

Seeing Spots

A Functional Analysis
of Presidential Television
Advertisements, 1952-1996

William L. Benoit

Prager Series in Political Communication

PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
London

Recent Titles in the Praeger Series in Political Communication

Robert E. Denton, Jr., *General Editor*

Communication Consultants in Political Campaigns: Ballot Box Warriors

Robert V. Friedenberg

Manipulation of the American Voter: Political Campaign Commercials

Karen S. Johnson-Cartee and Gary A. Copeland

Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press in the Post–Cold War World

Jim A. Kuypers

The 1996 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective

Robert E. Denton, Jr., editor

Reconciling Free Trade, Fair Trade, and Interdependence: The Rhetoric of Presidential Economic Leadership

Delia B. Conti

Politics and Politicians in American Film

Phillip L. Gianos

Electronic Whistle-Stops: The Impact of the Internet on American Politics

Gary W. Selnow

Newspapers of Record in a Digital Age: From Hot Type to Hot Link

Shannon E. Martin and Kathleen A. Hansen

Campaign '96: A Functional Analysis of Acclaiming, Attacking, and Defending

William L. Benoit, Joseph R. Blaney, and P. M. Pier

Political Communication in America, Third Edition

Robert E. Denton, Jr., editor

Reelpolitik: Political Ideologies in '30s and '40s Films

Beverly Merrill Kelley, with John J. Pitney, Jr., Craig R. Smith, and Herbert E. Gooch III

World Opinion and the Emerging International Order

Frank Louis Rusciano, with Roberta Fiske-Rusciano, Bosah Ebo, Sigfredo Hernandez, and John Crothers Pollock

Seeing Spots

A Functional Analysis of Presidential Television Advertisements, 1952–1996

William L. Benoit

Praeger Series in Political Communication

PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Benoit, William L.

Seeing spots : a functional analysis of presidential television advertisements, 1952–1996 / William L. Benoit.

p. cm.—(Praeger series in political communication, ISSN 1062–5623)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0–275–96645–3 (alk. paper)

1. Presidents—United States—Election. 2. Advertising, Political—United States. 3. Television in politics—United States. I. Title. II. Series.

JK524.B46 1999

324.7'3'097309045—dc21 98–56624

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Copyright © 1999 by William L. Benoit

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 98–56624

ISBN: 0–275–96645–3

ISSN: 1062–5623

First published in 1999

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48–1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Series Foreword | vii |
| <i>Robert E. Denton, Jr.</i> | |
| Preface | xi |
| I. | |
| Preliminaries | 1 |
| 1. Introduction: Presidential Television Spots | 3 |
| 2. The Functional Approach to Political Advertising | 15 |
| II. | |
| General Campaigns | 23 |
| 3. In the Beginning: 1952, 1956 | 25 |
| 4. The Democrats Ascend: 1960, 1964 | 35 |
| 5. Nixon’s Return: 1968, 1972 | 53 |
| 6. After Watergate: 1976, 1980 | 69 |
| 7. Republicans in Control: 1984, 1988 | 85 |
| 8. The End of the Millennium: 1992, 1996 | 103 |
| III. | |
| Other Campaigns | 123 |
| 9. Primary Campaigns: Who Shall Lead Us? | 125 |
| 10. Third-Party Candidates: Another Choice | 147 |

| | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----|
| IV. | | |
| Comparisons | | 157 |
| 11. | Contrasts | 159 |
| 12. | Conclusions | 203 |
| | Appendix: The Sample | 211 |
| | References | 221 |
| | Name Index | 231 |
| | Subject Index | 235 |

Series Foreword

Those of us from the discipline of communication studies have long believed that communication is prior to all other fields of inquiry. In several other forums I have argued that the essence of politics is “talk” or human interaction.¹ Such interaction may be formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal, public or private, but it is always persuasive, forcing us consciously or subconsciously to interpret, to evaluate, and to act. Communication is the vehicle for human action.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Aristotle recognized the natural kinship of politics and communication in his writings *Politics* and *Rhetoric*. In the former, he established that humans are “political beings [who] alone of the animals [are] furnished with the faculty of language.”² In the latter, he began his systematic analysis of discourse by proclaiming that “rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion.”³ Thus, it was recognized over twenty-three hundred years ago that politics and communication go hand in hand because they are essential parts of human nature.

In 1981, Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders proclaimed that political communication was an emerging field.⁴ Although its origin, as noted, dates back centuries, a “self-consciously cross-disciplinary” focus began in the late 1950s. Thousands of books and articles later, colleges and universities offer a variety of graduate and undergraduate coursework in the area in such diverse departments as communication, mass communication, journalism, political science, and sociology.⁵ In Nimmo and Sanders’s early assessment, the “key areas of inquiry” included rhetorical analysis, propaganda analysis, attitude change studies, voting studies, government and the news media, functional and systems analyses, tech-

nological changes, media technologies, campaign techniques, and research techniques.⁶ In a survey of the state of the field in 1983, the same authors and Lynda Kaid found additional, more specific areas of concerns such as the presidency, political polls, public opinion, debates, and advertising.⁷ Since the first study, they have also noted a shift away from the rather strict behavioral approach.

A decade later, Dan Nimmo and David Swanson argued that “political communication has developed some identity as a more or less distinct domain of scholarly work.”⁸ The scope and concerns of the area have further expanded to include critical theories and cultural studies. Although there is no precise definition, method, or disciplinary home of the area of inquiry, its primary domain comprises the role, processes, and effects of communication within the context of politics broadly defined.

In 1985, the editors of *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* noted that “more things are happening in the study, teaching, and practice of political communication than can be captured within the space limitations of the relatively few publications available.”⁹ In addition, they argued that the backgrounds of “those involved in the field [are] so varied and pluralist in outlook and approach, ... it [is] a mistake to adhere slavishly to any set format in shaping the content.”¹⁰ More recently, Swanson and Nimmo have called for “ways of overcoming the unhappy consequences of fragmentation within a framework that respects, encourages, and benefits from diverse scholarly commitments, agendas, and approaches.”¹¹

In agreement with these assessments of the area and with gentle encouragement, in 1988 Praeger established the series entitled “Praeger Series in Political Communication.” The series is open to all qualitative and quantitative methodologies as well as contemporary and historical studies. The key to characterizing the studies in the series is the focus on communication variables or activities within a political context or dimension. As of this writing, over 70 volumes have been published and numerous impressive works are forthcoming. Scholars from the disciplines of communication, history, journalism, political science, and sociology have participated in the series.

I am, without shame or modesty, a fan of the series. The joy of serving as its editor is in participating in the dialogue of the field of political communication and in reading the contributors’ works. I invite you to join me.

Robert E. Denton, Jr.

NOTES

- See Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Symbolic Dimensions of the American Presidency* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1982); Robert E. Denton, Jr., and 1. Gary Woodward, *Political Communication in America* (New York: Praeger, 1985; 2d ed., 1990); Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Dan Hahn, *Presidential Communication* (New York: Praeger, 1986); and Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Praeger, 1988).

2. Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 5.
3. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 22.
4. Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders, "Introduction: The Emergence of Political Communication as a Field," in *Handbook of Political Communication*, ed. Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981), pp. 11–36.
5. Ibid., p. 15.
6. Ibid., pp. 17–27.
7. Keith Sanders, Lynda Kaid, and Dan Nimmo, eds., *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1985), pp. 283–308.
8. Dan Nimmo and David Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication: Beyond the Voter Persuasion Paradigm," in *New Directions in Political Communication*, ed. David Swanson and Dan Nimmo (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1990), p. 8.
9. Sanders, Kaid, and Nimmo, *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984*, p. xiv.
10. Ibid.
11. Nimmo and Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication," p. 11.

This page intentionally left blank.

Preface

This book is a continuation of a research program that began when Bill Wells asked me to direct a research practicum (all Ph.D. students in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri are required to conduct research with a faculty mentor) on the 1992 presidential debates. That project extended my past work on persuasive defense (image repair) (Benoit, 1995a) by investigating persuasive attack and defense in those debates (Benoit & Wells, 1996). Subsequently, Joe Blaney, Penni Pier, and Bill Wells worked with me to extend this approach to include acclaiming (self-praise, a concept developed by P. J. Benoit, 1997) along with attacking and defending. We analyzed nominating convention acceptance addresses from 1960 to 1996 (Benoit, Wells, Pier, & Blaney, in press), keynote speeches from 1960 to 1996 (Benoit, Blaney & Pier, 1996), television spots from 1980 to 1996 (Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997), and the 1996 presidential campaign (Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998). I also analyzed the 1960 presidential debates with Allison Harthcock (Benoit & Harthcock, 1998). Bill Wells' dissertation is extending our work on presidential debates by analyzing acclaims, attacks, and defenses in the 1976, 1980, and 1984 debates (in progress). I wanted to extend our initial study of presidential television spots (Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997) in four ways, and that is the subject of this study.

First, I wanted to go back to the very beginning, studying every presidential campaign that used television spots. Other research (e.g., Kaid & Johnston, 1991; West, 1997) used samples that were limited (as I discuss in detail in the Appendix). Second, I wanted to include both primary and general spots in the same study. When one of the major party candidates is weak (e.g., presidents Ford in 1976, Carter in 1980, or Bush in

1992), the outcome of the primary contest may essentially determine who will become president. Third, I wanted to include some spots by third-party candidates. Although these candidates are occasionally mentioned in reviews of a given election campaign, there seems to be no study that focuses on third-party television spots. Finally, I wanted to increase the number of spots in our study of advertisements from 1980 to 1996. This book, therefore, is designed to investigate the use of acclaiming, attacking, and defending in presidential television spots from 1952 to 1996.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Central States Communication Association for the Federation Prize, which enabled me to purchase videotapes of hundreds of the spots I analyzed. The Loren Reid Fund, the Department of Communication, and the College of Arts and Science also helped purchase videotapes of spots. I also appreciate receipt of a University of Missouri Big Twelve Fellowship, which allowed me to spend two weeks at the University of Oklahoma Political Communication Archive, where I transcribed hundreds of additional spots. I want to thank Lynda Lee Kaid, Charles E. Rand, and Marie Mathos, at the Archive, for assistance and access to those spots. The George Bush Presidential Library sent me videotapes of Bush's television spots without charge. Other presidential libraries sold me tapes, and many spots were obtained courtesy of the Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Gerald R. Ford presidential libraries. I also want to thank Joseph R. Blaney, who graciously coded spots for this study. Unfortunately, I cannot offer thanks to the Nixon Presidential Library, which outsources videotape duplication, making their cost far too high for my limited resources. I especially regret not having more primary spots from President Nixon for this study.

I would also like to thank the co-authors with whom I've worked on other projects: K. Kerby Anderson, Julie Berman, Joe Blaney, Susan Brinson, Anne Czerwinski, Mike D'Agostine, Bruce Dorries, Shirley Drew, Paul Gullifor, Robert Hanczor, Allison Harthcock, Diane Hirson, Kim Kennedy, Andrew Klyukowski, Jim Lindsey, Dawn Nill, Dan Panici, Penni Pier, Bill Wells, and Jim Wilkie. I would also like to thank the students in my Political Campaign Communication course (Comm 373), who listened to me work out some of these ideas in class.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge the support of my family. Pam, my wife, developed the theory of acclaims on which I rely so heavily. My daughter, Jennifer, is a constant source of delight. I will miss her greatly when she goes to college in 1999. More importantly, Pam and Jennifer support me in tangible and intangible ways too numerous to mention.

Part I

Preliminaries

Page 2

This page intentionally left blank.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Presidential Television Spots

This chapter provides background on presidential television advertising. First, I will argue that political spots are an important form of campaign message that we need to understand. Second, I will review past research on presidential television advertising. Finally, I will describe my purpose in conducting this research.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESIDENTIAL TELEVISION SPOTS

Television spots are an extremely important component of modern presidential campaigns. Several arguments support this contention. First, candidates expend huge amounts of money on producing and broad-casting television advertising. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) observed that “The amounts of money spent on political advertising are staggering: Hundreds of millions of dollars are poured into what has become the main means of political communication in the United States” (p. 3). For example, Devlin (1993) reported that in 1992, Bush, Clinton, and Perot together devoted \$133 million (three-quarters of their budgets) to television spots. In 1996, Dole, Clinton, and Perot lavished even more money, about \$200 million, on television advertising (Devlin, 1997). The enormous amount of money candidates devote to television spots is a clear indication of the significance of this kind of political message form. It is also an indication of how many presidential television commercials are broadcast, with many advertisements being shown over and over. A vast audience is purchased with this money, and it is exposed repeatedly to these campaign messages. As Jamieson (1996) recognizes, “The spot

ad is the most used and most viewed of all available forms of advertising” (p. 517).

A second reason that political advertising merits scholarly attention is the fact that voters obtain substantial amounts of information on the candidates and their policy positions from them. For example, West (1993) analyzed data from eighteen campaigns, concluding that political advertisements affected candidates’ images, likability, electability, and assessment of policy positions. In fact, empirical research on both the 1972 (Patterson & McClure, 1976) and the 1984 (Kern, 1989) campaigns concluded that “by a ratio of 4 to 1, Americans received the majority of their information about candidate positions on the issues from ads rather than the news” (Kern, 1989, p. 47). This latter finding, that the electorate obtains more information about the issues in campaigns from commercials than from the news, may seem surprising. However, a closer look at the news media can explain why this is the case.

Three different factors are at work here. One reason that voters obtain more information from presidential spots than news is simply that campaign news is only one story topic among many. The nightly network news enjoys a 30-minute time slot, but after we subtract commercials and stories on non-campaign topics, relatively little time remains for campaign news. Furthermore, the number of campaign stories covered in the news decreased 20% from 1968 to 1988 (Steele & Barnhurst, 1996). Exacerbating these trends is the fact that the average length of a political news story decreased by about 20% (Hallin, 1992). Thus, the nightly news devotes precious little time to providing coverage of presidential campaigns.

Second, when the campaign does make the news, this coverage of presidential campaigns has a tendency to focus on the “horse race” elements of the presidential campaign. Patterson (1980) explained that “In its coverage of a presidential campaign, the press concentrates on the strategic game played by the candidates in their pursuit of the presidency, thereby de-emphasizing the questions of national policy and leadership” (p. 21). News stories are likely to report on such questions as: Who is ahead in the polls? Who are the candidates’ campaign managers? What campaign strategies are in play for each candidate? What is the status of fund-raising efforts? Which states are being actively contested by the candidates? Who will be included in presidential debates? The answers to these questions are clearly news, but they don’t really provide advice to the electorate about who would make a better president. In fact, Patterson’s (1980) investigation of the 1976 campaign concluded that “The election’s substance ... received only half as much coverage as was accorded the game” (p. 24). Thus, “horse race” coverage of the presidential campaign overwhelms coverage of the substance of the campaign.

Finally, when the news media do cover the issues in a campaign, in recent years they have devoted less and less coverage to the candidates themselves. The news is increasingly likely to offer short sound bites from candidates instead of extended quotations that provide thoughtful consideration of the issues in the campaign. Hallin (1992) reported that the average quotation from presidential candidates included in the news had dropped from 43 seconds in 1968 to a mere nine seconds in 1988. While the length of statements from journalists has also diminished, they spoke in campaign stories almost twice as often in 1988 as in 1968: “Journalists inserted their voices more often, by an increment of .17 times per report per year” (Steele & Barnhurst, 1996, p. 191). Thus, the stories tend to be fewer in number and shorter in length, they spend far less time quoting the candidates, and they feature the opinions and commentary of journalists (instead of candidates) more frequently. It is easy to understand why the electorate obtains more information about the issues in the presidential campaign from televised spots than from the news.

A third reason that campaign spots deserve scholarly attention is that considerable research conducted on the effects of televised political spots shows that such ads can affect viewers. Mulder (1979) found that advertising in a Chicago mayoral campaign correlated positively with attitudes toward the candidates. Studies have established a positive relationship between election outcomes and advertising expenditures (Joslyn, 1981; Palda, 1973). Wanat (1974) found that, for candidates who won elections, broadcast expenditures correlated highly (.56) with voting outcomes. McClure and Patterson (1974) reported that in the 1972 presidential campaign, “Exposure to political advertising was consistently related to voter belief change” (p. 16; see also Atkin & Heald, 1976). Therefore, empirical research documents the fact that political campaign advertising can influence voters and voting (studies have also examined the effects of political advertising on trust, involvement, and participation: Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Martinez & Delegal, 1990).

Furthermore, experimental research employing advertisements actually used by candidates (Atkin, 1977; Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Christ, Thorson, & Caywood, 1994; Faber & Storey, 1984; Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993; Garramone, 1984, 1985; Garramone & Smith, 1984; Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Hitchon & Chang, 1995; D. D. Johnston, 1989; Just, Crigler, & Wallach, 1990; Kaid, 1997; Kaid & Boydston, 1987; Kaid, Leland, & Whitney, 1992; Kaid & Sanders, 1978; Lang, 1991; McClure & Patterson, 1974; Merritt, 1984; Newhagen & Reeves, 1991) as well as commercials developed by researchers (Becker & Doolittle, 1975; Cundy, 1986; Donohue, 1973; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Hill, 1989; Meadow & Sigelman, 1982; Roddy & Garramone, 1988; Rudd, 1989; Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991) demonstrate that televised political

advertisements have a variety of effects (recall, attitudes toward candidates, voting intention) on viewers. Therefore, televised political spots are an important form of messages in political campaigns, messages that merit scholarly attention.

Of course, it is true that other factors—like political party affiliation, the state of the economy (and other domestic affairs), or significant foreign policy events—can influence voting intention. I would not dispute, for example, the contention that political advertising rarely alters the voting intentions of committed partisans. However, the role political party affiliation plays in elections does not mean campaigns and the messages in those campaigns (like television spots) are unimportant.

First, party affiliation cannot determine (or explain) the outcome of *primary campaigns*, because the candidates who contend with one another for their party's nomination are by definition members of the same party. In 1996, for instance, party affiliation could not help voters choose between Lamar Alexander, Pat Buchanan, Bob Dole, Steve Forbes, and Phil Gramm, because they are all Republicans. Second, the growth in the number of independent voters means that neither political party can win the *general campaign* without persuading other, non-party members to vote for their candidate. In fact, the number of independent voters has increased from 22.6% in 1952 to 38.0% in 1992 (Weisberg & Kimball, 1993). Furthermore, Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1979) observed that voting defections have increased over time: "Even among those who have a partisan identity, the proportion voting for the opposition party has grown" (p. 164). Thus, party affiliation is a significant impact on the voting behavior of many citizens, but it cannot account for the behavior of all voters and it does not determine (alone) the outcome of elections. Indeed, the simple fact that we have had five Republicans (Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush) and four Democrats (Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Clinton) in the White House since 1952 is good evidence that political party does not determine election outcomes. Finally, Iyengar and Kinder's (1988) research on agenda-setting indicates that on some issues (although not all) the *actual economic figures* had little or no impact on the perceived importance of an issue; but *presidential speeches* did have a substantial impact on viewers' attitudes. This study did not focus on campaigns or on television spots, but it does demonstrate that politicians can influence people's attitudes on the issues addressed in their messages (and that what they *say* in their messages can have more impact on attitudes than the *actual economic figures* themselves).

Furthermore, there are other important forms of campaign messages in addition to television advertisements. Presidential debates, for example, typically attract relatively vast audiences (see Benoit & Wells, 1996), and provide viewers with an hour or more of the candidates side-by-

side, answering (more or less) the same questions. However, this study is limited to television advertisements.

For these reasons, television spots are an extremely important component of the modern presidential campaign and merit scholarly attention. This work is designed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the functions of presidential TV spots. It investigates spots from the first presidential campaign to use television spots—the 1952 contest between Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson—through the most recent battle between Bill Clinton and Robert Dole. These are analyzed into spots from Republicans and Democrats, incumbents and challengers, and winners and losers. This study also contrasts general campaign spots with commercials from primary contests. Primary spots are analyzed by party as well as by winners (the nominees) and losers and primary ads are compared with general spots. This study also examines advertisements from several third-party candidates. These spots are compared with general campaign spots from the two major political parties. No study has ever included all three kinds of spots (the Appendix provides more detail on the sample).

This study applies the functional perspective on political campaigns, analyzing the utterances in spots into acclaims (self-praise or positive remarks), attacks (negative remarks), and defenses (see Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997; or Benoit, Wells, Pier, & Blaney, in press). Chapter 2 elaborates this functional approach. The candidates' statements are divided into those that address policy and those that concern character. Policy comments are further divided into those that address past deeds, future plans, and general goals, while character remarks are divided into personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals. Defenses are divided into the strategies for image repair (Benoit, 1995a, 1997b). Together, these analyses will provide the most comprehensive analysis of presidential television advertisements available.

PAST RESEARCH ON PRESIDENTIAL TELEVISION SPOTS

A great deal of research has been conducted on televised spots (see, e.g., Aden, 1989; Kaid, Nimmo, & Sanders, 1986; Loudon, 1989). For a history of the spot, see Devlin (1977, 1982, 1987b, 1989, 1993, 1997), Diamond and Bates (1992), or Jamieson (1996); for a discussion of negative advertisements in particular, see James and Hensel (1991) or Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1993). There are also a number of studies of non-presidential spots (Johnston & White, 1994; Latimer, 1984, 1989; Nowlan & Moutray, 1984; Payne & Baukus, 1988; Prisuta, 1972; Rose & Fuchs,

1968; Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1995; Tucker, 1959; or Weaver-Lariscy & Tinkham, 1987). There have also been a number of studies that compare political advertising in the United States with spots from other countries (Foote, 1991; Griffin & Kagan, 1996; Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 1995; Holtz-Bacha, Kaid, & Johnston, 1994; A. Johnston, 1991; Kaid, 1991; or Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995a, 1995b). A few studies discuss agenda-setting and political advertising (Ghorpade, 1986; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Schleuder, McCombs, & Wanta, 1991). Several studies adopt more of a rhetorically oriented approach to political advertising (Cronkhite, Liska, & Schrader, 1991; Descutner, Burnier, Mickunas, & Letteri, 1991; Gronbeck, 1992; Jamieson, 1989; Larson, 1982; Shyles, 1991; or Smith & Johnston, 1991). This next section reviews the literature on the two primary dimensions of televised political spots: negative (attack) versus positive (acclaim) ads and image versus issue ads.

Here, I focus on research designed to analyze the nature of political television commercials (as opposed to experimental studies of the effects of political spots). Most studies tend to discuss two dimensions: negative versus positive spots, and issue versus image ads.

Functions: Positive versus Negative Ads

Kaid and Davidson's (1986) analysis of 1982 Senate ads found that incumbents used more positive (90%) than negative ads (10%); challengers used a more balanced approach (positive: 54%; negative: 46%). Benoit, Pier, and Blaney (1997), using the same approach employed in this study, found that 50% of the utterances in presidential television spots from 1980 to 1996 were attacks (negative), 49% were acclaims (positive), and 1% were defenses. They reported that Republicans (55%) and challengers (54%) used more attacks, while Democrats (45%) and incumbents (53%) used more acclaims. West (1997) studied 379 spots from 1952 to 1996, reporting that 46% of the ads were positive and that Democratic ads were more positive than Republican ones. Kaid and Johnston (1991) found that 71% of the ads from 1960 to 1988 were positive and 29% negative. However, the number of negative ads varied over time: negative spots spiked at 40% in 1964, dropped to 22–28% in the 1970s, and increased to 35–37% in the 1980s. Kaid and Johnston (1991) did not find that challengers use more negative ads than incumbents, or that Republicans use significantly more negative ads than Democrats. See also Geer (1998).

Devlin (1989) reported that in 1988 Bush produced 37 ads, 14 of which were negative (38%), while Dukakis had 47 ads, 23 of which were negative (49%). In 1992, 63% of Clinton's 30 ads were negative, while 56% of Bush's 24 ads were negative (Devlin, 1993). Kaid (1994) reported that 17% of the ads in the 1992 primary were negative. In the general election

Bush employed 44% positive and 56% negative ads; Clinton 31% positive and 69% negative, and Perot had only positive ads. These studies of 1992 suggest that Clinton, the challenger, used more negative ads than Bush, but still more than half of both Bush's and Clinton's ads were negative. In 1996, Clinton and Dole both produced about 40 spots for the general campaign. About 10% of Clinton's spots were negative, and about 40% were comparative (Devlin, 1997). Two-thirds of Dole's spots were negative (and two spots were comparative). Thus, with few exceptions (e.g., Perot), political ads take both positive and negative approaches.

Topics: Policy versus Character Ads

Most research on televised political spots has reported a heavier emphasis on issues than on image. Patterson and McClure (1976) found that 42% of the television commercials in 1972 focused on issues, and another 28% included issue information. Hofstetter and Zukin (1979) reported that 85% of the ads by Nixon and McGovern addressed issues. Joslyn (1980) found that while 77% of the ads discussed issues, only 47% focused on images. Kern's study of 1984 ads indicated that "issues were mentioned in 84 percent of such [30-second] spots" (1989, p. 51). Benoit, Pier, and Blaney (1997) found that 67% of the utterances in spots from 1980 to 1996 concerned policy, while 33% addressed character. West (1997), studying 379 spots from 1952 to 1996, reported that 61% mentioned issues.

The most extensive of this type of study was conducted by Kaid and Johnston (1991), who examined 830 television spots from 1960 to 1988. They reported that 67% of the positive ads and 79% of the negative ads provide issue information, and that 65% of the positive spots and 64% of the negative spots include image information. In the 1992 campaign, Kaid (1994) found that 59% of primary television ads addressed image, 24% issues, and 17% were negative ads. In the general election, Bush's ads were divided evenly between issue and image; Clinton used two-thirds issue and one-third image, while Perot used about 60% issue and 40% image.

Three studies provide more specifics on issues and image in political advertising. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989) generated a list of topics found in negative political ads, grouped them into ten categories, and asked respondents to rate them as fair or unfair. The topics clustered into two groups, labeled "Political Issues" (political record, stands on issues, criminal record, and voting record) and "Personal Characteristics" (personal life, marriage, family, religion, medical history, and sex life). At least 83% rated each political issue as a fair topic for an attack; no more than 36% rated any of the personal characteristics as an acceptable topic for political attack. This reveals that there was general,

albeit not universal, agreement on which topics are fair for an attack. It also suggests that respondents did not condemn political attacks wholesale, but believed that attacks on some topics were more suitable than others. Joslyn's (1986) study of 506 political ads from 1960 to 1984 reported that 37% of the ads reveal future policy plans, 60% evaluate past governmental policy, 57% mention candidate qualities (compassion, empathy, integrity, strength, activity, and knowledge). Shyles (1986) analyzed 140 political ads from 1980. He divided his results into issue and image, reporting mentions of these topics: Carter's record, domestic, economy, energy, federalism, foreign policy, government management, national security, and national well-being (issue); altruism, competence, expertise, honesty, leadership, personal, strength, and other qualities (image). It is clear that political advertising addresses both issues and images (see also Benze & Declercq, 1985).

Of course these two approaches to political ads are not as discrete as one might assume. Benoit and Wells (1996), in their analysis of the 1992 presidential debates, argue that a candidate's stance on issues shapes that candidate's image, and that a candidate's image probably influences perceptions about his or her issue stances. This relationship between issues and image should hold true in advertising as well. Furthermore, as Devlin (1977) noted in his analysis of advertising in the 1976 presidential campaign, Carter's campaign "used issues or themes as a vehicle for Carter to achieve an image as a legitimate candidate" (p. 244; see also Rudd, 1986; Kern, 1989). Thus, issues and image are interrelated concepts.

Finally, although the distinction between "issues" and "image" is very well established in the literature, I prefer an alternate terminology. Confusion can arise because the term "issue" has two meanings. Generally, it refers to points or topics of conflict in a discussion or conflict. In the context of political discourse, "issue" also is used as a synonym for policy considerations. However, the candidates' character, or qualifications for office (e.g., their experience, their integrity) are certainly legitimate grounds for discussion and dispute during a campaign (whether aspects of a candidate's private life are acceptable topics is another question). This means that "image" is an "issue"—not an issue in the second sense of a policy disagreement, but in the first sense as a point of dissention. To try to avoid this possible confusion, I propose an alternative terminology, contrasting *policy* stands with the *character* of the candidates.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

It is clear that these scholars have provided important insights into the nature of political advertising. The purpose of this study is to extend this important work in several ways. First, I offer a theoretical framework

for understanding the fundamental functions of political advertising—acclaiming, attacking, and defending—articulated in the next section.

Second, unlike many of these studies, I analyze presidential spots on both dimensions used in the literature: functions (acclaim, attack, defend) and topic (policy, character). Other research does not always do so. For example, Kaid (1994) divided 1992 primary ads into image ads, issue ads, and negative ads, a category system that implies that image and issue ads were distinct from negative spots. Surely negative ads can address issues and image, but this classification system does not make that point clear.

Third, most research relies on binary classification of television spots, coding the entire advertisement as enacting *either* one category *or* another (either positive or negative; either policy or character). In contrast, my procedure identifies each of the appeals (themes) in a given spot. To illustrate the nature of this problem, consider the following Clinton spot from 1996:

Ten million new jobs. Family income up \$1,600 (since 1993). President Clinton cut the deficit 60%. Signed welfare reform—requiring work, time limits. Taxes cut for 15 million families. Balancing the budget. America's moving forward with an economic plan that works. Bob Dole: \$900 billion in higher taxes. Republicans call him tax collector for the welfare state. His risky tax scheme would raise taxes on nine million families. Bob Dole. Wrong in the past. Wrong for our future.

The italicized portion of this ad is positive, praising Bill Clinton's accomplishments and suggesting future benefits if he is re-elected. The underlined portion, however, attacks Bob Dole's past deeds and his proposed tax cut. A coding system that classifies this spot as *either* positive *or* negative clearly ignores or misclassifies half of this message. Incidentally, some research acknowledges this limitation by adding a third category, comparative ads. However, this move doesn't really resolve this problem, because ads exist on a continuum from all positive to completely negative. Only if all of the ads that contained both negative and positive appeals had equal amounts of each would addition of a third category, "comparative," solve this problem. Coding each theme in a spot as positive or negative (and as concerning policy or character) will provide a more accurate description of the content of TV spots.

Furthermore, some research (especially on policy and character, or issue and image) tends to count the number of advertisements that "mention" issues. However, this gives us no idea of how much time was devoted to issues in an ad. Was the entire spot devoted to issues, or was an issue simply mentioned in passing? More information would be gleaned from counting the number of policy (issue) and character (image) utterances that were contained in a spot.

Fourth, although positive and negative ads may well predominate, some political television spots are defenses, or explicit responses to prior attacks from opponents (Trent & Friedenber, 1995, acknowledge that such spots exist, but do not study them). Benoit, Pier, and Blaney (1997) found defenses in the presidential spots they analyzed. While defenses do not seem to be nearly as common in television spots as acclaims and attacks, they are an option in campaign discourse that should not be ignored by critics and analysts.

Fifth, the sample of spots gathered for this study includes multiple commercials from both major party candidates in every presidential campaign that employed television spots, from 1952 to 1996. This will permit an unparalleled description of presidential television spots. The Appendix contrasts the sample in this study with the samples used by the other two most extensive studies of television spots: Kaid and Johnston (1991), who studied virtually the same number of spots (albeit fewer campaigns), and West (1997), who studied as many campaigns (but far fewer spots). It also contrasts my sample of primary spots with those used by Kaid and Ballotti (1991) and West (1997).

Finally, I propose to study three different kinds of campaigns. Most of this investigation concerns general campaign television spots from candidates representing the two major political parties. However, I will devote a chapter each to primary spots and third-party spots. Then I will compare each with general spots from Republicans and Democrats.

In this study I will address several topics. Chapters 3–8 will present the results of my analysis of general election campaign spots, considered two campaigns at a time (I discuss two campaigns in each chapter as a compromise: I did not want to devote a chapter to each of the twelve campaigns, but I also didn't want to lump together all general spots in a single chapter). In these chapters I begin with a little background about the situation, the candidates, and their spots. I reproduce the transcripts of several spots from these campaigns to try to give a flavor for each contest. In each of these chapters I take up four topics. First, I describe the functions of presidential television spots (acclaims, attacks, defenses). Second, I consider these spots' treatment of policy and character topics. Third, I will discuss the subdivisions of policy (past deeds, future plans, general goals) and of character (personal qualities, leadership ability, ideals) as delineated in Chapter 2. Fourth, I analyze statements made by the candidate (the candidate sponsoring the ad) with statements made by others (e.g., "ordinary people," celebrity endorsers, anonymous announcers) to see who is the source of the utterances in each spot. Then I offer two chapters on other kinds of advertisements—spots from primaries and from third-party candidates—discussing the same basic ideas.

This analysis is followed by a comparative chapter. Chapter 11 dis-

cusses trends in general television spots, compares primary with general campaigns, major party (Republican and Democratic) spots with ads from third-party candidates, incumbents versus challengers, commercials by Republicans and those from Democrats, the advertisements of winners and losers, and, finally, the source of utterances in spots. Chapter 12 offers a discussion of implications and conclusions derived from this study. As mentioned earlier, the Appendix describes my sample in some detail.