THE SAGE HANDBOOK OF
POLITICAL ADVERTISING

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Methodologies for the Study of Political Advertising

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Over the past decades, scholars have used a variety of methods to research political advertising. In the individual chapters of this handbook, the authors explore the legal, cultural, political, and communication environments of and the research findings on political advertising in various countries. In this chapter, we turn our attention from what we know about political advertising to how scholars have researched political advertising. This chapter provides a review of some of the methods used in exploring political advertising across the globe, comments on the value of the methods, and offers suggestions for future directions in political advertising research.

Political advertising can include many types of research; therefore, in this chapter, the definition of what counts as political advertising will include those forms of advertising available to candidates, political parties, government entities, and other organizations throughout the world. This will include content, paid for or given as free time, such as political spots, political party broadcasts,

posters, newspaper ads, or, as defined by Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, "any format under the control of the party or candidate and for which time is given or purchased" (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995, p. 2).

HISTORICAL STUDIES AND OVERVIEWS OF CULTURE AND CONTEXT

Our understanding of political advertising across the globe has been well served by studies providing overviews of the ways in which political advertising has emerged within a particular context and culture. In these studies, the method may be a combination of historical and rhetorical methods, or the study may be more descriptive, outlining how the particular legal, cultural, political, and media or communication environment gave rise to political advertising. In some cases, researchers have used broader concepts of political marketing to discuss the growth of political advertising within a particular country.

Historical studies have laid important groundwork for understanding the role of political advertising in political campaigns, and they have helped scholars understand the evolution of some of the styles and types of ads as well as their functions (Jamieson, 1986, 1996). Researchers have also characterized televised political ads in terms of the communicative functions they perform, placing their functions into discussions about gender, political position, type of ad, and political consulting (Trent & Friedenberg, 1995).

In addition to historical studies of ads, scholars have used exploratory or descriptive methods to connect the political advertising to some broader cultural phenomenon or to identify a context or theory in which to understand the use and influence of advertising. Numerous studies have looked at the style and use of political advertising in various countries to understand the influence of an "American" style of campaigning or a "modernization" of campaign techniques; others have used political marketing as the way in which political advertising is contextualized and understood within a country's legal, economic, political, and media systems (see, for example, Baines, Scheucher, & Plasser, 2001; Dean & Croft, 2001; and chapter 16 in this handbook). Several studies have used product advertising and branding concepts to explore or explain the use of political advertising in a country (see, for example, James & Hensel, 1991; Yen, Coats, & Dalton, 1992).

Other studies have provided overviews of the legal, political, cultural, and communication environments in a country and then described the ads in terms of a variety of characteristics, such as production techniques, settings, themes, and issues mentioned in political broadcasts (see, for example, chapters in Bolivar, 2001; Bowler & Farrell, 1992; Gross et al., 2001; Mazzoleni, 1987; O'Neil & Mills, 1986; Papathanassopoulos, 2000; Swanson & Mancini, 1996). Although there is some discussion of content, the analysis in many of these works is more descriptive than systematic

or more qualitative than quantitative. However, these studies of the cultural, legal, political, and media environment have provided a good foundation for an understanding of the ways in which differences in international communities influence how political advertising develops and forms. For example, by providing a description of some of the video and film techniques used in various campaigns in Europe, Axford and Huggins (2002) examine how political advertising communicates cultural messages. Although the analysis is fairly descriptive, it provides an aesthetic critique of the techniques used in the political ads and how those techniques serve to connect the ads to broader, cultural images and forms. The edited book by Roper, Holtz-Bacha, and Mazzoleni (2004) provides chapters on political advertising strategies and descriptions of some of the global patterns and then discusses how the legal and political contexts necessitate changes in the styles, strategies, and appearance of ads in Germany, New Zealand, Italy, and the United States.

These types of studies have been useful in our understanding of how political advertising fits into particular legal, governmental, cultural, and communication environments. They provide, in many ways, case studies of particular races and campaigns within particular cultures. Because systematic case studies are very important to the understanding, in depth, of some communication event or environment, political advertising research could certainly benefit from more systematically done case studies. Case studies of course provide a way to study a "bounded system . . . over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Many of the pieces that have looked at the legal, historical, and cultural environments and then have described or content-analyzed a set of ads could be considered case studies, but future research might build on this initial knowledge of the legal, historical, and cultural environments of a country's political campaigns and

look at the ads and their use and role in the campaign. The studies so far have generally done a good job of providing the settings and context of the case, but researchers should consider looking at "multiple sources of information . . . [including] observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61).

Case studies do exist in political advertising research and have included an analysis of Paul Wellstone's attack ads from his 1990 senate campaign (Pfau, Parrott, & Lindquist, 1992), an analysis of the Canadian Tory Party's advertising in 1993 and the British Labour Party's advertising in 1992 (O'Shaughnessy, 2002), a study of the factors affecting the 1994 Italian elections and the political advertising used (Mazzoleni, 1995), and an in-depth look at U.S. president Eisenhower's first spot campaign (Wood, 1990).

ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING CONTENT

An important approach in understanding political advertising is analysis of the content of the political poster, advertising, or broadcast. Over the decades and across cultures, contexts, and countries, researchers have tried to uncover the various layers of symbols, styles, appeals, and content in political advertising. Through the use of various methods of looking at content, scholars have been able to document how cultural myths and symbols, how negative and positive appeals, how issue concerns and image characteristics have shaped the nature of what exists in political advertising. Analyses of content have benefited from methods including qualitative content analysis, quantitative content analysis, and critical and rhetorical analyses.

Descriptive and Rhetorical Analysis

Descriptive analyses of political advertising content have typically tried to describe the content in terms of functions they serve or

how the content is connected to larger factors and influences in the campaign. Several of these studies have described the content of ads over a course of decades (see, for example, Braund, 1978; Devlin, 1986, 1993, 2001) or from a variety of specific campaigns from Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Russia, Belgium, Israel, Australia, and Britain (Acosta & Garcia, 2000; Brants, 1995; Johnson & Elebash, 1986; Leitch & Roper, 1999; Miskin & Grant, 2004; Moring, 1995; Philo, 1993; Siune, 1995; Van den Bulck, 1993; and chapter 18 in this handbook).

Studies using rhetorical analysis have applied a variety of approaches in understanding the content of political ads. For example, rhetorical analysis has been used to study the use of Burke's frames in explaining the images and storylines in U.S. presidential ads (Smith & Johnston, 1991); to identify the rhetorical visions present in the convention acceptance speeches, political ads, campaign posters, and the official political broadcasts during the 1988 presidential elections in France and the United States (Hale, 1991); to analyze political campaign films (Morreale, 1991); to look at the elements of political argumentation present in the television ads featured on Québec television during the 1993 Canadian federal elections (Gauthier, 1994); and to explore the function and rhetorical strategies of political ads over the course of a campaign (Diamond & Bates, 1992). Narrative analysis has been used to study the language and stories present in political advertising (Gronbeck, 1992), and semiotic analysis has provided a way of exploring the meaning of symbols and signs in political advertising. For example, Quéré (1991) looked at posters used during the 1988 French presidential campaign and used semiotics to explore the images, photos, language, slogans, and themes present in the candidates' and parties' posters. Semiotic analysis has also been used to explore ads of major political parties in South African elections (Bertelsen, 1996), to study Dukakis' advertising (Descutner, Burnier, Mickunas, & Letteri, 1991), to

understand the hidden myths in the political ads used during a gubernatorial election (Nimmo & Felsberg, 1986), and to analyze Dianne Feinstein's 1990, 1992, and 1994 campaign television advertisements (Sullivan, 1998). In many cases, the overall symbols and structures of the ads are analyzed using rhetorical or semiotic analysis, but in other studies, the researchers have applied more linguistic analysis, looking at sentences and the semantic content of each sentence (not the overall ad) to see the semantic direction (positive, negative, or neutral) of the sentences (for example, de Repentigny, 1999).

Quantitative Content Analysis

Content analysis has been perhaps one of the most popular methods for understanding political ads or broadcasts. As mentioned earlier, sometimes content analysis has been part of a case study approach in looking at the legal, historical, and cultural aspects of a country's political campaigns and then analyzing the ads to understand how those aspects affect the content of ads. Some standard content analyses have included descriptions of issues and image characteristics; the evidence of attacks in ads and the content of negative advertising; the information shortcuts contained in ads; how gender is represented in ads; masculine and feminine styles in ads; the acclaims, attacks, and defenses in ads; the values present in ads; the language and symbols used in the ads; the production components of the ads and the methods of presentation; the narrative elements of the ads; the relation of the content in ads to models of voting or theories of elections; and the intermedia agenda-setting function for ads (Benoit, 2000, 2001; Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997; Boiney & Paletz, 1991; Brazeal & Benoit, 2001; Bystrom, 1996; Dermody & Sullion, 2000; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991; Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Johnston & White, 1993; Kaid & Johnston, 1991, 2001; Kern, 1989; Lebel, 1999; Lemish & Tidhar, 1999; Lopez-Escobar, Llamas,

McCombs, & Lennon, 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Romanow, de Repentigny, Cunningham, Soderlund, & Hildebrandt, 1999; Sayre, 1994; Shyles, 1986; Stein, 2005; Vavreck, 2001; Wadsworth et al., 1987; Weimann & Wolfsfeld, 2002; West, 2001).

In addition to these and other categories analyzed in content analyses, scholars have dealt with a variety of issues in deciding how to carry out content analyses of political advertising. Several of these issues include the sample of ads used, how the ads are coded and how the content categories are determined, and the comparability of the sample selected between countries and its influence on coding.

Selection of Samples and Categories

In content analyses of political advertising, the samples studied have been fairly diverse. Several studies have used convenience samples (Boiney & Paletz, 1991; Joslyn, 1986; Kern & Edley, 1994), but more have used purposive samples, gathering ads from particular campaigns to study the ads used in a particular election or elections during a particular year (Brazeal & Benoit, 2001; Gronbeck, 1992; Johnston & Gerstlé, 1995; Johnston & White, 1993; Procter, Schenck-Hamlin, & Haase, 1994; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1995; Trent & Sabourin, 1993; Vavreck, 2001; West, 1994.) Other purposive samples have been chosen to look at issues of gender and have sampled, for example, ads from women candidates who ran for U.S. House, Senate, and gubernatorial seats from 1964 to 1998 (Shames, 2003) or 124 spots from mixed gender Senate and gubernatorial campaigns in 1996 (Robertson, Froemling, Wells, & McCraw, 1999). Purposive samples have also included samples covering several years to look at trends and changes over time (Balloti & Kaid, 2000; Benoit, 2001; Benoit et al., 1997; Brazeal & Benoit, 2001; Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Kaid & Johnston, 1991, 2001; West, 2001) or covering numerous

elections in a single year, as in the study by Spiliotes and Vavreck (2002), which analyzed 1000 ads aired by 290 candidates in 153 elections in 37 states during the 1998 U.S. midterm elections.

Researchers have used a variety of methods to collect their samples of ads and have employed several criteria for including or excluding certain ads from the sample. For example, Kern (1989) defined her sample as ads that appeared on air from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. in four states. Other studies have used samples of ads taped off air (Gunsch, Brownlow, Haynes, & Mabe, 2000) or ads taped off air but during a particular time, such as ads appearing during network newscasts (West, 2001). Some studies have used archival services to provide the sample of ads (Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Kaid & Johnston, 1991). In whatever way the ads are gathered, from archives, consultants, off air, or off the Internet, it is important that researchers explain the criteria for why ads will be included or excluded from their sample. For example, Kaid and Johnston (2001), in their study of presidential advertising from 1952 to 1996, used a political archive to gather their ads and define the boundaries for using the ads as only those ads known to be sanctioned by the candidate or the candidate's election committee. West (2001) studies what he defines as the prominent ads and selects his ads in a variety of ways: either ones that other scholars have identified in their historical studies as important on a variety of criteria or as those aired on a particular news station.

Operationalizing Concepts, Defining Variables, and Coding Categories

Most content analyses of political advertising have clearly defined, at least for their particular study, how a concept would be measured. Also, there have been numerous ways that the topics in political advertising have been operationalized. For example, what

count as issues and images in political advertising has varied in the studies on political advertising across the globe. How and what to code to get at issues and images have also varied. Sometimes researchers have been interested in the frequency of issue mentions in an ad, as well as how often the ad appears. For example, Romanow (1999), in his study of ads appearing on English-language TV during the 1993 Canadian federal elections, noted the "telecast occasions" of ads or how often ads were broadcast. In addition, he noted how many times an issue was mentioned in an ad and coded those as "issue citations." Scammell and Semetko (1995) looked at the total number of seconds that issues were discussed and the percent of time they occupied in the party election broadcasts (PEBs) during the 1992 British general elections.

The debate on what counts as an issue ad or an image ad affects both content analysis and experimental research. Defining what is meant by a negative ad has also been an issue for researchers doing content analyses of political advertising. Several studies have argued that the operationalization of negative advertising is problematic. For example, Richardson (2001) presented a critical review of the academic work on negativity in political advertising, arguing that the definitions have been too broad and too holistic. There have been some studies that have attempted to separate out what makes an image ad versus an issue ad or positive ad versus a negative one by looking at large samples to find commonalities (for example, see Kaid & Johnston, 1991; Johnston & Kaid, 2002). Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991) operationalize negative advertising as a type of short story and analyze more than 1000 ads based on what is said in the ads (substance and underlying themes) and how it is said (presentation style or plot).

Early studies of televised political advertising content tended to be interested in verbal content categories or what was being said in the ads. Later studies began to integrate not

only what was being said but also how it was said. One of these methods, which has been used over the course of 20 years of political advertising research and in a variety of countries, is "videostyle." Researchers using videostyle code for the verbal content, the nonverbal content, and the film or video production techniques of political ads. First outlined by Kaid and Davidson (1986) in a study of senatorial ads, the approach has been used over the years to look at the style of candidates in their ads and to look at how context, culture, and political position influence the style components a candidate might use in his or her ads. The method has been applied to ads or broadcasts used in a variety of countries, including Germany (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 1995) and Italy (Mazzoleni & Roper, 1995) as well as others discussed in the chapters in this volume. (For a complete discussion of the method and theory and for a review of studies using videostyle, see Kaid & Johnston, 2001.)

Research using videostyle has also evolved in accordance with the countries being studied, and researchers have made modifications to the videostyle coding design based on the unique attributes of the political ads or broadcasts being studied. For example, chapter 12 in this handbook looks at the content of the Greek polispots using videostyle but combines this discussion with an analysis of models of voting and frames in the spots. Studies of German spots have modified the videostyle instrument and adapted it to German elections because of the unique characteristics of German spots (chapter 10 in this handbook; see also Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 1995).

There have been several content studies that have been truly comparative, looking at two or more countries to see what differences or similarities exist in the content of political broadcasts and ads (see, for example, Johnston, 1991; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Tak, Kaid, & Lee, 1997). The strength of these studies has been the researchers' ability to incorporate the differences in the approaches, theories, and cultures

of the countries to compare and analyze the ads. For example, Tak et al. (1997) look at the form and content of political ads in major daily newspapers in South Korea and the United States, as well as at the TV political commercials, during the 1992 elections in both countries. A comparison of spots used in Israel and the United States in the 1992 campaigns highlights the differences in visual imagery (Griffin & Kagan, 1996). In comparing ads in different countries, the way in which to analyze the ads is one issue, but how to sample is another issue. Researchers have tried to make the samples equivalent, not necessarily equal (Tak et al., 1997).

In other studies, available content analysis data in the form of studies from different countries are compared on various dimensions. Carlson (2001) reports the results of a secondary comparative analysis of male/female legislative candidates in the United States and Finland. Data were collected for single country studies (one in the United States and one in Finland) and then the author compared the two studies, discussing in detail how comparable the two content analyses are. Using available data from other studies, Plasser and Plasser (2002) compared videostyle studies from a variety of countries to make comparisons about how styles in ads are different across countries.

Although ways of operationalizing the content categories have been suggested by past research or writing about issues in political advertising, experts have also been used to help researchers decide how to code ads. Several studies have asked panels of experts to help formulate the content categories or to help interpret the categories. For example, Sayre (1994) asked scholars, media experts, and party officials in Hungary to help in the interpretive analysis of visual images used in the political ads. Other researchers have used Delphi panels to help determine themes and patterns in smaller samples of ads to help in future coding (Kern, 1989; Shyles, 1986).

Many content analyses in political advertising have used at least two coders and report an

intercoder reliability. In some cases, coders must agree before a category is marked. For example, Lemish and Tidhar (1999) used two trained coders and a consensus coding model in which coders had to talk and agree before only one entry was recorded for each variable. Garramone, Steele, and Pinkleton (1991) also had disagreements between two coders resolved by a third coder in a content analysis of responses to ads. Although most content analyses in political advertising have used human coders, there have been several studies using computerized content analysis to look at language, verbal style, linguistic dimensions, and policy information in ads (Ballotti & Kaid, 2000; Gunsch et al., 2000; Hansen & Benoit, 2002).

Although there have been a variety of techniques and methods used to analyze content, the application of theory to the analysis has been sporadic. It should be noted that research on theory used in content analysis studies in mass communication shows that most of these types of studies lack a theoretical framework (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Political advertising content analyses that use theory or models include those that have connected the content in ads to theories or models of voting or approaches to elections (Boiney & Paletz, 1991; Joslyn, 1986), to gender systematic analysis and theories of gender portrayal and meaning (Lemish & Tidhar, 1999; Shames, 2003), to priming or functional analysis (Benoit, 2000, 2001; Benoit et al., 1997; West, 2001), and to philosophical or cultural theory and differences in comparing content from two cultures (Tak et al., 1997).

Other studies have used approaches that combine theories of communication, politics, or film theory to analyze the content of the ads. One of the ways in which both the quantitative and qualitative content analyses would benefit would be a more systematic discussion of the theoretical elements guiding the research. There are actually now a variety of studies, in a variety of countries, that have

looked at videostyle, for example. Because videostyle is an approach to understanding the languages of political ads, it may now be beneficial for research to step back and look at how the body of research in this area has helped define the stylistic components of ads and determine whether the approach has any predictive or explanatory value. In their book, Kaid and Johnston (2001) set out the major elements of videostyle and how these elements have translated into a presidential style over time and within particular contexts of campaigns and political position. Future studies of videostyle across culture and time could build the theoretical groundwork of videostyle and comment explicitly on what the studies add to our conceptual thinking about that approach.

STUDYING THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Experiments on the effects of political advertising have provided a wealth of information about what influence political ads have on the public. The topics studied in experimental research in political advertising have included the interrelationships of audience motivation, commercial type, and information processing on candidate image formation (Garramone, 1986); influence of information processing and candidate characteristics (Garramone et al., 1991); the influence of attitudes toward political advertising on information processing of TV political ads (Christ, Thorson, & Caywood, 1994); how adwatches influence the effects of ads (Pfau & Louden, 1994); influence of ads on persuasion, information retention, and issue salience (Groenendyk & Valentino, 2002); reception of political spots and changes in candidate images (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 1995; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1993); what is learned from ads and how emotion and structure influence memory of both audio and visual information (Lang, 1991); the priming effects of ads compared to news stories (Schleuder, McCombs, & Wanta, 1991); information

seeking (Kaid, 2002); influence on vote and evaluation of candidates (Chang, 2003); moderating effect of attitudinal bond or relationship between voter and candidate to predict how voter will process and respond to a persuasive message (Alwitt, Deighton, & Grimm, 1991); comparing the processing of political commercials to brand commercials, looking at attitudinal responses, not memorial responses (Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991b); the impact of issue and image content in political advertising and the interaction of that content with the audio and visual components of television on memory (Geiger & Reeves, 1991); influence of negative advertising on the political process (Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990); inoculation from negative advertising, boomerang effects, and black sheep effects of negative advertising (King & McConnell, 2003; Matthews & Dietz-Uhler, 1998; Pfau & Kenski, 1990; Pfau, Park, Holbert, & Cho, 2001; Shen & Wu, 2002); how female voters process ads and how ads using male and female styles are processed (Chang & Hitchon, 2004; Wadsworth et al., 1987); comparisons across six countries of the effects on images of candidates of emotional reactions to political advertising (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995); and effects of technological distortions in ads (Kaid, 2001; Noggle & Kaid, 2000). (See chapters in this volume for a more explicit discussion of effects findings from individual countries.)

Although most of the experiments have been set in the laboratory and have measured short-term effects, some have been field experiments (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1994) and have looked at delayed effects of ads over repeated exposures (e.g., King & McConnell, 2003).

Factors in Experimental Design

Developing Stimulus Materials

One of the questions for studies trying to understand the effects of advertising has been

what ads to use as stimuli and how to gather the ads for the experiment. The question facing researchers in many cases is whether to use actual ads from campaigns and pretest them in some way to determine the validity of what they are measuring; to construct ads and be able to include various dimensions of the independent variable; or to include some combination of these, using real ads from campaigns but manipulating and editing them to incorporate other dimensions. For example, Chang (2003), in his study of newspaper ads, took ads from real campaigns but created and manipulated the content to which the subjects were exposed. Cundy (1986) created a script for an ad that was then read by a professional radio announcer. For studies researching broadcast ads, digital video and editing and the ability to download ads from Web sites have generally made manipulating ad content much easier. Studies that have produced ads or manipulated the content of actual ads for the experiment include Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, and Valentino (1994); Thorson, Christ, and Caywood (1991a); Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams (2004); and Wadsworth et al. (1987).

A critical issue in studying the effects of political ads is defining and operationalizing the variables. Several experiments have used formal content analysis first to define the ads (Lang, 1991; Noggle & Kaid, 2000; Schenck-Hamlin, Procter, & Rumsey, 2000), textual analysis to identify the "textual oppositions" present in political ads (Cronkhite, Liska, & Schrader, 1991), or experts or judges to determine the content of ads before they are used in experiments (Geiger & Reeves, 1991).

Some researchers have used detailed procedures to first ascertain how subjects are interpreting ads by coding responses to ads. In Garramone et al. (1991), subjects were given 3 minutes to list their thoughts about ads they were shown. Trained coders then coded these thoughts into image or issue thoughts. If a subject's thoughts were dominant in one

category or the other, that subject was identified as an image processor or issue processor. Then the same subject was shown made-up ads to see how his or her processing style interacted with the attractiveness of the candidate (with a panel of judges also used here to determine attractiveness) in his or her evaluation of the candidates and vote likelihood.

Subjects

As in most studies in mass communication, student populations dominate the subject pools in political advertising studies. Several studies have combined student and nonstudent samples (Chang, 2003; Kaid, Chanslor, & Hovind, 1992). Some researchers have used members of churches, clubs, or community groups or random adult nonstudent groups (Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Cundy, 1986; Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Newhagen & Reeves, 1991; Schleuder et al., 1991; Valentino et al., 2004). Other studies have used likely or eligible voters (Ansolabehere et al., 1994; Clinton & Lapinski, 2004; Pfau & Kenski, 1990) or subgroups of voters. For example, Alwitt et al. (1991) used only female voters. The debate about using student versus nonstudent populations in general can be applied to studies of political advertising effects. Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, and Babbitt (1999) found in their meta-analysis that there were no major differences attributable to student subjects versus adult samples, but other analyses have shown that subjects can be a moderating variable in terms of effects and effect sizes from political advertising studies (Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2005).

Measuring Effects

Typically a pen and paper questionnaire is used to ascertain feelings, attitudes, or information about ads. Several studies have used continuous measurement techniques, through which participants respond to ads using handheld dials linked to computers (Newhagen &

Reeves, 1991; Tedesco, 2002), or have used computer-assisted self-interviewing software (Valentino et al., 2004). Several studies have used the thought-listing approach or the cognitive response tradition, in which subjects are asked to list their thoughts and responses to ads that researchers then put into categories (Meirick, 2002; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002; Schenck-Hamlin et al., 2000). In some cases, researchers have looked at memory, recognition, and influence from ads by looking separately at the audio content and the visual content of broadcast ads (Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Newhagen & Reeves, 1991; Thorson et al., 1991a) or have looked at visual literacy effects by testing this in a video rather than a written format (Noggle & Kaid, 2000).

Some studies of information processing of ads have used elaborate study designs to test the influence of ads on different types of processors. Garramone et al. (1991) used a two-part study to first content-analyze subjects' cognitive responses to a series of televised ads into image or issue processing. They then exposed the subjects to ads to see how their processing style influenced their evaluations of candidates. Subjects have also sometimes been divided into study cells based on motivations provided by the researcher for watching the ads (Garramone, 1983) or based on context issues during a campaign (Mazzoleni & Roper, 1995). Mazzoleni and Roper (1995) divided their subjects into groups to deal with scandals that had been a part of the 1992 Italian elections. In this case, they divided their subjects into two groups, with one cell instructed to think back to political circumstances surrounding the period.

Embedding Ads Into Other Content

One concern in experimental studies is the setting of the experiment and how the ads are viewed. In several studies, researchers have attempted to naturalize the setting by having the participants view the ads in smaller groups,

around a table simulating a living-room experience (Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Lang, 1991; Thorson et al., 1991b). One of the ways in which researchers have tried to naturalize the exposure to ads has been to embed the ads into news programs or content, entertainment programs or content, or filler and consumer ads (Meirick, 2002; Pfau et al., 2001; Valentino et al., 2004).

Although the embedding of political ads into other content is a good way of naturalizing the exposure to the ads, most of the studies have not tested for the effects or influence of the context materials. Although it makes sense to include political ads among other materials in an experiment, it does not make sense to assume that the surrounding material is somehow neutral and will not influence the response to the political ads. Several studies have explicitly looked at the influence of the surrounding material or have asked subjects about their response to the context or surrounding material (Basil et al., 1991; Chang, 2003; Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Kaid, Chanslor, et al., 1992; Schleuder et al., 1991). Looking at how surrounding material influences the response to political ads is a very important way to understand the effects of political ads. Studies should continue to explore the differing effects of content on a variety of types of ads (such as issue and image ads or negative and positive ads) in a variety of media settings (broadcast, print, the Internet). In studies that do embed ads simply to naturalize the exposure, researchers should include questions about the surrounding material simply to lessen the participants' awareness that they are being asked about only the political ads or to give the researchers a way of checking the neutrality of the surrounding content.

Meta-analyses of Effects

Several meta-analyses exist of political advertising effects. For example, Lau et al. (1999) provide a meta-analysis of the effects of

negative political advertising. Meta-analyses are valuable in any discipline as a way of quantitatively evaluating and combining findings from several studies (Rosenthal & DiMatteo, 2001). There are a couple of issues that are particularly important to consider when doing meta-analyses of political advertising effects.

One important issue that is mentioned in reviews of this method is the need to look carefully at how the variables in the studies are operationalized and measured. Therefore, meta-analyses of political advertising effects should ask: How are the studies similar or different in how they operationalized the concepts? How did the individual studies measure the dependent variables? As the previous discussion of how effects might be measured in political advertising indicates, we need to be cautious in how we group effect studies, depending on how the content of the ads or the stimuli is determined or operationalized and how the effects, whatever they might be, are measured. In good meta-analyses, these things are comparable.

Most meta-analyses deal with published studies, and this is one of the biggest criticisms of existing meta-analyses (Rosenthal & DiMatteo, 2001). The question that is frequently asked here is, how does one account for the bias in a meta-analysis of reviewing only those studies that have been published and not being able to account for those that have not been published? Do we assume that the published ones are the best? Do we assume that the unpublished ones are the ones with smaller effects or no significant effects (Rosenthal & DiMatteo, 2001)? There are solutions offered for this dilemma (Rosenthal & DiMatteo, 2001), but the important aspect for meta-analyses done on political advertising effects is to acknowledge this issue within the study. The Lau et al. (1999) study of the effects of negative political advertising tried to find the unpublished studies as well as the published studies for their meta-analysis.

UNDERSTANDING THE USES OF ADS AND SURVEY RESEARCH

Survey research has been an important method for understanding how voters globally use, remember, and interpret information and images in political ads. Survey research has helped scholars understand the general impact of advertising and other media sources during campaigns, understand the effects of negative advertising, measure reactions to negative advertising over time, explore general attitudes toward or information-seeking behavior inspired by political broadcasts or advertising, test whether misleading claims in ads worked, measure learning from ads, and measure believability and value of political advertising and recall of advertising (Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Jasperson & Fan, 2002; Marks, 1993; Moring, 1995; O'Cass, 2002; Ohr & Schrott, 2001; Pattie & Johnston, 2002; Siune, 1995; Winneg, Kenski, & Jamieson, 2005; Zhao & Bleske, 1995; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995). Use of available data, typically from the American National Election Survey, has helped in our understanding of recall of ads, effects of ads on vote choice, effects of ads on issue knowledge and salience, and effects of negative advertising on turnout (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Goldstein & Freedman, 2000, 2002; Gwiasda, 2001; Holbert, Benoit, Hansen, & Wen, 2002; Kahn & Kenney, 1999). Chapters in this handbook offer other examples of surveys in a variety of settings and countries.

Surveys have also been used to test assumptions about theories, particularly about uses and gratifications and rational choice as they apply to political advertising (Cohen & Wolfsfeld, 1995; Ohr & Schrott, 2001), or to further explore conceptual dimensions of types of political ads. For example, Sigelman and Kugler (2003) looked at data from three gubernatorial campaigns to measure how

voters define and interpret "negativity" in political ads.

Although most survey research in political advertising has included adults in the general public or likely voters as the sample, scholars have been interested in understanding professionals' attitudes and opinions about political advertising. Plasser and Plasser (2002) provide a survey of political consultants in the United States, Latin America, Western and Mediterranean Europe, East Central Europe, and other areas to understand the experience and attitudes of political consultants in these areas. (See also Perloff & Kinsey, 1992, for a survey of consultants.) Other samples surveyed in a variety of countries about their opinions on, use of, or reactions to political advertising include children (Rahn & Hirshorn, 1999), journalists (Perloff & Kinsey, 1992), newspaper ad directors (Fletcher, Ross, & Schwietzer, 2002; Ross, Fletcher & Schwietzer, 1994), advertising agency executives (Waller, 2002; Waller & Polonsky, 1996), and politicians (Waller, 2002; Weaver-Lariscy & Tinkham, 1987).

Survey research has also been combined with content analysis in several studies to explore the use and influence of negative advertising or advertising and public policy issues (see, for example, Finkel & Geer, 1998; Gwiasda, 2001; Hansen & Benoit, 2002; West, 1994, 2001) or in conjunction with experimental studies to see how subjects primed by viewing political information might differ from subjects surveyed during the same time (Schleuder et al., 1991).

Most assessments of audiences have used traditional survey research; however, there have been other methods used in studying audiences of political advertising. For example, Mansfield and Hale (1986) used Q analysis to examine the subjective viewpoint of varied audience members about political advertising. Other studies using qualitative approaches have included "participatory action research," used in a study of college students, urban communities, and political party strategists during

the 1993 Canadian federal elections (Romanow et al., 1999), and a focus group approach to understand voters' ethical perceptions of political advertising (Kates, 1998).

Qualitative audience studies have provided valuable insights into the ways in which voters (viewers or readers) may process and interpret political advertising. Approaches such as participatory action research allow the researcher to interview, in depth, audiences or professionals without the structure of a survey. As Romanow et al. (1999) explain, there is a lot of care taken in this approach to prevent the researcher's bias from controlling the interview or the answers. In this type of design, research participants are encouraged to associate themselves with the study and to help the researcher interpret the responses.

A similar approach that researchers might find fruitful in doing qualitative research in political advertising would be the long interview method and the grounded theory approach. A grounded theory approach allows for the construction of a "theory closely related to the phenomenon being studied." "The researcher collects primarily interview data, makes multiple visits to the field, develops and interrelates categories of information, and writes theoretical propositions or hypotheses or presents a visual picture of the theory" (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). The long interview, as part of a grounded theory approach, is a method that can help the researcher understand how culture and context may mediate human action (McCracken, 1988). In the field of political advertising, grounded theory and the long interview might prove fruitful in, for example, a study of women politicians to understand how they process, interpret, and use political advertising. Studies of gender differences in the styles and strategies in political advertising content have provided a good foundation for this type of research. A grounded theory study of female politicians might reveal how the female candidates themselves are interpreting and understanding their use of political advertising.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Globally, political advertising research has been enriched by the variety of methods used by scholars to understand the content, use, and effects of this type of political communication. The historical and legal studies have enabled us to acknowledge and understand the important foundation for the rise and development of political advertising within the context and climate of political, social, and cultural dimensions of the various countries studied. True case studies could be developed even more systematically in this area, to understand a particular election and the use of ads in that election from a variety of information sources. Content analysis has provided details about what form political advertising, broadcasts, and posters might take in terms of the languages available to the medium in which the content appears. Content analysis has also given us some ways of measuring the same variables across time and across cultures, proving that different contexts and cultures require that researchers refine the ways in which they operationalize or categorize variables. Content analysis studies, particularly those using similar approaches or theories, would benefit from increased attention to comparisons across culture, time, and circumstance. Experimental research has also shown that political advertising does affect our reaction to candidates, our vision of our role in our political system, and our attitudes toward the system. Experimental research is continuing to explore new areas: Studies with promise include those looking at the context of how we experience the ads and the content surrounding those ads. Finally, analyses of audience reception and reaction have used methods ranging from survey research to more interpretive analyses to help us understand political advertising's role in our processing of campaign communication. Survey research will continue to refine and help us explore voters', viewers', and readers' reactions to political advertising, but we would also benefit from research that allows not only a breadth of information, as surveys do, but also a depth of information about the interpretive processes of the public or of the political actors using and exposed to political advertising.

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