. Frequency of Evidence in Presidential TV Spots, 1952-2004



Perhaps even more interesting than the frequency of evidence use is how it was used. Table 1 shows that evidence is used disproportionately to support attacks rather than acclaims. The themes with evidence were attacks in 60-80% of the cases across the individual samples of ads. However, this emphasis on attacks with evidence becomes even more striking when one realizes that overall

candidates used more acclaims than attacks (59-80% acclaims, 20-40% attacks) in their ads. Thus, candidates produced more acclaims than attacks, but evidence was used predominantly in attacks. Geer (2006) found that negative ads are more likely to use evidence than positive ads (his sample consisted of presidential ads, 1960-2000). Furthermore, although defenses are infrequent (too few to include in statistical analysis except for presidential ads), it appears that defensive themes with evidence occur more frequently than defenses without evidence.

Politicians avowedly seek elective office, an activity which does not brook much modesty. Thus, statements from political candidates are likely to be seen as self-serving. Given the fact that the public does not like mud-slinging (Merriitt, 1984; Stewart, 1975), voters may be particularly suspicious of, or less likely to be persuaded by, attacks on a candidate's opponent. Geer (2006) argues that "*in general* criticism requires more evidence to succeed, because viewers are going to be skeptical without documentation" (p. 52, emphasis original). Additionally, candidates with higher perceived credibility are more successful with attacks (Yoon, Pinkleton, & Yo, 2005). Thus, it makes sense for candidates to employ evidence more to support attacks than acclaims.

There is no clear pattern for use of evidence by topic. Only in presidential ads is there a difference in the topics of themes with evidence (evidence is used more to support policy themes than character themes). However, this difference is quite small and never occurs in the non-presidential ads in this sample. Geer (2006) concluded that negative information is more common in issues than personal appeals (recall that he included statistics without sources as instances of evidence). There is no particular reason to anticipate that evidence would be more useful for one topic. Brazeal and Benoit (2006) reported that congressional spots from 1980-2004 stressed policy (51%) and character (49%) about equally; they speculated that "character is more important for congressional than presidential elections" (p. 413). Evidence may support policy and character at about the same level because non-presidential ads do not emphasize policy as much as presidential ads.

The relative frequency of use of the various types of evidence could be a function of two factors. First, newspapers may be seen as a relatively objective and familiar source. Although some newspapers have clear biases (and often endorse candidates), and although academics may argue that no human being (including editors and reporters) can be truly objective, newspapers probably appear relatively objective compared with other possible sources. Researchers have substantiated the levels of citizens trust in this medium and have even found that newspaper reading can increase overall political trust for those less cynical after candidate message reception (Avery, 2009). And, although newspaper readership rates may be decreasing over time, surely more people are familiar with newspapers than, say, voting records. Second, quotations and paraphrases from newspapers may be more accessible. Newspaper stories can be found on a wide range of topics, and particularly topics that are "hot" in an election, and newspaper stories are relatively easy to access. Candidates can easily find research on opponents to use in advertisements.

This study investigated the use of supporting evidence in political television advertisements. Further research should consider performing similar trend analysis on non-presidential advertising. Additionally, experimental investigations could examine reactions to supporting evidence used to enhance various types of candidate statements. Future research could examine other message forms in political campaign discourse, such as direct mail brochures or candidate-sponsored webpages. Other research could investigate the use of evidence in other fields, such as corporate communication or governmental communication. We know relatively little about the use of evidence in persuasive messages. Other research could investigate the effects of evidence in situated discourse (as opposed to research employing experimenter-designed messages). This investigation provides just one glimpse into candidate advertising, but the choice to include evidence may prove to be a strategic advantage for candidates at various levels of office.

Endnotes

¹We would like to thank Amanda Brown, Melissa Joel Iverson, Melissa Marek, John McHale, and Roberta Kerr for video-taping political advertisements for us. David Airne graciously shared the non-presidential TV spot transcripts with us (see Benoit & Airne, 2005).

References

- Airne, D., & Benoit, W. L. (2005). Political television advertising in campaign 2000. *Communication Quarterly*, 53, 473-493.
- Allen, M., & Burrell, N. (2002). The negativity effect in political advertising: A meta-analysis. In J. P. Dillard & M. Pfau (Eds.), *The persuasion handbook: Developments in theory and practice* (pp. 83-96). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ansolabehere, S., & Iyengar, S. (1994). Riding the wave and claiming ownership over issues: The joint effects of advertising and news coverage in campaigns. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 58, 335-357.
- Ansolabehere, S., & Iyengar, S. (1995). *Going negative: How attack ads shrink and polarize the electorate*. New York: Free Press.
- Ansolabehere, S. D. & Iyengar, S. (1999). Replicating experiments using aggregate and survey data: The case of negative advertising and turnout. *American Political Science Review*, 93, 901-910.
- Avery, J. (2009). Videomalaise or virtuous circle? The influence of the news media on political trust. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14, 410-433.
- Benoit, W. L. (1999). *Seeing spots: A functional analysis of presidential television advertisements from 1952-1996*. New York: Praeger.
- Benoit, W. L. (2003). Presidential campaign discourse as a causal factor in election outcome. *Western Journal of Communication*, 67, 97-112.
- Benoit, W. L. (2007). *Communication in political campaigns*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Benoit, W. L., & Airne, D. (2005). Issue ownership for non-presidential television spots. *Communication Quarterly*, *53*, 493-503.
- Benoit, W. L., Leshner, G. M., & Chattopadhyay, S. (2007). A meta-analysis of political advertising. *Human Communication*, *10*, 507-522.
- Benoit, W. L., Stein, K. A., McHale, J. P., Chattopadhyay, S., Verser, R., Price, S. (2007). *Bush versus Kerry: A functional analysis of campaign 2004*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Benoit, W. L., McHale, J. P., Hansen, G. J., Pier, P. M., & McGuire, J. P. (2003). *Campaign 2000: A functional analysis of presidential campaign discourse*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Biocca, F. (Ed.). (1991a). *Television and political advertising: Volume 1 Psychological processes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Biocca, F. (Ed.). (1991b). *Television and political advertising: Volume 2 Signs, codes, and images*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bradley, S. D., Angelini, J. R., & Lee, S. (2007). Psychophysiological and memory effects of negative political ads: Adversing, arousing, and well-remembered. *Journal of Advertising*, *36*, 115-127.
- Brazeal, L. M., & Benoit, W. L. (2006). On the spot: A functional analysis of congressional television spots, 1980-2004. *Communication Studies*, *57*, 401-420.
- Cohen, J. (1960). A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *20*, 37-46.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cooper, C. A., & Knotts, H. G. (2004). Packaging the governors: Television advertising in the 2000 elections. In D. A. Schultz (Ed.), *Lights, camera, campaign! Media, politics, and political advertising* (pp. 101-120). New York: Peter Lang.
- Diamond, E., & Bates, S. (1993). *The spot: The rise of political advertising on television* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Geer, J. G. (2006). *In defense of negativity: Attack ads in presidential campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hellweg, S. A., King, S., & Williams, S. E. (1988). Comparative candidate evaluation as a function of election level and candidate incumbency. *Communication Reports*, *1*, 76-85.
- Jamieson, K. H. (1996). *Packaging the presidency: A history and criticism of presidential advertising* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson-Cartee, K. S., & Copeland, G. (1991). *Negative political advertising: Coming of age*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Johnson-Cartee, K. S., & Copeland, G. (1997). *Manipulation of the American voter: Political campaign commercials*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Kaid, L. L. (2004). Political advertising. In L. L. Kaid (Ed.) *Handbook of political communication* (pp. 155-202). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum.
- Kaid, L. L., & Johnston, A. (2001). *Videostyle in presidential campaigns Style and content of televised political advertising*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

- Kern, M. (1989). *30 second politics: Political advertising in the eighties*. New York: Praeger.
- Lau, R. R., Sigelman, L., Heldman, C., & Babbitt, P. (1999). The effects of negative political advertisements: A meta-analytic assessment. *American Political Science Review*, *93*, 851-875.
- Lau, R. R., Sigelman, L., & Rovner, I. B. (2007). The effects of negative political campaigns: A meta-analytic reassessment. *The Journal of Politics*, *69*, 1176-1209.
- Levasseur, D., & Dean, K. W. (1996). The use of evidence in presidential debates: A study of evidence levels and types from 1960 to 1988. *Argumentation & Advocacy*, *32*, 129-142.
- Louden, A. (2007). Political spot advertising: Selected bibliography. Accessed 6/6/07: <http://www.wfu.edu/%7Elouden/Political%20Communication/Bibs/SPOTBIB.html>
- McCroskey, J. C. (1967). The effects of evidence in persuasive communication. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, *31*, 189-199.
- Min, Y. (2002). Intertwining of campaign news and advertising: The content and electoral effects of newspaper ad watches. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *79*, 927-944.
- O'Keefe, D. J. (1998). Justification explicitness and persuasive effect: A meta-analytic review of the effects of varying support articulation in persuasive messages. *Argumentation & Advocacy*, *35*, 61-75.
- Payne, J. G., & Baukus, R. A. (1988). Trend analysis of the 1984 GOP Senatorial spots. *Political Communication and Persuasion*, *5*, 161-177.
- Petrocik, J. R. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*, *40*, 825-850.
- Petrocik, J. R., Benoit, W. L., & Hansen, G. J. (2003-2004). Issue ownership and presidential campaigning, 1952-2000. *Political Science Quarterly*, *118*, 599-626.
- Merritt, S. (1984). Negative political advertising: Some empirical findings. *Journal of Advertising*, *13*, 27-38.
- Nelson, J. S., & Boynton, G. R. (1997). *Video rhetorics: Televised advertising in American politics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- O'Keefe, D. J. (2002). *Persuasion: Theory and research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Reinard, J. C. (1998). The persuasive effects of testimonial assertion evidence. In M. Allen & R. W. Preiss (Eds.), *Persuasion: Advances through meta-analysis* (pp. 69-86). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Reinard, J. C. (1988). The empirical study of the persuasive effects of evidence: The status after fifty years of research. *Human Communication Research*, *15*, 3-59.
- Schultz, D. A. (2004). *Lights, camera, campaign! Media, politics, and political advertising*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Stewart, C. J. (1975). Voter perception of mud-slinging in political communication. *Central States Speech Journal*, 26, 279-286.
- Stiff, J. B., & Mongeau, P. A. (2003). *Persuasive communication* (2nd ed.). New York: Gilford.
- Teven, J. J. (2008). An examination of perceived credibility of the 2008 presidential candidates: Relationships with believability, likeability and deceptiveness. *Human Communication*, 11, 383-400.
- Thurber, J. A., Nelson, C. J., & Dulio, D. A. (2000). *Crowded airwaves: Campaign advertising in elections*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Weaver Lariscy, R. & Tickham, S. F. (1999). The sleeper effect and negative political advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 28, 13-30.
- West, D. M. (2001). *Air wars: Television advertising in election campaigns, 1952-1996* (3rd ed.). Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly.
- Yoon, K., Pinkleton, B., & Ko, W. (2005). Effects of negative advertising on voting intention: An exploration of the roles of involvement and source credibility in the development of voter cynicism. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 11, 95-112.
- Zhao, X., & Chaffee, S. H. (1995). Campaign advertisements versus television news as sources of political issue information. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 59, 41-65.

Jayne R. Henson (Ph.D., University of Missouri) is a postdoctoral fellow for the Mizzou Advantage Program at the University of Missouri. William L. Benoit (Ph.D., Wayne State University) is a professor in the School of Communication at Ohio University. Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to Dr. Henson at jrh8y3@mail.missouri.edu.