

Human Communication. A Publication of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association. Vol. 12,
No. 1, pp.91 - 117.

Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

William L. Benoit
University of Missouri
Department of Communication
115 Switzler Hall
Columbia, MO 65211-2310
benoits@missouri.edu

David Airne
University of Louisiana, Monroe
Department of Communication
112 Stubbs Hall
700 University Avenue
Monroe, LA 71209
airne@ulm.edu

Abstract

Most research on political advertising focuses on television spots aired in the race for the presidency. However, far more political commercials are broadcast in races for other offices. This study applies the Functional Theory of political campaign discourse to 1032 non-presidential 2004 broadcast campaign advertisements for 188 candidates in 41 states: 209 gubernatorial spots, 496 U.S. senate spots, and 327 U.S. house spots. We investigated the functions (acclaims, attacks, and defenses) and topics (policy, character) for the entire sample. Then we considered the relationship of the functions and topics with other variables: incumbency (incumbent, challenger, open-seat), political party affiliation (Democrat, Republican), campaign phase (primary, general), medium (television, radio), sponsor (candidate, party, other), office (governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House), and outcome (winners, losers).

Key Words: gubernatorial, senate, house, tv, radio, spots, functions, topics, campaign phase, incumbency, party, sponsor

Consultants and candidates alike believe that political advertising is a vital element component of successful campaigns (Jenkins, 1997; Sinclair, 1995). A meta-analysis (Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2007) found that televised political advertising increased issue knowledge, influenced perceptions of the candidates' character, altered attitudes, affected candidate preference; influenced agenda-setting, and altered vote likelihood (turnout). The Wisconsin Advertising Project reported that "gubernatorial candidates have spent \$225 million for television ads" by September of 2002 (Terrien, 2002). TNS Media Intelligence (2004) reported that congressional ad spending in 2004 was \$379.4 million on television and \$10.5 million on local radio. The huge amount of money spent on gubernatorial and congressional races is not wasted: Research confirms that television spots influence election outcomes at all levels (Joslyn, 1981; Wanat, 1974). However, most research on political advertising focuses at the presidential level: Books on presidential advertising include Benoit (1999), Diamond and Bates (1992), Dover (2006), Jamieson (1996), Kaid and Johnston (2001), and West (2001). Although several books examine both presidential and non-presidential advertising (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991, 1997; Kern, 1989; Nelson & Boynton, 1997; Schultz, 2004; Thurber, Nelson, & Dulio, 2000), few books focus exclusively on non-presidential advertising (Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Maisel & West, 2004; Nesbit, 1988) and none examine gubernatorial commercials. However, political advertising is arguably more important in non-presidential than presidential races because the news lavishes most attention on the presidential contest. Political advertising, which has been shown to inform the electorate (Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2005), probably has more impact in non-presidential races where less information is usually available about these candidates and their issue positions from other sources, such as the news.

Furthermore, there is only one presidential campaign every four years. In sharp contrast, the United States is the scene for thousands of other political campaigns, some of which are held as often as every two years. Clearly, the study of non-presidential political advertising is justified by the large amounts of money spent on this medium, the sheer number of candidates and offices involved, as well as the number of voters who constitute the audience for these messages. This study will investigate television spots from campaigns for governor, U.S. senate, and U.S. house in the 2004 election. First, we begin with a review of the literature on non-presidential television spots. Then we identify the hypothesis and research questions and develop the method, the functional analysis of political discourse. Finally, we will discuss the implications of this study.

Literature Review

Most investigations into the nature of political advertising focus on two variables, tone and topic. First, scholars are concerned with understanding the functions of television commercials (i.e., positive, negative; or acclaims, attacks, defenses). Second, studies have analyzed the topics of political advertisements (i.e., policy versus character, or issue versus image). This section reviews the existing literature in both areas.

Functions of Political Advertising

Several studies of congressional spot advertising examined the function of political commercials. Negative advertising was used frequently in the North Carolina Senate race between Helms and Hunt (Kern, 1989). Challengers frequently use attack ads, as in the Maryland Senate race between Mikulski and Chavez (Sheckels, 1994) and in the Boschwitz-

94 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

Wellstone race (Pfau, Parrott, & Lindquist, 1992). Benze and Declerq (1985) found that congressional candidates attacked nearly half the time: 47% for male candidates, and 44% for female candidates. Kahn and Kenney's (1999) study of the 1988, 1990, and 1992 Senate campaigns found that 18% of the ads in their sample criticized the general policy priorities of the opposing candidate, 17% criticized a specific policy position, and 20% blamed an opponent for a negative policy outcome. Weaver-Lariscy and Tinkham (1996) reported a survey of U.S. House candidates: 48% reported that they ran partly or mainly negative campaigns in 1982 whereas 35% said their campaign was partly or mainly negative in 1990. Ansolabehere et al. (1994), who analyzed newspaper coverage rather than ads, indicated that 51% of U.S. Senate campaigns in 1992 were mainly negative. Benoit (2000), analyzing a variety of races in the state of Missouri in 1998, reported that candidates acclaimed 67% of the time and attacked 31% of the time in their television spots (2% of utterances were defenses against attacks). Several studies of specific congressional races in 2002 found more positive than negative ads (Brewer, 2004; Ezra, 2004; Larson, 2004; Petterson, 2004; cf. Busch, 2004. Prysby, 2004). Two studies found that challengers attacked more than incumbents (Petterson, 2004; Shockley, 2004) and four reported that candidate ads were more positive than ads from other sponsors (Brewer, 2004; Larson, 2004; Petterson, 2004; Shockley, 2004). It is unfortunate that none of these studies of the 2002 congressional races reported statistical analyses to indicate whether these differences were significant.

Lau and Pomper (2004), relying on newspaper reports of campaigns (not ads), concluded that about one-third of U.S. Senate races from 1992-2002 were negative. Brazeal and Benoit (2001) analyzed 80 House and Senate ads from 1984-2000. They found that acclaims (positive statements) constituted 64% of the statements in these ads, attacks (negative) were 35.5% of statements and defenses (refutation of attacks) were rare (0.5%). Airne and Benoit (2005) analyzed 238 U.S. Senate, 121 U.S. House, and 79 gubernatorial ads from the 2000 campaign. Acclaims dominated the ads for all three offices (Senate, 71%; House, 62%, governor, 76%). Attacks were roughly one-quarter to one-third of the ad content (Senate, 29%; House, 37%, governor, 23%) and defenses were again uncommon (Senate, 0.5%; House, 0.7%, governor, 1%). Cooper and Knotts (2004) reported that gubernatorial ads in 2000 were 50% positive, 28% attack, and 22% contrast (combination of positive and negative).

It is difficult to summarize this diverse work, in part because articles use different categories when they report result (e.g., Kahn & Kenney [1999] do not report total attacks, but only attacks on various aspects of policy; Cooper & Knotts [2004] report positive, attack, and contrast ads). Still, attacks in non-presidential races seem to range from about 25-50%, with acclaims making up most of the rest of ad tone. One important limitation is that most studies focus on US congressional advertising, ignoring gubernatorial advertising. We also lack contrasts of different kinds of ads (e.g., primary versus general spots or TV versus radio commercials).

Topic of Political Advertising

Research has also investigated the occurrence of policy (issues) and character (image) in congressional advertising. Earlier studies seemed to support the contention that character is discussed more often than policy. Joslyn (1980) reported that 24% of Senate spots mentioned policy positions and 40% of those spots mentioned the candidates' character. Benze and Declerq (1985), who analyzed California congressional commercials, found that ads usually discussed

policy (68%) but they discussed character even more frequently (82% by female candidates, 90% by male candidates). A study by Payne and Baukus (1988) investigated 81 Republican senate ads. They found roughly equal emphasis of policy and character. Johnston and White (1994) investigated advertising by female candidates in the 1986 senate races, reporting that females tended to emphasize “issues more than image in their ads” (p. 325). Kahn and Kenney (1999) reported that 80% of their ads mentioned, and 36% emphasized, policy. Benoit’s (2000) analysis of non-presidential television advertising found that 66% of utterances concerned policy and 34% addressed character. Brazeal and Benoit (2001) found that congressional ads from 1984-2000 focused on policy (70%) more than character (30%). Cooper and Knotts’ (2004) study of gubernatorial ads from 2000 reported that policy ads predominated (59%), followed by ads discussing both policy and character (31%), and character only (10%). Airne and Benoit (2005) also reported a preference for policy discussion in 2000 political advertising (Senate, 62% to 38%; House, 55% to 45%, governor, 69% to 31%).

Again, summarizing this work is a challenge because of the diverse ways they report results (e.g., some studies report figures for mentioning or emphasizing a topic; Cooper & Knotts, 2004, on the other hand, report figures for policy, character, and both). It appears, though, that research which uses ads as the unit of analysis indicate that character or image ads predominate; studies using themes as the unit of analysis suggest that policy comments outnumber character remarks. Most of this research focuses on US congressional advertising, ignoring campaign advertising for other offices (and does not inform us about different kinds of ads, such as primary versus general ads).

Functional Theory of Political Discourse

Functional Theory was utilized as the foundation for this analysis. This theory was developed by Benoit and his associates through a series of studies centered primarily on Presidential campaign discourse (see Benoit, 1999, 2000, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier 1998; Benoit & Harthcock, 1999; Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997; Benoit, Wells, Pier, & Blaney, 1999). This theory argues that citizens vote for the candidate who appears preferable on whatever criteria are most important to each voter. Candidates can demonstrate their desirability in three ways. First, the candidate can engage in acclaiming or self-praise (Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998). The greater the benefits or advantages of one candidate, the more likely that person will appear preferable compared with opponents. Second, candidates can attack their opponents; as voters become aware of more costs or disadvantages to opponents, they should appear less desirable to voters. The candidate who attacks hopes for a net increase in desirability as the attack is intended to reduce the opponent’s preferability. Finally, candidates who have been subjected to attack can defend against those attacks. The smaller the costs or disadvantages, the more likely that candidate will appear preferable to opponents. These three options comprise an informal form of cost-benefit analysis, providing information that can help persuade the voter to prefer one candidate. Notice that characterizing these as a rough form of cost-benefit analysis does not mean we claim that voters systematically quantify the impact of acclaims, attacks, or defenses or perform mathematical calculations to decide their vote choice. Rather, it is meant to indicate that acclaims tend to increase one’s benefits, attacks may increase an opponent’s costs, and defenses can reduce one’s costs.

The three functions (acclaims, attacks, and defenses) can occur on two topics, policy or character. Policy utterances concern governmental action or problems that are amenable to

96 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

governmental action. Character comments concern the candidates as individuals. We also subdivide the two topics into three forms of policy and three forms of character (these subdivisions are represented in Tables 5 and 6).

We propose several hypothesis and research questions to apply the functional analysis on political advertising in the 2004 election campaign. First we will discuss the overall distribution of functions and topics. Then we address the emphasis on policy and character. Next we look into the role of political party affiliation on functions and topics. This is followed by a discussion of the role of incumbency in political advertising. Next we discuss campaign phase (primary, general) and advertising. This will be followed by a discussion of medium, television versus radio. Then we take up the question of ad sponsorship. Next we discuss office and political advertising. Finally, we investigate the relationship between advertising and election outcome.

Overall Distribution of Functions and Topics

Functional Theory (Benoit, 2007; see also Airne & Benoit, 2005; Brazeal & Benoit, 2001) predicts that acclaims will be more common than attacks: Acclaims have no drawbacks, but because many voters report that they dislike mudslinging (Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975) there is some incentive to moderate attacks. Defenses are expected to be rare for three reasons: Most attacks occur where a candidate is weak, so responding to an attack will usually take the candidate off-message; one must identify an attack to refute it and that identification may inform or remind voters of a potential weakness; finally, attacks may create the undesirable impression that the candidate is reactive rather than proactive.

H1. Political advertisements will acclaim more than they attack and attack more than they defend.

Public opinion polls for both presidential (Benoit, 2003) and congressional (Brazeal & Benoit, 2001) campaigns reveal that a majority of voters report that policy is a more important determinant of their vote than character. Because candidates have an incentive to adapt to voter desires, Functional Theory predicts that policy will receive a heavier emphasis than character in political advertising.

H2. Political advertisements will discuss policy more than character.

Incumbency

Functional Theory (Benoit, 2007; see also Airne & Benoit; 2005; Lau & Pomper, 2004) suggests that challengers tend to attack more than incumbents. This is in large part due to the fact that, by definition, incumbents have a record in the office sought; challengers may have records in other elective offices, or in the military, or in business, but none of those other kinds of records are as pertinent as a record in the specific office sought in an election. The incumbent's record is a resource from which incumbents can draw acclaims (highlighting successes) and the challenger can derive attacks (stressing failures).

H3. Incumbents will use more acclaims and fewer attacks than challengers.

H4. Incumbents will acclaim more, and attack less, on past deeds than challengers.

Research has tended to slight open-seat candidates, so we pose these questions to help understand the third type of candidate:

RQ1. What is the distribution of functions in open-seat advertisements?

RQ2. What emphasis will incumbent, challenger, and open-seat candidates place on policy and character?

Political Party Affiliation

Lau and Pomper (2004), relying on newspaper accounts of campaigns (not ads specifically), observed that Republicans attacked more than Democrats in U.S. Senate campaigns from 1992-2002. Airne and Benoit's (2005) analysis of 2000 non-presidential ads found mixed results: Democrats attacked more than Republicans in Senate and gubernatorial ads but less than Republicans in House ads. Cooper and Knotts' (2004) study of gubernatorial ads in 2000 reported that Republican attacked more (36% to 25%) and acclaimed less (42% to 54%) than Democrats (Republicans had fewer contrast ads than Democrats: 22% to 28%). Because the literature is mixed, we pose a second research question:

RQ3. Is there a difference in use of the functions by Democrats and Republicans?

Functional Theory (e.g., Benoit, 2007) argues that in general, Democrats are more likely to emphasize policy than Republicans, whereas Republicans discuss character more than Democrats. Democrats have a proclivity to see governmental solutions to problems whereas Republicans often prefer private action (e.g., charity). This means Democrats are more likely to discuss policy than Republicans. Research on presidential campaign messages (Benoit, 2004) confirms this expectation. Hence we predict:

H5. Democratic advertising will discuss policy more, and character less, than Republican spots.

Campaign Phase

Benoit (2007), analyzing presidential television spots, reported that ads from the general election phase of the campaign employed more attacks than primary spots (40% to 27%). He explained that, all things being equal, candidates from different political parties (opponents in general elections) were likely to have more policy difference on which to attack, compared with candidates from the same party (primary opponents). Furthermore, the winner of the primary campaign will want to have the support of the candidates he or she defeated in the primary—and, perhaps more importantly, the support of the voters who preferred the other candidates. So, primary candidates have an incentive to moderate the level of attacks in the primary compared with the general campaign. Finally, it is well known that general election candidates sometimes recycle the attacks from the primary, sometimes using video of one candidate attacking another member of the same political party. This could mean that primary candidates may wish to withhold some attacks in the primary to avoid giving “ammunition” to the other political party.

H6. General election advertising will employ more attacks, and fewer acclaims, than primary advertising.

Functional Theory (Benoit, 2007) suggests that because primary candidates have fewer policy differences to discuss, compared with general opponents, candidates should stress policy more, and character less, in the general than the primary campaign. Another reason to expect greater emphasis on character in the primary than the general campaign is that, in general, candidates are less well known to voters (and reporters) in the primary, so there is a greater need to introduce the candidates' character in this phase.

H7. General ads will emphasize policy more, and character less, than primary advertisements.

Medium

Political candidates employ both television and radio advertising in their election campaigns. Although there is relatively little research on radio spots, research on the 2000

98 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

presidential campaign found that radio ads were more negative than television ads in both the primary and the general phase of the campaign (Benoit et al., 2003).

H8. Radio ads will employ more attacks, and fewer acclaims, than television ads.

Benoit (2007) also found a tendency for presidential television spots to stress policy more (58% to 54%) and character less (42% to 46%) than radio ads. For this reason we predict that:

H9. Television ads will discuss policy more, and character less, than radio ads.

Sponsor

Functional Theory (Benoit, 2007) argues that candidates and consultants realize that voters say they do not like mudslinging (as noted earlier). Although this does not prevent candidates from attacking, it does mean that surrogate sources (the political parties and other organizations such as PACs and 527 groups) are likely to attack more than candidates. The hope is that if there is a backlash from voters against an attack, it will hurt the sponsor of the ad more than the candidate. Obviously this strategy assumes (1) that voters pay attention to a spot's sponsor and (2) that voters do not take it for granted that the candidate and the sponsors of other ads are coordinating the campaign. Still, it might help to put the most, or worse, attacks in ads from sponsors other than the candidate:

H10. Ads sponsored by candidates will use more acclaims and fewer attacks than ads sponsored by political parties.

There is little guidance about the topic emphases (policy versus character) of political advertisements sponsored by candidates and other groups. Thus, we pose this research question:

RQ4. What is the topic emphasis of political advertisements sponsored by candidates and other groups?

Office

Examination of advertising for three elective offices allows us to investigate the differences between these offices. In the 2000 campaign, Airne and Benoit (2005) reported that Senate (71% acclaims) and gubernatorial (76% acclaims) ads were more positive than ads for the U.S. House (62%). They also found that ads for Senate (62% policy) and gubernatorial (69% policy) races emphasized policy more than ads for House campaigns (55%). Based on past work, we predict that:

H11. Senate and gubernatorial ads will have more acclaims, and fewer attacks, than House spots.

H12. Senate and gubernatorial ads will discuss policy more, and character less, than House spots.

Outcome

Benoit (1999) reported no significant difference in the functions of ads from winners and losers of presidential elections. We pose this Research Question:

RQ5. What is the emphasis of the functions in political advertising of winners and losers?

Functional Theory (Benoit, 2007) argues that because most voters report that policy is a more important determinant of their vote than character, there will be a tendency for winners to stress policy more, and character less, than losers. Benoit (2003) found that presidential winners tend to discuss policy more, and character less, than losers. Airne and Benoit (2005) reported that Senate and gubernatorial (but not House) winners discussed policy more, and character less, in spots than losers. So, we predict that:

H13. Winners emphasize policy more, and character less, than losers in their advertising.

Finally, Functional Theory predicts that candidates will be more likely to use general goals and ideals as the basis for acclaims rather than attacks (Benoit, 2007). How does one oppose a goal such as creating jobs or making America secure? The last hypotheses predict that:

H14. General goals will be employed more frequently as the basis for acclaims than for attacks.

H15. Ideals will be employed more frequently as the basis for acclaims than for attacks.

We also investigate the distribution of the three forms of policy and three forms of character in these ads.

RQ6. What is the relative emphasis on the three forms of policy?

RQ7. What is the relative emphasis on the three forms of character?

These hypotheses and research questions will guide a fairly comprehensive analysis of gubernatorial, senate, and house advertising from the 2004 campaign. We will look at the overall functions and topics and then explore the functions and topics of advertisements using seven other variables: incumbency, political party, campaign phase, medium, sponsor, office, and outcome.

Sample and Method

No resource contains the population of all gubernatorial, senate, and house advertisements. Even the extensive University of Oklahoma archive is incomplete. Thus, this study of necessity will employ a convenience sample. Television spots were obtained by downloading transcribed commercials from National Journal's database (www.nationaljournal.com) and by video-taping ads from broadcasts. The sample comprised a total of 1032 spots from the 2004 election: 209 gubernatorial ads (both 2003 and 2004 races were included for this office), 496 US Senate ads, and 327 U.S. House spots. 185 different candidates from 41 states are represented. See Tables 1 and 2. We also identified incumbency, political party affiliation, campaign phase, medium, sponsor, and outcome for each ad included in the sample.

Table 1. *Ad Sample: State and Office*

States	Governor		Senate		House	
	Ads	Candidates	Ads	Candidates	Ads	Candidates
Alaska	-	-	75	3	7	2
Arizona	-	-	-	-	16	6
California	-	-	3	3	-	-
Colorado	-	-	32	4	11	4
Connecticut	-	-	4	1	4	3
Florida	-	-	33	7	-	-
Georgia	-	-	27	5	3	3

100 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

Illinois	-	-	47	10	3	2
Indiana	12	3	3	1	-	-
Iowa	-	-	-	-	6	2
Kentucky	71	6	2	1	24	5
Louisiana	21	4	12	3	6	2
Maine	-	-	-	-	-	-
Maryland	-	-	4	1	4	1
Michigan	-	-	-	-	9	3
Minnesota	-	-	-	-	10	2
Mississippi	17	3	-	-	-	-
Missouri	47	3	4	1	5	3
Montana	3	1	-	-	1	1
Nebraska	-	-	-	-	7	3
Nevada	-	-	2	1	5	2
New Hampshire	-	-	4	1	-	-
New Mexico	-	-	-	-	8	3
New York	-	-	2	1	9	3
North Carolina	18	7	13	2	72	12
North Dakota	-	-	10	1	1	1
Ohio	-	-	1	1	8	1
Oklahoma	-	-	40	4	6	3
Oregon	-	-	-	-	9	3
Pennsylvania	-	-	34	2	6	2
South Carolina	-	-	65	6	-	-
South Dakota	-	-	-	-	23	2
Texas	-	-	-	-	40	7
Utah	6	1	-	-	-	-

Vermont	2	1	10	2	-	-
Virginia	-	-	-	-	1	1
Washington	-	-	19	2	14	5
West Virginia	12	3	-	-	-	-
Wisconsin	-	-	50	4	2	1
Wyoming	-	-	-	-	7	1
Total	209	32	496	67	327	89

Table 2. *Ad Sample: Incumbency, Party, Campaign Phase, Medium, Sponsor, Outcome*

	Governor	Senate	House	Total
Incumbent	21	97	75	193
Challenger	14	46	76	136
Open	69	99	176	344
Democrat	118	218	145	481
Republican	91	278	182	551
Primary	113	253	145	511
General	96	243	165	504
Special	0	0	17	17
Television	193	394	239	826
Radio	16	102	88	206
Candidate	195	443	326	964
Party	14	20	1	35
Other	0	33	0	33

102 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

Winner	90	254	135	479
Loser	119	242	192	553

Note. Groups do not always sum to the same total (e.g., incumbency status was only designated for general campaign ads).

Coding Procedures

Our content analysis employed four steps. First, the advertisements were unitized into themes, or utterances that address a coherent idea. Benoit (2000) described the theme as “the smallest unit of discourse that is capable of expressing a complete idea” (p. 280). Similarly, Berelson (1952) indicated that a theme is “an assertion about a subject” (p. 18). Holsti (1969) defines a theme as “a single assertion about some subject” (p. 116). Themes can vary in length from a short phrase to several sentences, as long as the textual excerpt focuses on a single idea. We used the theme (rather than the entire spot) for the unit of analysis for several reasons. Many political ads are mixtures of acclaims and attacks (and occasional defenses) and/or policy and character. We examined the Senate spots in our sample to obtain an indication of how many ads contained both positive (acclaims) and negative (attacks) themes: 210 of the 496 ads (42%) contained both acclaims and attacks. We also found that 371 of these ads (75%) discussed both policy and character. These two figures clearly illustrate the limitation of coding entire spots rather than themes. Attempting to force these 210 ads with both acclaims and attacks into the categories of *either* positive *or* negative cannot help but misrepresent the content of these ads, just as forcing the 371 ads with both policy and character content into the categories of *either* issue *or* image would misrepresent the content of those ads. Furthermore, of the 210 spots with both acclaims and attacks, only 31 (15%) had the same number of acclaims and attacks, so adding a third category, comparative ads (as some scholars do), does little to improve accuracy when coding entire spots. Thus, using themes as the coding unit provides a much more accurate measurement of the content of these messages than using the entire spot.

Furthermore, political ads vary in length from 15 seconds to 5 minutes (although most ads in recent years have been 30 and 60 second spots). We believe that treating ads of different lengths equally—that is, every ad counts as “one” positive, negative, issue, or image spot, as is done in research using the entire spot as the coding unit—does not accurately represent the content of political advertising. That is, twice as much content can be covered in 60 seconds as in 30 seconds but both 60 and 30 second spots count as “1” ad. Finally, using the theme as the coding unit for ads facilitates comparisons with other message forms (would one consider a stump speech as the coding unit just as one codes an entire spot to be one coding unit? would the coding unit in a debate be the entire debate, or the entire response?). Thus, using the theme as the unit of analysis provides a much more precise measure of the functions or topics in an advertisement than coding the entire spot or than reporting results for “mentions” of a topic.

Second, each themes’ function was classified using the following rules:

- > *Acclaims* portray the sponsoring candidate favorably.
- > *Attacks* portray the opposing candidate unfavorably.
- > *Defenses* explicitly respond to a prior attack on the sponsoring candidate.

Virtually all of the utterances in the texts of the advertisements in our sample served one of these functions; the very few other (non-functional) utterances were not analyzed (it appears that candidates wanted their ads to be efficient, not wasting many statements on non-functional utterances, statements that gave no reason to vote for the sponsor [acclaims, defenses] or against the opponent [attacks]).

Third, the topic of each theme was classified according to these rules:

- > *Policy* remarks concern governmental action and problems amenable to such action.
- > *Character* remarks address properties, abilities, or attributes of the candidates.

Because defenses are so infrequent they were not coded by topic. Finally, policy themes were coded into one of the three forms of policy while character themes were categorized as one of the three forms of character.

The two coders analyzed the spots and intercoder reliability was calculated from 20% of each of the five groups of spots. Cohen's (1960) *kappa* was calculated to control of agreement due to chance (function .93; topic .90; forms of policy .85; forms of character .88). Landis and Koch (1977) explain that *kappas* of .81 or higher reflect almost perfect agreement between coders.

To illustrate how these texts were coded (and to clarify the nature of our coding categories) we offer examples of the three functions and two topics from the texts in our sample. For instance, this passage from a commercial by Representative Rick Renzi of Arizona illustrates acclaiming: "We've been able to do a lot this year: secure money for our local schools and hospitals, cut taxes on hardworking families, and create jobs in rural Arizona." It should be clear that his constituents would likely consider these three themes (securing money, cutting taxes, and creating jobs) to be desirable outcomes. On the other hand, Brian Hamel's ad for a seat in the U.S. House for Maine attacked his opponent: "Mike Michaud pushed to raise sales taxes, gas taxes, our property tax, and Mike Michaud even backed a tax on Social Security benefits." Most voters do not enjoy paying taxes, so this utterance illustrates attacks on four themes.

Finally, candidates can also defend themselves against attacks from by their opponents. For example, in the South Carolina senate race, Jim DeMint accused Inez Tenenbaum of wanting to raise taxes. Tenenbaum denied this attack: "On taxes, DeMint's misleading again. Inez Tenenbaum doesn't support a sales tax increase." This utterance rejected her opponent's attack.

John Salazar ran for a congressional seat in Colorado. One of his advertisements said that he "led the fight to lower health care costs." Health care is obviously an example of a policy topics. On the other hand, a commercial for Tom Tancredo (also running for Congress from Colorado) told viewers that "Tom Tancredo was born in Colorado, he went to school in Colorado, he raised his family in Colorado." These comments tell voters about his personal background, but nothing about his policy positions, so they illustrate character.

We will test differences among these groups with *chi-squares*. For tests of functions and topics overall, we used the *chi-square* goodness of fit test. When contrasting different groups (e.g., functions and incumbency, or topics and political party) we report measures of effect sizes: ϕ when the $df = 1$ and Cramer's V for other cases. We would also note that with a sample size this large, the tests we report are relatively powerful. Cohen (1988) indicates that the power of a test with an n of 1000 (1000 is the largest n in Cohen's χ^2 table; the total number of themes here is over 6,000) is .89, over .99, and over .99 to detect small, medium, and large effects respectively.

Results

The results for each hypothesis and research question will be presented in the order in which they were developed above. The first hypothesis was confirmed, as acclaims were the most common themes in these spots (72%), followed by attacks (27%) and then defenses (1%). For example, this spot from Tom Daschle, running for the U.S. Senate in South Dakota, praised his work on thinning the Black Hills forests: “Tom Daschle’s done three things. He brought local people to the table to hammer out an agreement, and then he took that agreement and turned it into federal legislation, and he found the funds to begin the thinning process” (“Timber”). In sharp contrast, this advertisement from John Thune criticizes his opponent:

I’m getting tired of politicians not telling us the truth. For years, Tom Daschle’s been telling us one thing here in South Dakota and then doing the opposite in Washington. He says he’s fought for lower energy prices, but he hasn’t. He wants us to think that he didn’t vote to raise gas taxes, but he did, and when he had a chance to lower gas taxes, he voted against that, too. (“Straight Talk”)

Clearly, this passage criticizes Daschle. Although it is not very specific about the accusations, this commercial from Daschle is meant as a response to attacks:

CHARLOTTE CADWELL: I know Tom is not that kind of person that they’re trying to make him out to be.

STEVE GUBBRUD: I hate these negative ads. Tom Daschle’s a good man. He’s done a lot of good things for South Dakota. I’m a Republican and there’s a lot of Republicans in South Dakota that feel the same way as I do.

SUSAN HEIDPRIEM: I’m a Republican, but I don’t like these negative ads attacking Tom Daschle. We don’t need outside groups coming in and telling us lies about Tom. (“Angry”)

These statements clearly reject criticisms of Daschle, which means they function as defenses. Because Daschle is a Democrat, it is interesting that two of the statements are attributed to Republicans, an attempt to increase the credibility of the defense. This distribution of functions was significant ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 5229.94, p < .0001$). These data are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. *Functions of 2004 Campaign Advertising*

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses	χ^2 $p < .0001$ (except as noted)
Incumbents	869 (78%)	231 (21%)	12 (1%)	54.48
Challengers	550 (65%)	299 (35%)	0	$V = .08$
Open-Seats	1738 (70%)	720 (29%)	20 (1%)	
Democrats	2208 (71%)	865 (28%)	28 (1%)	4.25
Republicans	2641 (72%)	988 (27%)	19 (0.5%)	$p > .1$
Primary	2601 (73%)	920 (26%)	20 (0.6%)	11.52, $p < .005$
General	2137 (70%)	898 (29%)	27 (1%)	$V = .04$

Special	111 (76%)	35 (24%)	0	(PvG only)
TV	3653 (72%)	1384 (27%)	30 (0.6%)	3.69, $p > .15$
Radio	1185 (71%)	469 (28%)	17 (1%)	
Candidate	4706 (74%)	1648 (26%)	43 (0.7%)	195.12, $V = .17^*$
Party	78 (43%)	102 (55%)	3 (2%)	
Other	65 (37%)	111 (62%)	1 (0.6%)	
Winners	2187 (75%)	694 (24%)	26 (1%)	6.86
Losers	2662 (73%)	965 (26%)	22 (0.5%)	$p < .05$, $V = .03$
Governor	985 (70%)	496 (29%)	14 (1%)	42.5
Senate	1973 (70%)	823 (29%)	24 (1%)	$p < .001$, $V = .06$
House	1891 (75%)	624 (25%)	9 (0.3%)	
Total	4744 (72%)	1919 (27%)	46 (1%)	5229.94

*Acclaims versus defenses (including defenses would violate the assumptions of χ^2)

Hypothesis two predicted that themes about policy would be more common than themes about character. The frequency of the two functions was split fairly evenly, with a bit more emphasis on policy (52%) than character (48%). Betty Castor ran for the Florida Senate, promising that “I’ll work across party lines to improve schools, create jobs, lower the cost of prescription drugs and strengthen law enforcement to keep us safe” (“Work”). Education, jobs, health care, and law enforcement are obviously examples of policy topics. On the other hand, her opponent, Mel Martinez, illustrates the use of character in this spot: “He escaped Communism as a young boy and fell in love with America.... No special privileges, just hard work. A community leader, Little League coach, to the president's Cabinet” (“Dreams”). This ad emphasizes Martinez’s positive qualities, not policy, so it is an example of the discussion of character. The relative emphasis on policy versus character was statistically significant ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 11.03$, $p < .001$) due to the sample size, but as noted earlier the difference here is small. See Table 4 for these data.

106 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

Table 4. *Topics of 2004 Campaign Advertising*

	Policy	Character	χ^2 <i>p</i> < .0001 (except as noted)
Incumbents	659 (62%)	411 (38%)	49.0 <i>V</i> = .11
Challengers	477 (56%)	372 (44%)	
Open-Seat	1211 (49%)	1251 (51%)	
Democrats	1696 (55%)	1381 (45%)	21.76 ϕ = .06
Republicans	1793 (49%)	1836 (51%)	
Primary	1683 (48%)	1838 (52%)	54.45 <i>V</i> = .09 (PvG 54.08, ϕ = .09)
General	1730 (57%)	1309 (43%)	
Special	76 (52%)	70 (48%)	
TV	2729 (54%)	2315 (46%)	33.19 ϕ = .07
Radio	760 (46%)	894 (54%)	
Candidates	3291 (52%)	3063 (48%)	5.66, <i>p</i> > .05 (CvP χ^2 = 0.0)
Party	92 (52%)	86 (48%)	
Other	106 (61%)	68 (39%)	
Winners	1568 (54%)	1313 (46%)	11.63 ϕ = .04
Losers	1921 (50%)	1904 (50%)	
Governor	720 (52%)	671 (48%)	14.59 <i>p</i> < .001, <i>V</i> = .05
Senate	1526 (55%)	1270 (45%)	
House	1243 (49%)	1276 (51%)	
Total	3489 (52%)	3217 (48%)	11.03, <i>p</i> < .001

The next prediction concerned incumbency status and functions. As expected, incumbents acclaimed more (78% to 65%) and attacked less (21% to 35%) than challengers. Considering only incumbents and challengers, the difference was also statistically significant (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 48.92, *p* < .0001, ϕ = .16). See Table 3.

The first research question addressed the functions of spots from open-seat candidates. Open seat candidates' use of these three functions was in between, with 70% acclaims (65% challengers, 78% incumbents) and 29% attacks (35% challengers, 21% incumbents). Overall, these use of functions by these three kinds of candidates was significantly different ($\chi^2 [df = 4] = 54.48, p < .0001, V = .08$).

As expected (H4), incumbents use past deeds to acclaim more, and attack less, than challengers. Incumbents employed 284 acclaims on past deeds but only 110 attacks; on the other hand, challengers used past deeds to attack more than to acclaim, 189 to 87. This was statistically significant ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 108.05, p < .0001, \phi = .4$). Open seat candidates used past deeds to acclaim (252) roughly as often as to attack (297). See Table 5.

Table 5. *Forms of Policy in 2004 Campaign Advertising*

	Policy					
	Past Deeds*		Future Plans		General Goals	
Incumbents	284	110	22	3	215	25
Challengers	87	189	5	0	177	19
Open-Seat	252	297	37	34	518	69
Democrats	418	470	30	8	774	93
Republicans	462	408	98	37	611	76
Primary	369	453	75	11	714	61
General	491	403	51	34	641	106
Special	20	22	2	0	30	2
TV	688	691	111	32	1065	135
Radio	192	187	17	13	317	34
Candidates	846	790	124	38	1352	137
Party	14	40	4	6	18	10
Other	20	48	0	1	15	22

108 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

Winners	504	306	49	17	610	82
Losers	376	572	79	28	775	87
Governor	150	189	61	7	284	29
Senate	393	355	48	29	604	97
House	337	334	19	9	497	43
Total	880	878	128	45	1385	169
	1758 (50%)		173 (5%)		1554 (45%)	

*left number = acclaims, right number = attacks

The next research question concerned the topics of ads from these three types of candidates. Incumbents (62%) and challengers (56%) both emphasized policy over character. On the other hand, the topics of ads from open seat candidates were almost balanced, with a slight emphasis on character, 51% to 49%. These three groups emphasized topics differently ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 49.0, p < .001, V = .11$).

RQ3 addressed the use of functions by candidates from the two major political parties. Democrats and Republicans used acclaims (71%, 73%, respectively) and attacks (28%, 27%) at virtually the same rate. There was no significant difference in functions by party ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 4.25, p > .1$).

The fifth hypothesis predicted that ads from Democrats would emphasize policy more, and character less, than spots from Republican candidates. This hypothesis was confirmed: Democratic ads discussed policy more (55% to 49%) and character less (45% to 51%) than Republicans. This difference was significant ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 27.76, p < .001, \phi = .06$).

The next prediction, hypothesis six, anticipated that ads in the general campaign phase would be more positive and primary spots. This prediction was upheld: General ads contained somewhat fewer acclaims (70% to 73%) and more attacks (29% to 26%) than primary commercials. This was statistically significant ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 11.52, p < .005, V = .04$), but again the differences are small.

Next, we tested the relative emphasis on the two topics for primary and general campaign messages. As expected, general campaign spots stressed policy more (57% to 48%) and character less (43% to 52%) than primary ads. These differences were statistically significant ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 54.08, p < .0001, \phi = .09$).

Hypothesis 8, on the functions of television and radio ads, was not supported. Commercials in both media acclaimed (72% TV, 71% radio) and attacked (28% TV, 29% radio)

at about the same rate. There was no significant difference in function for media ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 3.69, p > .15$).

On the other hand, there were differences in topic by medium, confirming hypothesis 9. TV spots emphasized policy more (54% to 46%) and character less (46% to 54%) than radio ads. These differences were significant ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 33.19, p < .0001, \phi = .07$).

The tenth prediction concerned a possible effect of source on function. This was upheld: Candidate ads employed more acclaims (74%) than party ads (43%) or ads from other groups (37%). Concomitantly, candidate-sponsored spots attacked less (26%) than party (55%) or other (62%) ads. These differences were statistically significant ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 195.12, p < .0001, V = .17$; defenses were excluded because the frequency violated the assumptions of *chi-square*). We compared each set and candidate ads were different from ads sponsored by each of the other two sources (candidate versus party: $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 77.87, p < .0001, \phi = .11$; candidate versus other: $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 116.43, p < .001, \phi = .13$; there was no difference in functions for ads sponsored by the party and others: $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 1.52, p > .2$; again, defenses were excluded from these tests).

The fourth research question investigated the topic emphasis of ads sponsored by these sources. Candidate and party ads both discussed policy in 52% of themes; ads from others appeared to have a greater emphasis on policy (61%), but there was no significant difference in topic emphasis for these three groups ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 5.66, p > .05$).

Hypothesis 11 predicted that senate and gubernatorial ads would have more acclaims and fewer attacks than house spots. This hypothesis was not supported; there was a significant difference but in the opposite direction ($\chi^2 [df = 4] = 42.5, p < .001, V = .06$). House ads acclaimed more (75% compared with 70% for governor and senate) and attacked less (25% to 29%) than either gubernatorial or senate commercials.

The next prediction (H12) concerned topics and office. Senate ads stressed policy more (55%) than gubernatorial (52%) or House ads (49%). These differences were significant ($\chi^2 [df = 3] = 14.59, p < .001, V = .05$). However, only senate and house ads were significantly different ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 14.54, p < .0005, \phi = .05$); there were no differences for governor versus senate ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 2.96, p > .05$) or governor versus house ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 2.09, p > .1$).

RQ5 investigated the relationship of functions to campaign outcome. Winners acclaimed more (75% to 73%) and attacked less (24% to 26%) than losers. These differences were significant ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 6.86, p < .05, V = .03$) although the effect size is small.

Hypothesis 13 anticipated that winners would stress policy more, and character less, than losers. This prediction was confirmed: winners devoted 54% of their themes to policy (and 46% to character) whereas losers used 50% policy (and 50%) character). These differences were significant ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 11.63, p < .0001, \phi = .04$), although with a relatively small effect size.

The fourteenth hypothesis predicted that general goals would be the basis for more acclaims than attacks. This expectation was confirmed: general goals were used as acclaims 1385 times and as attacks 169 times ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 949.96, p < .0001$). H15, on ideals, was also confirmed: Ideals were used 480 times to acclaim but only 61 times to attack ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 322.96, p < .0001$).

We now turn to the last two research questions. When discussing policy, these ads stressed past deeds (50%) and general goals (45%) more than specific future plans (5%). See Table 5 for these data. When addressing character, these ads focused mainly on personal

110 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

qualities (60%), followed by leadership ability (23%) and ideals (17%). These data are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. *Forms of Character in 2004 Campaign Advertising*

	Character					
	Personal Qualities		Leadership Ability		Ideals	
Incumbents	166	84	130	4	52	5
Challengers	143	66	107	24	31	1
Open-Seat	564	280	254	22	113	18
Democrats	770	336	351	30	298	51
Republicans	537	288	318	46	182	10
Primary	788	313	337	44	318	38
General	478	300	319	32	157	23
Special	41	11	13	0	5	0
TV	937	430	503	54	349	42
Radio	363	194	165	22	131	19
Candidates	1265	561	651	73	468	45
Party	28	33	12	3	2	8
Other	14	30	6	0	10	8
Winners	507	245	316	16	201	28
Losers	800	379	353	60	279	33
Governor	243	154	124	20	123	7

Senate	476	266	191	25	261	51
House	588	204	354	31	96	3
Total	1307	624	669	76	480	61
	1931 (60%)		745 (23%)		541 (17%)	

*left number = acclaims, right number = attacks

Implications

This study applied Functional Theory to non-presidential television advertisements in the 2004 races for governor, U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House. We will note both consistencies and differences in these campaign messages. First, ads for all three offices emphasized acclaims over attacks and attacks over defenses. This relationship is also true in every grouping of ads save two (ads sponsored by parties and ads sponsored by other groups; we will discuss these exceptions later). Incumbents, challengers, and open-seat candidates; Republicans and Democrats; primary, general, and special elections; TV and radio ads; and winners and losers all acclaimed more than they attacked, and attacked more than they defended. This finding is consistent with past work on presidential campaign messages (Benoit, 2007) and, generally, with the literature on non-presidential ads reviewed earlier. A focus on acclaims rather than attacks is also consistent with most of the research on non-presidential television advertising reviewed earlier.

All three functions are capable of persuading voters that a candidate is preferable to one's opponent. As noted earlier, acclaims have no disadvantages but most voters report that they dislike mudslinging (Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975). This discourages candidates from attacking too heavily (candidates do attack; the point is that attacks have a potential disadvantage which makes them less attractive than acclaims). Defenses, on the other hand, have three potential drawbacks. First, opponents are likely to attack where the opponent is weak, which means that defending against an attack will usually take a candidate "off-message." Second, defenses are likely to sound reactive rather than proactive and candidates may not wish to encourage this impression. Third, a candidate must identify an attack in order to refute it. This means that when a candidate mentions an attack in preparation for the defense he or she may remind or inform voters of a potential weakness. So, it is reasonable to expect that acclaims would be more frequent than attacks and attacks more common than defenses.

Overall, these ads discussed policy a bit more than character, but the findings for topic emphasis were less consistent than for functions. An emphasis on policy generally is consistent with past research on presidential messages (Benoit, 2007). An emphasis on policy is also consistent with much of the research on non-presidential spots discussed above in the literature review.

As noted earlier, public opinion poll data reveals that, in every campaign in which this question was asked (1976-2000), more voters reported that policy was a more important

112 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

determinant of their vote for president than character (Benoit, 2003). Brazeal and Benoit (2001) located public opinion poll data which indicates that policy is a more important determinant of congressional votes than character as well. Thus, if voters believe policy is more important, this could lead candidate to emphasize policy more than character in their ads.

Incumbent candidates acclaim more, and attack less, than challengers (and the relative emphasis of these three functions for open-seat candidates lies between these two other groups of candidates). This finding is consistent with previous research on presidential campaign messages (Benoit, 2007). It also appears to be in large part of function of the fact that the incumbent candidate has a record in the office sought. The incumbent's record is a resource for the incumbent to acclaim and the challenger to attack; indeed incumbents do acclaim more, and attack less, on past deeds than challengers. Challengers may have records in other offices, but the most relevant evidence comes from accomplishments or failures in the office being sought. Open seat candidates do not emphasize either attacks or acclaims on past deeds; Table 5 reports many themes on past deeds from open-seat candidates, but there are more of open seat candidates than incumbents or challengers in our sample.

Unlike open-seat candidates, incumbents and challengers emphasized policy over character. This may in part be due to the fact that open-seat candidates do not have an incumbent's record to acclaim or attack. Calculating percentages from the data in Table 5, we can see that 45% of open-seat candidates' policy utterances are about past deeds whereas incumbents and challengers respectively devote 60% and 58% of policy statements to past deeds ($\chi^2 [df = 4] = 55.25, p < .0001, V = .11$). With no record in the office sought for either candidate in an open-seat race, these candidates can neither acclaim their own record nor attack their opponent's record (again, they may discuss records in other offices, but such evidence is less relevant than the record of an incumbent). Calculating percentages on the data in Table 6 reveals that when open-seat candidates discuss character, they stress personal qualities more (67% compared with 57% and 56%), and leadership abilities less (22% compared with 30% and 35%) than incumbents or challengers respectively ($\chi^2 [df = 4] = 35.76, p < .0001, V = .09$). This suggests that with no record in the office sought, open-seat candidates emphasize personal qualities more, and leadership ability less, than incumbents or challengers. The idea that a candidate's record is used in campaign messages is not greatly surprising but past research has not investigated these differences in topic emphasis.

This sample of non-presidential ads did not reveal a significant difference in function for candidates of the two major political parties. Benoit's research on presidential television advertising (1999, 2001) found that Republicans acclaimed more and attacked less than Democratic candidates. However, this finding was not consistent across message forms. Democrats produce more acclaims than Republicans in Acceptance Addresses (Benoit, Wells, Pier, & Blaney, 1999) and in general debates (Benoit, 2007). Thus, taken together, these data suggest that political party does not exert a consistent or strong influence on functions of campaign discourse.

In 2004, these non-presidential spots revealed that Democrats emphasized policy more, and character less, than Republicans. This finding, on the other hand, is consistent with past research on political campaign messages (Benoit, 2004) and with a study of non-presidential ads from 2000 (Airne & Benoit, 2005). Benoit (2004) suggests that Democrats have some tendency to see governmental solutions to problems whereas Republicans are more likely to prefer private

action. These ideological differences incline Democrats to discuss policy somewhat more, and character less, than Republicans.

We also found that campaign phase influences the functions of political messages. Specifically, primary ads employed more acclaims, and fewer attacks, than general ads. This is consistent with past research on presidential campaign messages (Benoit, 2007). First, primary opponents, being from the same political party, tend to have fewer policy differences than general election opponents, who are from different parties. Of course, primary candidates do have some differences, just as general candidates have some policy positions in common (who would not be for a safer America?). Nevertheless, in general, there are more policy differences to attack in the general than the primary campaign. Furthermore, the ultimate winner of the primary election (e.g., Kerry in the 2004 presidential race) wants to be endorsed by the losers (e.g., Clark, Dean, Lieberman) and perhaps more importantly, desires the support of the voters who preferred the losers. This may give primary candidates an incentive to moderate their attacks against fellow party members. So, it makes sense that acclaims would be more common, and attacks less common, in primary than general campaigns.

This study found that the topic emphasis varies by campaign phase. Primary ads stressed policy less, and character more, than general ads. Again, there are fewer policy differences to discuss in the primary than the general campaign phase. Furthermore, most candidates are less well-known in the primary than the general election. First, many candidates in the primary are simply not well known to many voters, such as Dennis Kucinich, Carol Moseley-Braun, or Al Sharpton in the 2004 Democratic presidential primaries. Furthermore, even John Kerry was better known to most voters by the time the general election began than during the primaries. Thus, candidates have a greater need to introduce themselves to voters in the primary than the general election. Of course, candidates often run bio spots in the general campaign (particularly in the beginning), but still there is a greater need to discuss character in the primary election phase.

The data from this sample of political ads do not support a difference in the function of ads by medium. Although Benoit et al. (2003) found a difference at the presidential level (more attacks in radio than television spots), this finding did not replicate with these non-presidential ads. Perhaps greater attacks occur at the presidential level because radio permits greater selection of the target audience. However, the constituencies of house candidates particularly, but also of senate and gubernatorial candidates, are simply not as diverse as the audience for presidential candidates, so there may be less point in using radio ads to attack more than television ads.

Radio ads in this sample did emphasize character more, and policy less, than television spots. It is possible that radio ads stress image (character) more than TV spots because no visual element is available in radio ads. It is unfortunate that so little research has investigated the content of radio ads; more work may help us better understand this medium.

Sponsor of ad did influence the function of political advertising. Commercials sponsored by candidates had more acclaims and fewer attacks than either party-sponsored ads or ads from other groups (e.g., PACs or 527 groups). Keynote speakers are usually more negative than Acceptance Addresses and political ads from candidates at the presidential level have more attacks than ads from others (Benoit, 2007). This undoubtedly occurs because it is well known that voters say they dislike mudslinging, as noted earlier. The belief presumably is that it is

114 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

better for a surrogate (the party or another group) to do most of the attacks in a campaign; hoping that if there is a backlash from the attacks it will damage the party or the group and not the candidate. It is not clear whether this assumption is correct (i.e., that there is more backlash against the candidate from attacks in candidate than other ads), but it appears to influence the content of political ads.

These spots revealed a small relationship between function and outcome: Ads from winners tended to have more acclaims and fewer attacks than ads from losers. This result is consistent with prior research on presidential television spots (Benoit, 1999, 2001), but the effect size is small. It is possible that voters' dislike for mudslinging could have inclined some of them to vote against candidates who attack frequently.

Winners also stress policy more than character (although again the effect size is small). This is consistent with past work on presidential ads (Benoit, 2003). As noted earlier, more voters tend to report that policy is the most important determinant of their vote for president (Benoit, 2003) and for congress (Brazeal & Benoit, 2001). It could be that voters have a tendency to vote for candidates who talk more about the most important topic (policy).

We did not find that House ads had more attacks and fewer acclaims than senate and gubernatorial ads; in fact, it was just the opposite. However, this prediction was empirically derived from a study of non-presidential ads in 2000; there is no theoretical reason to expect such differences.

We also found that house ads discussed character more than senate ads. This could be because each House member is only one of 435 policy makers; a senator is one of 100 policy makers. Thus, responsibility for legislation is more diluted among members of the house than the senate (although of course there is only one president, so executive branch responsibility for signing or vetoing a bill affixes to only one individual). It is also with less news devoted to the average member of the House, compared with senators, candidates for the House may feel a greater need to introduce themselves to voters – which would lead to a greater emphasis on character.

Conclusion

We argue that non-presidential political advertising—for U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and governor—merits additional scholarly attention. This study investigated ads for these three offices in the 2004 campaign. We found both similarities and differences in these advertisements. Almost every grouping of advertisement acclaimed most, followed by attacks and then defenses. Policy was generally more common than character, but there were more exceptions to an emphasis on policy than to an emphasis on acclaims. We investigated several potential influences on message content (incumbency, political party, campaign phase, medium, sponsor, and office) and potential influence on election outcome. Future research should extend this work to include multiple races from different election years. This research should also be supplemented with studies of other media, such as debates, direct mail advertising, stump speeches, and Internet campaign websites.

References

- Airne, D., & Benoit, W. L. (2005). Political television advertising in campaign 2000. *Communication Quarterly*, 53, 473-493.
- Ansolabehere, S., & Iyengar, S. (1995). *Going negative: How political advertisements shrink & polarize the electorate*. New York: Free Press.
- Ansolabehere, S., Iyengar, S., Simon, A., & Valentino, N. (1994). Does attack advertising demobilize the electorate? *American Political Science Review*, 88, 829-838.
- Benoit, W. L. (1999). *Seeing spots: A functional analysis of Presidential television advertisements, 1952-1996*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Benoit, W. L. (2000). A functional analysis of political advertising across media, 1998. *Communication Studies*, 51, 274-295.
- Benoit, W. L. (2001). The functional approach to presidential television spots: Acclaiming, attacking, defending 1952-2000. *Communication Studies*, 52, 109-126.
- Benoit, W. L. (2003). Presidential campaign discourse as a causal factor in election outcome. *Western Journal of Communication*, 67, 97-112.
- Benoit, W. L. (2004). Political party affiliation and presidential campaign discourse. *Communication Quarterly*, 52, 81-97.
- Benoit, W. L. (2007). *Communication in political campaigns*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Benoit, W. L., Blaney, J. R., & Pier, P. M. (1998). *Campaign '96: A functional analysis of acclaiming, attacking, and defending*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Benoit, W. L. & Harthcock, A. (1999). Functions of the great debates: Acclaims, attacks, and defenses in the 1960 Presidential debates. *Communication Monographs*, 66, 341-357.
- Benoit, W. L., Leshner, G. M., & Chattopadhyay, S. (2007). A meta-analysis of political advertising. *Human Communication*, 10, 507-522.
- Benoit, W. L., McHale, J. P., Hansen, G. J., Pier, P. M., & McGuire, J. P. (2003). *Campaign 2000: A functional analysis of presidential campaign discourse*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Benoit, W. L., Pier, P. M., & Blaney, J. R. (1997). A functional approach to televised political spots: Acclaiming, attacking, defending. *Communication Quarterly*, 45, 1-20.
- Benoit, W. L., Wells, W. T., Pier, P. M., & Blaney, J. R. (1999). Acclaiming, attacking, and defending in Presidential nominating addresses, 1960-1996. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 85, 247-267.
- Benze, J. G., & Declerq, E. R. (1985). Content of television political spot ads for female candidates. *Journalism Quarterly*, 62, 278-283, 288.
- Berelson, B. (1952). *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Brazeal, L. M., & Benoit, W. L. (2001). A functional analysis of Congressional television spots, 1986-2000. *Communication Quarterly*, 49, 437-453.
- Brewer, M. D. (2004). Tightly contested everywhere but the ballot box: The 2002 campaign for United States Senate in Maine. In L. S. Maisel & D. M. West (Eds.), *Running on empty? Political discourse in congressional elections* (pp. 199-213). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Busch, A. E. (2004). Down to the wire: Colorado United States House district 7. In L. S. Maisel & D. M. West (Eds.), *Running on empty? Political discourse in congressional elections* (pp. 99-114). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

116 Non-Presidential Political Advertising in Campaign 2004

- Cohen, J. (1960). A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 20, 37-46.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Cooper, C. A., & Knotts, H. G. (2004). Packaging the governors: Television advertising in the 2000 elections. In D. A. Schultz (Ed.), *Lights, camera, campaign! Media, politics, and political advertising* (pp. 101-120). New York: Peter Lang.
- Diamond, E., & Bates, S. (1992). *The spot: The rise of political advertising on television* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Dover, E. D. (2006). *Images, issues, and attacks: Television advertising by incumbents and challengers in presidential elections*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ezra, M. (2004). Partisanship trumps incumbency in Maryland's 8th district. In L. S. Maisel & D. M. West (Eds.), *Running on empty? Political discourse in congressional elections* (pp. 27-39). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Holsti, O. (1969). *Content analysis in communication research*. New York: Free Press.
- Jamieson, K. H. (1996). *A history and criticism of presidential campaign advertising* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, K. (1997). Learning to love those expensive campaigns. *US News and World Report* [On-line], 122 (9).
- Johnson-Cartee, K. S., & Copeland, G. (1991). *Negative political advertising: Coming of age*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Johnson-Cartee, K. S., & Copeland, G. (1997). *Manipulation of the American voter: Political campaign commercials*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Johnston, A., & White, A. B. (1994). Communication styles and female candidates: A study of the political advertising during the 1986 Senate elections. *Journalism Quarterly*, 71, 321-329.
- Joslyn, R. A. (1980). The content of political spot ads. *Journalism Quarterly*, 57, 92-98.
- Joslyn, R. A. (1981). The impact of campaign spot advertising on voting defections. *Human Communication Research*, 7, 347-360.
- Kahn, K. F., & Kenney, P. J. (1999). *The spectacle of U.S. Senate campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kern, M. (1989). *30-second politics: Political advertising in the eighties*. New York: Praeger.
- Kaid, L. L., & Johnston, A. (2001). *Videostyle in presidential campaigns: Style and content of televised political advertising*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*, 33, 159-174.
- Larson, S. G. (2004). Turning a "no win" race into a win: Democrat Time Holden beats the other George W. (Gekas) in Pennsylvania's 17th. In L. S. Maisel & D. M. West (Eds.), *Running on empty? Political discourse in congressional elections* (pp. 157-170). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lau, R. R., & Pomper, G. M. (2004). *Negative campaigning: An analysis of U.S. senate elections*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Maisel, L. S., & West, D. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Running on empty? Political discourse in congressional elections*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Merritt, S. (1984). Negative political advertising: Some empirical findings. *Journal of Advertising*, 13, 27-38.
- Nelson, J. S., & Boynton, G. R. (1997). *Video rhetorics: Televised advertising in American politics*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Nesbit, D. D. (1988). *Videostyle in senate campaigns*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press.
- Payne, J. G., & Baukus, R. A. (1988). Trend analysis of the 1984 GOP Senatorial spots. *Political Communication and Persuasion*, 5, 161-177.
- Petterson, P. R. (2004). Civil discourse derailed, or the invasion of the body (politic) snatchers in Connecticut 2. In L. S. Maisel & D. M. West (Eds.), *Running on empty? Political discourse in congressional elections* (pp. 1-13). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pfau, M., Parrott, R. & Lindquist, B. (1992). An expectancy theory explanation of political attack television spots: A case study. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 20, 235-253.
- Prysbys, C. (2004). A civil campaign in a competitive state: The 2002 North Carolina U.S. Senate election. In L. S. Maisel & D. M. West (Eds.), *Running on empty? Political discourse in congressional elections* (pp. 215-228). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Schultz, D. A. (Ed.). (2004). *Lights, camera, campaign! Media, politics, and political advertising*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Sheckels, T. F. (1994). Mikulski vs. Chavez for the Senate from Maryland in 1986 and the "rules" for attack politics. *Communication Quarterly*, 42, 311-326.
- Shockley, J. S. (2004). A three-peat in the 2nd congressional district race in Minnesota. In L. S. Maisel & D. M. West (Eds.), *Running on empty? Political discourse in congressional elections* (pp. 41-55). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sinclair, J. (1995). Reforming television's role in American political campaigns: Rationale for the elimination of paid political advertisements. *Communications and the Law [Online]*, 17(1).
- Stewart, C. J. (1975). Voter perception of mud-slinging in political communication. *Central States Speech Journal*, 26, 279-286.
- Terrien, J. (2002, September 22). Gubernatorial candidates lead national stats on ad spending. *The Badger Herald*. Accessed 8/7/05 http://badgerherald.com/news/2002/09/23/gubernatorial_candid.php
- Thurber, J. A., Nelson, C. J., & Dulio, D. A. (2000). *Crowded airwaves: Campaign advertising in elections*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- TNS, (2004, November 1). U.S. Political advertising spending reaches \$1.45 Billion reports TNS Media Intelligence/CMR. Accessed 8/7/05: <http://www.tns-mi.com/news/11012004.htm>.
- Wanat, J. (1974). Political broadcast advertising and primary election voting. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 18, 413-422.
- West, D. M. (2001). *Air wars: Television advertising in election campaigns, 1952-2000*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Weaver-Lariscy, R. A., & Tinkham, S. F. (1996). Advertising message strategies in U.S. congressional campaigns, 1982, 1990. *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 18, 53-66.