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## Persuasion in Contemporary Presidential Campaigns

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### Recommended Citation

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# Persuasion in Contemporary Presidential Campaigns

Dylan Moore

July 30, 2008

HPR 401 Prof. Joanne Mundorf

As the Presidential Election of 2008 approaches its apex, the citizens of the United States of America will be increasingly bombarded with information and images of the presidential candidates. However, most individuals have never stopped to ask themselves, why and for what purpose they are having this experience. This analysis of the 2004 and 2008 Presidential Election Campaign will answer these unasked questions. Before I delve into the complexities of these contemporary campaigns, it is important to discuss the roots of political campaigns, their history, and components.

A political campaign, like politics, has its foundation in persuasion; their goal is motivate the masses to stand behind a particular message or grouping of messages (Mutz, 1999). In a campaign, this objective is refined and focused on getting voters to pledge their vote to a specific candidate (Devlin, 1987). This is accomplished through persuasive messages telling individuals to adapt a new belief or attitude, or engage in a new behavior for their own benefit (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). Campaigns also use propaganda, which delivers a message similar to persuasion, but focus on the desirability of the action or belief to social groups of which the individual is a part (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). These messages are commonly distributed through the mass media,

in mediums such as newspapers, television, and the World Wide Web. Political campaigns do more than just deliver messages designed to influence the American public, they provide work for the politicians, their staff, and the reporters on the campaign trail, and most importantly, they give the voters a sense of involvement in the political process (Devlin, 1987). While political campaigns, especially large-scale Presidential campaigns, represent a great deal to Americans this phenomenon did not happen overnight.

Ascension to the presidency in the United States was uncontested for the first two elections in 1789 and 1792, where George Washington was unanimously elected in both cases. Mr. Washington's Vice President John Adams was not as fortunate; although he became the second U.S. President, he had to win the first contested U.S. Presidential election. The Presidential campaign that won John Adams the White House looked drastically different from campaigns today. Adams, along with his rival Thomas Jefferson, never left home during the campaign process, instead their parties took stands on major issues on their behalf. One candidate, Aaron Burr did campaign for election. However, he never made any speeches or public promotions, instead Burr choose to visit every New England State to speak with the presidential electors. The presidential campaigns of 1796 were also the first to use mass media as a persuasion strategy, with all of the candidates having write-ups printed by partisan supporters, in newspapers such as the Philadelphia Aurora, and the Gazette of the United States. (Ferling, 1996)

During the 1800's campaigns started to shift with candidates using print media to their advantage and personally traveling to give speeches. Political parties also took to the streets in an attempt to enlist as many supporters and potential voters as possible. Due to the dynamic nature of these new campaigns, presidential candidates were starting to have a fan base similar to

today's professional sports. This made political campaigns the number one source of news at the time. (Ferling, 1996)

It was another hundred and fifty years before another major campaign breakthrough occurred, but it caused the most significant change in political campaigns since their inception, this was the first presidential television advertisement. In 1952, presidential primary candidate General Dwight Eisenhower ran a series of television (TV) ads, entitled "Eisenhower Answers America" (Political Campaigns, 2004). These advertisements had broadcast time of twenty seconds, this format lasted until 1976 when the television ads or spots were changed to thirty or sixty seconds, so they would be standard commercial format (Devlin, 1987). Television permanently changed the face of presidential campaigns by allowing the potential voters to see and hear the candidates, along with being able to receive instant news updates on elections. The ability of viewers to have instant news updates was both the source of the next advancement in campaign technology and a source of controversy. On election night in 1980, at 8:15 PM, NBC used exit polling to predict the President before all the votes were counted. Unfortunately, this was announced at 5:15 PM on the West Coast, hours before the polls closed. This debacle caused Congress to pass a law stipulating that all polls would close at the same time around the country, the television networks subsequently agreed not to announce election results until all the polls had closed. (Devlin, 1987)

The campaign front was quiet over the next three elections, until a new mass media giant, the internet disrupted campaign advertising. In 1996, the web site made in support of Jerry Estruth (D-CA) was the first of its kind (D'Alessio, 1998). Although this opportunity was lost for other candidates in the 1996 elections, politicians soon joined the cause. By 1997, 85.7% of all presidential, 46.8% of all senatorial and 16.1% of all house candidates had their own

campaign web sites (D'Alessio, 1998). Since 1997, the use of the internet as a campaign advertisement medium has only expanded, with all candidates having their own web sites, and many presidential candidates having peer-to-peer site accounts, such as My Space or Facebook.

In contemporary campaigns, candidates use a mix of the three major forms of advertising (print, television, and internet) to develop what is called a media plan. Since most major campaigns lack the resources to run ads continuously from the start of the primaries to Election Day, a plan has to be made allowing the candidate to spread his funds throughout the duration of the campaign. Based on expected fundraising, candidates will determine how and when to buy their advertising. Print ads are usually the least expensive and are therefore purchased first, along with roadside billboards and flyers (for mailing and hands on distribution). The next medium to be financially accounted for is internet advertising. This is a key advertising component because both television and print ads will refer to a candidate's web site for expanded information. Additionally, a candidate's web site is an important source of current information and campaign donations. Campaigns have also started to use banner type advertisements on other websites, which will link the user to the candidates' home or donation pages. The last and main medium for campaign advertising is television.

Television is considered to be the best and most cost effective (although it is the most expensive) way to reach voters because of TV's enormous and diverse audience (Political Campaigns, 2004). When a political campaign is purchasing a group of ad spots or a "flight", three factors have to be considered. These factors are the flight's reach (how many people will view the ad), repetition (how many times will they view the ad), and the cost of the flight. A flight's reach is determined by the gross rating points (GRP), which are determined by the sum total of the ratings achieved for a specific media schedule (Berkovitz, 1996). A schedule with a

GRP of 100 would expose the average viewer to the advertisement once. Most campaigns want the average target voter to view their ads a minimum of five times, requiring a flight schedule with a GRP of 500 to achieve the desired repetition. In order to determine the cost of these advertisements television networks use two types of price scales. For most programming a cost per point system is used, in which you would multiply the GRP times the cost for the slot; for example a daytime slot in New York has a GRP of 10 and a cost of \$500 per point, makes an ad spot cost \$5000. Alternatively, popular prime time shows such as “Survivor” or “American Idol” are priced on a cost per spot basis, and command \$350,000 and \$705,000 respectively (McClellan, 2005). These costs are then multiplied by the number of spots to determine the overall cost of the ad flight. (Berkovitz, 1996)

Due to the expensive nature of run television flights, campaigns have developed continuity, pulsing, and flighting patterns as methods of maximizing their dollars by airing ads only during key times. The continuity pattern runs advertising at a constant level throughout the entire campaign. This can be done at a high GRP level with a well-funded campaign, or on a lower level if money is a concern. This method contrasts sharply to the pulsing pattern which runs a few ad spots during the majority of the campaign, with the occasional spike in advertising around key times, such as the beginning of the campaign and the final weeks preceding the election. The last method, flighting is a combination of continuity and pulsing patterns with a twist, and is frequently used when monetary recourses need to be conserved. Flighting continually runs a low level of ad spots on less costly radio and cable TV (so voters are always receiving the message), and also runs ads on network television but only during key time frames. (Berkovitz, 1996)

Once a media plan has been formulated, the campaign focuses its attention toward whom the plan should be focused. The importance of this step has been known since ancient Greece, when Aristotle said, “without a thorough understanding of the audience, the likelihood of successful persuasion was deemed very small” (1932). This concept has not been lost in American campaigns, as evidenced by their search of voters who are susceptible to persuasion since 1940. The general target for all campaign ads has to be both undecided and attentive (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). However, this does not mean absolutely. Potential voters only have to be undecided enough to consider another course of action, and pay at least some attention to campaign messages. Although campaigns now know that they have to target undecided voters, the block of citizens needs to be broken down into smaller groups so the messages effectiveness can be maximized. (Johnson-Cartee, 2004)

The process of dividing the potential voters into groups based on commonalities is called segmentation. “Public segmentation is needed because many people view the marketing of products within a sociological framework” (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). The undecided individuals who fall into this framework use factors such as social conformity and group membership to guide their decision-making. Successfully segmenting of voters requires campaigns to hire private pollsters, who analyze the target audience by way of polling, and have made a reputation for the accuracy and objectivity of their polls (Devlin, 1987). The results of these polls are used by campaigns to segment voters into different demographic categories, such as age, sex, education, and socio-economic status. This allows a campaign to tailor specific advertisements to different groups of people based on their commonalities.

The largest voting block to be specifically targeted is individuals over the age of 35; this age range produces the largest voter turnout (Berkovitz, 1996). In order to target these voters,

campaigns use television networks ratings information to determine where to buy their advertising. To reach the 35 plus voters, the ad flights purchased usually run during the morning news and talk show programs. To reach wealthy voters in the same age range ads flights will run during the local evening news, and on CNN. Ads are also run in different locations based upon gender. Male audiences are targeted through action programming and sports channels such as ESPN, while women are reached through syndicated talk shows, game shows, and soaps. If a campaign is trying to reach the most diverse population, they will have to buy the premium priced prime time spots. Once a campaign has identified its target audience, they will then look at different geographic areas the in which audience groups should be targeted. This is done through advertising weighting, which decides how much of the advertising budget should be spent in a geographic region. (Berkovitz, 1996)

After a campaign has formulated its media plan, and identified its target audience, the media strategy is ready to be enacted. In contemporary campaigns, such as the presidential campaigns of 2004 and 2008, the media plan has focused predominantly on three mediums, print, television, and the internet. Although most Americans get their news from television and the internet, approximately twenty percent receive their news from newspapers; these voters tend to be well educated and politically savvy (Devlin, 1987). During the presidential campaigns of 2004 and 2008, newspapers have played an important role because of their print advertising and political columns.

Recent political columns have not been telling readers what to think, but rather what issues to think about (Broder, 1984). In 2004, the Wall Street Journal published an article entitled “Vietnam Boomerang”. This column was centered on Senator Kerry’s talks of Vietnam, sighting that he claims to be a hero and yet protested the war, charged the U.S. with war crimes,



and eluded to President Bush being a wartime deserter. While the article was not printed by Bush's campaign, or telling its readers what to think, its effect was persuasive. The editorial used the propaganda slinging (labeling the behavior of others as propaganda without considering their argument) by charging Sen. Kerry with using his war stories as propaganda without listening to the rest of his speech (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). The technique of polarizing was also used when the editor said that Kerry could not use Vietnam to criticize the U.S. and promote himself at the same time. By dividing Kerry's argument into only two parts and eliminating the gray area the editor forced the readers to decide whether Kerry was justified in what he said or not. (Johnson-Cartee, 2004)

Although newspapers are nonpartisan they are generally slanted toward the right (such as the Wall Street Journal), with more liberal newspapers sounding neutral (Devlin, 1987). For example on July 8, 2004 The New York Times printed the article "Republicans Move Fast To Make the Experience Of Edwards an Issue". By looking at the title one might think that The Times would be focusing on the Republican's use of negative campaigning. However, the column gave equal weight to the Republican and Democrats point of view, bolstering the papers stance of neutrality. Throughout the article, the Democrats used positive testimonials from many senior democratic senators to enhance the position that Edwards was more than capable of handle matters of national security (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). Sen. Kennedy also used the tactic of positive transfer, when he attached the prestige and age similarity of John F. Kennedy to Sen. Edwards (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). The Republicans on the other hand used the authority of the Presidency to bolster their point, along with an example of glittering generality, when Mr. Bush said Dick Cheney acted presidential (Cialdini, 2001).

In 2008, both the Wall Street Journal and The New York Times stayed with their rightward slanted views, while adding some new persuasive techniques to their bag of tricks. In the July 15<sup>th</sup> Journal column “As Economy Worsens, Democrats Could Gain”, author Gerald Seib used a pity appeal to paint the picture that Sen. John McCain is being penalized for being a Republican during an economic recession. Seib strengthens the argument of unfair penalization by using positive transfer to attribute Teddy Roosevelt’s willingness to use governmental powers to help the economy to McCain (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). Three days earlier on July 12<sup>th</sup>, The Times published “Friendly Campaigning, Only Not So Much”, that displayed the personal attacks via name-calling that each campaign was slinging at one another. While both the Obama and McCain camps were criticized for not following their word of running a clean campaign, it was mentioned that negative ads usually garner tangible results (Devlin, 1987).

Aside from the nonpartisan newspaper columns, contemporary presidential campaigns have print advertising to sway voter opinions. In the summer of 2004, the Bush-Cheney campaign launched a negative print ad that was both issue oriented and values laden. This ad entitled “Got Conservative Values?” (a parody of the “got milk?” commercial) increased voters susceptibility to the message through humor, before attacking Sen. Kerry’s values (Campaign Communication, 2005). After the comedic slogan, the ad featured a quote from Kerry saying, “I represent the conservative values that they feel”. This quote was mockingly placed above six statements that countered the quote. These statements were used persuasively in a tactic known as card stacking, which overwhelms the audience with supported evidence arranged for maximum effect (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). The statistics used also fell into the category of guilt by association because they linked Kerry to liberal ideas and Senators, which were unpopular in the area of the publication. This ad also used a variety of visual persuasion techniques such as

bold sans serif font that would attract initial attention, good use of white space that mirrored the “got milk?” ads, and a smirking caricature of Sen. Kerry for comedic value (Muth, 2004).

Similarly to the Bush-Cheney ad, John Kerry’s full-page ad, which appeared in the Los Angeles Times May 26, 2004, contained a surprisingly diverse array of persuasion tactics (Campaign Communication, 2005). The ad featured eye-catching sans serif phrase of “This Is a Fight for America’s Future, Will You Join Us?” centered above a portrait of Sen. Kerry (Muth, 2004). This starting phrase polarized the reader by giving them a choice to be patriotic with Kerry or risk America’s future. Kerry’s campaign then strengthens the polarization with the scare tactic phrase of “I will not let us be the first generation of Americans to pass our country on in worse shape than we were handed it” (Gass, 2007). Once the audience is attentive and charged with a decision, the written portion of the ad (the bottom half of the page) issues personal attacks against President Bush by calling his policies selfish and swaggering. After the attacks, the ad turns to the social proof technique of bandwagon appeal (sighting that everyone else is doing it, so you should to) by saying that you should help save our country and donate to the Kerry campaign because over 475,000 people already have (Cialdini, 2001). If the reader does donate, they will have fallen into the persuasive trap of commitment and consistency, which states that once you commit to something (i.e. the Kerry campaign through donation), you will be personally and interpersonally pressured to remain consistent with your commitment (Cialdini, 2001).

Dramatically different from the ads of 2004, the print ads of campaign 2008 have stayed away from negative advertisements and fundraising attempts. Both the Obama and McCain camps have been focusing on what makes them different from the stereotypical candidates put forth by their respective parties. Obama’s message has centered on the idea of change and unity,

this concept has resonated with typically underrepresented constituent groups. Obama's ads, such as the one he ran in Jewish Week on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007 have featured Obama laughing, or with his family. This imagery has highlighted his physical attractiveness and congenial natural, making Obama more likable and therefore more persuasive (Cialdini, 2001).

McCain's print ads have also stayed away from negativity, but unlike Obama, who is relatively new to the political arena, McCain has been highlighting his long years of distinguished service in the Navy and the Senate. Sen. McCain's January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 New Hampshire Union Leader ad featured a presidential looking John McCain, who was sharply dressed in a business suit, and backed by the American Flag. The imagery of this ad makes McCain appear to be an authority figure who is worthy of the Presidency, and triggers compliance among the readers (Cialdini, 2001). This ad also makes use of the glittering generalities technique by using words like courageous, bold, and experienced (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). The final tactic in this ad is positive transfer, which is when McCain is called "a conservative leader in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan" (Johnson-Cartee, 2004).

The second component to recent presidential campaigns is television coverage, which like print media, comes in the form of campaign advertisements and nonpartisan news. The role of television news in political campaigns is to inform the public about the candidates. However, this goal is only partially realized due to three limiting factors. The first obstacle to proper news coverage is the result of a recent trend to cut campaign coverage time (Political Campaigns, 2004). This problem exists because political coverage is only one topic that needs to be covered, and thus competes for on-air time with other stories from sports, business, weather, etc. Farnsworth and Lichter have shown that presidential campaigns have been losing this battle

because from 1988 to 2000 there has been an average of three-hundred and eleven minutes less of campaign coverage a year (2003). Aside from a lack of coverage, news programs have strayed away from reporting the issues of a campaign, and have focused on “horse-race” coverage (Political Campaigns, 2004). This type of reporting covers facts like, which state a candidate is campaigning in, who is ahead in the polls, and which organizations are donating to whose campaign.

Lastly, news station bias accounts for a large portion of campaign coverage inaccuracies. Although television stations are supposed to be nonpartisan, research has found that specific stations tend to favor one candidate or party. An example of this type of bias is Fox News Networks October 28, 2004 special report with Brit Hume entitled, “Bush and Kerry Continue Stinging Exchange on Missing Weapons”. During this broadcast, both Hume and Senior White House Correspondent Jim Angle discuss clips of the President sighting what he has learned during his time in office, and commenting that Kerry obviously does not have that insight. Their bias is furthered by airing clips Gen. Tommy Franks saying that Kerry cannot lead U.S. Troops to victory. Finally, these reporters go off topic to comment that while Sen. Kerry is cheering on the Boston Red Sox, their pitcher Curt Schilling said, “Tell everyone to vote, and tell everyone to vote President Bush.

Fox News continues its Republican bias into 2008 with segments like “Is Age a Factor for McCain?”, which was shown on the Hannity and Colmes Show on May 14<sup>th</sup>. This show featured guest pollster Frank Luntz, who discussed how there was a considerable gap in voters that crossed party lines. This gap had younger voters registering and turning out in record numbers for Obama, and older voters regardless of party favoring McCain. After this comment Hannity and Colmes started a dialog about how these younger voters should not be voting, and

accusing Luntz of only interviewing liberals. After the co-hosts tirade, they closed out there segment with “Senator Barack Obama caught on tape make some comments that people are describing as sexist”. It is clear from this type of programming, that Fox News is biased in favor of Republicans, and sacrifice informing the public for ratings.

As a result of the limiting factors of news coverage, presidential candidates own campaign messages do a better job of informing the public on central issues than news programming. Today’s campaign ads present this information through the two topics of policy or character. These topics are delivered by acclaims (I will messages), attacks (my opponent messages), or defenses (the accusation that I will... is false) (Political Campaigns, 2004). In 2004, Both Senator Kerry and President Bush’s ads focused on the issue keeping America safe from terrorism. In the President’s ad “Solemn Duty”, he talks about his duty to lead the nation to protect itself and bring our enemies to justice (Campaign Communication, 2005). During the 30-second ad spot the President is sitting on the couch with his wife in casual clothes, making himself appear caring and approachable. This is increasing his likeability through similarity because his is taking on the role of an “average American” (Cialdini, 2001). While the visual and auditory components of this ad are sending a message, there is also the implied message that the American people will only be safe under the leadership of President Bush.

Senator Kerry’s ad “Protecting America” has a similar message to Bush’s ad, with the predominate focus of protecting America from terrorists, but that is where the similarities end (Campaign Communication, 2005). Throughout the course of this ad, the viewer is presented with images that represent America. In the beginning of the ad there is a large American flag flapping in the breeze that fades into the image of a soaring bald eagle. These images along with Sen. Kerry giving a salute are the basis for strengthening his authority, and triggering the click

and whirr of the viewer, initiating their compliance (Cialdini, 2001). This process makes the audience more susceptible to the idea that if Sen. Kerry is elected he will “stop at nothing to find and kill terrorists” and “return our foreign policy to the values that have always earned us the respect of the world”.

The television ads of campaign 2008 have bore a striking resemblance to those of 2004 do to the emphasis on American military policy, but have also differed slightly in their approach. In the Obama ad “Gulf”, the Senator is pictured wearing a suit and standing in front of what appears to be a building in Washington, D.C. (Appleman, 2008). These images, like those in previous T.V. ads, boost Obama’s authority through clothes and backgrounds that are considered Presidential, thus making his message more persuasive (Cialdini, 2001). This strategy is coupled with the use of positive testimonial via Gen. Merrill McPeak, who promotes the Senator’s position on the war in Iraq. The General’s authority and the promotion of Obama’s ideas were further strengthened by the use of positive transfer (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). To accomplish this, a picture of Gen. McPeak with Colin Powell was displayed while he was speaking. These various tactics were not only used to help sway voters to support Obama, but also to develop the Senator’s image as a military leader.

To counter Obama’s latest message, Sen. McCain fires back with the most well crafted sixty-second ad thus far in campaign 2008. This ad, entitled “Love”, starts off with images of young Americans enjoying the freedoms of the U.S. during the “Summer of Love (1969)”, while the narrator talks about a time of uncertainty, hope, and change (Appleman, 2008). This segment of the ad is using ideas and images that are familiar and common among young Americans, therefore increasing this demographics’ (usually a demographic associated with Obama) liking of McCain through similarity (Cialdini, 2001). The ad then uses an asymmetrical definition of

the word love (the ad transitions from the “Summer of Love” to McCain showing another kind of love, love of his country) to engage the audience further (Johnson-Cartee, 2004). During this transition, liking is used through physical attractiveness, when a picture of McCain as a handsome young pilot was shown (Cialdini, 2001). For the remainder of the advertisement, appeals to similarity, authority and positive transfer were used in a montage, showing McCain dressed casually shaking hands with constituents, speaking in front of a waving U.S. Flag, and appearing with Presidents. During this montage, the narrator spoke of the positive aspects of McCain’s policies and character traits. In the 2008 race for the White House, this ad has stood out because of its cross-generational appeal, and breadth of topics that will draw the attention of undecided voters.

Looking back at presidential campaign advertising over the years, new persuasive tactics have been used in tried and true formats like print media, and standard policy messages have been delivered in contemporary mediums such as television, but it wasn’t until the last two Presidential Elections that all these techniques were brought together in one format, the internet. In 2004, the candidate’s web sites were primarily used as a combination of print advertising and television commercials. Bush and Kerry used visual persuasion techniques in the design and layout of their sites (Bold sans serif headlines, patriotic colors, uncluttered site layout, etc), along with having video ads present on the site (Muth, 2004). This served as a “one stop shop” for potential voters to get a better understanding of their candidates by being a central location for advertisements, and additional policy and biographical information.

Aside from the variety of persuasive components and additional information on candidate’s web pages, the rules and usages of web advertising differs from other mediums. Unlike traditional advertisements, election rules do not require candidates to appear in or endorse



the messages being delivered (Rutenberg, 2008). This allows candidates to distance themselves from the negative ads that appear on their web sites, subsequently avoiding the political fallout. Although one might think that because the negative ad appeared on a candidate's web site, they would be held accountable, but research has shown that offensive advertising is more permissible on the internet than on T.V. (Rutenberg, 2008). Although oppositional ads are more offensive and accepted on the web, they are less common than their television counterparts. A 2008 survey has shown that on average twenty percent of presidential television ads are negative, while only six percent of on-line ads were negative (Political Campaigns, 2004). In addition to being the location for dramatic video ads, candidate's web sites have become the focal point for their campaign due to cross media promotions, which direct the viewer of all other media sources to the candidate's web site.

On [www.barackobama.com](http://www.barackobama.com) you will notice that media is only one tab (that contains speeches and T.V. ads) on the site. There are also news stories and a calendar of events to keep supporters up to date. The site is also visually stunning, with its use of a changing video center screen surrounded by a light blue faded border. There is also some humor because the site features a press pass that reads "Back Stage with Barack". All of these features will enhance the refreshing appeal of Obama to those who view the site. Similarly, on McCain's site, the viewer will find news, events, and a blog, accessible via tabs above a video screen. Although these sites are similar, and contain basic information, it is their ability to get a potential voter to commit that makes these sites campaign centerpieces.

As stated earlier, once a person commits to something they encounter personal and interpersonal pressure to maintain consistent with their decision (Cialdini, 2001). In the case of an election, if a potential voter makes a commitment to a campaign, they will then feel obliged to

vote for that candidate. It is also important to note that with a larger commitment the voter will feel like they have a stronger obligation to vote. Barack Obama and John McCain's campaigns have blended this idea with cross media promotion (Cialdini, 2001). Both camps display their web site address on all their other forms of advertising in hope that the viewer will make a small initial commitment to visit their site. Once on the site (either Obama's or McCain's site) the potential voter will be bombarded with a multitude of options to make a larger commitment. Both sites offer the visitor opportunities to recruit friends or family members, purchase items, volunteer (Obama) or host an event (McCain), and donate money. Once the visitor engages in one of the offered activities he or she will be caught in the trap of commitment and consistency.

The idea of getting a voter to commit to a candidate and stay consistent with that decision through the second Tuesday in November has been the goal of contested presidential election campaigns since their inception in 1796. Although the methods of persuasion have changed and the number of mediums for their delivery has expanded, the concept has endured: Get voters to the polls! Campaigns have found commitment and consistency to be a natural match because the integrated "follow through" ensures that the voter actually votes for the candidate in question. This technique was discovered (although not identified) in American campaigns as early as 1800, when campaign "armies" recruited supporters (Ferling, 1996). During the past two elections, the focus of commitment and consistency has been on getting the initial commitment via a web site visit. In 2004, this small commitment led to the possibility of campaign donations, or buying from the candidate's on-line store. Today, potential voters can choose from a wide array of participatory options (some of which are free). This change is evidence that campaigns have not only realized that they need to get voters involved, but also that they need to bring the involvement to the potential voter, and on the voters terms.

Although the tactical change of bringing the involvement to the potential voter has been shown to increase voter turn out, it is hard to determine whether this has benefited a particular campaign (Mutz, 1999). Between the elections of 2000 and 2004 overall voter turnout has risen from sixty to sixty four percent of eligible voters, along with an eleven percent increase in voters between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four (the lowest turnout bracket) (Rock the Vote, 2008). Due to backing from the Democratic and Republican parties and their respective candidates, partnerships with independent organizations like Rock the Vote and Vote or Die, and voter registration (almost) evenly split between parties, it is unclear who benefited most from this strategy.

Presidential campaign studies have also concluded that exposure to persuasive political ads have a negligible effect on election results, but does increase voter turnout (Mutz, 1999). Alternatively, communications studies have recorded that five to seven percent of people who are exposed to campaign ads are persuaded by them (Devlin, 1987). This means that although the 2008 election is predicted to have an even larger turnout than 2004, the increase in voter turnout is not indicative of campaign success. However, these results indicate that if Obama and McCain have a close race, their persuasive campaign ads and tactics will have more than a negligible effect.

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Keywords: Presidential, Persuasion, Campaigns

