

How Do Candidates Get Your Attention?

A Guide to Campaign Advertisements

A. **Testimonial** – endorsements from celebrities and other well-known people.

Example: Michael Jordan's endorsement of Bill Bradley for President; Senator Warner's endorsement of George Allen for Senate; any local celebrity or well known community leader's public endorsement of a candidate for office.

B. **Mudslinging** – often referred to as “attack ads,” the TV, radio and print advertisements make assertions about the opponent in a variety of unflattering ways. Name-calling and/or groundless assertions about one candidate by his/her opponent. This advertising strategy is used by a candidate primarily to create a negative impression of one's opponent. This strategy may backfire and create a negative impression of the candidate who is responsible for the creation of the negative ad if used excessively, or in a manner that is perceived as false, deceptive, “tasteless” or “going too far.”

Example: The Bush “Rats” Ad; 1996 Democratic Presidential and Congressional commercials that “morphed” the candidate into images of Pat Robertson or Newt Gingrich.

C. **Transfer** – Use of popular symbols to create a positive connotation for the candidate or the use of negative or controversial symbols to create a negative connotation of one's opponent.

Example: Positive: Ads that feature pleasant music, beautiful outdoor country or rural scenery, happy families, playful children, successful teams or businesses etc.

Negative: Talking about an opponent's record with ominous music in the background, using black and white photos, visually shocking images such as oil spills, home foreclosure, car accidents, prison bars etc. Images of one's opponent in slow motion causing the eye's to blink slowly, thereby giving the impression of disinterest, laziness and/or intoxication.

D. **Card stacking** – Use of statistics, often in a one-sided manner; the omission of information that is crucial to drawing an informed and balanced conclusion.

Example: 95% of citizens surveyed support Mrs. Jones for City Council; “Time after time, my opponent voted against legislation that would have supported new jobs in our community.”

E. **Plain Folks** – An attempt by a candidate to appeal to the average voter as just “one of the people.”

Example: Lamar Alexander in 1996 wearing his trademark red and black-checked shirt. Any candidate ad where he or she appears with no jacket or suit, shirtsleeves rolled up and/or wearing a sweater. Usually doing everyday task such as shopping at the supermarket or walking down a street or “visiting” with neighbors. Another technique that fits this category is one where the candidate does not appear in the ad, but “average” people on the street stop to talk about the candidate. The negative version of this would be “man on the street” interviews where the interviewees are critical of the opponent.

F. **Glittering Generalities** – Usually the first type of ad used in a campaign, these spots are designed to introduce a candidate to the voters. Needless to say, like any introduction, these types of ads are almost always very positive. Designed to leave the viewer with a very good first impression. This ad type uses very vague words and phrases that have a positive effect on the viewer and appeal to a variety of interests.

Example: Ads use images and phrases that are virtually impossible not to like such as: “Working for your family,” “Building a Bridge To The Future,” “Saving Our Schools” “Improving America” “Saving Social Security” “Building One America” etc. The images are usually of a perfect world with happy families and children in pleasant surroundings on sunny days with blue skies or images of the candidate hard at work, sleeves rolled up, actively engaged in conversation with people in a “responsible” business environment.

G. **Bandwagon** – Similar to card stacking, this is an attempt to convey a sense of momentum and to generate a positive “everybody’s doing it so you should too” mentality.

Example: Voice-overs in commercials stating “Polls show Robert Stone leading in the race for the United States Senate.” Large groups of people greeting a candidate or carrying signs in support. Group testimonials and/or corporate endorsements such as: “Endorsed by the National Association of Retired Persons,” or “Endorsed by the National Education Association.”

H. **Contrast Ad** – Juxtaposing positive images of one’s candidacy with negative images of the opponent in the same ad.