**Gronbeck, 1992**

Questions with right and wrong answers:
1. (p333) T/F: Negative campaign ads are relatively recent phenomena.
2. (p335) Name the three types of negative ads.
3. (p335) What is the difference between *enounce* and *enunciation*? Why do we care?
4. (p337) What did the Bush and Dukakis ads have in common?
5. (p337) T/F: The ads focused more on past behavior than current policies.
6. (p339) What does it mean to move from "melodrama to irony to apocalyptic vision"?
7. (p340) Does he think the negative ads work? What evidence does he use to show this?
8. (p341) T/F: Gronbeck believes that negative strategies keep getting worse and worse as the campaign goes along
9. (p341) T/F: Gronbeck believes that the 1988 Presidential campaign was worse than other campaigns.
10. (p342) What was the only issue that voters were offered in the 1988 elections?
11. (p342) T/F: Narrative form is the best method for character/motive attacks.
12. (p344) What does Gronbeck mean when he says that narratives "create fissures in the social order"?
13. (p344) T/F: Gronbeck thinks that negative campaigning makes voters alienated from the political process because politics becomes too much of a machine-like "structure."
14. What evidence does Gronbeck offer to support the conclusions in 8-14 above?

Questions that ask your opinion:
-- Do you disagree with any of these conclusions (8-14)?
-- Do you think that the evidence he presented supports the conclusions he drew in 8-14?
-- Did you think that whole *enuncae-enunciation* thing did much for him in the end?

**Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993**

Questions with right answers:
1. (p68) T/F: Voters recall negative ads more than positive ones.
2. (p68) T/F: There have been studies both that show that negative ads work and that they backfire.
3. (p68) T/F: The studies that Faber et al cite are different from those cited by Gronbeck and Devlin.
4. (p68) What are the different types of ads that Faber et al list? What are the ones Gronbeck had?
5. (p69) What is the sponsorship variable?
6. (p69) List all the factors that Faber et al think effect the effectiveness of a negative ad.
7. (p69) List all the voter attributes that Faber et al think effect the effectiveness of a negative ad.
8. (p70) How do the authors think that TV and newspaper reading relate to the impact of negative ads?
9. (p70) What is the difference between magnitude and direction?
10. The Results (p72-73)
    Did enduring involvement, situational involvement, and attention to TV news correlate with the effectiveness of negative ads?
    Was situational involvement related more strongly with an ad's effectiveness than enduring involvement?
    Did attention to newspapers correlate with an ad's effectiveness? In what direction?
    Were demographic variables or political partisanship related to an ad's effectiveness?
    Looking at Table 1, on an 8-point scale how effective were negative ads?
    Who are the most influenced by negative ads; highly involved or highly uninvolved voters?

Questions that need an opinion
-- There was a lot of talk about the types of negative ads and things that influenced them. Were they tested? Was this a good idea?
-- Do you think that the results generalize to Presidential elections?
NEGATIVE NARRATIVES IN 1988 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN ADS

Bruce E. Gronbeck

PERSONALIZED attacks upon one's opponent have been a staple of American presidential politics almost from the start. The 1796 race was, in the words of historian Page Smith (1963, p. 889), filled with "newspaper polemics, pamphlets, and political rallies" that attacked and defended the characters of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. He notes that, in Massachusetts, "[h]andbills denouncing Adams as an aristocrat and monarchist were nailed to gateposts, doors of houses, and posts ... and men were hired to ride through the state, their saddlebags stuffed with Anti-Federal broadsides" (pp. 901–2). Jefferson was depicted as a dupe of a foreign power, France, and Adams was accused of being an elitist with no faith in the people (Roller, 1985). By the election of 1828, Jamesion (1984) found, electors favorable to the various presidential candidates were equally praised or vilified for their political preferences, and even sample ballots associating particular electors with particular candidates circulated in Pennsylvania that year.

The coming of electronic presidential campaigning extended the reach of communications—and political acrimony. Radio came to presidential campaigns in 1924, with 500 stations and three million receivers in the U.S. That year radio featured the 103 successive ballots at the Democratic National Convention required when "Knucks" (Ku Klux Klan members and sympathizers) took on "Turks" (anti-Klan forces) in the battle that saw Al Smith triumph over Gibbs McAdoo in a seventeen-day marathon (Becker & Lower, 1962). The GOP's nomination of Calvin Coolidge was stunted by comparison, although later Coolidge's ability to adapt his speaking style and evaluations of his opponent to radio certainly contributed to his victory (Fleser, 1966).

The power to present one's self and one's opponent in dramatic and strongly contrasting ways, however, was not fully realized until the arrival of television and computerized elections. The first TV ads came in 1952, when Dwight Eisenhower spent between $800,000 and $1.5 million on spots, somewhere between ten and twenty times the $77,000 spent by Adlai Stevenson. With music by Irving Berlin, animation by Walt Disney, and words by Ben Duffy of Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborne, the Eisenhower campaign drove America into the Unseeing Eye (pacem Patterson & McClure, 1976) of candidate-sponsored video.

Even as late as Patterson and McClure's groundbreaking study of presidential television ads in the 1972 campaign, 40% of the ads had characteristics of documentary-style television, running five to thirty minutes (Kern, 1989). By the 1980s, however, that had changed. In the study of the 1984, 1986 bi-electoral, and 1988 campaigns, Kern found the move to 30- and 60-second spots almost complete; short spots were used so frequently that they became a source of political information able to overwhelm news coverage in terms of facts as well as feel-good and feel-bad images. She also documented the steady rise of negative political advertising in that
decade, which culminated in 1988 in what Newsweek (1988, p. 100) terms "one of the most negative national campaigns since the McCarthy era—so negative, at its worst moments, as to invite the suspicion that George Bush would say nearly anything to win." However, Michael Dukakis was equally liable.

In this essay, I will take negative political advertising seriously. If we are to understand its positive and negative roles in electoral politics, however, we must: (1) define the practice carefully; (2) examine its structures to comprehend its rhetorical engines; (3) discuss explicitly how such devices both contribute to and detract from voters' decision making as we understand that process within a democratic political framework; and (4) question the possible relationships between negative ads and America's conception of citizenship, political process, and political culture, especially in presidential campaigns.

I will consider all these questions, although full exploration would demand more space than can be used for this essay. Here, I will focus attention on one class of negative polit spots, narrative or story-telling ads, and on one campaign, the presidential race of 1988.

THE RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF NEGATIVE POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS

In the writing about attack ads that followed the Watergate affair, a general and all-encompassing negative tone was struck. For example, Charles J. Stewart's article on "mud-slinging" (1975, p. 279) defined a mudslinger as a "person guilty of spreading rumors, making insinuations, perpetuating deceptions, telling lies, and calling names." He condemned the practice out of hand because such people were seen by the public as "untrustworthy, dishonest, incompetent, unqualified, unlikeable, not self-confident, and immature" (p. 285). Similarly, Judith S. Trent and Robert V. Friedenberg (1983, pp. 112-3) discussed communicative messages they called "sneak tactics and political hatchet work." They noted that shrewd campaigners assign these messages to "surrogate speakers" because "Demogogy [sic] is never viewed as an asset and normally backfires for the challenger who employs it." Their position corresponded to Dean Jars and Gene Mason's discovery (1969) that so-called "demagogic appeals" would likely be counterproductive in campaigns. In using the language of mudslinging and demagoguery, these researchers absolutely accentuated the negative in their analyses of attack ads.

In 1984, Cragan and Cutbirth started to redirect our attention on this matter; they suggested we examine the positive effects of character-centered ads in political campaigns. They found ad hominem arguments—where "The primary message of the campaign must . . . be 'trust me rather than my opponent,'" (p. 279)—to be the heart of political campaigns. Working in part from their discussion of ad hominem ads and in part from a general definition of a negative political advertisement as one that creates unattractive or undesirable images of one's political opponents, in 1985 I identified three classes of such ads: (1) the impliciative ad, which works by innuendo, by subtle contrast, to construct a sharper and more positive profile of the politician sponsoring the ad; (2) the comparative ad, which draws indirect or direct comparisons between opposing candidates on particular issues, presumably to aid voters in making rational choices; and (3) the assaultive ad, which forcefully attacks another politician's character, motives, associates, and actions.

In my view, the impliciative ad is a positive force in campaigning, building links of identification between candidate and voter. A comparative ad is also a positive force, for it foregrounds voting decision, even rational choice (whether or not the actual comparison being featured is itself rational). Only the assaultive ad undercut the electoral process, as voters' strongly negative reactions to them indicate (Gronbeck, 1985; in press).

These conclusions force us to deal with character, with competing ethoi, as central to political campaigning. The heart of campaigning, from this perspective, is the creation of arguments—and, I will add shortly, stories—that indicate to and show us why one should vote both for me and against my opponent (Tarrance, 1982). If Kern is correct in her argument that candidate-controlled media are much more pervasive sources of political information than news media and if we believe that campaigning is a character-centered activity, then the portrayal of candidates—self and other—takes us to middle of voter decision-making and political myth. In candidate portrayals, we come upon the ground upon which people are expected to vote and the fountainheads for our understandings of political process.

THE DUAL NARRATIVE STRUCTURES OF NEGATIVE POLIT SPOTS

As campaign junkies know, presidential campaigns run in roughly four phrases. In the first phase, the preannouncement time, candidates criss-cross the country to raise hopes and money. Primaries and caucuses fill the second phase, as candidates jockey for position in the "horse race" against other party contenders. Phase three comprises the summer of the conventions. The general election period runs from sometime in mid-August until election eve. Thus, campaigns can be charted on a timeline; we as an electorate have come to expect different sorts of political messages delivered at us at different times. We expect attention-getting messages in phase one, the rhetoric of expectations in phase two, the political myth-making and power-talk in conventions during phase three, and the argumentative thrusts and parries as well as sloganeering of phase four (Gronbeck, 1990). We have come to expect negative ads in the September-October period of general elections: after the vilification of the opposing party that occurred in the conventions and before the final weeks, when candidates normally return to the high ground of patriotic depictions of themselves, families, and civic virtues.

Thus, we must be sensitive to the sequences of ads as well as their timing. We must study both what is said in an ad and what is said by whom and how it is related. The story told in a narrative ad is from time-past, focusing on the guilt or innocence of the story's characters: the story told by a narrative ad is in time-present, in the electoral context, focusing on whom voters should prefer as a result of what they have learned from that story.

In the language of narrative performance theory (Maclean, 1988), what polispot stories are about we can call the enuncié, the enunciated, while their broadcast at various times during the campaign is the enunciation, the saying or telling, which simultaneously is an incident in a story, the unfolding story of a particular election. Both the enuncié and the enunciation are narrative performances: the first, a story about past events, and the second, a story about a present telling of those past events. The happenings, thus, are past matters being interpreted by candidates or (more typically) their representatives; the tellings are acts to be understood as messages with an impact on voting decisions, or, in other words, for what they reveal about political character of candidates/representatives in the here-and-now.
To see the import of these theoretical constructs, we should look both at pairings between opposing negative ads, what can be called adversarial narratives, and at changes in negative ads over time, sequel narratives. After examining negative narratives from Campaign '88, we can explore some of the socio-political implications of such stories. The blackening of candidates' characters, the focus upon their personal morality rather than occupational competencies, not only sickened voters in 1988, but should lead us to consider their effects upon American electoral processes.

Adversarial Narratives

The presidential campaign of 1988 was generally characterized by negative discourse. Attacks began during the early months of the year in the various caucus and primary battles. Ben. Robert Dole (R-Ks.) was vitriolic in assessing the governmental experience of the sitting Republican vice-president, George Bush; Bush countered that Dole was hypocritical and inconsistent on defense, oil-import fees, and taxes. Ben. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) was subsumed by Michael Dukakis' campaign manager, John Sasso, who leaked videotapes of Biden and British Labor leader Neil Kinnock giving the same speech. Ben. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) rapped Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) in New Hampshire for changing political positions with great speed. Ben. Al Gore (D-Tenn.) joined in the anti-Gephardt campaign during the Super Tuesday southern primary. Gephardt, in turn, ridiculed Michael Dukakis (Gov., Mass.) during the South Dakota primary for purportedly telling Iowa farmers to grow Belgian endive; after winning South Dakota, Gephardt kept up the fire, assaulting the Governor for structuring a "Yuppie party" and for having "the most money and the least message." Dukakis finally counter-attacked during the southern primary, criticizing Gephardt's PACT contributions in one ad and his issue-jumping in another (via an acrobat doing flips) (Newsweek, 1988; Editors of Time, 1988).

The interparty battle, however, stirred up the most political negativity. By June, Bush's pollster, Robert Teeter, showed him eighteen percentage points behind Dukakis and sinking. Teeter used focus groups reacting to information about Dukakis's postulated liberalism to convince Bush that negative ads could work, should be started early, and should run throughout the campaign. This unusual strategy bothered Bush, for it did not feature positively what he stood for—another important consideration for a man trying to separate himself from his popular predecessor. Finally, Bush's braintrust of Teeter, Lee Atwater, John Sununu, and Roger Ailes convinced him to launch attack ads.

The negative attacks on Dukakis began in the summer. While we cannot follow all of the issues, exchanges over the environment nicely illustrate the adversarial and sequel narratives both parties used. Boston Harbor was featured early on. The ad told a story:

Michael Dukakis called Boston Harbor an open sewer. As governor, he had the opportunity to do something about it, but he chose not to. The Environmental Protection Agency called his lack of action the most expensive public mistake in the history of New England. Now, Boston Harbor, the dirtiest harbor in America, will cost residents $6 million to clean. And Michael Dukakis promises to do for America what he has for Massachusetts (Payne, 1989).

In an ad made on September 18, the Dukakis camp told its version:

Now George Bush has attached Michael Dukakis on the environment. The environment! For seven and a half years, George Bush tried to kill the Super Fund cleanup of toxic waste sites; twice supported venues of the Clean Water Act; ordered regulations weakened on corporate polluters; pushed for offshore oil drilling again and again. And, what's most amazing, George Bush doesn't think you'll even bother to look at the facts. That's politics (Payne, 1989).

Consider these stories. The enunciation of the GOP story was of executive short-sightedness that carried a $6 million pricetag. This mini-tragedy depended on the viewer's willingness to hold the man who called Boston Harbor "an open sewer" culpable for its condition. Two kinds of evidence emerged from the story: testimony from the EPA and visual depiction of the harbor. The moral of the story was stated ironically: "And Michael Dukakis promises to do for America what he has done for Massachusetts." That last line moved listeners from the past to the present out of the enunciation and into Campaign '88. Dukakis's presumed ineptitude and callousness were the reasons for telling the story; they were featured in the enunciation. Dukakis was blameworthy because of the future difficulties he could cause if elected president.

In response, the Democrats chose not to refute the GOP, but rather told a story about the ruthlessness of Bush. Bush, the melodrama's villain, was hissed off the stage for slashing the Super Fund budget, supporting vetoes of the Clean Water Act, weakening corporate requirements, and championing offshore drilling. Allegedly, Bush's motives were those of a cynic. Moving from past-events to the present campaign, the ad made the charge of cynicism explicit: "And, what's most amazing, George Bush doesn't think you'll even bother to look at the facts. That's politics." Bush's presumed villainy in the enunciation realm of environmental problems thus transferred to the present campaign; you and I were asked to judge its political, not natural, consequences.

Both Bush's and Dukakis's initial ads on the Boston Harbor issue, therefore, told stories about past-fact ineptitude or villainy, signalled their own storytellers, and called attention to that enunciation or telling. The Bush camp's reference to Dukakis's "promises" and the Dukakis camp's final sentence, "That's politics," asked viewers to make judgments about the ethos of each man; Dukakis's blundering indicated incompetence and Bush's actions were immoral and cynical. By implication, those lapses were deemed important enough to govern each American's vote.

This pair of basic ads, therefore, illustrates the double narrative structure of negative polispos: their forensic attack upon the personal qualities of opponents and their epideictic praise or blame of the candidates seeking offices. Significantly, little is said about environmental policies by either candidate; the focus is upon the past sins, not future directions. Bush's attacks upon Dukakis's defense posture (the tank ads) and his crime policies (the furlough ads) also reflect this pattern. In both cases, Dukakis's strategy was to counterattack Bush, sometimes with, sometimes without, a defense of his own record. While the paired ads presented some information, they provided little guidance in understanding the candidate's goals and visions for tomorrow.
Sequel Narratives

Before considering the socio-cultural import of adversarial narratives, however, let us examine stories-in-sequence, the retelling of a single political story at different stages of the campaign. Dukakis's later retellings of Bush's environmental plots provide an example. Two weeks after his initial response to Bush, on October 3, Dukakis's retailers launched a series of ads called "Bush's False Advertising," including the following:


This ad followed the initial story rather closely, but added material: the endorsement—bringing in Dukakis as the good guy in Bush's villainous story—and the twist in the final sentence that turned the story from melodrama to irony. New evidence was introduced in the narrative of past-facts, but, more importantly, when the storyteller brought us to the present, we were asked to remember that things are not always what they seem in politics. Statements often are ironic reversals of actions; seeing and hearing are not believing in politics.

About this time in mid-October, after the presidential debates, "The Packaging of George Bush" series appeared with its narrative about the environment. Men who were presumably making ads for Bush had the following exchange:

A: "Geez, look at these poll numbers. People are really worried about the environment."
B: "So do a commercial standing on a beautiful beach."
C: "Give me a break! After seven and a half years of our boys taking apart the Environmental Protection Agency, James Watt—Bush personally got him to ease up on corporate polluters—that is on the record, and now we're going to say...
D: "He's going to say he loves the environment, he's gunna make it clean and wonderful.
C: "He'd say that?" [chuckles from everyone]
VO/on-screen words: They'd like to sell you a package. Wouldn't you rather choose a president? (Payne, 1989)

Here, the story of Bush's villainy expands to include complicitous staff members who know the facts yet refuse to act in accordance with them, and who, with the help of a malleable Bush, will say anything. As typical, this forensic review of the actions of Bush's campaigners is tied to the present: the device used in "The Packaging of George Bush" series is a strategy familiar from Hill Street Blues—a day and time reference. The enunciation act occurs in the present and emphasizes the importance of making a proper voting decision at this time and on the basis of the immoral inconsistencies depicted in the story. The ad, like the previous one, puts Bush's actions in conflict with his words and questions his motivations; Bush's hidden ethical sins—rather than his environmental policy per se—are the pivotal issues. By this time in the campaign, the pretense that one is assessing actual evidence even-handedly is gone; rather, the focus of the ad is not the environment at all, but the campaigners.

The ultimate effort in the sequel narratives on the environment came from the last series of attack ads made by the Dukakis organization, the so-called "Future" or "Imagine" series. While USA Today reported these would be upbeat, the ad on the environment, made on October 21, 1989, included a story that combined elements of On the Beach and Bladerunner. In black and white, it showed future life in a completely polluted environment. Its texts purportedly came from a television news broadcast, radio news, and a voiceover commentator:

[TV]: Exercise extreme caution, please remain indoors. [RADIO]: Today the Republican administration promised a major new effort to deal with the growing environmental crisis. California ocean pollution closed down the last remaining public beach. A Republican spokesman said today if you must go outdoors, use extreme caution and protect yourself from toxic air pollution. [A young couple is sitting on the beach, look at a drilling rig; as they turn toward the camera, we see them wearing gas masks.] [VO]: Republicans and their failed environmental policies are destroying our quality of life. If we don't make some changes now, imagine what it's going to be like in the future. "The Future" appears on the screen

This story is a dream of horror, of a dehumanized life. In Northrop Frye's climatological genres of literature, we are in Winter, in the deepest of ironic narratives where the normal values of humanity are reversed (Frye, 1957). The forensic qualities of assessment are gone; blame is so pervasive that even Bush is missing from the story, as unidentified "Republican" personnages are the faceless actors. There is not even villainy here, only death.

The sequence we find in the Dukakis 1988 negative narratives on the environment is echoed in other sequences. His enunciation gets shriller and shriller, attacking Bush for the federal government's furlough program and for the rape by a furloughed drug dealer of Patsy Pedrin, shouting his ineffectiveness as head of the federal anti-drug effort, and questioning his selection of Dan Quayle as follow-up chief of the anti-drug effort (Payne, 1989). The education issue received the same treatment; a "Future" negative ad depicted an imagined 21st century with school closings and children unable to pursue education.

On most of the issues for which I viewed ads, the negative narratives in their sequels abandoned the pretense of assessing candidates' records and situated topics in a political rather than social-institutional context. Finally, when the weapons of rhetorical assault seemed dulled through overuse, attacks disappeared from the campaign environment altogether in favor of dystopic visions of hell on earth. Finally, the negative ads generated analogic visions of final states devoid even of political controversy; the rhetorical dialectics of politics gave way to the poetics of despair. The enoncé always was a story of civic then demonic villainy, and the enunciation gained psychical speed as we moved from melodrama to irony to apocalyptic vision across the campaign timeline.

CONCLUSIONS

So what are we to make of the adversarial and sequel narratives we have found in these negative ads? Conclusions seem warranted at three levels: conclusions about
Campaign '88 as a political event, about negative narratives as rhetorical techniques, and negative campaigns as socio-cultural rituals.

Negative Narratives in Campaign '88

For reasons no one seems to have understood fully, Campaign '88 was saturated with negative polispos. They started earlier than usual and continued through the general election period to the very end; even the election eve half-hour shows of both parties were periodically framed in attack. Were these effective? The margin of Bush's victory, the predominance of his negative television commercials, and the fact that he was able to reverse a twenty-point gap in the polls after he focused his television campaign on his opponent's faults suggest that the technique worked well for the Republicans. One of the first social-scientific studies done during 1988 of senatorial elections showed that attacks were effective with voters, although more effective when launched against stands on issues than on the character of the politicians (Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; cf. Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989). for a 1986 electoral study with similar results. Frank Biocca, director of the National Political Advertising Project, concluded near the end of the 1988 campaign that voters' distaste for negative commercials dissipated over time, while the negative information was retained and affected voting; distasteful or not, he argued, negative polispos worked for those who used them (Katz, 1988).

That conclusion, however, seemed to be belied by the study he executed in late October for USA Today. As Biocca tested voter reaction to a variety of ads, the most highly rated ads, those judged the most fair and those voters thought were more likely to affect their decisions in affirmative ways, were the positive ads (Katz, 1988). As much of the literature on negative ads predicts (Garramone, 1984, 1985; Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975), Biocca's data from audience expressions of probable voting behavior show that such negative polispos as the Bush tank ad and the Dukakis attack on "President Quayle" may have boomeranged. In addition, the bi-elections from 1989 in New York, Virginia, and New Jersey tend to demonstrate that negative campaigns may be backfiring on their heaviest users (Grady, 1989). Still, George Will thought the New Jersey gubernatorial race showed that negative campaigning works (1989). In short, we cannot conclude confidently from recent evidence that negative ads are surefire winners—or losers. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991, p. 282) reached the same conclusion. Campaign '88 settled nothing, although it suggested that we should differentiate among different kinds of negative ads.

The Force of Negative Polispot Narratives

But we can draw some conclusions about the force of these ads in the campaign process.

First, because negative narratives wear out, they must be rebuilt. The Democrats, particularly, returned repeatedly to the studio, retelling their tales of woe, to keep fresh attacks before the voters. Political advertisement still is more an art than a science and, thus, experimentation continually occurs during the run of campaigns. While the earlier ads presented political information about candidates' past acts and positions, the sequels became more and more personalized.

Second, negative political advertising is as much a defensive as offensive weapon.

"Going negative" is something one does either when far behind (as Bush was when he started) or when one has been attacked personally by an opponent (as Dukakis insisted he was when first going negative in the primary period and again in the summer of 1988). Afraid of the power of their opponents' negative polispos, candidates believe they need strong negative defenses for use in the case of preemptive first strikes by the other party. Moreover, adversarial narratives—a direct countering of one jab with another—may add excitement and ward off any judgment of weakness. In 1988, Bush still carried the "wimp" label and Dukakis was seen as cool and emotionless; adversarial narratives gave both chances to repair presumed character faults at the expense of an opponent.

Third, as negative narratives get reframed, political rhapsoles are obliged to tell darker and darker stories. If the assignment of evil to a candidate does not produce much movement in the polls, then the evil must be intensified in sequels. Just as laundry soap advertisers constantly look for new ways to contrast their similar product with that of other soap manufacturers, so do the attacks on the Brand X's of politics gain in volume and sensation over time. On a seven-point scale of emotional intensity, the movement always is toward seven. The sequels to negative ads for both Democrats and Republicans in 1988 were always darker and more intense than early ads. Sequels are designed, we must assume, to jolt insured voters.

The comparison with laundry products is not exact, however. Comparative ads for detergents end with a positive statement about one's own product; sales are presumed to depend upon affirmation. Negative comparative ads in politics, however, frequently (almost always in 1988) end in denial or subversion of one's opponent. Their function is to destabilize the voter support for the other, either increasing the undecideds (who presumably can be won by one's own candidate) or even driving voters out of the electoral arena altogether, which seemed to happen in a 1984 senatorial race poll (Elbert, 1984). Nationally, for example, the political savants know that Democrats (with more registered voters than Republicans) often win when the turnout is large, Republicans when it is small. The parties' positions are also reversed, of course, in specific locales. Therefore, reducing the size of the electorate may be desirable strategically for some candidates in some situations. More generally, the positive contributions attributed to comparative argumentative ads (Gronbeck, 1985) do not seem to characterize comparative narrative ads; at least in these, no positive affirmations of self appeared.

Fourth, what was especially bothersome in 1988 was the predominance of negative ads (Katz, 1988). Conventional wisdom on campaigning, as we noted earlier, has perceived four stages, with negative advertising usually targeted for late phase three and early phase four. In 1988 that pattern was broken, as negative polispos were aired from midsummer until the election. Both candidates locked into strategies of mass-mediated character assassination early on and could not let loose.

The voters tested by Biocca longed for more positive ads. One reported: "I liked the ones with the convention speeches because the music attracts my attention. The George Bush family things are really effective, but when he puts down Michael Dukakis, that really hurts him." Another, reacting to Dukakis's relaxed discussion of young families and their problems, added, "To me, it means he has all of us in his heart. I just have a warmer feeling." A third responded: "For the young family with
two people working, he seemed to get closeness talking directly to them. These voters expressed sadness about the amount of negativity. Nonetheless, as Teeter's focus groups reported and the November 1988 voting pattern illustrated, the negative campaign—in spite of voters' preferences—apparently worked.

Such self-report data are unreliable, for voters are often inept at articulating the grounds for their decisions and may sometimes offer the kinds of responses they believe will be attractive to the pollster. Yet, as was noted earlier, the first social-scientific study done during 1988 confirmed that attacks were more effective with voters when launched against stands on issues than on the character of politicians (Pfau & Burgoon, 1989; cf. West, 1991). Even if we cannot directly connect expressions of sentiment to voting, we probably can take those sentiments as indicative of citizen's attitudes toward the campaign process.

Fifth, the relationship between voter feelings and actions can be explained partially by the relationships between the enonle and the enunciation of its narratives. As one might expect, the enonle tried opposition candidates for their various faults and sins; but, because those forensic stories were, in terms used earlier, almost only assaultive and seldom comparative in their character studies, they gave voters little to vote for, only characterizations to vote against. Further, in emphasizing the politics of issue-manipulation and in presenting us with negative portraits throughout the duration of the general election, the enunciation focused reasons-to-vote almost only upon political motive. What voters saw in the negative narratives of 1988 were forensic studies of character defects that, in the final analysis, were offered within dyslogic assessments of the political process itself.

The primary subjects of ads—of a kind of political information with great reach—were negative assessments of personal morality, which, as we have known since Aristotle's Rhetoric (1378a), comprise but one element of ethos or credibility. Little concern appeared for an opponent's good sense or good will, the other elements that are generally recognized as important to political performance. Few of the negative ads contributed any kind of political sense, and almost all were marked in their emphasis on ill, not good, will. Except for the initial negative ads that treated Dukakis's actual performance as governor or Bush's actual votes when presiding over the Senate, no incidents in the attack narratives treated relationships between candidates' actions and the quality of thought or the liberality of sentiment behind them.

Rather, all issues were reduced to matters of ethicality of motive. The narratives were morality plays, in which the sequences of actions depicted the principal player, the opposing candidate, as acting from reprehensible motives. The enonle narrowed our purview to the moral dimension of ethos. The enunciation was always justified by implying that praise or blame of past motives is the primary campaign issue.

The duality of the narrative structures occurs because the implicit storyteller of the ad is also the enunciator in the present—a candidate or candidate's representative. The persona of the storyteller unites the two narratives, allowing them to resonate, permitting the attack on past-fact issues to be narrativized as a or even the central story of the campaign. So, voters were asked in 1988 to judge between the predicted Reign of Vice and the promised Reign of Virtue—and little else.

Within an articulation of the campaign process that emphasizes winning through destruction of the opposition's moral base rather than construction of political agenda, therefore, voters were presented with precious little to vote for. In Brown's understanding of interpretation and explanation (1987), in the 1988 politics the past was reinterpreted primarily in terms of the good-bad motives of the candidates, not political action per se, while campaign organizations implicitly explained that public governance pivots primarily on personal ethics.

Finally, narrative is preferred to argumentative discourse when the subject matter is morality. One can easily build arguments over whose voting record is more isomorphic with voter wishes, what someone did or did not accomplish while in office, and agenda for future actions needed to improve life in the collectivity. Bald assertions about someone's virtues and vices, however, can come off as whining, tattling, dull, or smug preachment. When the subject is virtue and vice, the key to success is the description of actions. Again, returning to Aristotle, "we praise a man for what he has actually done," more particularly a sequence of actions where "we must try to prove that our hero's noble acts are intentional" (1367b)—or our villain's ignoble acts were likewise intentionally performed. In what Osborn (1986) calls a rhetoric of presentation, we are told how to look at the world, and in a subsequent rhetoric of arousal, we are instructed how to feel about what we see.

The key to the arousal is the seeing—the perception of the sequence of actions that are given a kind of coherence and point by narrative form. Actions are related to each other, they cohere, through narrative structuration and are made to point to a moral conclusion by the narrator's deliberate inscription of a particular interpretation of why we are seeing what we see. Moreover, the very act of telling is an explanation of what this campaign is about—what this year's political agenda for the country ought to be. Negative narratives frame the past in order to inscribe intentions and intersect the present in order to explain how prudent voting behaviors follow reasonably from other events. In the case of presidential campaign ads about character, narrative persuasion would appear to be much, much more effective than argumentative discourses on political ethics. The visibility of the stories, too, is well suited to the visual mode of presentation—televisual discourse.

These six conclusions should help us toward a better understanding of the force—for good or ill—of negative polispos in our political process. In suggesting some of the unfortunate psychosocial effects of the attack ads we saw in 1988, I also mean to hint at ways they can work more positively. What has been suggested is that adversarial stories, with their focus on character differentiation and definition, function much like the comparative ads of the argumentative genre and thus may have some redeeming values as a vehicle for campaigning. But, the sequel stories, because of their perhaps-avoidable movement toward the darker zones of life, put their focus on character assassination. Far from redemptive, their force is solely destructive.

THE NARRATIVIZATION OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

This last observation draws us to a socio-cultural level of analysis. American presidential campaigning is a socio-drama writ large—extended over two or more years, dense in the amount and variety of discourse generated, and costly as a multi-billion dollar enterprise (Gronbeck, 1984). The time, effort, and cost produce an occasion to assess our social order: the condition of the citizenry, the spray of our social commitments, the valuative foundations of our self-images.
records, policies, fundamental ethos or characters—should define presidential campaigning. In democratic theory, the testing of character is central to electoral contests. Only the degenerate forms of character testing must be avoided. As Wilson Carey Williams opined, “For both Republicans and Democrats, the election of 1988 indicates the need for a new civility, and for the kinds of word and deed necessary to affirm, in the coming century, the dignity of self-government” (Election, 1989, p. 200). Our politicians, media representatives, and citizens will hold only the most troubling images of campaigning until we refocus the discourse about politics we offer up every four years.

Notes

Bruce E. Gronbeck is a professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Iowa. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Speech Communication Association convention, 1989, San Francisco. An expanded version, including the study of argumentatively structured negative ads, will appear as a chapter in a book (Gronbeck, in press); the author thanks the SCA for permission to use portions of this essay in that chapter. He also thanks Dr. J. Gregory Payne and his associates at Emerson College for preceding the tapes of the 1988 ads, Iowa’s 1991 Obermann Fellows for their guidance, as well as Jay Semel and Lorna Olson of the Iowa Center for Advanced Studies for all of their courtesies.

A topic that could be pursued further is the impact, ultimately, of ironic discourse on political understanding. Not being able to accept the world as it presents itself to us and being forced to reverse the polarities of our perceptual judgments probably have significantly adverse effects on self and social perceptions. Such arguments get broached in Burke, 1945/1969, and Rostow, 1969.

List of References

Broder, D. (1991, June 5). Why politics is alienating voters. The Des Moines Register, p. 6A.
Elbert, D. (1984, October 14). Iowa poll discloses gains by Democrats. Des Moines Register, pp. 1A, 10A.
A direct examination of current communication formats will reveal that today's electronic devices are much like any others, relying on packed formats. New forms of communication, such as the Internet, promise to change how we communicate, and the advent of mobile computing has further sped up the process of changing the way we communicate. However, the new forms of communication also bring with them new security challenges.

This interest is due in part to the 1996 Federal Communication Commission's decision to liberalize the ownership of radio stations, which has led to the rise of new forms of communication. The new forms of communication, such as satellite radio and cable television, have led to a proliferation of new forms of communication, which in turn has led to new security challenges.

Brenda L. Brock

THE LIMITS OF BURKEAN SYSTEM
Burke, Revised and Reviewed

THE FORUM: A JOURNAL OF SOCIAL FORUM

Vol. 12 (2011-12) No. 3

EDITORIAL BOARD

Associate Editors

John L. Brock

Negative Political Advertising and Voting Intent: The Role of Involvement and Alternative Information Sources

Ronald J. Faber, Albert R. Tims and Kay G. Schmitt

Previous research on negative political advertising has found both intended and backlash effects, indicating that the impact of these ads is likely to be contingent on other factors. The current study examines some potentially important contingent variables — level of involvement and attention to both newspapers and television for political information. Regression analyses indicate that both enduring and situational involvement and attention to television news increase the impact of negative political ads on voting decisions. Although it initially appears that attention to newspaper is unrelated to the impact of negative ads, analysis of covariance shows that newspaper reading actually reduces the impact of negative ads after controlling for other variables.

Ronald J. Faber, (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin) is Associate Professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota.

Albert R. Tims, (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin) is Associate Professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota.

Kay G. Schmitt, is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota.

Currently, one of the most discussed aspects of political advertising is the impact of negative appeals. Questions and concerns about the ethics and influence of negative political ads are common in both the popular press (Grove 1989; Martz 1988; Taylor 1989) and the academic literature (Caywood and Laczniak 1985; Garramone et al. 1990; Hill 1989; Merritt 1984). This debate has been spurred by the high degree to which candidates are employing this form of advertising.

In 1981, Sabato estimated that negative ads made up one third of all spot political ads. More recent estimates of the percentage of campaign advertising expenditures devoted to negative advertising range from 30% to more than half of the average candidate’s advertising budget (Colford 1986; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991). Appropriating such a large percentage of the ad budget to negative advertising suggests that candidates and their campaign committees believe it is an effective technique.

Academic research, however, has indicated that the effects of negative political ads may not be so clear-cut. Several studies indicate that negative ads can create negative opinions of the target candidate (Boydston and Kaid 1983; Garramone 1985; Merritt 1984). Other studies, however, have found backlash effects against the sponsoring candidate to be as great or greater than the intended effects (Hill 1989; Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1990). Additionally, these studies have found that while some people show large changes in candidate preference after exposure to negative ads, many others indicate no effect from exposure. One possible reason for these conflicting results is that several contingent factors influence the impact of political ads. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to suggest a number of possible factors, characteristics of either the message or of voters, that may affect the outcome of negative ad exposure, and to examine the role two potentially important voter-related variables — alternative sources of political information and political involvement — play in influencing the magnitude of impact negative political advertising has on voters. Both involvement and alternative information sources have previously been found to influence voters’ motivation and ability to process and evaluate political information (Atkin 1980; Berkowitz and Pritchard 1989; Choi and Becker 1987; McClure
and Patterson 1974; Rothchild 1978); they are, therefore, also likely to affect the magnitude of impact negative messages have on voters.

**Theoretical Background**

Prior survey research has indicated consistently that voters do indeed recall negative ads. A survey across six southern states found two thirds of the respondents remembered seeing a negative ad during the 1986 elections (Johnson and Copeland 1987). More than 75% of the respondents in a Michigan congressional election survey stated they recalled seeing a negative ad, and 57.7% were able to recall the name of either the sponsor or target of the ad (Garramone 1984a). More specifically, between 47% and 68% of respondents were able to recall specific negative ads from a Minnesota senatorial election (Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1990), and almost 20% of all information recalled from ads in a Texas gubernatorial election were negative comments about an opponent (Faber and Storey 1984).

One reason why negative information may be particularly likely to be remembered from ads has been proposed by Lau (1982). Using Gestalt principles, he suggested that negative information may be counter to what people are accustomed to and expect from advertising messages and, as a result, stands out disproportionately. Whether due to novelty or some other reason, researchers have typically found that negative information is better recalled than positive information (Garramone et al. 1990; Reeves, Thorson and Schleuder 1986; Shapiro and Rieger 1989). Even more importantly, it has been demonstrated that negative information is weighted more heavily than positive information in developing impressions and forming evaluations (Kellerman 1984; Wyer 1970). Thus, information from negative political ads may play a key role in candidate preference decisions. Studies examining the relative effect of negative and positive information in political decisions have supported this belief (Klein 1991; Lau 1982, 1985).

Other studies have found that voters express negative opinions about the use of negative political ads (Garramone 1984a; Johnson and Copeland 1987; Stewart 1975), and that a backlash effect may result if voters disapprove of a candidate using negative appeals. Thus, while negative information may be disproportionately influential in voters’ decisions, it can influence voting preference in either direction. In both cases, negative ads may be more retrievable from memory than positive appeals and play a greater role in voting preferences, but the outcome of the voting decision would depend on how voters evaluated the negative ads.

Given the importance of negative advertising and the potential for bi-directional effects, research is needed on two related issues. The first is to determine what influences the direction of response to negative ads (intends or backlash effects), and the second issue is to determine what factors influence the degree to which negative ads will influence voters at all (the magnitude of impact negative ads have on voting preferences). A number of potentially important variables that may affect either or both of these issues have been suggested. These variables can generally be divided into two groups — attributes of the ads and attributes of the voters.

**Ad Attributes**

Existing research supports the belief that attributes of the ads themselves influence their effectiveness. Boydston and Kaid (1983), for example, compared pre- and post-exposure scores for five negative ads on a 13-item scale assessing the image of the target of the ad. In general, their results indicated that exposure to negative ads had a negative effect on the image of the target, but not all ads were equally successful in changing impressions of the target candidate. Of the five negative ads they examined, three produced significant changes while two did not. Additionally, when individual image items were examined, some actually improved as a result of exposure to some of these negative ads. Similarly, Faber, Tims and Schmitt (1990) found variations in intended and backlash effects across the four negative ads studied. Since these studies involved the same voters and the same political race, it would seem that differences across ads must be attributable to advertising differences.

Several authors have recently suggested that there may be different types of negative ads and that a typology of negative ads may help explain differences in reported effects (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; Thorson, Christ and Caywood 1991). For example, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991) suggest that there may be three types of negative political ads — direct attack, direct comparison and implied comparisons. Direct attack ads are the ones that most people consider when they think of negative ads and the type most common in research studies. They are also the form most likely to cause backlash effects. On the other hand, implied comparisons, where the
opposing candidate is not specifically mentioned, may be the most effective in creating intended effects because they lead viewers to generate their own arguments.

Additional studies have pointed out other potential within-ad factors that can affect how people evaluate a negative ad. Garramone (1985) compared the effect of a negative ad that was sponsored by the opposing candidate versus one sponsored by a political action committee. Results indicated that subjects had a more negative image of the target candidate and were less likely to vote for this candidate if the ad was sponsored by an independent source than if the sponsor was the opposing candidate. Additionally, the image of the opponent and likelihood of voting for this candidate were higher if the negative ad was sponsored by an independent source. Thus, it would appear that intended effects may be more common if the ad is sponsored by someone other than the opposing candidate.

Another content factor that might influence the impact of a negative ad is the focus of the attack. Johnson and Copeland (1987) found that respondents considered attacks against an opponent's stand on issues to be more acceptable than negative ads focusing on "personal" aspects of the target candidate. In an experimental study, Roddy and Garramone (1988) found that viewers of a negative ad based on issues had significantly more positive evaluations of the sponsor's character and were significantly less likely to vote for the target candidate than were viewers of a negative image ad. Thus, it appears that negative issue ads may produce more intended effects while negative image ads may produce a greater backlash effect.

Other factors such as believability or credibility of the message or the salience of the issue or personality attribute attacked may also influence voters' evaluations of negative ads. Additionally, other ad-related factors may influence the impact of a negative ad by affecting its accessibility from memory. Two factors that seem particularly likely to accomplish this are emotion and visual imagery.

Evidence indicates that emotional political ads are better recalled than non-emotional appeals (Lang, 1991; Shapiro and Rieger 1989) and that negative emotional political ads are better recalled than positive emotional political ads (Lang and Lanfear 1990). It has also been suggested that ads that contain strong visual images may be more accessible from memory (Kisielius and Sterntahl 1986). Finally, some research suggests that negative emotions in commercials improve memory for the visual elements in the ad (Lang and Friestad 1987). Taken together, these findings might help to explain why the "Willie Horton" and "Boston Harbor" ads may have played such a strong role in the 1988 presidential election.

The impact of these ad attributes discussed above can best be assessed in experimental settings. They require control of all extraneous variables with the manipulation of some content element. This can not be observed in an actual race where many additional factors vary. While appropriate for studying these content attributes, experiments typically have a difficult time accounting for voter-related variables. These too need to be examined, but are typically better studied through survey research during actual elections.

Voter Attributes

While work is currently being done on the impact of several of the ad attributes on political decision making, much less attention has been focused on voter attributes. The one voter attribute that has been examined is partisanship. Although partisanship does not effect voters' recall of negative ads for one candidate or the other, it does strongly influence how these ads will affect voters' candidate preferences (Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1990; Merritt 1984). Negative ads have much greater intended effects on partisans of the source candidate than on partisans of the target candidate. Conversely, backlash effects are more likely among partisans of the target candidate. Independent voters are somewhat more likely to report backlash effects than intended effects (Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1990).

While partisanship has been found to influence the direction of the impact of negative ads, little previous work has examined what voter variables may influence the magnitude of these effects. The broader literature in political communications suggests that two variables, involvement and alternative information sources, may be important.

Although strong disagreements exist over just what involvement is (Roser 1990; Zaichkowsky 1986), it has generally been regarded as an important mediator of the effects of political advertising (Atkin 1980; Rothschild 1978). Some authors have conceptualized involvement as a stimulus characteristic with the level of the election race (low level versus high level races) serving as an indicator of involvement (Rothschild 1978; Rothschild and Ray 1974). These studies found greater knowledge gains from exposure to political ads in low involving elections. Other re
searchers have conceptualized involvement as a characteristic of the voter and in these studies conflicting findings have emerged. Some find less involved voters learn more from political ads (Hofstetter and Buss 1980; Hofstetter, Zukin and Buss 1978; Patterson and McClure 1974). However, others report that advertising recall is positively associated with interest level (Faber and Storey 1984) and information seeking (Atkin et al. 1973; Garramone 1983, 1984b), both of which are characteristics of high involvement situations (Rothschild 1978).

The confusion in findings regarding involvement is often attributed to the variations in how involvement has been conceptualized and operationalized (Roser 1990; Zaichkowsky 1986). Some authors have suggested that there are three different types of involvement: physical, enduring and situational (Houston and Rothschild 1978; Zaichkowsky 1985). Physical involvement refers to characteristics of the object being examined (Zaichkowsky 1985). In the realm of political advertising this would refer to the level of the election. Enduring (or personal) involvement refers to a long-term, inherent interest in a product category or topic, while situational involvement reflects the temporary relevance of a specific object or concern with a short-term outcome (Roser 1990; Rothschild, 1978; Zaichkowsky 1985). When discussing political elections, enduring involvement might refer to a voter's general interest in politics while situational involvement would reflect concern about the outcome of a specific election.

Each type of involvement can also be considered to influence at least two different mechanisms that relate to an ad's impact on attitude change (Petty, Unnava and Stratham 1991). These mechanisms are one's motivation to process information and one's ability to process the ad content. People who are high in both situational and enduring involvement should be motivated and able to process negative political ads. Those with high enduring involvement should have greater ability to process and evaluate these messages since they have probably developed more prior political knowledge. However, this previously developed knowledge may mitigate the impact of any additional piece of new information. Situational involvement, on the other hand, may exert less impact on ability to process political messages and more on motivation. As a result, new information may exert its greatest impact when situational involvement is high and enduring involvement is moderate or low. Therefore, we can hypothesize that both enduring and situational involvement will be positively associated with the impact of negative ads on voters, but that this association will be stronger for situational involvement than for enduring involvement.

Another variable that might influence the impact of negative political ads is exposure to other information sources about the candidates. Unfortunately, most political studies have chosen to examine one source of information in isolation from other potential sources. Several authors have recently criticized this practice and have argued for the need to examine the interdependent relationship among information sources (Berkowitz and Pritchard 1989; Choi and Becker 1987). Similar calls for the examination of the political advertising effects within a larger framework of media use have occasionally been made (Atkin and Heald 1976) but rarely heeded.

To date, most research on the outcomes of media usage has focused only on cognitive effects (Berkowitz and Pritchard 1989; Choi and Becker 1987). These studies have found that newspaper reading is positively associated with candidate knowledge (Becker and Dunwoody 1982) and with the ability to discriminate between candidates' stands on issues (Choi and Becker 1987), while television news viewing is unrelated to these variables.

Therefore, attention to newspapers may accord a more sophisticated framework of knowledge and reasoning, thereby lessening the likelihood of influence from campaign appeals such as negative political advertisements. In contrast, television viewing is associated with lower amounts of information holding and is not associated with discriminating among candidates. Accordingly, we can hypothesize that: 1) attention to newspapers will be negatively associated with negative ad impact, while 2) attention to television news will be positively associated with negative political ad impact.

Among the voter variables, partisanship has previously been shown to mediate the direction of the impact negative ads have on a voter's decision making (Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1990; Merritt 1984). It has been suggested here that involvement and use of other media sources will mediate the magnitude of this impact, although this has not previously been tested. Therefore, the current study was designed to examine the impact of situational and enduring involvement and news media usage on the magnitude of influence negative ads have on voter preferences.

Methodology

The context for this investigation was the 1988 U.S.
Senate race in Minnesota. This race matched a Republican incumbent, Dave Durenberger, and a relatively well-known Democratic challenger, Hubert (Skip) Humphrey III, the state attorney general. Both candidates ran television advertisements that employed extensive negative advertising. Four of the most prominent negative ads were selected for examination in this study. Each of these ads made a direct attack on the opponent. Two of the ads were sponsored by the incumbent, and two were sponsored by the challenger (see Figure 1 for descriptions). Each ad ran during the middle stage of the campaign (three to six weeks before the election). The ads were chosen because of their perceived equivalence between candidates in terms of frequency of occurrence, timing and content.

**Sample**

A sample of eligible voters was interviewed by telephone during the ten-day period preceding the election. Subjects were drawn systematically, using a random start, from the voter registration list of the state's most populous county. Interviewers were instructed to try at least three times to reach each voter. A total of 286 interviews were completed from among the 448 eligible voters sampled, yielding a response rate of 64 percent.

The sample was comprised of 51.6 percent males and 48.4 percent females; 51.3 percent of the sample were younger than 40. The respondents were well educated, with 41.0 percent holding at least an undergraduate degree. Finally, 29.0 percent of the subjects regarded themselves Republican, 36.0% were Democrat and 30.1% said they supported neither major party (4.9% refused to answer). These findings closely match the profile of the population of registered voters.

**Dependent Measure**

Respondents were asked if they had seen each of the four specific negative ads. A brief indication of the central content of each ad was provided as a prompt. For each ad, those respondents who said they recalled seeing it were asked to indicate, on a five-point scale, whether the ad made them more or less likely to vote for the candidate sponsoring the ad and whether they were more or less likely to vote for the candidate being attacked.

In a previous study it was shown that the direction of changes in candidate preference as a result of exposure to these ads was highly related to partisanship (Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1990). While some variations exist across these ads in the amount of people reporting preference changes, the pattern of these changes was highly consistent. Since the purpose of the current study was to determine if involvement
and use of other media influenced the magnitude of preference change resulting from exposure to negative ads, a non-directional measure was needed here. This was accomplished by folding the original scales to form three-point non-directional measures of the magnitude of change toward each candidate (no change, some change or much change). This "folding" procedure is a common and recommended method for developing measures of the magnitude of an effect (Torgerson 1958). These non-directional scales were then summed to develop an overall index of the magnitude of preference change that could directly be attributed to exposure to the negative ads examined here (negative ad impact index). Cronbach's alpha for this eight-item index was .82, indicating that the folded scores form a reliable index.

Naturally, not all respondents recalled all four of the negative ads. When a respondent failed to recall a particular negative ad they were coded as if this ad had no influence on their candidate preference. This was considered to be a logical approach since recognizing a particular ad would seem to be a precondition for this ad's exerting an impact on candidate preference. However, to insure the adequacy of this assumption, separate analyses were also conducted treating no recall of an ad as missing data. These alternative analysis strategies produce identical results. Therefore, only the analyses treating no recall of an ad as having no impact on voting preference are reported here.

**Independent Variables**

As indicated earlier, involvement can be subdivided into enduring involvement and situational involvement. Measures of each of these constructs were included here. Enduring political involvement reflects a long-term, on-going interest in politics (Rothschild 1978). If someone has an enduring involvement it was believed that this would be reflected by their actively seeking political information and by their desire to discuss politics in general. Therefore, enduring involvement was operationalized by using an additive index based on the following two items: (1) "Is news about politics something you try to pay attention to, or is it something you just happen to learn about because it is in the media?"; (2) "Is politics something you like to talk about or do you only discuss it if someone else brings it up?" These items were significantly correlated ($r = .37; p < .001$).

Unlike enduring involvement, situational involvement is specific to the current political campaign (Rothschild 1978). Therefore, the measure of situational involvement focused directly on respondents' interest and concern with the specific race. The following two items were used in an additive index to operationalize situational involvement: (1) "How closely have you followed the current U.S. Senate race in Minnesota?"; (2) "How concerned are you with who wins the race for the Senate?" Four-point scales were used to measure responses to both questions. The correlation between the two indicators of situational involvement was .44 ($p < .001$).

Single item measures were used to assess attention to news about politics (1) on television and (2) in the newspaper. Both items were based on four-point scales ranging from very closely to not closely at all.

**Results**

It was hypothesized that both enduring and situational involvement would be positively associated with the perceived impact of negative ads on voting preference and that this association would be stronger for situational involvement than for enduring involvement. Additionally, it was believed that attention to newspapers would be negatively associated with negative ad impact index, while attention to television news would be positively related. An initial examination of the data via zero-order correlations showed that enduring involvement, situational involvement, attention to television news about politics and attention to newspaper news about politics were all positively related with each other (see Table 1). Of greater importance, however, is the association of each of these variables with the negative ad impact index. As expected, enduring involvement, situational involvement and attention to television news about politics were all positively related ($p < .01$) with the negative ad impact index. Additionally, the magnitude of the correlation for situational involvement was greater than that for enduring involvement. However, attention to news about politics in the newspaper and the negative political ad impact index were not significantly correlated as had been hypothesized.

Since the independent variables were correlated and this could mask or distort the impact of any particular variable, a multiple regression analysis was run to assess the unique contribution of each of the independent variables. Additionally, by using a hierarchical model, it was possible to control for the potential effects of demographic variables (age, education and gender) and political partisanship by entering them in an initial block. None of these control
Table 1  
Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for All Measures  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact of negative ads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enduring involvement</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV news attention</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper news attention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean  
Standard Deviation  

6.4 2.8 3.8 1.7 2.0  
4.9 .78 1.4 .71 .86  

Note: All correlations > .16 are significant at the p < .01 level.

variables was significantly related to the dependent variable and this block of variables did not make a significant contribution to the multiple regression equation. Further analysis showed that these control variables were also unrelated to any of the independent variables. Therefore, the analysis was rerun without the initial block of control variables in order to simplify the model.

Table 2 reveals that political engagement, campaign interest and attention to television news about politics make statistically significant, unique contributions to the prediction of the negative political ad impact index. Higher levels of enduring involvement, situational involvement and television news attention are clearly associated with a greater influence of negative political ads on candidate vote preference. Attention to politics in the newspaper, in contrast, is now significantly associated with lower levels of impact for negative political ads. This change from the results of the zero-order correlations shows that once we control for enduring and situational involvement and attention to television news, attention to politics in newspapers does lessen the influence of negative political ads on candidate vote preference.

To provide a clearer and more visual representation of the relationship between newspaper attention and the impact of negative political ads on voting intent, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed using enduring involvement, situational involvement and attention to television news as covariates. Mean values, adjusted for the covariates, were estimated for the negative ad impact index at each level of newspaper attention. As would be expected, the results of the ANCOVA reproduced the pattern of findings from the multiple regression analysis.

Table 3 shows the observed means for the negative ad impact index and the estimated mean values after introducing the covariate controls. The pattern is clear: negative political ads are substantially more influential when newspaper attention is low. These findings suggest that the lack of a significant zero-order relationship between the ad impact index and newspaper attention was a result of enduring involvement, situational involvement and television news attention acting as suppressor variables. Attention to news about politics in the newspaper, all other things being equal, seemingly diminishes the influence of negative campaign advertising. Because all things are not equal—those people having higher levels of enduring and situational involvement tend to pay more attention to political issues in newspapers—the true nature of the relationship between newspaper attention and negative ad influence is masked.

Discussion

This study has attempted to illuminate the relationships between voter-related variables (involvement and news media use) and the magnitude of impact of negative political ads. The findings demonstrated support for the hypotheses that political in-
Table 2
Regression Analysis for Involvement and News Media Attention to Politics on the Impact of Negative Political Advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regression Weight</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enduring involvement</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.497</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational involvement</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.270</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news attention</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>.504</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper attention</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple R = .49, R² = .24, p < .001.

Table 3
Observed and Adjusted Means for Negative Ad Impact on Vote Decision by Levels of Newspaper Attention to Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observed Mean</th>
<th>Adjusted¹ Mean</th>
<th>(N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very closely</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat closely</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too closely</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not closely at all</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>9.36</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The adjusted means are estimated mean values of the dependent variable after removing the influence of the covariates (enduring involvement, situational involvement and television news attention).

Involvement (both enduring and situational) positively influences the degree of impact negative political ads exert. This is in opposition to much of the previous literature examining involvement and learning from political advertising which indicated that political ads were most influential on passive voters who are unengaged in politics and disinterested in a campaign (Hofstetter and Buss 1980; Patterson and McClure 1974). Instead, we found that when voting preference is the dependent variable, people who are more involved and interested are most influenced by negative ads.

Two possible explanations may be suggested to account for these findings. First, people who are engaged in politics and caught up in a race may attend more to campaign-related communication, regardless of its form or medium. People with low involvement may pay little attention to any type of political communication including negative ads and thus be unaffected by them. Another possible explanation is that more involved voters may identify more strongly with candidates, thereby increasing the influence of negative ads. For supporters of the target candidate, this should lead to a strong backlash effect, while supporters of the source candidate will experience a strong intended effect. Although this study did not examine direction of effects, prior research has found that this type of polarization of the electorate is a likely outcome of exposure to negative ads (Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1990). Further research examining if and when backlash effects from negative ads are more powerful than intended effects is needed.
The findings also show that television news exposure, after controlling for enduring involvement and interest, was positively related to the amount of impact negative ads had on voting preferences. Television news viewing thus appears to accentuate the impact of negative political advertising. Since broadcast news has begun to include discussions of negative ads, television news viewing may heighten the awareness and salience of these messages. Following television news may also allow voters to develop some knowledge of the candidates. As a result, these knowledge structures might enhance the processing and elaboration of negative political messages in ads. Elaboration is a particularly likely outcome if the negative messages are incongruent with information from other sources (Sullivan 1981). This could result in information that is more accessible and more likely to influence choice decisions (Kisielius and Sternthal 1986).

A negative relationship between newspaper reading and the impact of negative political advertisements was found, but only after imposing statistical controls for political involvement and television news attention. Despite acquiring a basis for more sophisticated and independent candidate evaluations from newspaper exposures, the politically involved appear to be significantly influenced by negative political advertising. Only after controlling for involvement and television news viewing does newspaper reading lessen the impact of negative political ads on the individual.

Several potential limitations must be considered in interpreting the findings from this study. First, all of the negative political ads examined here were television ads. While television ads constitute a major portion of the advertising mix for candidates running for the U.S. Senate, they nonetheless do not represent a full mix of campaign advertising. Examining only television ads may have particularly influenced the findings regarding the impact of exposure to television and newspaper news.

A second important limitation of this study is that it relied on relatively simple operationalizations of the independent variables. More fully developed operationalizations of these concepts, with demonstrated reliability and validity, are needed. Future studies incorporating such measures are needed to confirm the findings reported here and to more fully examine how and why involvement and attention to newspapers and television serve to mediate the impact of negative campaign advertising.

Finally, this study examined the magnitude of impact of negative political advertising regardless of the direction of these effects. Future research should determine if these variables work differently for intended versus backlash effects and what additional factors influence the direction of effects.

References


Roser, Connie (1990), "Involvement, Attention, and Perceptions of Message Relevance in the Response to Persuasive Appeals," Communication Research, 17 (October), 571-600.


In recent elections, Ohio voters have been subjected to some of the nastiest negative campaign ads ever seen in the state. In state Supreme Court races and Statehouse contests, ads built on innuendo and misrepresentation were broadcast across the 88 counties.

In some cases, the ads worked, as was the case for state Rep. Unda Reidelbach when the Ohio Republican Party aired an ad with her blessing that trashed her Democratic opponent, Lori M. Tyack as a "tax-hiker," even though Tyack never has held public office.

In other cases, such ads failed. Ohio Supreme Court Justices Alice Robie Resnick in 2000 and Evelyn Lundberg Stratton this year easily weathered attack ads by independent political groups and won re-election handily. Political consultants overwhelmingly believe in the efficacy of negative advertising, particularly in close races, and that's why there are so many negative ads in each election.

Donna Lucas, president of the American Association of Political Consultants, recently said: "When the polling numbers get tight, you go on the attack. I don't think the rules have changed. This is what has worked. And I don't know what campaign has ever been hurt by doing it."

But even if negative ads work, are they good for democracy? Academic studies have reached contradictory conclusions.

This shouldn't be surprising. As with all social behavior, numerous factors influence how people act in the voting booth, and trying to isolate and measure the effect of any single influence with certainty is impossible.

Some studies have found that negative ads simply disgust and demoralize the public and act to drive down voter turnout.

They blame the rise of negative ads for the dramatic decline in voter participation since 1960. In the 1996 general election, for example, voter participation fell below 50 percent for the first time since 1924. Two weeks ago, about two-thirds of registered voters nationwide didn't bother to go to the polls. Yet the election was momentous, awarding the Republican Party control of the U.S. Senate while strengthening its control of the House.

Other researchers have argued that negative advertising generates interest in politics and stimulates more people to cast a ballot.

A third faction has concluded that the effect varies depending on the kind of negative ad being analyzed.

Among the best-known proponents of the negative-ads-are-bad school are political science professors Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar. Their 1995 book Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate argues that nastiness turns off voters and drives down turnout, while positive campaigns stimulate voting and confidence in government.

Studying 1992 U.S. Senate campaigns, the pair determined that voter turnout was highest in races that were positive and lowest in races in which both candidates took the low road of attack and
But professor Ken Goldstein of the Wisconsin Advertising Project at the University of Wisconsin makes the opposite argument:

"Negative ads often contain a lot of information that allows voters to make decisions about the candidates. We should not necessarily see them as a harmful part of our electoral system. In fact, voters actually learn more from negative ads than they do from positive ones. Moreover, negative ads can stimulate turnout, and that's not a bad thing, either."

A third viewpoint propounded by Paul Freedman, assistant professor of political science at the University of Virginia, says the truth is somewhere between the two camps. He says his research shows that the crucial issue is not whether an ad is negative or positive but whether it is fair.

"Voters tend to see charges that focus on job performance (such as voting records), campaign funding and business activity as more legitimate than charges concerning personal behavior or the behavior of family members and party leaders. Further, voters distinguish between charges about current activity and past actions," Freedman and collaborator L. Dale Lawton have written.

Freedman's approach appears to gain support from the experience of Ohio Supreme Court Justices Stratton and Resnick.

Two years ago, Resnick was accused of being in the pay of plaintiffs' attorneys. In the recent election, Stratton was accused of allowing chemical and pharmaceutical companies to poison employees and customers.

These ads were vicious slander; voters apparently recognized this and rejected them.

Freedman's thesis does not account for Tyack's loss, however. Though Tyack never held office and therefore, never proposed or voted for a tax increase as a public official, voters apparently did not reject the attack ad that labeled her as "Tax-Hike Tyack."

Perhaps this was because Democrats are perceived as being more amenable to tax increases, and, thus, the ad seemed plausible to viewers, even if based on no other evidence. Another possibility is that any number of unrelated factors caused Tyack's loss and that the influence of the ad was negligible.

As mentioned above, isolating one of many influences on voting behavior and accurately measuring its impact are impossible.

But despite conflicting academic studies of negative campaigning, there is at least one harm that is undeniable: the politicization of judicial races.

The attacks on Stratton and Resnick spread the notion that judges are partisans who not only do, but should, represent some special interests while stacking the judicial deck against others. Worse, these ads encourage voters to select judges on this basis.

If this idea is accepted by the electorate, it will be poison to the rule of law. The judicial branch of government is supposed to be a nonpartisan, independent and impartial arbiter of disputes. It is intended to apply the law without fear or favor, not twist it, rewrite it or ignore it on behalf of one constituency or another.

If people are not treated fairly and equally under the law, a fundamental underpinning of civil society is destroyed. No one's rights, liberty or property are safe. Plenty of nations in South America, Africa and Asia are examples of the social, economic and political decline that results.

Whether legislative and executive branches of government can continue to endure and survive the effects of negative ads remains unclear. But there is no question about the harm they do to the courts.