ABSTRACT
         In a presidential election campaign, any dimension of
an image is important if it motivates the voters to favor or disfavor
a candidate. Therefore, to study what motivates electoral behavior is
one way to study the persuasion of image building in presidential
campaigns. In this paper some of the research in presidential
election campaigns is described, and some of the current thinking
about electoral behavior is synthesized. The two aspects of
presidential campaigns most closely analyzed are the effect of
partisan loyalty and the influence of television on the behavior
patterns of voters. Some of the questions raised and some of the
areas for further research are described in the paper's conclusion.
(RB)

"The Persuasion of Image Building and Presidential Campaigns"

by

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The Persuasion of Image Building and Presidential

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INTRODUCTION

Image building denotes a persuasive process whereby political candidates attempt to convince the electorate to vote for them. While it may connote television advertising which emphasizes a candidate's virtues (or conjures them out of thin air), there is no clear, accepted definition of image building in the literature. It is safe to say that "image" consists of many factors revelant to the voter's perception of a candidate. Kjeldahl and his associates did a factor analysis of presidential candidate images and determined that the two main dimensions ~~that the two main dimensions~~ of an image are "genuineness" and "leader-ship," (Kjeldahl, et. al., 1971, p. 129), but this hardly clarifies the meaning of the term in a campaign. Some authors suggest that image is based upon personality attributes, previous public record, group affilia-tions, and stance on the issues (Hahn & Gonchar, 1972; Kelley; 1969). Presumably, an important aspect of a candidate's image is his party affiliation, as Governor George Wallace believes.

In a presidential election campaign, any dimension of an image is important if it motivates the voters to favor or disfavor a candidate. Therefore, to study what motivates electoral behavior is one way to study the persuasion of image building in presidential campaigns.

What motivates voters to vote for one candidate for President instead of another? A definitive answer to this question is not possible, since the electoral process is so complex. The scope of the question, however, has not discouraged students of persuasion from trying to find out. There has been no shortage of books and articles dealing with the topic. Lynda Kaid's 1974 bibliography of entries relevant to the communi-cation process as it operates in a political campaign or similar context in the United States from 1950 through 1972 lists 1539 citations. At the present time, the Speech Communication Association is sponsoring a coordinated study of the 1976 presidential campaign which will involve dozens of scholars representing both the historical-critical and the behavioral approaches to research.

While each election year may be considered unique in many of the factors which are related to voting decisions (incumbency, personal attributes, socio-economic and political conditions during the period of the campaign, strategies and tactics used by the candidates, even the weather on Election Day), scholarly attention seems to have been concen-trated on a relatively small number of such factors, expecially the role of partisanship. Most recently, interest has also emerged in analyzing the influence of the mass communications media in shaping voter percep-tions of the candidates.

In this paper, some of the research in presidential election campaigns will be described, and hopefully some of the current thinking about electoral behavior will be synthesized. At the conclusion of this essay, some possible areas for further research will be suggested.

PARTISAN LOYALTY

The conventional wisdom holds that voting behavior may be explained for the most part by party preference. The notion that knowledge of partisan alignments is highly predictive of how the votes will be cast is firmly grounded in the standard voting studies by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Campbell. (The People's Choice, 1944; Voting, 1954; The American Voter, 1960.)

Some second thoughts were generated by Key's posthumously published The Responsible Electorate (1966), whose stated thesis was that "Voters are not fools," since they tend to cast their ballots in accordance with how well the candidates conform with their feelings towards the issues. Thus a challenge was issued to the finding of the 1950's that "the voter's pervasive character was his partisan commitment." That statement may still be true of some voters; it is still a persuasive statement to some contemporary political scientists such as Richard Merelman, who stated in 1970, "Most important, partisan identification is the most fully explanatory of all possible influences on the vote."

Another dissenting view was published in 1972 which had the effect of exploding the old axiomatic belief in the primacy of party. DeVries and Tarrance's The Ticket-Splitter states:

> But in the survey studies that we have conducted or reviewed
> over the last several elections, the dominance of party identi-
> fication has evaporated. Today when people are asked how they
> make up their minds about a candidate, they discuss his general
> ability, his personality, his ability to handle the job, his
> stand on the issues, and so on. (pp. 73-74.)

DeVries and Terrance found that in the 1968 presidential election, 45% of self-designated Republicans actually voted a split ticket, as did 47% of self-designated Democrats; but 25% of the self-designated "independents" actually voted a straight party ticket! (p. 51) Prior to the publication of The Ticket-Splitter, the so-called "independent" was seen in the same terms originally used in the standard works of the 1950's: They were thought to be confused, disinterested, indifferent, uninformed, uncommitted, rootless, and politically inactive. (For example, Crespi and Mendelsohn's excellent work, Polls, Television, and the New Politics, 1970, pp. 248-9, and Murray Edelman's essay in Barber's Choosing the President, 1974, hew to this line.) On the other hand, DeVries and Tarrence found that the behavioral ticket-splitter is younger, more suburban, better informed, and more active politically than the typical middle-class voter. (DeVries and Tarrance pp. 61, 67.) This assessment is gaining acceptance among other scholars, such as Erikson and Luttbeg of Florida State University (American Public Opinion, 1973, p. 220).

DeVries and Tarrance attack the methodology of the trailblazing research of the 1950's for relying too heavily upon the self-designation of party identification, and they point to possible reinterpretations of the original data. However, their conclusions are mainly based upon their own data collections in recent election campaigns. They suggest that perhaps <u>voting behavior</u> has <u>actually changed since the 1950's</u>. After all, the original work was done with data collected during the 1940's and '50's (the Elmira and Erie studies), before the introduction of television as an important medium of mass communication. Today's young voters, they say, "are oriented to audio-visual media, principally television, because they are the first generation to grow up in the environment of this media. They view television as a more authoritative news source than print media. They learn most about politics from television." (p. 117)

Therefore, party alignment is far from an automatic predictor of voting behavior in contemporary presidential elections, and the suggestion of media influence upon voting behavior has been offered as an alternative explanation.

TELEVISION IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

Today, 97.1 percent of American homes have television, and viewing time in the average home averages over six hours a day. Television is a direct, major part of all of our lives which we take for granted, a major part of the American environment, including election years.

Presidential candidates have used television as a means of persuasion since 1952. Some of the most memorable campaign events have been television events: Nixon's "Checkers" speech, the Nixon-Kennedy debates, the daisy-petal countdown commercial against Goldwater, and McGovern's 2:00 a.m. acceptance speech, to mention but a few. Despite the relatively recent introduction of television into the techniques of presidential campaigning, for many of us it is as much a part of our model of a campaign as a textbook is a part of our teaching scheme.

As students of persuasion in image building in presidential campaigns, we have been able to describe some of the changes which television has wrought, but we have not been able to establish as clear and systematic theories of television usage as we would like. For example, we have catalogued the ways the candidates have allocated their media time. We know that they used longer campaign speeches on camera when television first became available as a novelty, but they have used other formats since then, including debates, slice-of-life documentaries, telethons, silly pseudo-events for the evening news, and, of course, the ubiquitous spot advertisements. Indeed, there is fair agreement among the scholars on some of the changes in presidential campaigns which may be attributable to the impact of television: more people attend to political campaigns, the nomination procedure has been altered and also candidates are now chosen for their media potential, and campaign costs have been greatly

inflated. The electronic media have added drama and conflict, the
actual sight and sound of the candidate, and breathless commentary
by the political reporter, right in 97.1 percent of America's living
rooms. (Mendelsohn and Crespi, 1970, pp. 297-298; Erikson and Luttbeg,
1974, p. 150; Agranoff, 1972, pp. 257-258.)

What we do not yet know about television in political campaigning
is how it influences voter behavior. Television has grown too much, too
fast, for our theories to be able to assimilate it into our models of
electoral influence. We could grasp Truman's whistlestop campaign, but
we do not comprehend the modern selling of the president.

Prior to the 1960 Great Debates, the conventional wisdom held that
the media has little direct effect upon voting behavior. However, most
scholars agreed that public attitudes were reinforced by the media.
Viewers used the psychological processes of selective exposure, attention,
and recall in their reception of presidential television campaigning.
(Klapper, 1960.) This axiomatic approach seemed to hold firm in the
face of the"hypodermic" theory of campaign advertising suggested by
McGinniss' The Selling of the President 1968. How can voting behavior
be attributed to a candidate's spot advertising when the air waves are
saturated during a campaign by spot advertisements for every candidate
for every office from the city courthouse to the White House? In fact,
when both candidates for president use the professional advertising
techniques, including television ads, then no conclusion can be drawn
that the electoral outcome resulted from them.

Here again, however, recent research has added a further myth-
shattering note to the conventional wisdom. DeVries and Tarrance,
the same two challengers, found that for the ticket-splitter (who is,
as we recall, more aware, informed, and politically active than the
typical middle class voter), television is the most influential medium
of political influence and information. A critical distinction must
be made: of all sources of information, television news and documentaries
carry the greatest influence, but television advertising carries very
little influence (less than either brochures or newspaper ads, for
example) for these crucial voters. (DeVries and Tarrance, 1972, p. 78.)

In keeping with the Ticket-Splitter's observation that intelligent,
active voters are subject to media influence in a campaign, other
researchers have reported findings equally heretical to the old faiths.
A survey by David Swanson reported that voters seem to attend to
television communications by and about both party's candidates without
much evidence of selectivity. (Swanson, 1973, p. 139.) And Sidney
Kraus, in his concise and cogent summary of the major research in this
area during the past two decades, concluded, "Today we have empirical
evidence that 'massive and desirable changes in opinions' can occur as
a result of media advertancy to the political process." (Kraus, 1974,
p. 433.)

If there is a stronger relationship between mass media and the electorate than we formerly believed, we now have a basis for explaining some of the phenomena of current campaigning. For example, the decline of party primacy in voting decisions correlates with the increasing use of television over the past couple of decades. Several researchers have drawn the connection between these two trends, concluding that the mass communications media have supplanted the political parties as the principal means of mediation between the candidates and the voters. (Mendelsohn and Crespi, 1970, pp. 310-311; Agranoff, 1972, pp. 5-18; Dreyer, 1971-1972, p. 553.)

Another important note is that television seems to enhance the credibility of the incumbent President through free access to it throughout his administration. In terms of image, the incumbent shapes the public's perception of what a President is supposed to look like and how he is supposed to act, each time he is seen on the evening news and in his occasional news conferences. Consequently, when election time nears, he fits the public image of the presidency better than any challenger. It is a reasonable assumption that television furnishes an advantage to the incumbent. Who would have imagined, even one year ago, that Gerald Ford would be a viable presential candidate in 1976? Ford was not even mentioned in White's _Making of the President 1972_. Now, thanks to his round of television speeches as the incumbent, along with regular news coverage, he stands high in the public opinion polls. (David S. Broder has written perceptively about the advantages of the incumbent in several sources; _The Party's Over_, p. 239, is one.)

Some progress has also been made toward formulating theories of how television operates to influence voter behavior, even though it remains true that no theory explains it clearly enough to make predictions as yet. (1)Dan Nimmo, drawing upon Stephenson's "play theory," suggests that the viewing public sees a political campaign on television as an acted-out fantasy, like a sports competition, with the candidates cast in the roles of heroes and villians, favorites and underdogs. (Nimmo, 1970)(2) Tony Schwartz has proposed a theory of attitudinal resonance, drawn from McLuhan, which suggests that our media usage stems from the principle that many of our life experiences are stored in the human memory _as received_, rather than as verbal or symbolic translations of those experiences. In American culture particularly, many of our life experiences are literally media experiences in this age of television. As a consequence, television images evoke viewers' memories and attitudes by providing auditory and visual cues which tap them directly and "resonate" with them. In regard to political television, Schwartz said, "The real question in political advertising is how to surround the voter with the proper auditory and visual stimuli to evoke the reaction you want for him, i. e., his voting for a specific candidate." (Schwartz, 1974, pp. 24-25, 92-93.)

Neither of these theories is precise enough to generate testable hypotheses for the research laboratory, although both suggest lines of

analysis which might lead to refinements.

STRATEGIES FOR PERSUADING THE VOTERS

Agranoff has summarized the present task-orientation of campaign planners:

> The specific motivational forces which strategists select and the campaign processes they choose are necessarily a mixture. It is always a matter of the proper mix between candidate, issue, and party factors, and reinforcement, conversion, or activation of latency. (Agranoff, 1972, p. 25.)

This complexity surely exists in presidential campaigning, as the preceding analysis has shown. Agranoff also showed how campaign strategies have changed due to the changing roles of parties and media:

> Foremost in media campaigning is the candidate image, in which the campaign organization stresses human qualities of the candidate and his competence for the job. Electronic media have become the vehicle for candidates to appeal to electorates as party organizations once did. Party organizations were better suited to utilize their manpower or mobilize a pre-existing sentiment, party orientation. Electronic media are better suited to use advertising to manufacture sentiment, candidate and issue orientation. (Agranoff, 1972, pp. 18-19.)

CONCLUSION

This analysis of political campaign persuasion has raised numerous questions for academic analysis:

1. How can we identify, isolate and manipulate the variables involved in a candidates's image?

2. How do partisan factors influence a candidate's media uaage?

3. What are the auditory and visual cues which actually comprise a candidate's image on television? (Suggest a content analysis.)

4. What role does the substantive issue position (such as the pocketbook issue, foreign policy, etc.) play in a candidate's image? (Kitchens and Powell, 1975, have suggested discriminant analysis as a method for correlating voter opinions and candidate positions to predict voting behavior.)

5. Have Watergate and its aftermath traumatized the electorate to such an extent as to confound our theories and predictions about future campaigns?

6. What are the ethical ramifications of political image-building upon the candidates, the voters, and the country?

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