

Effects of the Television Spots on Images of Dole and Clinton

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This experimental study of the 1996 television spots conducted in a series of locations during the general election campaign indicates that exposure to Dole's spots enhanced his image in September, but October exposures resulted in a negative image effect for Dole and a positive one for Clinton. Effects of spot exposure on independents and on women were particularly significant. The results also show that technological manipulations in negative spots can achieve the desired effects for ad sponsors.

The 1996 presidential campaign advertising was of historical importance for three reasons already well established. First, as Devlin (1997) points out elsewhere in this volume, it was the most costly, highest spending advertising campaign ever; and second, although heavily issue oriented, it was the most negative campaign in the history of presidential spots (Kaid, in press). Finally, the campaign spots included unusually high amounts of spots that used technological manipulations to distort the opponent's image (Kaid, in press). However, expenditure totals, content descriptions, or distortions do not provide much evidence of the effects of spots on voters. The analysis provided here uses experimental methods to assess the effects of the 1996 advertisements on the images of Clinton and Dole and to determine if the presence of particular technological distortions affected the image of either candidate.

Candidate image has proved to be a very important way of assessing voter decision making (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). Because candidate image evaluations have been so directly linked to voter behavior, the use of image as a way of measuring the spot effects is a well-established one (West, 1993).

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The most convincing evidence for the influence of political spots, particularly on candidate image and voting behavior, has come from experimental research (Kaid, 1996a). For instance, exposure to political advertising has been shown to result in higher candidate ratings for intelligence, strength under pressure, dependability, fairmindedness, honesty, and liking (Cundy, 1986). In the 1988 presidential race, exposure to political spots significantly increased the image evaluations of George Bush (Kaid, 1991; Kaid, Leland, & Whitney, 1992). Similarly, experimental testing indicated that viewing political spot ads enhanced the images of both Clinton and Bush in 1992 (Kaid & Chanslor, 1995).

In addition to the potential impact of the spots on candidate images in general, this research considered whether or not the use of technological distortions might have affected voter perceptions of candidates. Previous research in this area has demonstrated that campaigns, particularly at the presidential level, are using higher and higher levels of manipulated video and computer technology¹ in the production of television spots (Kaid, 1993). For instance, in the 1992 presidential primary and general elections, 42% of the spots contained some type of distortion designed to manipulate or deceive voters (Kaid, 1996b). The 1996 spots reached an all-time high in distortions in that 70% of the 1996 general election spots contained some type of distortion. Clinton was the biggest offender here with 84% of his spots containing some type of distortion, whereas 49% of Dole's spots had such problem content (Kaid, in press). Research has shown that most of these distortions take place in negative spots (Kaid, 1993). Research on such distortions in spots for lower level races has previously demonstrated that the presence of such distortions may have an effect on candidate image (Kaid, 1996c; Nogle, 1996).

Consequently, the research here was designed to test two basic hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Exposure to political spots will significantly enhance the images of Dole and Clinton.

Hypothesis 2: Exposure to a distorted negative political spot will significantly enhance the image and vote likelihood of the sponsoring candidate and significantly decrease the image and vote likelihood of the opponent.

METHOD

Experimental testing was chosen as the method of measuring effects for the 1996 campaign. Subjects were exposed to sets of Clinton and Dole spots at two different times during the general election campaign. Subjects reported their pretest evaluations of the candidates before exposure and again immediately after exposure.

The experimental sessions to test the general effects of the spots on Dole and Clinton images (Hypothesis 1) took place first on September 30, 1996, and again

on October 30-31, 1996. Each session proceeded identically with basically the same questionnaires. The first set of stimulus materials (used in the September session) consisted of four spots each for Dole and Clinton (a mixture of positive and negative spots),² with the order alternated. The second set of spots (used in the October session) contained four new spots for each candidate (another mixture of positive and negative),³ again with the order alternated.

The subjects consisted of students at 19 different universities located throughout the United States, representing all regions and parts of the country.⁴ A total of 603 students (47% male, 53% female; 34% Democrats, 43% Republicans, 26% Independents) participated in the September 30 experimental sessions, and a total of 525 students (47% male, 53% female; 33% Democrats, 41% Republicans, 26% Democrats) were subjects in the October 30/31 experiment.⁵

The procedures for testing the second hypothesis were similar in their pretest/posttest design but also incorporated an experimental treatment that was conducted on October 17 with only subjects from the University of Oklahoma. In this case, the 116 subjects were randomly assigned to four treatment groups. Subjects filled out pretest measures and then were exposed to either (a) an actual 1996 Dole or (b) Clinton spot that contained a technological distortion or (c) the same Clinton or (d) Dole spot with the distortion removed. In other words, the researcher reversed the procedure used in normal spot production, taking out the distortion. For instance, if the spot converted color footage to black-and-white footage to make the opponent look sinister or threatening, the color was put back into the spot. If computer graphics or alterations were inserted into the distorted original spot, these were taken out of the spot. In each case, the spot remained identical verbally in the distorted or nondistorted version, and as much as possible the visual presentation was the same, except for the removal of the distortions.⁶ Following exposure to either a distorted or a nondistorted spot, subjects filled out the posttest measuring instrument.

The effect of the spots on images of Dole and Clinton were assessed in all sets of experiments with a series of semantic differential scales used in the pre- and posttest questionnaires administered to respondents. This semantic differential scale consists of 12 adjective pairs,⁷ which were summed to provide an overall mean score evaluation of the candidate's image. This scale has been developed over a period of many years and used frequently to measure candidate image with high reliability (Kaid, 1995). The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for these scales as used here on Clinton and Dole in all experiments ranged from .82 to .89.

Demographic data were also collected, along with additional data designed to determine other types of reactions to the spots that are not reported here. In the experiments related to the second hypothesis, respondents were also asked to indicate their likelihood of voting for both Dole and Clinton on a 7-point Likert-type scale.

TABLE 1: Images of Dole and Clinton Before and After Viewing Political Spots

	<i>Pre-Dole</i>	<i>Post-Dole</i>	<i>Pre-Clinton</i>	<i>Post-Clinton</i>
September 30				
Total (<i>N</i> = 603)	4.47	4.55***	4.45	4.45
Male (<i>n</i> = 284)	4.55	4.62**	4.32	4.30
Female (<i>n</i> = 319)	4.40	4.49**	4.55	4.58
Democrats (<i>n</i> = 203)	4.07	4.04	5.03	5.13*
Republicans (<i>n</i> = 257)	4.96	5.12***	3.96	3.88*
Independents (<i>n</i> = 143)	4.17	4.25*	4.49	4.52
October 30/31				
Total (<i>N</i> = 525)	4.48	4.34***	4.51	4.59***
Male (<i>n</i> = 245)	4.56	4.44***	4.44	4.49
Female (<i>n</i> = 280)	4.42	4.25***	4.58	4.67***
Democrats (<i>n</i> = 173)	3.97	3.71***	5.17	5.37***
Republicans (<i>n</i> = 214)	4.98	4.92*	4.04	4.04
Independents (<i>n</i> = 138)	4.35	4.22**	4.42	4.47

****t* test indicates difference between pre- and posttest is significant at $p < .001$. ***t* test indicates difference between pre- and posttest is significant at $p < .01$. **t* test indicates difference between pre- and posttest is significant at $p < .05$.

FINDINGS

These results indicate that the 1996 spots did have important effects on those exposed to them. These differences are especially interesting when analyzed at the two different points in the campaign.

EFFECT OF 1996 SPOT EXPOSURE ON CANDIDATE IMAGES

Hypothesis 1 received considerable support from the findings reported here. Exposure to the spots can have a positive effect (or alternatively, a negative effect) on candidate image. Table 1 shows that in the early phase of the campaign, the Dole spots were the most effective across the total sample. Both candidates had about the same image evaluation scores in the pretest, before spot viewing. Using the semantic differential scale average, Dole's image rose significantly from 4.47 in the pretest to 4.55 in the posttest, $t(602) = -4.04$, $p = .001$, for those exposed to the set of Clinton and Dole spots on September 30. Clinton's image, however, did not change as a result of the spot viewing.

Interestingly, this positive effect for Dole was present with both males and females. Both groups registered a significant positive increase for Dole after viewing the spots. Results for political party groups were somewhat more predictable. Democrats rated Clinton significantly higher after viewing, $t(202) = -2.42$, $p = .017$, and Republicans did the same for their candidate giving Dole higher ratings after exposure, $t(256) = -5.30$, $p = .001$. Perhaps most important was the success Dole had with Independent voters who increased their evaluations of him significantly, $t(142) = -2.20$, $p = .03$. Independents did not change significantly their evaluation of Clinton.

At this point in the campaign, although commentators were already predicting that Dole had no chance, his spots were capable of influencing his evaluations for both genders and, importantly, for Independents. However, by the second experimental phase of this study, at the end of the campaign on October 30/31, the situation changed dramatically.

Again, in the pretest, subjects' ratings of Dole and Clinton were not dramatically different. However, respondents ($N = 525$) who were exposed to the new set of Clinton and Dole spots at the end of the campaign evaluated Dole more negatively after viewing. Table 1 indicates that Dole's pretest rating (4.48) had already dropped back down near his pretest rating in September (4.47), and it fell even further after ad exposure to 4.34, $t(524) = 7.17, p = .001$. Clinton's pretest rating on October 30/31 had risen somewhat from 4.45 in the pre- and posttest in September to 4.51 in the pretest in October and rose significantly higher after exposure to the spots to 4.59, $t(524) = -3.57, p = .001$.

It is also apparent from these data that at this second point in the campaign, the so-called gender gap was a substantial effect in Clinton's favor, in that female subjects rated Dole significantly lower and Clinton significantly higher after viewing the spots. Males, on the other hand, responded more negatively to Dole but did not become more positive about Clinton.

The "death knell" for Dole was most apparent also when the responses were broken down by partisan affiliation of respondents. Table 1 shows that all three groups, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, became significantly more negative about Dole after viewing. Thus he not only lost his edge among Independents (who had actually increased their positive feelings about him since the September time period), but he lost the support of Republican voters.

EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGICAL DISTORTIONS IN SPOTS

The second hypothesis suggested that exposure to a spot with technological distortion would enhance the image and vote likelihood of the sponsoring candidate while decreasing the image and vote likelihood of the opponent. The findings here provide mixed support for this hypothesis. As Table 2 shows, the negative distorted Dole spot (the actual Dole spot as aired during the campaign) achieved most of the predicted effects. Respondents exposed to the Dole spot with distortion present gave Dole an average rating on the semantic differential scale of 4.68 in the spot that contained the distortion but a rating of only 4.19 when the distortion was removed. They were also much more likely to vote for Dole in the distorted (4.53) versus the undistorted (2.96) spot. Similarly, Clinton, who was attacked in the Dole spot, fared much better on both image evaluation and vote likelihood when the distortions were removed. Because the prior attitudes to the candidates are likely to affect the outcomes here, a MANCOVA analysis, controlling for feelings toward the candidates and using strength of voting behavior as a consolidated variable, was used to examine the effects of the distorted and undistorted versions of the spots. Table 2 also indicates that this more complex analysis also confirms the predicted findings. Thus the use

TABLE 2: Effects of Technological Distortion in Ads on Candidate Image and Vote Likelihood

	<i>Dole Image</i>	<i>Dole Vote</i>	<i>Clinton Image</i>	<i>Clinton Vote</i>
Dole spot ^a				
Distorted	4.68	4.53	4.38	3.61 (<i>n</i> = 28)
Undistorted	4.19	2.96	4.89	4.96 (<i>n</i> = 28)
Clinton spot				
Distorted	4.44	4.33	4.12	3.83 (<i>n</i> = 30)
Undistorted	4.65	4.35	4.32	3.61 (<i>n</i> = 30)

a. Results of MANCOVA, using the evaluation of each candidate as a covariate, the multivariate effect for presence/absence of distortion: Wilks's lambda = .83, $F(3, 50) = 3.35$, $p = .026$. Group effects for dependent variables: (1) strength of vote, $F(1, 52) = 7.15$, $p = .01$; (2) image of Dole, $F(1, 52) = 1.08$, $p = .30$; (3) image of Clinton, $F(1, 52) = 6.89$, $p = .01$.

of the technological distortions in the Dole spot definitely worked to his advantage.

The findings are not so clear for the Clinton spot. The results are, for the most part, in the predicted direction but not sufficiently large to achieve statistical significance. The distorted Clinton spot (the original spot as aired) did increase Clinton's vote likelihood from 3.61 (undistorted spot) to 3.83 (distorted spot) while decreasing Dole's image rating. However, the predicted effect was not present on Clinton's image, which was actually a bit higher in the undistorted spot, and the distortion had very little effect on likelihood of voting for Dole. The MANCOVA analysis also did not produce any significant effect for the presence of the distortion.

DISCUSSION

The results reported here provide evidence that the most costly, most negative, most technologically misleading political spot campaign in history was effective. Both the Dole and Clinton spots had identifiable effects on the images of both candidates at two different points in the campaign.

The initial question to ask may be, Why was Dole successful in his first set of ads but not in the second set in October? Of course, one possibility is the content of the ads themselves. This early set of ads included a shortened version of the Dole biographical ad with a powerful testimonial from Colin Powell. When these ads were tested in the experimental sessions, respondents were also hooked up in some locations to automated computer dials that measured their responses on a second-by-second basis to the content of the ads. Dole received very high ratings from subjects during the Colin Powell endorsement. Another Dole spot in this set was the earliest example of the ads Dole produced ridiculing Clinton's statement on a 1992 MTV program that he wished he'd been able "to inhale" when he tried marijuana. This ad, which had only just begun to play

frequently in some markets, seemed to surprise and shock viewers. Another Dole ad that seemed to score well was a spot that attacked Clinton for his flip-flops on balancing the budget.

It is more difficult to assess why Dole's campaign ads failed to continue their positive effect as the campaign progressed. Of course, content offers a possibility here as well. Content analysis of the spots used throughout the general election by both candidates indicated that Dole was much less able to articulate a clear vision based on values in his spots. Clinton's spots were much more successful at incorporating and taking credit for enhancing American values such as "a comfortable life," "a sense of accomplishment," "family security," and "wisdom" in his ads (Kaid, *in press*). Clinton often ended his spots with the tag line, "protecting our values." Dole, the conservative standard-bearer, never caught up to Clinton in stressing the "value of the individual," the importance of "achievement and success," or the need for "change and progress," values that traditionally resonate with American voters.

Additional clues to the reactions in favor of Clinton and against Dole may be identified in the automated dial responses that were again utilized in some sessions with the October 30/31 experimental groups. In these sessions, respondents reacted very negatively to negative ads, and the dial responses registered this immediately for both candidates. Clinton seemed to be more successful in diffusing this problem by incorporating some comparative (positive) information into ads that were otherwise predominantly anti-Dole. The second set of experimental ads also included an entirely positive ad for Clinton, one of the few positive ads in the entire Clinton campaign. Called "Seconds," this ad featured Jim Brady applauding Clinton for passage of the Brady Bill gun control law. Women were particularly persuaded by this ad. The dramatic visual footage at the beginning of the ad (showing actual footage of the Reagan assassination attempt in which Brady was injured) struck an emotional chord with viewers.

None of Dole's ads toward the end of the campaign achieved this kind of emotional response for viewers. Dole's best-scoring ad on the automated dials in the second experimental session was an ad called "From the Heart," in which Elizabeth Dole speaks convincingly of her husband's strengths. On the other hand, this ad, however impressive, may only have reinforced for many voters the contrast between Elizabeth Dole's effectiveness and her husband's lack of dynamism.

Another factor that cannot be discounted is the interaction of the spots with other campaign activities and coverage during the campaign period. Experimental sessions like those discussed here are, of course, only one-shot happenings. This does not mean their effects disappear, because other research on spot effects has shown that political spot advertising effects may be sustained and even enhanced over time, even after single exposures (Kaid & Sanders, 1978; McKinnon, 1995). However, in a real campaign situation, other events are occurring during the intervening time, and many subjects were undoubtedly exposed to such events. The presidential debates, for instance, did not put any

substantial number of points on the board for Dole. In addition, most news coverage of the campaign cast Dole as “hopelessly” behind and with little chance to win. The Center for Media and Public Affairs (1996) has also reported that on the three major networks throughout the general election coverage, Clinton received 50% positive evaluations while Dole received 67% negative evaluations. Such evaluative information in the news media may well have interacted with the respondents’ evaluations of the two candidates’ ads, working to Clinton’s advantage.

The fact that the presence of a technological distortion in spots can enhance the effect desired by the sponsor of the ad, as indicated with the Dole spot, confirms that attention must be given to this problem. Earlier results, with spots at lower level races, had suggested that this could be the case (Kaid, 1996c; Noggle, 1996), and the Dole negative spot seemed to have the same result. The Clinton negative ad, on the other hand, did not result in significant effects. Several factors may have accounted for the failure to confirm the effect with the Clinton spot. First, the change in the spot may not have been substantial enough to produce a difference in perceptions for voters. The experimental manipulation should be reevaluated. Second, it may be the case that some types of manipulations produce more severe effects than others. Further testing of different types of manipulations may be necessary to determine this. Finally, it is possible that the fact that this was not an entirely negative spot may be a complicating factor. The Clinton spot used for the manipulation was a spot that some observers might label a “comparative spot” in that it included both negative information about Dole and positive information about Clinton.

In any case, the finding that a candidate can enhance his own image, decrease that of the opponent, and strengthen his vote likelihood by using technologically manipulated spots is a cause for real concern in our political system. Voters certainly have a right to many different types of information during a political campaign. However, political decisions should not be clouded by the presence of distortions that manipulate and deceive voters. Additional research should seek to isolate these effects and to determine how voters can be made more aware of the problems.

NOTES

1. The types of technological manipulations and distortions have been described in detail elsewhere (Kaid, 1993; Kaid, 1996b) but include such techniques as computerized alterations, slow motion, superimpositions, color changes and enhancements, misleading editing or sequencing, and other techniques designed to deceive or to lead viewers to false conclusions.

2. The spots used were (a) short version of Dole bio “The Better Man,” that included background information on Dole and an endorsement from Colin Powell; (b) Clinton spot called “Dreams” with young children expressing their career aspirations, leading into an attack on Dole’s record with education and presenting Clinton’s tuition tax cut plan; (c) Dole spot called “Let’s Be Clear” (later version called “More Talk”) that attacks Clinton for his flip-flops on the balanced budget time frame;

(d) Clinton spot known as "Parents" (or "Melissa"), which features an ill child's parents talking about the president signing the Family and Medical Leave Act and attacks Bob Dole for his 6-year fight against family and medical leave; (e) Dole ad titled "The Stakes" referring to the stakes being too high for the voter to choose Clinton and presenting Dole's 15% tax cut and Balanced Budget Amendment plans; (f) a positive Clinton spot using a Dayton, Ohio, police officer to praise Clinton's initiative to ban assault weapons; (g) a Dole spot called "School" that contains Clinton's famous MTV clip in which he states that if he had to do it all over again, he would inhale Marijuana; and (h) a Clinton spot attacking Dole for offering nothing but empty slogans and emphasizing Dole's leniency with the tobacco industry ads aimed at children, his votes against the Drug-Czar office, and his votes against vaccines for children.

3. The spots for this second session were (a) a Dole spot called "Truth on Spending" that attacks Clinton's support for big money projects like \$48 million for Alpine Slides and Midnight Basketball; (b) a Clinton negative ad with split screens of Bob Dole saying he was fighting against Medicare and the creation of the Department of Education; (c) a Dole positive ad called "From the Heart" in which Elizabeth Dole talks about her husband keeping his word and commitment to a 15% tax cut; (d) a Clinton positive spot titled "Second" in which Jim Brady endorses Clinton as a man of strong character for supporting gun control legislation; (e) a Clinton negative ad attacking Dole as "Wrong in the Past" capturing Dole's Washington insider status by showing Dole's actions in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s against such legislation as Medicare, the Brady Bill, Family and Medical Leave, the Department of Education, and the creation of the Drug Czar; (f) A Dole ad called "Riady," which is a negative ad playing on Clinton's creation of large government bureaucratic Health Care System and his tax increase and using clippings to emphasize his ethical uncertainties; (g) a Dole spot called "Nicole," which describes an editorial from *The New York Times* about a teenage girl named Nicole who thinks its okay to smoke marijuana because the president did it; and (h) a Clinton spot titled "Look," which emphasizes how "risky" the Dole tax scheme is and accuses Dole of voting for legislation that would total \$900 million in higher taxes.

4. The 19 universities were located in the following regions: East and Southeast (Maryland, Pennsylvania, Florida, Alabama, South Carolina); Midwest (Illinois—2 locations, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri); Southwest (Oklahoma—2 locations, Texas); West (California—2 locations, Oregon).

5. Because of differing subject availability, not all subjects were chosen in the same way (i.e., in some locations subjects were chosen randomly from student subject pools and in others students were used as part of intact general communication, mass communication, and political science classes).

6. In this particular experiment, the Dole ad used was a 30-second ad called "Pledge." The distorted (original ad) attacked Clinton for his position on taxes, using a Clinton photo that had been distorted by the superimposition of large graphic, accusatory words in red letters. The spot also included unattributed newspaper clippings designed to suggest proof for the statements made and a growing red arrow that used a misleading scale to indicate increased taxes. The altered, or undistorted, ad was revised to remove the red letters altering Clinton's photo, to remove the unattributed newspaper clippings, and to make the red arrow stationary. The Clinton negative ad was called "Table." Also 30 seconds in length, this spot mentioned several issues on which Clinton was compared favorably to Dole. Dole is shown walking behind Gingrich in slow motion, and scenes of the elderly, children, and pollution are shown in black and white to create a negative impression. In the altered, nondistorted version, a still photo of Dole and Gingrich was used in place of the distorted slow-motion frames, and color pictures of the black-and-white scenes were substituted. The color pictures, ironically, were generally easy to substitute because other Clinton spots used the identical scenes in their original color versions.

7. The 12 bipolar adjective pairs used were qualified-unqualified, sophisticated-unsophisticated, honest-dishonest, believable-unbelievable, successful-unsuccessful, attractive-unattractive, friendly-unfriendly, sincere-insincere, calm-excitable, aggressive-unaggressive, strong-weak, active-inactive.

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