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Courtne Claudet

Western Connecticut State University

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The Quest for Best: Grassroots vs. Mass Marketing Campaigning

Courtné Claudet

Grassroots campaigning is a strategy that has been used for generations in the United States because it has been recognized for having many benefits. For example, it has been cultivated as a way for politicians to reach out and understand constituents on a personal level in order to connect their concerns to the national party. In turn, politicians have used this awareness of voters' concerns to develop their political platforms and public policies. Politicians also utilize grassroots strategies to mobilize volunteers to get voters to the polls on Election Day. Grassroots campaigning focuses on generating community based "earned media", consisting of locally generated news stories. "Earned media" provides the candidates with free publicity thereby educating the public about the candidates. The strategy of grassroots campaigning is to bring attention to the candidates, and their issues. The technique focuses on adding strength and credibility to candidates by reaching out on a personal and local level to the constituent base.

This research project will explore the effectiveness of grassroots campaigning as opposed to mass marketing campaigns. For this research project, the term "grassroots campaigning" will be understood as politics at the local and fundamental level. Overall, this research project about grassroots campaigning will be inductive. Also, the project will be based upon the Grounded Theory Method; consequently theories generated will be solely based upon examination of data collected from exploring, describing, and explaining the phenomenon of grassroots campaigning in the United States today and comparing it to the examination of mass marketing data. The first step in the research process will be to explore specific observations from the strategies of grassroots campaigning to developing general theories about the process. The second step will be to explore, describe, and explain the strategies of the grassroots and mass marketing campaigning at the national and local levels. Through the procedure of describing these strategies, the research project will compare the components of the grassroots campaign and to the mass marketing approaches. The research project will explain the observations made. In addition, it will analyze the data and determine if there are any correlations that can develop a theory that can advance grassroots campaigning as a viable campaign tool, as opposed to mass marketing campaigning. The research project will focus on the strategy inputs and the effective outputs of grassroots and mass marketing campaigning. Overall, the aim of the research project is to compare grassroots and mass marketing campaigning to determine if constituents prefer a certain campaign style.

Additional research was carried out via surveying. The questionnaires were anonymous in nature and they began with demographic questions, to aid in analysis of the results. The questionnaires consisted of closed-ended questions from willing respondents. The populations that were studied consisted of residents from New York and Connecticut from rural, suburban, and urban settings. The research project was based on an inductive approach to characterize, explore and compare the phenomenon of grassroots and mass marketing campaigning. Finally, the research project compared the differences of grassroots campaigning to the mass marketing approach and the different political attitudes constituents held towards each campaign technique.

Analysis was quantitative in nature. The research project attempted to give insight into the phenomenon of grassroots and mass marketing campaigning to determine if constituents preferred a certain style of a political campaign.

Literature Review

This literature review section used articles that were empirical and peer-reviewed studies, which were in the realm of grassroots and mass marketing campaigning. It focused on developing effective strategies for grassroots organizations. It contained a brief case study that included ethnographies that gave a synopsis of the developmental history of grassroots associations. It contained articles that focused on that viability of grassroots campaigning. The literature review demonstrated the effect the media had over political campaigns and the bias news networks could create. All empirical studies covered a variety of topics, and each related to the research objective of understanding the potential effect that grassroots campaigning had a potential effect on voters' choice, and the comparison of any possible benefits of grassroots campaigning to the mass marketing approach.

The study, "Union Organizing (sic) in 'Big Blue's Backyard'" of Patricia Findlay and Alan Mckinlay (2003), investigated whether collective participation could have a positive effect on union benefits. They probed to understand if this form of grassroots campaigning against management could improve working conditions. During 1998 and 2000 Findlay and Mckinlay per-

formed case analyses, with semi-structured interviews, along with national surveys. Union workers from the "hostile environment" of Scotland's "Silicon Glen" were the population directly under study via semi-structured interviews. They then compared these findings to the results of labor dispute in the United States. Findlay and Mckinlay first discovered the pivotal players in the union and labeled them the "Shadow Steward." Findlay and Mckinlay identified the Shadow Steward as the unofficial prefigure, who was crucial in establishing the activities' effectiveness (Findlay 2003; McKinlay 2003). Their central research objective was to examine the effectiveness of the recruitment and the organization (sic) of grassroots movements and the implications for the Shadow Steward. In their conclusion, Findlay and Mckinlay determined that the grassroots activities employed by the union workers helped them achieve their collective goals. Findlay and Mckinlay found that the workers had achieved real progress in formalizing the disciplinary process and in constraining arbitrary supervision (Findlay 2003; McKinlay 2003).

In Patricia J. Fredericksen's study, "Community Collaboration and Public Policy Making: examining the long-term utility of training in conflict management. (Community-oriented Research: Grassroots Issues versus National Policy Agendas)," she recognized that many communities in the United States were searching for a way to build a consensus and for an effective way to implement it without conflict. She developed a way to address the diverse needs of a community during a time when mandated programs were being shifted from the state to local governments (Fredericksen 1996). The methodologies utilized by Fredericksen were fieldwork-based comparative studies, along with longitudinal multiple case work which spanned over two years (Fredericksen 1996). She analyzed one hundred and fifty leaders of public, private, nonprofit, and private organizations attitudes and self-reported behaviors related to community intervention. She did this to understand their perception and the effectiveness of grassroots organizations with regard to the community. Also, based on the observation that differences in opinion, values, beliefs, and goals appear to be characteristics of human nature. Fredericksen had the nuance to develop a theory to resolve such dispute. Fredericksen's conclusions aligned with the finding of Fisher and Ury, 1983; Gray 1989; Kartez, 1990. Fredericksen described her one central finding as the collaborative negotiation, which is articulated as the community and grassroots interests facilitating problem solving, and mediating it (Fredericksen 1996). Collaborative negotiation was to be an extremely useful grassroots tool when there was a relationship and interdependence between parties. Also, when the parties involved shared some commonality of interest, they drew upon mediation in the resolution process to resolve any disputes.

The "Union Organizing (sic) in 'Big Blue's Backyard'" produced by Patricia Findlay and Alan McKinley in 2003, was beneficial when studying grassroots campaigning because it identified the effectiveness of grassroots associations. It symbolized the benefits of people joining together for a common goal. It concluded by recognizing the success of the union, workers over management organizing and becoming a grassroots association. Findlay and McKinley's 2003 empirical study was different than this research project due to its difference in locality.

In Patricia J. Fredricksen's fieldwork-based comparative study, "Community Collaboration and Public Policy Making" (1996), she acknowledged the need for collaborative negotiation. Collaborative negotiation was an extremely useful and viable tool, used by grassroots associations and by political parties. This study was different from this research project because Fredricksen conducted one hundred and fifty interviews from public, private, nonprofit, and private organizations. This research methodology has been conducted via surveys.

Methodology

The intent of this study was to examine the effectiveness of grassroots campaigning and compare it to mass marketing campaigning. The study also focused on comparing the various political attitudes held by constituents towards each of the two different forms of campaigning. From the research conducted, it was prospectuated that certain patterns would occur; resulting from constituents' backgrounds to their preferences in campaign style.

The population under study was constituents from New York and Connecticut. Since the goal of the research project was to compare the two campaign strategies and the political attitudes towards them, the population under study was limited to constituents over eighteen years old.

Time restrictions dictated a non-random, small, semi local sample from rural, suburban, and urban settings consisting of seventy people. The population was sampled via closed-ended questioned surveys, which were the most conducive to collect the most amount of data with consideration to the time constraints. All political attitude questions on grassroots and mass marketing campaigning were asked through Likert Scales. They were all framed positively in order to keep continuity throughout the

survey. The Likert Scale questions were based on different common grassroots strategies to measure the individual support of the specific techniques. The population under study was then asked to respond to their level of support for the mass marketing campaign strategies using a Likert Scale. Of the population studied, sixty nine were registered to vote. In the total population there were sixteen registered Republicans, twenty-nine registered Democrats, six registered Independents, and nineteen subjects who were not affiliated to any political party. For demographic purposes, the subjects placed themselves into specific political classifications. One considered himself to be very Conservative, sixteen Conservative, twenty-three Moderate, four very Liberal, twenty-three Liberal, and three subjects were not sure. Of the seventy constituents under study, one was very trustful of the government throughout their life, twenty-one were somewhat trustful, thirty were somewhat skeptical, and eighteen were very skeptical of the government throughout their life.

Findings

Quantitative findings included the results of the closed-ended questioned surveys. The survey's results were analyzed through the SPSS statistical program to reach conclusions from the seventy surveys conducted. Quantitative analysis resulted in the emergence of themes that candidates and politicians can take mobilize voters, whether grassroots or mass marketing campaigning.

Table 1: Overall Level of Support for Grassroots Campaigning

Table 1 represents a frequency analysis based on the number of the population under study, and the number of subjects who either had a high, medium, or low level of support for grassroots campaigning.

Overall Support for Grassroots Campaigning

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1.00 High Level of Support | 17 | 24.3 | 24.3 | 24.3 |
| | 2.00 Medium Level of Support | 46 | 65.7 | 65.7 | 90.0 |
| | 3.00 Low Level of Support | 7 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 1 indicates that seventeen or twenty-four point three percent of the population under study had a high level of support for grassroots campaigning. The majority (forty-six constituents and sixty-five point seven percent of the population) had a medium level of support for the strategies employed by candidates and/or politicians that would be considered grassroots strategies. Seven subjects did not favor grassroots strategies when surveyed.

Table 2: Overall Level of Support for Mass Marketing Campaigning

Table 2 represents a frequency analysis based on the number of the population under study and the number of subjects who either had a high, medium, or low level of support for mass marketing campaigning.

Overall Support for Mass Marketing Campaigning

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1.00 High Level of Support | 7 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 |
| | 2.00 Medium Level of Support | 55 | 78.6 | 78.6 | 88.6 |
| | 3.00 Low Level of Support | 8 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 2 indicates ten percent, seven constituents out of the population showed a high level of support for mass marketing strategies. The majority of seventy-eight point six percent had a medium level of support.

In comparison, Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that constituents' did have an inclination towards grassroots campaigning. The number of subjects who fell into the high level of support cohort for grassroots campaigning was ten more constituents and fourteen point four percent higher than the number of those for the mass marketing. In a study that was restrained to seventy people because of time restrictions, that amount was significant. There was also a slight difference established with the low level of support cohorts, which shows predilection towards grassroots campaigning.

Table 3: Grassroots Campaign Support based on Self Political Classification

This table exemplifies how constituents of various self political classifications differ in their support levels for grassroots campaigning.

Grassroots Campaigning Support Levels * Self Political Classification Cross tabulation

| | | | Self Political Classification | | | | | Total | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|--------------|----------|--------------|---------|--------|----------|
| | | | Very Conservative | Conservative | Moderate | Very Liberal | Liberal | | Not Sure |
| Grassroots Campaigning Support Levels | 1.00 High Level of Support | Count | 0 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 17 |
| | | % within Self Political Classification | .0% | 43.8% | 8.7% | 25.0% | 26.1% | 33.3% | 24.3% |
| | 2.00 Medium Level of Support | Count | 0 | 9 | 18 | 2 | 15 | 2 | 46 |
| | | % within Self Political Classification | .0% | 56.3% | 78.3% | 50.0% | 65.2% | 66.7% | 65.7% |
| | 3.00 Low Level of Support | Count | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| | | % within Self Political Classification | 100.0% | .0% | 13.0% | 25.0% | 8.7% | .0% | 10.0% |
| Total | Count | 1 | 16 | 23 | 4 | 23 | 3 | 70 | |
| | % within Self Political Classification | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|-----------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 17.903(a) | 10 | .057 |

Table 3 indicates that if a subject did consider them self to belong to a mainstream political classification, they were more apt to have medium or high support for the grassroots campaigning style. The Pearson Chi-Square was .057 concluding that Table 3 had statistical validity. Both Conservatives and Liberals had more supporters of grassroots campaigning then did non supporters. Indeed, all Conservatives either had a high or medium level of support for grassroots strategies. Moderates were the only cohort to have one more subjects in low level of support for grassroots campaigning than in the high support level.

Table 4: Mass Marketing Campaigning Support based on Self Political Classification

This table illustrates how constituents of various self-political classifications differ on their support levels for mass marketing campaigning.

Mass Marketing Campaigning Support Levels * Self Political Classification Cross tabulation

| | | | Self Political Classification | | | | | Total | |
|---|--|--|-------------------------------|--------------|----------|--------------|---------|--------|----------|
| | | | Very Conservative | Conservative | Moderate | Very Liberal | Liberal | | Not Sure |
| Mass Marketing Campaigning Support Levels | 1.00 High Level of Support | Count | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| | | % within Self Political Classification | .0% | 12.5% | 13.0% | .0% | 8.7% | .0% | 10.0% |
| | 2.00 Medium Level of Support | Count | 0 | 14 | 19 | 4 | 15 | 3 | 55 |
| | | % within Self Political Classification | .0% | 87.5% | 82.6% | 100.0% | 65.2% | 100.0% | 78.6% |
| | 3.00 Low Level of Support | Count | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 8 |
| | | Self Political Classification % within | 100.0% | .0% | 4.3% | .0% | 26.1% | .0% | 11.4% |
| Total | Count | 1 | 16 | 23 | 4 | 23 | 3 | 70 | |
| | % within Self Political Classification | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|-----------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 17.905(a) | 10 | .057 |

Table 4 signifies that a majority of the subjects studied supported the mass marketing campaigning strategies. The Pearson Chi-Square for Table 6 was .057, which signifies that it had statistical validity. There was however, more of the population who fell in to the less supportive category. The percentage dropped one point four percent from low support to high. The moderates were the only cohorts who had a greater number of their population in the high support category than the low.

In comparison, Tables 3 and 4 represent a greater overall support for grassroots campaigning based on self-political classification. The overall high level of support for grassroots campaigning was twenty-four point three percent, versus the mass marketing's ten percent. This ten percent in turn, was the exact percent of those who had a high level of support for mass marketing campaigning. Mass marketing campaigning had a higher percentage of subjects with a low level of support for its strategies politician cared about their area when it was canvassed. These findings are similar to Gerber and Green.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this research project was to compare grassroots and mass marketing campaign styles and to determine if constituents preferred either style. Particular patterns did emerge as a result of data analysis from the close-ended surveys; that were intended to measure their political attitudes towards specific strategies of grassroots and mass marketing campaigning. The political attitudes held by constituents reflected their predilection towards grassroots campaigning. This inclination towards grassroots campaigning was exemplified when comparing the levels of overall support for grassroots versus mass marketing campaigning.

More specifically, the age cohort of 18-25 was the most receptive towards having a high level of overall support for grassroots campaigning. Doctor Worley in the American Democracy Project stated that, "18 to 22 year olds are interested in the democratic process and voting." Through the examination of specific answers in the realm of grassroots campaigning, the 18-25 year olds exemplified their support. This could be due to their idealism and hope to inspire a positive change for the future. There is also participation among the youth in the past November 2007 elections. A lot of this participation was based on reaching out to constituents on the local and fundamental levels. With the changes that occurred in the political offices during the election season of November 2007; this age cohort saw that grassroots campaigning is a viable campaign tool and can indeed making a difference.

The age cohorts 26-35, 36-45, and 46-55 had their majorities fall into the medium level of support for grassroots campaigning. To strengthen this support for grassroots strategies and have the candidates' and/or politicians' messages resonate with these voters, the campaign could employ the few message model technique of "ad buying" (West 25). Based on the few message models via grassroots campaigning, candidates and/or politicians would emphasize a few key issues continuously, thereby allowing their main campaign themes to be emphasized (West 25). If the policies, personalities, and the personalized grassroots techniques are highlighted, support for grassroots campaigning may strengthen for these age cohorts.

Additionally, another age cohort with a high level of support for grassroots campaigning was the age cohort 67 and over. All of the population under study had a high or medium level of support for grassroots strategies; however, there were only five subjects in this cohort. Therefore, the size of this cohort is too small to make broad generalizations.

The support for grassroots campaigning as a viable campaign tool also has validity when reflected by the constituents self political classification. The overall high medium level of support for grassroots campaigning was ninety percent. This support for grassroots campaigning techniques was supported if constituents belonged to a mainstream political thought, such as being a Conservative or a Liberal; opposed to being a moderate, very Conservative, or very Liberal.

Constituents' inclination towards grassroots campaigning also became apparent when looking at the means of how they wanted to be updated about the evolution of the election and the issues. Overall, the population under study did not want to be updated via email, they preferred the grassroots strategy of issue oriented mailers. This could be due to the intrusiveness of being contacted through the use of email. In Gerber and Green (2000), they discussed the need for research to be conducted studying the effects of updating constituents via email.

The implication of this research was that candidates and/or politicians would benefit if they approached their campaigning from a grassroots approach. The population under study mainly agreed with the grassroots strategies over the mass marketing campaigning techniques. However, in the study the population was limited to seventy respondents. In some age cohorts there were ten members, therefore, it is hard to make broad generalizations. The findings of the research did correlate with the findings of Gerber and Green (2000), which stated that the more personal a campaign was, the greater effect it had on constituents. These findings were also similar to Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) and Smith (1980), who determined the more personal contact a candidate and/or politician had with constituents, the greater effect they would have over those with whom they have connected. These findings all supported that grassroots campaigning were a viable campaign tool, and that constituents did have at least a slight preference to this campaign style.

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