MEASURING ISSUE AND IMAGE IN POLITICAL ADVERTISING: AN INFORMATIONAL/TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH

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Abstract
An experiment examines Puto and Wells informational/transformational advertising scale in the context of issue and image political advertising. The purpose is to empirically prove the conceptual similarity between information/transformation and issue/image and assess the validity of using the scale to measure the perception of issue and image content in political advertisements. The results support the use of the scale for political advertising and provide insights about the relationship between advertising content and candidate evaluation for unknown candidates.

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Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

The idea that political candidates can be marketed in a way similar to products is prevalent in political campaign literature (e.g., Baines et al. 2005; Ben-Ur and Newman 2002; Henneberg 2004; Schiffman et al. 2002). The most visible similarity between those two types of marketing is probably the extensive use of advertising by sellers/candidates to inform and persuade consumers/voters (Shama 1976). In fact, the ever-increasing importance of political advertising has substantially contributed to the interest in applying consumer marketing theories and practices to political campaigns (Dermody and Scullion 2001). In line with the current trend in political advertising research, this study attempted to introduce Puto and Wells (1984) informational/transformational survey scale (hereinafter referred to as “the Scale”), originally developed for consumer advertising, to analyze issue and image in political advertising, one of the key concerns in political communication research (Kaid 2004).

An informational consumer advertisement aims to provide hard facts of a product (Puto and Wells 1984). A good example can be a computer advertisement that presents consumers with detailed product information, such as processor speed, hard drive size, and so on. A transformational consumer advertisement aims to establish brand personality of a product (Puto and Wells 1984). A good example can be a computer advertisement that associates a computer brand with a fun, trendy and smart personality by featuring a college-age consumer making an interesting movie on the computer on a boring overnight flight. An issue-oriented political advertisement aims to emphasize a candidate’s stand on policy issues (Kaid and Johnston 2001). A good example can be a congressional campaign advertisement in which a candidate explains to the audience his or her stands on a set of issues, such as tax and national security, or essentially provides “hard” political facts about
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

himself or herself. Finally, an image-oriented political advertisement aims to stress a
candidate’s personal qualities and characteristics (Kaid and Johnston 2001) and is well
analogous to transformational advertising that attempts to create personality for a brand. A
good example can be a senatorial campaign advertisement in which a candidate is shown to
speak to the elderly sincerely to create a caring and trustworthy personality. In an image
political advertisement, there is often no mention of a candidate’s stand on policy issues,
for example, Medicare for the elderly. In a transformational consumer advertisement, there
is generally no mention of a product’s technical details, for example, configuration facts of
a computer.

Despite the conceptual similarity between issue/image in political advertising and
informational/transformational consumer advertising, it remains an interesting question
whether the conceptual similarity can be empirically proved with the use of the Scale to
measure the issue and image content in political advertising. For example, will an issue-
oriented political advertisement be perceived as more informational than transformational?
Will an image-oriented political advertisement be perceived as more transformational than
informational? If the use of the Scale proves successful in the context of issue/image
political advertising, the Scale will provide a promising way to calibrate the issue and
image content in an advertisement with high precision. Because the Scale is particularly
valuable in a typical pretest environment for new advertisements (Puto and Wells 1984),
the enhanced measurement of the content will, through copy testing, eventually help
identify a manner in which issue and image can be managed that will lead to optimal
mental processing of political advertisements and favorable candidate evaluation, which is
of vital importance to both practitioners and scholars.
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

This research paper was structured as follows. The literature of issue/image and informational/transformational advertising was first reviewed. Second, hypotheses and research questions were formulated. Third, a content analysis and an experiment were conducted to empirically address the hypotheses and research questions. Finally, the results, limitations, and suggestions for future research were discussed.

**Literature Review**

**Issue and Image in Political Advertising**

The interest in issue and image can be traced back to voting behavior studies since the 1950s. Researchers identified party loyalty and group identification as the long-term factors and feelings about candidates and issues as the short-term factors influencing voting behavior in both presidential and congressional elections (Campbell et al. 1954). Nevertheless, for decades political advertising has been criticized for emphasizing image and trivializing issue, and therefore damaging the very foundation of democratic voting (Kaid 2004), i.e., voting behavior should result from rational decision-making based on policy issues rather than candidate personalities or images (Berelson 1966). However, studies on political advertising content, especially those on TV political advertising content, suggest that such an accusation is largely unfounded or mythical, since the content is in fact largely issue-based (Kaid 2004; Kaid and Johnston 2001).

For example, from 1952 through 1996, 66% of the presidential TV campaign advertisements were issue-oriented whereas 34% of them were image-oriented (Kaid and Johnston 2001). In 2000, 78% of the presidential campaign advertisements were issue-oriented and 22% of them were image-oriented (Kaid 2002). In 2004, 85% of the presidential campaign advertisements were issue-oriented and 15% of them were image-oriented.
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

oriented (Kaid 2005). Although the percentage of issue advertisement varied over time, it was below half (47%) only in 1968 (Kaid and Johnston 2001). The focus on issue is manifest not only in presidential campaigns but also in gubernatorial and senatorial campaigns (Vavreck 2001).

One experimental study suggested that issue advertisements led to more positive candidate evaluation than did image advertisements (Thorson et al. 1991). However, the study itself had a few problems. For example, the participants watched five different political advertisements and eight product advertisements in a row, but possible ordering effects owing to this within-subjects design were not addressed. Although issue advertisements produced significantly higher scores on all aspects of candidate evaluation than did image advertisements (Table 1, p. 478), the scores for both types of advertisements were well above the mid-point of a set of 9-point evaluation scales and the actual differences ranged from .31 to .73. The statistical significance could be inflated with a sample size of 161 college students and the scores appeared too high for unknown candidates. In other words, that study did not provide convincing evidence that issue advertisements did a better job than image advertisements to enhance evaluation of unknown candidates.

In another experimental study, Kahn and Geer (1994) used between-subjects design and compared candidate evaluation between issue and image TV advertisements of one unknown candidate. It turned out that issue and image advertisements produced almost identical candidate evaluation slightly above the mid-point of the evaluation scales (Table 2, p. 103) and there was certainly no statistically significant difference between the two types of advertisements for the unknown candidate.
Low familiarity is a reality for most candidates (Thorson et al. 1991), and with low familiarity, issue and image advertisements may work about the same (Kahn and Geer 1994). On the other hand, high familiarity does exist for some candidates such as incumbent presidential candidates, and high familiarity is achievable through an extensive political campaign (Kahn and Geer 1994). Copy testing is a highly rewarding investment even for an initially unknown candidate. It can track advertising effects at different levels of familiarity as a result of the candidate’s political campaign, and identify advantages and disadvantages of an unknown candidate to his or her well-known opponent.

Issue and image advertisements can be used to support a candidate and attack his or her opponent. The impact of support and attack was investigated in the two above-mentioned studies, but there was no evidence that support advertisements, paired with either issue or image, always produce more positive evaluation of a candidate than attack advertisements sponsored by the same candidate (Kahn and Geer 1994; Shen and Wu 2002; Thorson et al. 1991); or issue advertisements consistently outperform image advertisements when the comparison is madewithin the same support or attack condition (Garramone 1984; Kahn and Geer 1994; Thorson et al. 1991). In real-world campaigns, issue and image advertisements are primarily used to support candidates in presidential, state, and local elections (Kahn and Kenney 2000; Kaid and Johnston 2001; Vavreck 2001). The current study serves as the first step to assess the effects of issue/image from an informational/transformational advertising perspective and addresses supportive issue and image advertisements only. That being said, effects of issue and image in attack advertisements, such as those regarding backlash effects, sponsorship, and rebuttals (For a
detailed review about the effects of attack advertisement, see Kaid 2004, pp. 171-177), are definitely worthy of investigation in future research.

**Information and Transformation in Consumer Advertising**

Previous research has identified five antecedents that influence the use of informational or transformational advertising (Swaminathan et al. 1996). The relevance of those five antecedents to political advertising was assessed in the following sections.

**Antecedent 1: Newness of the Product**

Consumers need to search for information to identify and evaluate new product category (Cohen and Basu 1987). But when consumers become well informed, their information need declines and their evaluation of the product category is largely based on actual experience of the product (Swaminathan et al. 1996). The same idea is also found in some discussion about the relationship between the use of informational or transformational advertising and product life cycle. In the early stages of a consumer product, informational advertising is recommended to communicate factual information of the product; whereas in the late stages, transformational advertising is recommended to communicate use experience of the product (Porter 1985). Newness of product is relevant to political advertising. It makes good sense for an unknown challenger, or a candidate in the early stage of his or her political life, to build awareness through informational advertising, and for a well-known incumbent, or a candidate in the late stage of the political life, to capitalize voters’ positive experience with his or her first term through transformational advertising.
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

Antecedent 2: Level of Risk

In the context of consumer behavior, risk refers to the uncertainty encountered by consumers when they are estimating the social and economic consequences of a purchase decision (Swaminathan et al. 1996). Risk is associated with product newness and information search. A new product is perceived riskier than a familiar product; therefore, if consumers have to make a decision between the two, one way to make a less risky decision is to make an informed decision through adequate information search (Darke et al. 1995). Additionally, decision-making literature points out that risk is often associated with involvement (Hoyer and Maclnnis 2004).

Antecedent 3: Product Involvement

In the context of consumer behavior, involvement refers to the extent to which a product has important consequences for consumers to form an informed opinion and to justify their purchase decisions (Chaiken 1980). Expensive products result in both strong perception of risk and high involvement with the products (Hoyer and Maclnnis 2004). Voters highly involved with a political election may believe that their votes will have a significant impact on their society and tend to search for adequate information to make a well-informed decision. Therefore, for those voters, informational advertising may be the only appropriate approach. In fact, there is evidence that for voters who are interested in or involved with political campaigns, their candidate evaluation is primarily determined by issue advertisements rather than image advertisements (Christ et al. 1994).

Antecedent 4: Product Conspicuousness

In the context of consumer behavior, product conspicuousness refers to the intended communication roleplayed by certain consumption decisions (Belk et al. 1982). In other
words, consumers express themselves through purchasing and using products that are congruent with their self-images (Swaminathan et al. 1996). Therefore, the purchase decision is based on real or upcoming experience of using the product or the transformational aspect rather than the hard facts or the informational aspect of the product. In the context of political advertising, a candidate can use transformational advertising to reinforce support from voters who are highly identified with the candidate because of positive experience with the candidate.

*Antecedent 5: Product versus Service*

In the context of consumer behavior, intangibility is a fundamental difference between product and service (Swaminathan et al. 1996). Because consumers cannot perceive service in the same manner in which consumers can sense products (Zeithaml and Bitner 1996), transformational advertising is used to present service offering with real-person experience of the service (Swaminathan et al. 1996). At first glance, political office may be closer to the concept of intangible service than tangible product, which makes transformational advertising a better match to political campaigns.

However, research on intangibility suggests that although service itself may be highly intangible, the service delivery system is well tangible (Mittal 1999). Similarly, although the political service a candidate will provide may be highly intangible, the candidate himself or herself, as the core service delivery system, is well tangible. Basic facts about the candidate are crucial for voters to make an informed decision. Therefore, informational advertising is still an appropriate approach to political campaigns although political campaigns essentially aim to sell candidates’ political service.
Typology of Informational/Transformational Strategies

Previous research has also identified five informational strategies and four transformational strategies in consumer advertising (Laskey et al. 1989). Again those items were examined in the context of political advertising for relevance assessment.

The first informational item, comparative, refers to explicit mention of competition in consumer advertising. It is relevant to political advertising because in political advertising, especially in negative political advertising, explicit mention of opponent is basically a common practice. The second item, preemptive, refers to testable claim of superiority based on an attribute or benefit of a brand in consumer advertising. It is also relevant because in political advertising, there are often statements about a candidate’s previous performance in office and/or issue stands, which should be testable or verifiable and can help indicate that candidate’s superiority to other candidates. The third item, hyperbole, refers to un-testable claim of superiority based on an attribute or benefit in consumer advertising. It is also relevant because in political advertising, there are also superiority claims about new initiatives to be implemented but those new initiatives are largely un-testable at the moment they are proposed. The fourth item, unique selling point, refers to explicit claim of uniqueness in consumer advertising and involves heavy use of the word or concept of “only.” It is, however, not really relevant because in the U.S. elections, the influence of independent candidates is so limited that the competition is primarily between the two candidates from the Republican Party and the Democratic Party respectively (Devlin 2001). Because there are just two candidates, any comparisons between the two automatically involve the concept of “only.” Including this strategy may lead to possible confusion with other informational items that emphasize the superiority of
a candidate, for example, pre-emptive and hyperbole. Generic, the last informational item, refers to information about a product class rather than a particular product or brand in consumer advertising. It is also not relevant because there is no such a concept of generic candidate in political advertising.

The first transformational item, user image, focuses on the users of a brand and their lifestyles in consumer advertising. It is relevant because some political advertisements do show how the life of certain type of voters or “users” of a political candidate’s service will be influenced either positively or negatively by their decision to choose a candidate. The second item, brand image, focuses on the image of the brand itself to convey a brand personality in consumer advertising. It is also relevant because in political advertising, it is again a common practice to emphasize the personality or characteristics of a candidate. The third item, use occasion, focuses on situations where use of the brand is most appropriate or emphasizes a match between a brand and a situation rather than a match between a brand and a particular type of users in consumer advertising. It is also relevant because some political advertisements do show scenarios that suggest the appropriateness to choose a candidate for a particular issue rather than for a particular type of voters. Generic, the last transformational item, again focuses on a product class rather than a particular product or brand. This item is not relevant because there is no such a concept of generic candidate.

In summary, the antecedents to the use of information or transformation for consumer advertising are well applicable to political advertising. Furthermore, three out of the five informational strategies and three out of the four transformational strategies are relevant to political advertising. In fact, the three informational strategies and three
transformational strategies have been used to code the issue and image content in political advertisements (Shen and Kim 2006). Issue political advertisements were found to contain more informational strategies, and image political advertisements were found to contain more transformational strategies. Nevertheless, content analyses on issue and image in political advertising may be of little use if there is a lack of reliable and valid methods to measure voter’s perception of the content and identify the impact of the perception on candidate evaluation. In the current study, the Scale was used for a better understanding of the perception and impact in question.

**Survey Scale of Informational/Transformational Advertising**

The Scale has 23 items. Eight of them measure the perception of informational cues (hereinafter referred to as “PIFC”) in an advertisement and were developed from previous research on the informative function of advertisements (Aaker and Norris 1982; Resnik and Stern 1977). The other 15 items measure the perception of transformational cues (hereinafter referred to as “PTFC”) and were developed from viewer response profile measures (Schlinger 1979) and Needham, Harper, and Steers Advertising’s communication measures. The Scale is by far the most popular measure of informational/transformational advertising and has been used for more than two decades (Menon et al. 2006), although survey scales of this type are criticized for being limited in capturing transformational experience and should be replaced by open-ended projective techniques with pictures or narratives (Aaker and Stayman 1992).

In the original validation study, Puto and Wells (1984) first coded 400 TV commercials based on the definitions of informational and transformational advertising. Out of those 400 commercials, they selected five primarily informational commercials and
eight primarily transformational commercials. Next, 130 college students watched the 13 commercials and responded to the survey scale to report PIFC and PTFC of the commercials. The average responses of the 13 TV commercials were analyzed to assess the performance of the scale. A set of Cronbach’s reliability tests indicated that the eight informational survey items reached an average reliability of .73 and the 15 transformational survey items reached .88. A set of $t$-tests was used to compare the difference between each commercial’s PIFC and PTFC scores. The difference was significant for all the commercials and the higher score was in complete agreement with the prior coding as whether the commercial was primarily informational or transformational.

Unfortunately, the validation study itself was not flawless. The participants watched all the 13 commercials and responded to the same scale 13 times, but the researchers used $t$-tests rather than repeated measures for this within-subjects design. Moreover, since Cronbach’s reliability test is known to favor scales of larger numbers of items even with the same degree of inter-item correlations (Hair et al. 1995), the Scale is likely to be in favor of the transformational items because those items almost outnumbered the informational item by 2 to 1. Meanwhile, because the Scale has six points from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree,” the participants were forced to make a sided choice and could not indicate a neutral stand. Finally, the participants were also asked to report prior exposure and evaluation of the commercials, but the relationship between those measures and the Scale was not analyzed in that validation study. For a better use of the Scale in the current study, changes were made to the experimental design, scale points, and data analyses. More details are in the methodology section.
Hypotheses and Research Questions

There is evidence that issue and image advertisements may not differ in their impact on the evaluation of an unknown candidate (Kahn and Geer 1994). It is therefore hypothesized:

_Hypothesis 1:_ When a candidate is unknown to respondents, candidate evaluation in an issue advertisement condition will not be significantly different from that in an image advertisement condition.

According to the literature review of informational and transformational advertising, the concept of information and transformation is well applicable to issue and image. It is therefore hypothesized:

_Hypothesis 2:_ PIFC score of an issue political advertisement will be significantly higher than its PTFC score. Conversely, PTFC score of an image political advertisement will be significantly higher than its PIFC score.

For contrast purpose, the current study also included one informational and one transformational consumer advertisements. Consumers nowadays are highly familiar with major brands in most product categories (Marshall 2006). But voters, particularly college student participants, often have little or no prior knowledge about most candidates (Kahn and Geer 1994; Thorson et al. 1991). Familiarity at different levels is found to facilitate the processing of some cues over the others, for example, price versus product function in the formation of product attitude (Rao and Monroe 1988). The construct of familiarity is also multidimensional (Brucks 1985) and context-specific (Lee and Ganesh 1999; Rao and Monroe 1988). For instance, brand familiarity is composed of brand names, store names, technical terms, and usage situations (Rao and Monroe 1988), and country familiarity is
composed of economic status, pillar industry, friendliness to other countries, and participation in world affairs (Lee and Ganesh 1999). Those two types of familiarity have very different impacts on attitude toward locally manufactured foreign brands (Lee and Ganesh 1999). The current study also deals with different levels and different types of familiarity, i.e., high brand familiarity and low candidate familiarity. It remains unclear how those two types of familiarity will influence 1) PIFC and PTFC and 2) the impact of PIFC and PTFC on brand or candidate evaluation. Therefore, two research questions are proposed:

Research Question 1: How will familiarity influence PIFC and PTFC in consumer and political advertisements?

Research Question 2: How will the effect of PIFC and PTFC on evaluation be influenced by familiarity?

Method

Experimental Design and Participants

The current study employed between-subjects design with four conditions, namely informational consumer advertisement, transformational consumer advertisement, image political advertisement, and issue political advertisement. A total of 1058 undergraduate students were recruited from mass communication classes. As prior exposure to advertisements may influence both the validity and the reliability of the Scale, 58 participants who had watched the advertisements were excluded. The sample size became 1000 with 250 participants per condition. The mean age was 20.26 with a standard deviation of 1.74. A majority of the students was female, which accounted for 68% of the participants.
Materials and Measures

TV advertisements were chosen for the current study because 1) TV advertisements are particularly capable of functioning as a transformational medium (Puto and Wells 1984) and 2) TV advertisements dominate political broadcasting in the U.S. (Kaid and Johnston 2001). The current study employed a two-stage research process. In the first stage, a content analysis was conducted to select one primarily informational consumer advertisement and one primarily transformational consumer advertisement from a collection of EFFIE award winning commercials in 2003. The same content analysis was also used to choose one primarily issue political advertisement and one primarily image political advertisement from a pool of congressional and senatorial campaign advertisements for the 2004 and 2006 elections. The coding scheme for the consumer advertisements was based on the typology of informational/transformational advertising developed by Laskey and his colleagues (Laskey et al. 1989). The coding scheme for the political advertisements was modified from Laskey’s typology and used in a previous content analysis of political TV advertisements (Shen and Kim 2006). The content analysis was presented to 20 undergraduate students in an advertising research class as a class assignment. Complete agreement on coding outcome was achieved through careful explanation of the coding schemes and in-class discussion. The 20 students did not participate in the follow-up experiment.

Through the content analysis, an IBM laptop advertisement was chosen as the informational consumer advertisement because technical facts, such as those about CPU and hard drive, dominated the content. An Apple laptop advertisement was chosen as the transformational consumer advertisement because it presented a use scenario in which a
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

college-age boy made a movie with the laptop on an overnight flight. A campaign advertisement of U.S. Congressman Chris Chocola of Indiana was chosen as the issue political advertisement because the advertisement highlighted the candidate’s views on small businesses. Finally, a campaign advertisement of U.S. Congressman Mike Pence of Indiana was chosen as the image political advertisement because the advertisement emphasized the candidate’s personality and his devotion to Indiana voters without mentioning his viewpoints of political issues. Each participant in the experiment watched only one of the four advertisements.

When the Scale (Puto and Wells 1984, p. 641) was used for the political advertisements, “brand” was replaced with “candidate” and “company” with “party.” A mid-point category “neither agree nor disagree” was added to the Scale to form a 7-point scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

The participants were also asked to report their prior exposure to each advertisement on a three-point scale (1: never, 2: a few times, 3: many times), familiarity with the brand/candidate on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very unfamiliar) to 5 (very familiar), and evaluation of brand/candidate on another five-point scale ranging from 1 (very unfavorable) to 5 (very favorable).

Results

Because prior exposure was kept at “1” for the four advertisements, there were 25 variables left for each condition in the study. Consequently, the ratio of observations to variables became 10 to 1 and such a ratio is generally thought to be acceptable (Hair et al. 1995). Of the 25 variables, 23 items were from the Scale, and the other two were about familiarity with and evaluation of the brand/candidate.
There were three major analyses in the current study. First one was a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Familiarity and evaluation were the dependent variables, and the four advertisement conditions were the fixed factor. Second one was paired-samples $t$-test to compare PIFC and PTFC in each condition. The last one was structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the interrelationships among familiarity, PIFC, PTFC, and evaluation. Prior to the analyses, a set of required statistical assumptions, i.e., independence, normality, linearity, and equality of variance-covariance matrices across experimental conditions, were checked and satisfied (For more details about testing statistical assumptions, see Hair et al. 1995, pp. 70-76).

**MANOVA: Familiarity and Brand/Candidate Evaluation**

Table 1 (See Appendix 1) reports the descriptive statistics of familiarity and evaluation for the four advertisements. Four most popular multivariate significance tests for MANOVA, i.e., Pillai’s criterion, Hotelling’s trace, Wilks’ lambda, and Roy’s gcr, indicated that familiarity and evaluation were significantly different across the four advertisement conditions. Because the Scheffé method is the most conservative with respect to Type I error (Hair et al., 1995), it was used as a post hoc method to compare the differences between the advertisements.

The participants were significantly more familiar with and had significantly more favorable evaluation of Apple than IBM and the two candidates. The participants were also significantly more familiar with IBM than the two candidates. The participants’ evaluation of IBM and the two candidates did not differ from each other significantly.

Although the statistical significance might be inflated because of the large sample size, the familiarity scores of the two political advertisements were both below the scale
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

mid-point (3 on the 5-point familiarity scale). The evaluation scores in the political advertisement conditions were slightly above the mid-point and were essentially identical. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

**Paired-samples t-test: PIFC vs. PTFC**

The average of the eight informational items was computed for each commercial as the PIFC score and the average of the 15 transformational items as the PTFC score. Table 2 (See Appendix 1) reports the scores of the four advertisements. The PIFC score of the IBM informational advertisement was significantly higher than the PTFC score. The PTFC score of the Apple transformational advertisement was significantly higher than the PIFC score. The PIFC score of the Chris Chocola issue advertisement was significantly higher than the PTFC score. Finally, the PTFC score of the Mike Pence image advertisement was significantly higher than the PIFC score.

The results not only confirmed the validity of the coding scheme to identify informational and transformational advertisements and proved the experimental manipulation successful, but also supported Hypothesis 2. Although the statistical significance might again be inflated because of the large sample size, the PIFC scores were above the scale mid-point (4 on a 7-point scale) for the issue advertisement and below the mid-point for the image advertisement. The PTFC scores were above the mid-point for the image advertisement and below the mid-point for the issue advertisement.

One caveat of the results is noteworthy. Although PIFC and PTFC can be measured separately, they are not mutually exclusive (Puto and Wells 1984). Consumers can perceive transformational cues from an informational consumer advertisement (Aaker and Stayman 1992), for example, an upper-class brand image associated with cutting-age
product features of an IBM laptop. They can also perceive informational cues from a transformational consumer advertisement, for example, compact design of an Apple laptop that well fits the tiny personal space on an airplane. Likewise, voters can learn transformational cues from an issue political advertisement (Johnston and Kaid 2002), for example, a down-to-earth personality of Chris Chocola owing to his views on small businesses. Voters can also learn informational cues from an image political advertisement (Christ et al. 1994; Johnston and Kaid 2002), for example, Mike Spence representing Indiana in the U.S. Congress. An informational advertisement in fact has a primary focus on information and a secondary focus on transformation, and a transformational advertisement has a primary focus on transformation and a secondary focus on information (Puto and Wells 1984).

**SEM: Interrelationships among Familiarity, Perception, and Evaluation**

Figure 1 depicts the full path diagram of the SEM analysis. Familiarity can function as prior attitude and influence the processing of communication messages (Machleit and Wilson 1988); therefore, it was specified as the exogenous variable. The endogenous variables were PIFC, PTFC, and evaluation. The observed PIFC and PTFC scores from the Scale were used as the indicators of the latent PIFC and PTFC. To correct for measurement error, the residual variance of the observed PIFC and PTFC scores was defined as 1 minus the scale reliability of the informational and transformational items, a common approach in SEM (Kline 2004).

Table 3 (See Appendix 1) reports the reliability coefficients in the four advertisement conditions. The informational coefficients were a little bit higher than those reported in the validation study (Puto and Wells 1984) whereas the transformational
coefficients were quite close to those reported in that study. The informational coefficients were smaller than the transformational coefficients. But the smaller coefficients do not necessarily mean that the informational items are less reliable than the transformational items but indicate that Cronbach’s reliability test favors larger numbers of scale items (Hair et al. 1995).

Because the concepts of PIFC and PTFC are not mutually exclusive, the error variance of the latent PIFC and PTFC was correlated. All the causal relationships were specified in the path model (See Figure 1 in Appendix 2), which means that the path model was saturated and its absolute goodness-of-fit measure, known as the likelihood-ratio chi-square statistic, had to be 0 and indicated a perfect fit (Kline 2004). As an alternative, an overall coefficient of determination ($R^2$), similar to that used in multiple regression, was calculated to measure the overall fit of the path model. Although no significance test can be performed on $R^2$, it provides a relative measure of fit for the path model in the four advertisement conditions (Hair et al. 1995). Owing to the statistical properties of maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) employed in SEM, the minimum significance level for estimated parameter coefficients was specified at .025 (For more detailed discussion about MLE in SEM, see Hair et al. 1995, pp. 605, 613). LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 2005) was used to analyze the path model.

As indicated in Table 4 (See Appendix 2), the path model produced very similar $R^2$ in the four advertisement conditions, which again suggested the conceptual similarity between information/transformation and issue/image. Research Question 1 asked about the impact of familiarity on PIFC and PTFC. For the two consumer advertisements, familiarity had a significant direct effect on both of them in most cases except for PIFC of the
transformational advertisement. For the two political advertisements, familiarity had a significant direct effect on PTFC of the issue advertisement and PIFC of the image advertisement.

Research Question 2 asked about the interrelationships among familiarity, PIFC, PTFC, and evaluation. Familiarity had significant direct and indirect effects on brand evaluation in the two consumer advertisement conditions. Familiarity had a significant indirect effect on candidate evaluation through its direct effect on PIFC and PTFC in the two political advertisement conditions, but its total effect was not significant. PTFC, regardless of the type of advertisement, consistently had a significant direct effect on both brand and candidate evaluation. PIFC had a significant direct effect on evaluation in the informational consumer advertisement and image political advertisement conditions.

Discussion

This study attempted to investigate the issue and image content in political TV advertisements with the Scale. The conceptual similarity between information/transformation and issue/image was empirically proved. Pre-coded informational and issue advertisements had higher PIFC than PTFC. Pre-coded transformational and image advertisements had higher PTFC than PIFC. The significant error covariance for the latent PIFC and PTFC in all the four advertisement conditions as recorded in Table 4 empirically proved that PIFC and PTFC were not mutually exclusive but overlapped substantially. On the one hand, the overlap seems to suggest that the information/transformation or issue/image classification may be in fact a false dichotomy (Kaid 2004). On the other hand, despite the overlap, PIFC and PTFC had very different patterns across the four conditions.
PIFC and PTFC received unequal impact from familiarity. When familiarity was generally high as in the two consumer advertisement conditions, the perception of primary content focus, i.e., informational cues of the informational advertisement and transformational cues of the transformational advertisement, received a relatively larger impact from familiarity. By sharp contrast, when familiarity was generally low as in the two political advertisement conditions, it was the perception of secondary content focus, i.e., transformational cues of the issue advertisement and informational cues of the image advertisement, that received a relatively larger impact from familiarity.

The larger impact from familiarity enhanced the direct effect from the impacted content focus to evaluation. PIFC was significantly influenced by familiarity in the informational and image advertisement conditions and it had a significant direct effect on evaluation in those two conditions. When PIFC was not significantly influenced by familiarity in the other two conditions, it had no significant effect on evaluation. PTFC obviously outperformed PIFC and had a significant direct effect on evaluation in all the four conditions. But the enhancement function of familiarity was in no sense negligible. When PTFC received a significant impact from familiarity in the transformational advertisement and issue advertisement conditions, its direct effect size on evaluation was almost 7 or 25 times the effect size of PIFC in the same conditions.

The effects of familiarity might just be experimental artifacts because the familiarity scores were either around the low or high ends of the familiarity scale. In similar situations, some scholars recoded familiarity into a dichotomous variable (Machleit and Wilson 1988). However, there was still variance in the familiarity scores even when they were generally low or high. Dichotomization assumes zero variance within one
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

category and leads to loss of information. Furthermore, there were indeed some identifiable patterns of familiarity. Familiarity, either low or high, had a significant indirect effect on evaluation, but only high familiarity had a significant direct effect on evaluation. High familiarity enhanced the perception of primary content focus. Low familiarity enhanced the perception of secondary content focus, but the enhancement did not necessarily make the secondary content focus more salient than the primary content focus, i.e., higher PTFC of the issue advertisement or higher PIFC of the image advertisement. Once a content focus, no matter whether it was primary or secondary, was enhanced by familiarity, no matter whether it was low or high, the same outcome would occur, namely, a significant direct effect of the perception of the content focus on evaluation.

This study has important implications for political campaigning, particularly from a copy-testing standpoint. The Scale provided a valid measure of PIFC and PTFC of issue and image in political advertisements, and the assessment of PIFC and PTFC further helped understand the effects of the content on candidate evaluation. Nevertheless, this study did not provide strong evidence as to which type of advertisement, issue or image, would be the better choice for an unknown candidate, although PIFC and PTFC had more balanced contribution to evaluation in the image advertisement condition. Adding a third advertisement that has both high PIFC and PTFC may solve the limitation. In fact, there is increased blending of image and issue in real-life political advertisements (Johnston and Kaid 2002).

While the two political advertisements provided a low familiarity setting in this study, the two consumer advertisements provided a high familiarity setting. Nevertheless,
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

given the complexity of the construct of familiarity (Brucks 1985; Lee and Ganesh 1999; Rao and Monroe 1988), the patterns recorded in the consumer advertisement conditions cannot be assumed to hold true for political advertisements endorsing well-known candidates. This study was limited in providing insights about the relationship between advertising content and evaluation for well-known candidates, such as Hillary Clinton in the current Democratic primary race, and for increasingly well-known candidates, such as Hillary Clinton’s primary race opponent Barack Obama. But the Scale is a promising tool to address this issue in future research.

This study was also limited in measuring familiarity. Although the five-point scale of familiarity in this study is well acceptable in this line of research (Thorson et al. 1991), it is desirable to develop a multi-indicator measure of familiarity that assesses both specific and generic beliefs of an object (Rao and Monroe 1988). The participants in the political advertisement conditions might have little knowledge about the two candidates, but some knowledge about politics in a more general sense, which may contribute to the variance of the familiarity scores.

The measure of evaluation can also be improved. It will be worthwhile to borrow measures from the National Election Studies (NES) such as the NES feeling thermometer in future research. It will be also worthwhile to add other voting behavior measures such as intention to vote in follow-up studies. The $R^2$ in each condition was not very high, and it suggests that more variables should be included to better account for the variance of evaluation in future research. Possible variables are involvement with and interest in politics (Faber et al. 1993; Rothschild and Ray 1974), dependence on political
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

advertisement (Garramone and Smith 1984), and identification with a political party (Garramone 1985; Pfau et al. 2002), just to name a few.

The use of student participants may limit the generalizability of the findings to the general population because they are more educated and consequently more resistant to the effects of political advertisements (Kahn and Geer 1994). It is worthy recruiting non-student participants and contrasting findings from different social groups to acquire new insights about the effect of advertising content on voting behavior.
References


------------------------ (1984), “Voter Responses to Negative Political Ads,” *Journalism*
Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising

Quarterly, 61 (2), 250-259.


Measuring Issue and Image in Political Advertising


### Appendix 1: Descriptive Statistics and Informational/Transformational Scale Response

#### Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Familiarity and Evaluation by Advertisement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Advertisements</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familiarity</strong></td>
<td>IBM (Informational)</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apple (Transformational)</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chris Chocola (Issue)</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mike Pence (Image)</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation</strong></td>
<td>IBM (Informational)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apple (Transformational)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chris Chocola (Issue)</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mike Pence (Image)</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 2
Comparisons between PIFC and PTFC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PIFC Mean</th>
<th>PIFC SD</th>
<th>PTFC Mean</th>
<th>PTFC SD</th>
<th>Paired Samples Test t (df = 249)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IBM (Informational)</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>22.55**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple (Transformational)</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>-15.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Chocola (Issue)</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>19.73**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Pence (Image)</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>-14.53**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < .01.

#### Table 3
Reliability Coefficients of Informational/Transformational Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IBM (Informational)</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple (Transformational)</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Chocola (Issue)</td>
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<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Pence (Image)</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix 2. Path Analysis

Figure 1. Full path diagram of observed PIFC ($Y_1$), latent PIFC ($\eta_1$), observed PTFC ($Y_2$), latent PTFC ($\eta_2$), error covariance for latent PIFC and PTFC, and path coefficients between familiarity ($X_1$), latent PIFC, latent PTFC, and evaluation ($Y_3$) in the four advertisement conditions with LISREL notation. “nt” denotes not tested.
### Table 4
Model Fitting Statistics and Parameter Estimates for the Four Advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fitting</th>
<th>IBM Informational</th>
<th>Apple Transformational</th>
<th>Chris Chocola Issue</th>
<th>Mike Pence Image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parameter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\gamma_{11}$</td>
<td>.25(.07)**</td>
<td>.15(.07)</td>
<td>.14(.07)</td>
<td>.19(.07)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\gamma_{21}$</td>
<td>.16(.07)*</td>
<td>.22(.07)**</td>
<td>.17(.07)**</td>
<td>.15(.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\gamma_{31}$</td>
<td>.23(.06)**</td>
<td>.17(.06)**</td>
<td>-.05(.06)</td>
<td>-.10(.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_{31}$</td>
<td>.20(.09)*</td>
<td>.02(.12)</td>
<td>.07(.17)</td>
<td>.31(.09)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_{32}$</td>
<td>.28(.08)**</td>
<td>.49(.12)**</td>
<td>.49(.17)**</td>
<td>.28(.09)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\zeta_1$</td>
<td>.94(.10)**</td>
<td>.98(.11)**</td>
<td>.99(.11)**</td>
<td>.96(.11)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\zeta_2$</td>
<td>.98(.10)**</td>
<td>.95(.09)**</td>
<td>.98(.10)**</td>
<td>.99(.10)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Psi_{21}$</td>
<td>.61(.08)**</td>
<td>.77(.09)**</td>
<td>.85(.09)**</td>
<td>.65(.08)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indirect Effects of $X_1$ on $Y_3$

|                      | .09(.03)**        | .11(.04)**             | .10(.04)*           | .11(.04)**      |

Total Effects of $X_1$ on $Y_3$

|                      | .32(.06)**        | .28(.06)**             | .05(.06)            | .01(.06)        |

* $p < .025$; ** $p < .01$. The values in the parentheses are standard errors.