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**Televised Political Advertising as a Strategic Tool to
Positively Affect a Candidate's Chances of Winning an
Election**

**A Case Study: The 1994 California U.S. Senate Election:
Televised Advertising in the Michael Huffington Campaign**

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Before Michael Huffington declared his candidacy for the 1994 U. S. Senate race in California, Dianne Feinstein, the incumbent, was predicted to win re-election with possibly the largest vote in the history of Senate elections. However, after spending \$28 million dollars on a televised advertising blitz, Michael Huffington was able to come within two percentage points of winning the election. "Because of his money, Huffington turned the California race into a high-stakes cliffhanger after it had been considered by most Washington insiders to be one of the surest Democratic bets in the country"(How They Voted).

The importance of televised political advertising in modern elections is immense. No other form of communication has the potential to reach so many voters in quite the same way. Through televised advertising, political candidates may communicate their message as many times in a day, week, or month as they can afford. As such, televised political advertising has become a vital strategic tool unmatched in its ability to communicate a candidate's message. Subsequently, televised political ads present a valuable resource in which to evaluate a candidate's strategy and message. "Ads are a valuable lens on strategic behavior because candidate's reveal important things about themselves through their commercials. . . few studies have systematically investigated their strategic use"(West(a)29).

The evaluation of a candidate's televised advertising affords one a window into the strategies of campaign elites and how this strategy fits into the overall cultural context of the election. Central to this strategy is the style of presentation and how that style creates

an image of the candidate's policy views and personal qualities. Indeed, in the genre of televised political advertising, image is everything:

“It is not what is there that counts, it is what is projected - and, carrying it one step further, it's not what the candidate projects but rather what the voter receives. It is not the candidate we have to change, but rather the received impression. *And this impression often depends more on the medium and it's use than it does on the candidate himself*”(Biocca 150).

Hence, to study televised political advertising is to understand how a candidate uses television to create an image that conveys the campaign's message; a message so compelling as to influence voting behavior. With this in mind, I studied the televised ads in the 1994 Michael Huffington U.S. Senate campaign in an attempt to evaluate how this candidate, labeled an 'empty suit' by the press for his lack of experience and substantive policy views, could trail Dianne Feinstein by twenty-five points in February and then eight months later, come within an inch of winning. Although he failed to win the election, Michael Huffington succeeded in showing that televised political advertising positively affects the chances of a political candidate winning an election.

A. Review of the Literature

There are many ways in which one could classify ads in order to more easily organize them for evaluation. It seems that with each new study of political ads comes an innovative and creative way to describe them. The process of trying to classify ads in terms

of their style of presentation has often been described as determining an ad's videostyle.¹

Videostyle can imply a variety of meanings from the overall tone or purpose of an ad to the specific techniques employed within the ad. Some examples of techniques that have been discussed in previous studies are the use of music, color, or symbolism.² Other techniques that may comprise an ad's videostyle are factors such as whether or not the candidate speaks directly to the camera, sometimes called a 'talking head shot,' or the random person on the street interview, sometimes called a testimonial shot. There may be as many different ways to describe and classify ads as there are ads themselves.

The Ad's Purpose

A good place to start when evaluating ads is to look at their overall purpose. What is the ad seeking to accomplish? Often, the stage of the race determines the strategical purpose of an ad. For example, in their book, The Spot - The Rise of Political Advertising on Television, Edwin Diamond and Stephan Bates distinguished ads on the basis of whether they are structured to familiarize or identify the candidate with the electorate, rationalize the candidacy by presenting the candidate's argument, attack the opponent, or wrap-up the ad campaign.

¹ Nesbitt

² Caywood, Biocca

Ads that introduce the candidate to the electorate, or ID ads, are almost always used in the beginning of an ad campaign. These ads are particularly important for unknown candidates or challengers as they provide name identification that will form the basis for more detailed information later in the campaign. Often, identification ads avoid direct policy statements and instead seek to describe the candidate's background, accomplishments, and family life. In evaluating these ads, it is important to study what is left unsaid as closely as one studies what is said. For example, many times these initial identification ads will use symbolism and music to set a tone or establish a theme. However, in general, "ID spots trace compact narrative histories of the candidates life. Through film footage or stills, these spots frequently show the passages of childhood, school, military service, adulthood, family, and a life in politics."³

After the identification phase, many campaigns will run several ads that describe the candidates policy views and/or rationalize why this candidate is the best one for the job. In contrast to the first phase of the campaign, which may have used symbolism to paint an image of the candidate, the rationalization stage utilizes more direct means of communication. These ads, while not too specific, often focus on issues that have been identified as 'hot issues' in the election. High in content, "advertising in the argument phase of a campaign. . . follows the campaign strategy and the campaign research."⁴ As these ads focus on policy statements, they are

³ Bates 302

⁴ Bates 313

televised more frequently than ads in other stages of the campaign. The more frequently an ad is shown the more likely the a viewer will remember the information it presents.

As a campaign progresses, many candidates feel that it is necessary to use attack ads, sometimes called 'going negative.' These ads generally make direct, negative accusations about an opponents character or policy views. The purpose of these ads is to drive up the opponent's negative image among the electorate and in turn make the sponsor of the ad appear to be the more appealing choice. The strategy behind using negative ads involves "seeking to activate existing attitudes in the audience."⁵ These attitudes are identified through extensive polling and research. The question of when to start the negative phase of a televised ad campaign represents an important strategic decision. Although some politicians have chosen to wait until late in the race before releasing attack ads, some politicians opt to 'go negative' almost from the start of their campaigns. "It has become to quite common to go negative early and often in a two person race."⁶

The final phase of the campaign often involves the candidate 'wrapping up' the messages that have been presented throughout the race. Along with this summing up candidates will also strive to leave a lasting impression that conveys confidence, dignity, and leadership. In short, candidates try to come across as the natural choice as if they already have the position. The wrap-up phase is almost always positive in tone. The goal of this final phase is to provide resolution

⁵ Bates 340

⁶ Zoglin 44

and reflection.⁷ In order to accomplish this final goal, many ads in the wrap-up phase rely on music and heavy symbolism to create the desired image and are often "short and saccharin sweet."⁸

Within these four categories some scholars have also made further distinctions between issue or image oriented ads.⁹ Issue ads are those which concentrate on presenting the policy views of the candidate and/or the opponent. Image ads are the more affect laden of the two and focus primarily on character traits and personal qualities. However, it is sometimes difficult to make a clear distinction between what is an image and what is a policy appeal. "Although there are comparative ads that draw distinctions between the candidate and the opponent in terms of issues, few were neutral in the sense of being without theoretically affect-laden dimension to the total message."¹⁰

The Ad's Technique

The strategy of a campaign can further be discerned by taking a close look at the techniques that are utilized to present the message. These techniques involve the music, symbolism, and qualities of the actors in the ad. The music, generally sweeping and majestic, is intended to present the candidate as heroic and even larger than life. Other ads may use more sentimental music to paint the candidate as somehow destined for the job. Attack ads have

⁷Bates

⁸ Bates 339

⁹ Kern

¹⁰ *ibid* 94

been found to use foreboding and even frightening music as a way to raise the viewers doubts about an opponent's trustworthiness, morals, or abilities. ⁷

The use of symbolism in ads is perhaps the most frequently used technique to present a specific image of a candidate. Shots of the national or state flag and federal or state buildings are popular ways to create an impression of the candidate as a patriotic leader with a serious interest in the state or country. Another way to accomplish this image is to use a 'presidential blue' background. A studio backdrop that uses books is often used to present the candidate as serious, responsible, and educated. Urban and rural settings are other backdrops that are frequently used to target different groups in the electorate. The eagle is another popular image that is used to convey a sense of independence and heroicism. Finally, showing the candidate interacting with his or her family is another widely used symbol that may illustrate security and compassion. The importance of symbolism cannot be overstated. "The meaning of a sign lies not in expression itself, but in a set of connections to other concepts at the moment the sign is processed."¹¹

Other aspects of an ad's content provide important clues for determining a candidate's strategy and message. For example, the types of actors involved in the ad and how they are represented provide telling information about what a candidate considers important. When analyzing an ad it is important to note what minorities or other special interest groups are represented either

¹¹ Biocca 22

directly in the form of a testimonial interview or indirectly in pictures or as background for other shots.

Another question to ask is how the ad addresses the viewer. Is the narrator the candidate or some other implied speaker? Other things to look for in the ad are how the represented speaker is constructed. Is there an attempt to present the speaker in a certain social class? Is he or she wearing a traditional blue suit or something more informal such as a flannel or short sleeved shirt? Is the speaker in the ad and if so does the speaker address the viewer directly as if the candidate is talking one on one with the viewer? Biocca suggests that it is important to note whether or not a candidate moves around and interacts with people. According to Biocca, doing so may convey a sense of control to the viewer.

All of the factors discussed above are examples of techniques that producers and directors of the ads can manipulate in order to insure that the ads are received in a certain way. However, even the most careful planning and research can back fire causing what can be know as a backlash. These effects of political advertising are most often observed during the attack phase of an ad campaign. Although the purpose of negative ads is to define the terms of debate and pinpoint the opponent's liabilities, sometimes this can prove to have the opposite effect on the candidate. To avoid this backlash, producers will generally not include the candidate in a negative ad or attempt to separate the candidate from the ad's negativity by using a different studio backdrop, music, or clothing for the shots in which the candidate is appears. Another factor that may influence the way that a negative ad is received by the electorate is the context of the

ad campaign in the news media. If the electorate is presented with several stories concerning the horrors of negative advertising or political advertising in general, the viewer is much more likely to project this negative attitude onto the sponsor of the ads(Caywood).

This idea of the viewer projecting an pre-existing attitude or opinion onto the ad and its sponsor is called the projection effect. Producers of political ads place a great deal of importance on polling and research in order to ascertain the nature of the electorate's pre-existing views. As such, instead of striving for conversion of the viewer's opinions, political ads will focus on reinforcing previously held views. This is the most integral aspect of targeting through political advertising. Essential to this targeting is reaching swing voters. "Ads are developed to stir the hopes and fears of the 20-30% that is undecided, not the 70-80% that is committed or hopeless."¹²

Targeting and Strategy

However, there is more to the targeting of political advertising than just identifying the 'hot issues' among swing voters. The development of targeting and strategy depends on the type of race, whether the candidate is a challenger or incumbent, an unknown or known candidate, a presidential or midterm election, and the concentration of registered voters and party identifiers in the electorate. As my study concerns a race for the U.S. Senate, I will

¹² West

explain how the factors listed above may affect the development of strategy in ad campaigns for a U.S. Senate election.

In recent years, elections to the U.S. Senate have been characterized by an increase in the number of virtually unknown or inexperienced candidates who enter the race. Scholars such as Gary Jacobson who, in his book, Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections, have reasoned that the cause for this increase in unknown challengers is a switch in emphasis from party centered elections to candidate centered elections. An increase in the number of independent voters who fail to cite party identification as their primary voting influence have made it possible for both independent candidates and candidates who have failed to work their way up through a party apparatus to seek and win congressional seats.

The attainment of congressional seats by candidates without strong party ties has been achieved by well-known personalities as well as unknown candidates who seem to appear 'out of left field.' According to Jacobson, as long as a candidate for a congressional seat has enough money, that candidate has an excellent chance of victory. In short, when it comes to congressional elections, money is the key. A well-financed televised ad campaign can quickly make up gaps in name identification and position an unknown candidate as a viable threat to even the most experienced of incumbents. Challenger spending is "easily the most important single factor influencing the outcomes of Senate elections."¹³

This development from virtual anonymity to serious contender is in part made possible by the ability of an ad to create an image of

¹³ Abramowitz 113

the candidate and to broadcast that image to a large audience through the use of television. This is especially true in the case of a challenger to an incumbent seat. "Senate races have become heavily media oriented. Many Senate elections feature volatile races involving unknown challengers. The absence of prior beliefs about the candidate makes advertising influential. It is easier to create a new political profile than to alter a well-defined image."¹³

In races such as these, the strategy of the challenger's campaign may be characterized by its attempt to evade political discourse entirely. The focus of the campaign may be to remove the candidate from any serious discussion of policy, and instead, concentrate on the projected image of the candidate. In order to accomplish the aim of focusing the public's interest on the projected image rather than on policy, challengers for Senate seats have tended to avoid taking a clear stand on some issues. Often, the candidate will target the center of the state's political views and then work towards creating an image of themselves as the representative of those views.¹⁵ This strategy is characterized by the candidate espousing 'traditional values' and himself or herself as the embodiment of those values.¹⁶ What is important about this strategy is the lack of detail. "The lack of detail allows the viewer to fill in the default values."¹⁷

However, some candidates, particularly non-incumbents, will incorporate into their campaign a strategy that seeks to capitalize on

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¹⁵ Abramowitz 106

¹⁶ Friedenber

¹⁷ Biocca 80

socially divisive issues. This attempt to "pit one social group against another" is an excellent way to "draw attention to a candidacy and increase name recognition."¹⁸ These attacks are useful for positioning a non-incumbent candidate to "challenge the performance of the government or to question the handling of a particular policy problem."¹⁹

The advertising strategies that Senate candidates use also take into account the popularity of the incumbent president and the tenor of the national political environment. Essentially, "evaluations of the president's job performance shape some voter's Congressional preferences. . . unpopular president's make for unpopular political parties."²⁰ Candidate's that belong to the presidential party tend to somewhat focus their strategy according to the popularity of the president. If the president is enjoying high ratings in the polls then candidate's of his party will often present themselves as ideologically in line with the White House.²¹ However, this is often not the case, particularly during mid-term elections. Generally, mid-term elections provide an opportunity for the electorate to express dismay with the president and as such the president's party may experience some losses in Congressional seats.²² Consequently, in this situation, candidates of the president's party will distance themselves from not only the president, but also the party. Jacobson illustrates this scenario of congressional candidates distancing

¹⁸ West 156

¹⁹ Kern 78

²⁰ Jacobson 64

²¹ Lacayo

²² Finemann 10 Oct. 1994

themselves from an unpopular president by recounting the strategy of Republican congressional candidates during the 1974 and 1976 elections:

Republican leaders began to confront publicly a crucial question of how to win in 1974 and 1976 despite President Nixon's precipitous decline in popularity. The Republican question for 1974 quickly became how not to lose so badly, and their answer was principally to separate themselves from Nixon and emphasize their own integrity."²³

Candidates who are not members of the president's party will often develop their campaign message to exploit their opponent's membership in the majority party as a negative and highlight their own party membership as a positive factor of their candidacy. Candidates who are not members of the majority party may use messages that present them as independent or outside the 'politics as usual' status quo.

Theories of Voting Behavior and the Development of Strategy

Other candidates may rely on theories of economic voting or surge and decline as indicators of how the electorate will vote. Essentially, the theory of economic voting predicts voting behavior as a function of the state of the national economy. If the economy is booming then candidates belonging to the majority party in Congress or the presidential party will experience gains in congressional seats. On the other hand, if the economy is sluggish or in recession, these

²³ Jacobson 28

same candidates will experience losses in congressional seats. The theory of surge and decline predicts voting behavior in terms of long term factors such as party identification and local and state issues.²⁴ This theory holds that party identification is the strongest determinant of voting behavior and although voters may deviate from traditional party allegiances in some elections, they will eventually return to these allegiances in future elections.

Scholars have emphasized the importance of long term forces such as party identification as more important in affecting voter choice than short term factors such as campaign spending and candidate advertisement. As West recounts, some scholars claim that "the injection of high doses of political information during the frenetic periods of national campaigns does very little to alter the deeply rooted, tightly held political attitudes of most voters."²⁵ On the other hand, West goes on to argue that senate campaigns often show "extensive shifts in voter assessments" and hence, factors such as campaign spending and political ads can have an important impact on the results of Senate elections. West argues that the impact of political advertising is greatest when "political, social, and economic forces are more evenly balanced." It is then "that considerations such as the quality of ads, and their strategic use. . . become important."²⁶

The importance of what shapes voting behavior, either the popularity of the president or majority party during the election year, the economy, or party identification, lies in how those factors

²⁴ Jacobson

²⁵ West 1054

²⁶ West 1056

shape the strategy and message of the candidates. A candidate's message and strategy will in part depend upon which of these factors or combination of factors the candidate considers important as a determination of voting behavior. The president's popularity, the economy, or strength of party identification are all factors to consider when developing the message that televised ads will convey. However, there are conditions specific to the state and to the election that represent other equally as important factors in determining strategy. It is these factors in the 1994 California political culture that I will discuss in the next part of my study.

B. The Context of the Election

National

The national context for the 1994 midterm elections was characterized by an anti-incumbent, anti-democratic electorate. In poll after poll, Americans exhibited a high level of mistrust and cynicism in their opinions of government and government officials. The policies of President Clinton, particularly health care, exacerbated the electorate's view that government was too intrusive and too big and that politicians could not be trusted.²⁷ In a survey conducted by Time magazine in October 1994, only 21% of the respondents expected to vote for an incumbent, whereas 48% expected to vote for a challenger.²⁸ A large number of voters were undecided and many expected to vote for independent candidates.

²⁷ Barone 17 Oct. 1994

²⁸ Goodgame 10 Oct. 1994

However, Democratic challengers and incumbents had yet another obstacle to overcome. President Clinton was experiencing some of his lowest approval ratings since gaining office in 1992. “The President’s job-approval rating is 40%, the lowest for any President at this point in his term in four decades.”²⁹ Although the economy was fairly strong, the electorate nonetheless felt financially insecure. Many people felt that they were working harder for less and worried about job opportunities for their children. As a result, the electorate advocated lower taxes and less government. Consequently, the President’s proposed Health Care legislation received little support across the nation. While formulating their campaign messages and strategies, Democratic candidates across the nation could not overlook ‘the Clinton factor.’ “The prevailing mood is unhappiness with the Clinton administration.”³⁰ His unpopular presidency caused many Democratic congressional candidates to distance themselves from both the President and his policies. On the other hand, Republican candidates capitalized on the President’s negative image by focusing on democratic candidates who “consistently voted for Clinton’s bad ideas.”³¹

Just as people felt financially insecure, so they felt unsafe in their homes and neighborhoods. Crime became a national campaign issue as candidates stumbled over each other to demonstrate who was tougher on crime. Republican candidates strove to portray Democratic candidates as soft on crime by highlighting those candidates who were against the death penalty or who had

²⁹ Lacayo 12 Sept. 1994

³⁰ Barone 17 Oct. 1994

³¹ Lacayo 12 Sept. 1994

nominated judges who were perceived as lenient. However, women candidates received the harshest of these attacks. Women candidates were portrayed as soft on crime or not capable of dealing with crime as effectively as a man could. "In a year when crime is a top issue, male candidates can look tougher."³² Whereas the 1992 elections came to be known as the 'Year of the Woman' due to the large number of female candidates that were elected, in 1994 to be female was a liability: "In 1994, 'Vote for Women' does not play so well."³³

Essentially, the 1994 election season featured GOP candidates advocating lower taxes, welfare reform, and tougher crime legislation while Democratic candidates distanced themselves from President Clinton and Democratic policies in general. Republican campaigns across the country featured candidates who deliberately presented themselves in a vague manner to the extent that they were, "screens upon which voters can project their anger at Bill Clinton and Washington."³⁴ However, the context of the national election environment was particularly shaped by an emphasis on traditional values, character, and family. This theme, typically voiced by candidates of the Republican party, was bolstered by the perceived increase in crime and welfare dependents. The ambivalence and cynicism surrounding the election also helped to amplify this theme by turning the public's focus on "perceptions of character rather than on questions of government."³⁵

³² New York Times 4 Oct. 1994

³³ *ibid* 3 Oct. 1994

³⁴ Finemann 17 Oct. 1994

³⁵ Forum 33

The State

In the 1990's, California has been faced with an array of problems ranging from economic recession, to an increase in illegal immigration to natural disasters. A heavy increase in population due to increased migration from other states and illegal immigration exacerbated an already collapsing economy where thousands of people were losing their jobs. Once a booming state, the California of the nineties is described in the 1994 Almanac of American Politics as having a sour spirit and a lack of confidence. This lack of confidence in the economic prospects of Californians was coupled with a rising demoralization from a continued battering of riots, floods, fire, and earthquakes. Moreover, the state once known for its diversity and inclusiveness has developed wide cultural divides that give rise to stark manifestations of prejudice among its different minority groups(76). The drain on the state's resources by the high number of illegal immigrants and a perceived increase in crime had many Californians ready to pass tougher laws on immigration and demanding tougher sentences for crime.

Up until 1991, Californians had exhibited fairly steady if not predictable voting patterns. Typically, high political offices such as President and state executive offices went to Republicans and elections for the state legislature and Congress went to Democrats(Almanac 73). This steady voting pattern was in part due to redistricting plans that capitalized on Democratic registration patterns. However, after the economy began to falter in the early 1990's, the loss in jobs and the raise in taxes gave rise to a tide of

disillusionment with the Republican party among Californians. Consequently, many Californians turned away from the Republican party by voting for both Bill Clinton for President and Barbara Boxer and Diane Feinstein, all Democrats, for U.S. Senate in 1992. "The recession of 1990 - 91 resulted in a move away from the GOP and a tentative embrace of Democrats"³⁶.

Although the 1992 election saw George Bush only earn 33% of the vote, which was quite a fall from his 55% of the vote in 1988 and 13 points behind Clinton's 46% of the vote, one must not interpret this shift in voting patterns as a mandate for Democratic policies. During this same election, Ross Perot collected 21% of the vote which held Clinton back from earning the 48% of the vote that Michael Dukakis gathered in California in the 1988 election. According to the 1994 Almanac of American Politics, the vote in California in the 1992 election season was likely attributed to voters blaming Republicans for the recent economic downturn. Considering the fact that Bush suffered his worst losses in the Southern and Central regions of the state, some of the fastest growing regions in the state which had suffered particularly hard during the recession, it seems reasonable that the support for Democratic candidates was more of a strong message than a mandate. Rather than "an endorsement of higher tax rates and more active government intervention in the economy" the vote in 1992 was "but rather a judgement that the Republicans had broken. . . the promise of bounteous economic growth"(Almanac 76). In fact, even though the biggest Republican loses were in the typically conservative Southern

³⁶ 1994 Almanac of American Politics 75

and Central part of the state, these regions nonetheless retain “some of the cultural conservatism found in those Middle American states.”³⁹ This conservatism is especially significant in what is known as the ‘Inland Empire’ which encompasses the deserts of the central part of the state. Consequently, rather than coasting through the election of 1994, the Democratic party in California still faced some formidable challenges.

The Election - The Political Environment

As the 1994 election season began, the political environment in the state was decidedly different than in 1992. “The California political environment of 1992, so hospitable to women candidates, Clinton and liberal Democrats. . . has long since vanished.”⁴⁰ The faltering economy and the continued migration of illegal immigrants triggered a conservative backlash in the attitudes of the residents, particularly in the Southern part of the state. Citizens felt unduly burdened by high tax rates which they perceived as supporting the social welfare programs and education of illegal immigrants. This frustration was exacerbated by an unemployment rate of 8.9%. However, in terms of the election issues, Californians listed crime, not the economy, as their number one concern. “Violent crime is a major concern everywhere, but in California it’s an obsession.”⁴¹ Connected with the issue of illegal immigration, Californians approached crime as an issue of “basic order” that entailed “enforcing the law, punishing criminals, and

³⁹ *ibid* 76, 79

⁴⁰ Barnes 31

⁴¹ “ “ 32

policing the border.”⁴² Moreover, residents of the state also registered low approval ratings for the President and the Democratically controlled Congress as well as incumbents in general.

Another issue that gained salience in the 1994 election season was an emphasis on character and values. This emphasis was directed at not only candidates, but also residents of the state. Because of the distrust in Washington and incumbents, experience became more of a liability than an asset and candidates began to stress their morals and character as virtues of their candidacy, “Candidates in both parties are running ads about values and morality and a sense of lost social moorings.”⁴³ Self-reliance and self-help became the watch words of the election as candidates began “seeking out issues in which morality was a subtext.”⁴⁴ For example, along with crime, Republican candidates added welfare reform, with an underlying message of hard work and determination as a means of taking one off of welfare, to the campaign agenda.

The Election - The Candidates

In the 1994 election for a six year term to the U. S. Senate, the Democratic candidate was incumbent Dianne Feinstein and the Republican candidate was challenger Michael Huffington.

Dianne Feinstein

Born in 1933 in San Francisco, Dianne Feinstein earned her college degree at Stanford University and entered California state

⁴² Barone 10 Oct. 1994

⁴³ Los Angeles Times 9 Oct. 1994

⁴⁴ “ “

politics as a member of the California Women's Parole Board of Terms and Parole in 1960. From there she went on to serve as president of the San Francisco board of supervisors and finally, mayor of San Francisco from 1978 to 1989. She reached national notoriety in 1984 when she was briefly considered as the vice-presidential running mate in Walter Mondale's presidential campaign.⁴⁵

After a failed attempt at the governor's office in 1990, Feinstein rallied to win a landslide victory for U. S. Senate in a special election in 1992. Running a successful campaign against State Senator John Seymour, Feinstein collected the largest vote in American history for a U.S. Senate seat with a handsdown 54 - 38% victory.⁴⁶ Although Feinstein showed big wins in the Bay Area and Los Angeles County by taking 68% and 59% of the vote respectively, she failed to do so well in the South where she lost to Seymour, 44% to his 47% of the vote(Almanac 83).

Throughout her career in politics, Feinstein has earned a reputation as a moderate Democrat who "governs from the center" rather than from a position of a fierce ideologue.⁴⁷ While in office she has "leavened her support for traditional liberal themes such as environmental protection and abortion rights with support for the death penalty and for a beefed up Border Patrol to stem illegal immigration from Mexico."⁴⁸ She has also supported a balanced-budget constitutional amendment, a presidential line-item veto, and

⁴⁵ Blumenthal 62, Politics in America 101

⁴⁶ 1994 Almanac of American Politics 83

⁴⁷ 1992 Politics in America 101

⁴⁸ " "

"has led the fight for an assault weapons ban."⁴⁹ Believing strongly in the ability of government to help solve problems, Feinstein has supported President Clinton's economic stimulus plan, his plan to lift the ban on gays in the military, and his desire to reform health care. At the same time, she also opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement. Two of Feinstein's most significant accomplishments since her arrival in Washington has been to sponsor a major assault weapons ban that was passed in the summer of 1993 and a desert protection act that was passed in late summer 1994. Upon her election, Feinstein was given assignments to both the Senate Judiciary and Appropriations Committees.

Michael Huffington

Michael Huffington was born in 1947 to a moderately wealthy family in Houston, Texas. Educated at an exclusive military school in Indiana, Huffington went on to receive his college degree from Stanford University in California. Shortly after his graduation, his father's company, Huffco, discovered a large gas field in Indonesia thus causing the personal fortune of the Huffington family to grow to three hundred million dollars. While working for his father, Huffington contributed to the collapse of two of the company's subsidiaries.

In 1986, Huffington began working at the Pentagon under the Reagan administration as deputy assistant secretary for negotiations policy. However, after only a year, he moved back to Texas and in 1990 sold Huffco from which he received seventy million dollars. It

⁴⁹ Blumenthal 62

was also in 1990 that he moved to Santa Barbara, California where he soon began to discuss a career in politics announcing to friends that rather than run in a local or state election, "he wanted to start in a higher office."⁵⁰

Although a local republican leader dismissed his ambitions by virtue of the fact that he wasn't very well known in the district, he managed to unseat nine term Republican incumbent Robert Lagomarsino in the 1992 race for twenty-first Congressional District of California. His first election, Huffington's campaign was notable for a spare no expense attitude which helped the candidate to overcome his lack of experience and name recognition. Financed largely from his personal fortune, Huffington's campaign depended upon a televised advertising blitz that saturated the local media markets "overwhelming Lagomarsino with a harshly negative ad campaign that ended up costing the challenger \$5.2 million - more than anybody had ever spent before on a congressional race."⁵¹

Once elected, Huffington spent the next year and a half in office compiling a legislative record that one reporter described as "thin to nonexistent"(New York Times 8 Aug. 1994). Another columnist from the The New Yorker observed that, "In the House of Representatives, he has been a tabula rasa for almost two years; his main achievement has been to propose an increase in the deductability of charitable contributions."⁵²

Although Huffington describes himself as one who "believes strongly in Republican values," he is noted in Politics in America as

50 " " 59

51 Blumenthal 60

52 Blumenthal 55

"hardly a mainstream Republican - except in money issues"(169). He²⁵ supports abortion rights, less government, gay rights, cutting taxes and spending, and term limits. He also opposes offshore drilling for gas and oil and favors eliminating seniority when determining committee rankings.⁵³ His most notable legislation while in office has been his co-sponsorship of the 'Three Strikes and Your Out' bill that seeks to insure the incarceration of repeat offenders. Huffington is also a strong supporter of the death penalty. He serves on the House Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee as well as the Small Business Committee.

The Horserace

In January 1994, a poll conducted by the Field Poll in California showed Dianne Feinstein leading Michael Huffington by a margin of 53 to 25. In July her lead had narrowed to 45 to 39. In just six months, the inexperienced, unknown Michael Huffington had managed to turn a race that was considered a Democratic 'sure bet' into a hotly contested event against Dianne Feinstein, a candidate described by New York magazine as "one of the most experienced figures in California politics and public life."⁵⁴ How did he do it? By using \$28 million dollars of his personal fortune to fund a televised advertising blitz that was marked by a bitterly negative tone. "In just six months, Mr. Huffington's cannonade of commercials has narrowed Ms. Feinstein's huge lead to single digits."⁵⁵

⁵³ 1992 Politics in America 169

⁵⁴ Blumenthal 54

⁵⁵ New York Times, 8 Aug. 1994

Essentially, the contest between Dianne Feinstein and Michael Huffington for the U.S. Senate in 1994 was characterized by not only its expense, but also its negativity. The emphasis on utilizing televised advertising was the primary reason for the high expense of this election. Televised advertising represents an important strategical tool in California elections. Due to the large size of the state, it remains virtually impossible for candidates in statewide elections to depend on personal voter contact as their sole means of reaching the electorate. Due to the fact that Los Angeles is the nation's second largest media market and San Francisco is the nation's fourth largest media market, it is much easier for candidates to utilize televised advertising to reach large portions of the electorate.

As such, in order to establish name recognition and narrow the gap in the opinion polls, Huffington utilized an advertising strategy that saturated all of the state's media markets, leaving little time for Feinstein to present her own message or reply to his attacks. According to Farrell Media, the firm that purchased the advertising time for the Huffington campaign, their strategy throughout the campaign was to place ads "all day and all night in every media market, less so in San Francisco but inundating every where else."⁵⁶ Strategically, Huffington was virtually unlimited in terms of televised advertising. Huffington's campaign could afford to pay top dollar for an unlimited number of non pre-emptible prime time advertising slots.

⁵⁶ Personal Interview, Farrell Media 11 Jan. 1994

Shut out of time slots with the greatest reach, Feinstein's advertising strategy focused on delivering her message through repetition. In an interview with Morris Carrick, the media consulting firm which produced Feinstein's ads and placed the buys, their representative commented that, "Huffington outspent us - bought everything that moved - a lot of prime time so he got increased reach and less frequency and rating points. Since Feinstein had a limited budget, we had to buy slots during the morning and midday news shows and Sunday talk shows. We had less reach but more frequency and rating points. Towards the end we started buying prime time."⁵⁷ By purchasing a constant number of commercials each day, Feinstein's strategy allowed "the candidate who is ahead to remain constantly visible for a long period of time, and then finish strongly" by purchasing more time in the last stages of the campaign.⁵⁸

The budgetary constraints of the Feinstein campaign forced her to "make hard choices about spending" that Huffington did not have to make. "In most campaigns, there is a choice between buying ads to answer accusations or buying them to articulate a message, he[Huffington] doesn't have to say either/or."⁵⁹ Although Feinstein's buying strategy included all twelve of the media markets in California, it did so proportionally in terms of cost and what size of the expected vote that media market was expected to deliver. For example, according to Morris Carrick, the Los Angeles media market was expected to constitute 45% of Feinstein's vote. Hence, the

⁵⁷ Personal Interview, Morris Carrick, 11 Jan. 1994

⁵⁸ Friedenber

⁵⁹ New York Times 29 Aug. 1994

Feinstein campaign devoted 45% of its budget to advertising in Los Angeles.

The Feinstein-Huffington race is also notable for its high level of negativity. Although Huffington was singled out in the press for producing a a number of negative ads, it was Feinstein who was the first to 'go negative.' On June 1, 1994, Feinstein released her first attack on Huffington which focused on his personal fortune and questioned his trustfulness by accusing him of trying to buy the election. Until then, both had been airing positive ads such as Huffington's 'ID' ads, ads that were intended to establish name recognition and set the tone for his campaign. Huffington also released some rationalization ads whose purpose was to provide voters with more information concerning his policy views.

However, Huffington was well prepared for Feinstein's expected attack. During the months leading up to the election season, Huffington had hired some of the biggest names in political consulting and polling, a virtual 'dream team' of campaign consultants. Gannon McCarthy Mason was hired to produce the ads, Richard Wirthlin, an advisor to Ronald Reagan's winning presidential campaigns, was hired as the campaign pollster, and Ed Rollins, who also served as Reagan's campaign manager in 1984, was hired as the lead strategist. Together, this team of consultants stood ready to answer any Feinstein attack both "quickly and massively."⁶⁰

The Huffington televised advertising campaign answered Feinstein's attacks that Huffington was a essentially trying to buy the election by accusing her of being a career politician that catered to

⁶⁰ Los Angeles Times 12 Sept. 1994

special interests. Huffington also questioned Feinstein's husbands' business dealings by insinuating that Feinstein gave special favors such as exclusive government business contracts to her husband's companies, one of which was shown to conduct questionable business practices. To further the career politician image, Huffington focused on Feinstein's decision to not support President Clinton's health care plan after it became apparent that the bill was unpopular even though she had originally been one of the bill's major proponents. Along this same line, Huffington also labeled Feinstein as a 'Clinton' liberal for her support of the President's economic stimulus plan.

However, Huffington's strongest attacks painted Feinstein as soft on crime. Repeatedly, Huffington brought to light Feinstein's support for judges who failed to support the death penalty or who imposed light sentences on people who committed violent crimes. Huffington contrasted this image with his sponsorship of the 'Three Strikes and Your Out' bill which imposed mandatory sentences on repeat offenders.

Huffington tied this soft on crime image to the issue of illegal immigration and Feinstein's refusal to support Proposition 187. Proposition 187, a bill that sought to deny social, health, and educational services to illegal immigrants, was a controversial issue that stood out as one of the defining issues of the campaign. Popular among voters, particularly those in the Southern and 'Inland Empire' regions of the state, this proposition received its support from mostly Republican candidates across the state. Consequently, Republican candidates, Michael Huffington included, capitalized on this socially

divisive issue as a way to increase campaign visibility as well as to gather support for their candidacy among the electorate.

In response to Huffington's attacks, Feinstein supplemented her accusation that Huffington was trying to buy the election by highlighting his business failures and the fact that he was not a California native. She also stressed her sponsorship of the assault weapons ban that was part of the President's crime bill and her support of the death penalty as proof that she was tough on crime. "Feinstein's ads concentrate strongly on her anti-crime measures."⁶¹ Observed by Time magazine as "moving cautiously rightward" in order to counteract Huffington's campaign, Feinstein also highlighted her support of the balanced budget amendment and for limits on illegal immigrants.⁶²

As the race reached its last phases in late October and the first week of November, analysts hypothesized that the election, already neck and neck, would be decided on Proposition 187. With support for the proposition gaining throughout the state, conventional wisdom held that Republicans would do well quite well in the election. As such, it seemed as if Huffington was poised to win. However, the race was thrown into turmoil upon the disclosure that Huffington had employed an illegal immigrant as his nanny. The publication of this knowledge led to the accusation that Feinstein had also employed an illegal immigrant. As a result, both candidates suffered a loss in credibility among the electorate. The entire affair had the worst consequences for Huffington due to the fact that he

⁶¹ Lacayo 17 Sept. 1994

⁶² *ibid* 17 Sept. 1994

had so vociferously advocated the Proposition and other restraints upon illegal immigrants. Consequently, an already tight race ended with Feinstein squeaking by with 47% of the vote to Huffington's 45% of the vote.

Dianne Feinstein's message that Huffington was a wealthy carpetbagger who was trying to buy the election turned out to be less of a criticism than Huffington's accusations that Feinstein was a career politician who catered to special interests.⁶³ Considering that she was outspent 2:1 and that over half of Michael Huffington's 29 ads were negative, it is surprising that Feinstein was able to pull it out. According to exit polls conducted by the Los Angeles Times, the major issues of the election were crime, immigration, taxes, and experience and trustworthiness. In terms of the issues, Huffington had the edge on the larger issues of crime and immigration while Feinstein held the 'lesser issues' of education, health care, ethics, and experience and trustworthiness.

Among the electorate, Huffington fared better among senior citizens, Asians, and white 30-44 year old men. Feinstein earned her support from women, blacks, college and post-graduate students, lower income voters, and voters in the 18-29 and the 45-59 year old age group. Feinstein's win is attributed to her earning 48% of the from middle income moderates and independents in contrast to Huffington's 40%. According to the exit poll, the three most significant factors that influenced Feinstein's voters were her experience, her support for Clinton, and the feeling that Huffington was trying to buy the election. On the other hand, Huffington's

⁶³ Barone 10 Oct. 1994

voters cited their feeling that Feinstein was a tax and spend liberal and her support for Clinton as rationalization for their vote.

Both Michael Huffington and Dianne Feinstein received much criticism in the press for different aspects of their advertising campaigns. Although both candidates received admonishments for conducting such negative campaigns, Huffington was observed by the electorate as responsible for the greater number of negative ads. However, by the end of the election, the extent of the campaign's negativity managed to discredit both candidates among the electorate. "The negative campaigning that marked the 1994 election seemed to take its toll."⁶⁴ For example, among the voters who supported Feinstein, 38% stated that they did so only because they saw her as "the lesser of two evils."⁶⁵

Additionally, Huffington was also criticized for focusing his campaign too extensively on his political advertisements. Due to the fact that Huffington shunned interviews, public appearances, and debates, his image and message were almost entirely constructed and communicated by way of televised political advertising. In fact, so much of Huffington's campaign depended on the cultivation of his image and not substantive policy that critics labeled him an 'empty suit' politician and cartoonist Gary Trudeau devoted a portion of his comic strip "Doonesbury" to ridiculing Huffington's campaign and motives for running.

Utilizing a strategy that was similar to Jimmy Carter's strategy for his presidential campaign in 1975, Michael Huffington strove to

⁶⁴ Los Angeles Times 9 Nov. 1994

⁶⁵ *ibid*

establish himself as a political neophyte, a member of “the clean-slate club” of challengers with virtually no experience.⁶⁶ In order to capitalize on this theme, Huffington, like Carter, rationalized his candidacy by declaring that he was running for office for high minded, nonpolitical reasons with an emphasis on charity, values, and faith. “Huffington discusses his run for the Senate as though it were a spiritual quest,” declaring that he was “in this to get government out of the way of human decency.”⁶⁷ Like Carter, Huffington was “a man with no past to hide - indeed, with no really relevant past at all - incessantly sprouting the notion that the state should be as good and honest and decent and truthful and competent and filled with love as are the American people.”⁶⁸ Also like Carter, Huffington’s campaign seemed to strive to elect him by “creating an image without saying anything.”⁶⁹ It was this strategy that placed Huffington at the center of such caustic criticism by the press.

C. Putting It All Together: The Michael Huffington Ads

'Videostyle' - Content and Technique

Michael Huffington released his first ad, “Virtue,” in early February during the Winter Olympics. Intended to establish name recognition and familiarize voters with his candidacy, “Virtue” features Huffington endorsing William J. Bennet’s Book of Virtues. Speaking directly to the camera against a presidential blue backdrop

⁶⁶ Finemann 17 Oct. 1994

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ Bates 155

⁶⁹ *ibid* 152

and dressed in a traditional blue suit, Huffington begins the ad by stating, “You don’t usually see Senate candidates reviewing books, but I think everyone should read this.” Followed with a tight shot of Bennet’s book, Huffington goes on to say, “It’s called the Book of Virtues. It’s a wonderful, classic collection of stories to help teach our children values such as responsibility, courage, compassion, perseverance, hard work, and faith.” Switching back to the live shot of Huffington speaking directly to the camera, Huffington finishes the ad by saying, “This book is also a great reminder that solving problems in our country depends on strong individuals and strong families, not on government. That’s a good lesson for all of us.”

I described this ad in such detail for the reason that it is a classic example of using symbolism to convey a lot without really saying anything. First of all, by speaking against a backdrop of presidential blue, Huffington connected himself with an image that appears as if he is already holding the office. Moreover, his endorsement of a book also presented him as a serious and learned candidate. Finally, his advocacy of values and strong individuals and families was particularly skillful. By advocating strong families along with hard work, responsibility, and faith, Huffington presents himself as a Middle American cultural conservative. From this point, Huffington could easily launch into a ad about the need for welfare reform, the importance of charity, or the needlessness of government intervention. Consequently, this ad is an excellent way to set the tone for Huffington’s campaign as well as to introduce him to the electorate.

Huffington's ad, "Hard Work," continues where "Virtue" left off and is also a classic identification ad. To fully appreciate all the aspects of this ad, it is helpful to lay it out in a frame by frame format.

Visual	Voice
Plain Speaking: Michael Huffington	With hard work and luck, I succeeded in business,
Old family picture of young Huffington posing with sister and mother	I didn't grow up rich, we were middle class, I went to public schools,
Picture of college aged Huffington in Stanford track team uniform	Then Stanford,
Picture of Huffington at desk in library	Then business,
Aerial shot of the Pentagon	The Pentagon,
Picture of Huffington with wife and two daughters,	Family, Congress,
Huffington in a direct to camera	Having had success in business, I can be independent and not take contributions from lobbyists and special interests PAC's and I support term limits to eliminate career politicians. It's time elected officials stopped taking care of special interests and started taking care of California.

This entire ad is done in thirty seconds. Viewers are bombarded with flashes of Huffington's life labeled with no more information than what is absolutely necessary. Once again, the use of symbolism is important in presenting a specific image of the candidate. Yet, what is even more intriguing is what is left unsaid. Similar to a journalist's use of white space, "Hard Work" leaves much room for interpretation for viewers to fill in the blanks between the flashes of the the athletic Huffington, the Pentagon, and most importantly, the family portrait.

In a classic biographical ad format, Huffington is able to combine the theme of hard work and strong families that was initiated in "Virtue," while at the same time introducing another prominent campaign theme, that of the independent candidate free of the special interest chains that bind the dreaded career politician. Yet he introduces both of these themes in an almost inadvertent, through the back door technique. By speaking directly to the camera in both "Virtue" and "Hard Work," Huffington is able to present in a positive ad some general policy statements while not appearing 'too political.' In an election year that was marked by a heavy anti-incumbent attitude that sought economic and social reassurance by extolling middle class values, Huffington's identification ads played right into the hands of the electorate both in content and technique.

During the rationalization stage of the campaign where Huffington released ads that made direct policy statements, Huffington focused on crime, welfare reform, character, and the strength of families. In his ad "Plain Speaking," Huffington, in a firm tone of voice and speaking directly to the camera in a traditional

blue suit, presents direct yet very general policy statements concerning his position on crime. Attempting to appear tough on crime, Huffington states, "We have to expand the number of crimes punishable by the death penalty and not let appeals drag on forever." It is here that Huffington showcases one of the few pieces of legislation that he has sponsored while in Congress. "I'm co-chair of three strikes and you're out. To lock up repeat felons and throw away the key." What is notable about this ad is its use of a format that reinforces visually what is heard in the voiceover. While Huffington speaks of three strikes and you're out, the visual switches from a live shot of Huffington to a computer generated screen that says "Tougher Prison Sentences - 3 Strikes and You're Out" in black and white. Several of Huffington's later ads use this same technique to drive home the major points of his message.

Another one of Huffington's ads that sought to present his policy views without using an attack format was "Willie." Sixty seconds in length, "Willie" was one of Huffington's 'piece de resistance.' The purpose of "Willie" was to advocate charity, self-reliance, and individual responsibility as alternatives to the welfare state which Huffington terms, "the problem." In this ad, Huffington documents the story of a woman named Willie, who, "right there in the middle of skid row. . .is helping to feed the homeless. . . educate the homeless so that they can get a job." Between shots of Huffington speaking at what appears to be a business meeting and an outdoor food line for what appears to be homeless people, Huffington proudly states that "she doesn't get one dollar from the federal government. .

. and I've put forward legislation to give all of you a tax incentive to give to charity.”

What is significant about “Willie” is not its attack on the welfare state as its skillful use of the actors in the ad and the situations in which the actors are placed. For example, the ad features a homeless person sitting on the street with a cardboard sign hung around the neck that reads ‘I’m Hungry.’ Another loaded shot is the outdoor soup kitchen where a sharply dressed middle aged white woman, presumably ‘Willie,’ pats a presumably homeless black man on the shoulder as he holds a plate of food. In the next shot, ‘Willie’ is seen talking to a homeless Latino man while several African-American’s holding plates of food provide the backdrop. It is hard to miss the social and racial maternalism that is conveyed in these shots.

Huffington contrasts these images with shots of himself giving a speech in front of a large American flag where he states, “Middle income tax payers who earn \$30,000 dollars a year and pay taxes are subsidizing those who do not work and get \$20, 000 a year tax free.” During this speech, the camera takes more cut-away shots of Huffington speaking to Caucasian senior citizens and Caucasian middle class families with young children playing in the background. Another shot in the ad features a Caucasian priest greeting Caucasian parishioners as they leave the Church and then one other shot focuses on one African-American male attending a mostly Caucasian business luncheon.

In short, the message is hard to miss. Through skillful use of the actors and voiceover, Huffington conveys the message that

minorities are living the high life off Caucasian tax dollars.

Moreover, Huffington also presents the message that self-reliance and responsibility alone will enable one to work themselves off of welfare like Willie. By flashing shots of smiling Caucasian families on a sunny day enjoying a picnic or smiling Caucasian ministers greeting their smiling Caucasian parishioners as they leave the church, Huffington is communicating a prescriptive view of society that says that middle class life is attainable to minorities if only they would exercise the personal responsibility and self-reliance found in strong families and pious, church going people.

Most of Michael Huffington's negative ads utilized a format that compared and contrasted his policies with those of Dianne Feinstein. For the most part, these ads featured a computer generated screen that was split in half horizontally. One half of the screen would have a fiery red background and the other side of the screen would have a deep blue background. These backgrounds would be used to highlight in white writing important words from the voiceover. For example, in the ad "Get What You Want," the voiceover says "Mike Huffington doesn't take special interest money," the screen shows a small picture of Michael Huffington against a blue background with white writing that says, "Does not take special interest money." Of the twelve negative ads, seven used this format of reinforcing visually what is heard in the voiceover.

Along with this technique of visually reinforcing the voiceover, these compare and contrast negative ads also consistently featured a distorted and drained picture of Feinstein placed along side her policy views against the red background, while a fresh and

professional picture of Huffington would be placed along side his views against the blue background. Moreover, pictures of Huffington were almost always twice as small as Feinstein's in these negative ads, if they were used at all. For the most part, Huffington's likeness was excluded from his attack advertising and rarely did he appear as a live shot in these ads.

Interestingly, when he did use live shots of himself in negative ads, he did so by completely setting himself apart from the rest of the ad. The ad "Single Vote" is a good example of how a candidate can include a personal likeness, even a live shot, in an negative ad yet at the same time avoid reflecting the ad's negativity back upon the ad's sponsor. "Single Vote" was released relatively early in the campaign as a response to Feinstein's first attack ad. For the reason that Huffington was still in the introductory stages of his campaign, it was important that he continue to establish name and face recognition among the electorate. However, it was also important that he avoid connecting that name and face with too much negativity. Consequently, from a strategic point of view, Huffington needed to answer Feinstein's charges while at the same time including a likeness of himself.

In order to accomplish this, the producers of the ad made the direct attacks in the compare and contrast, split blue screen red screen format utilizing the visually reinforced voiceover. This first part of the ad which features sharp attacks on Feinstein was contrasted with the second part of the ad where Huffington is filmed in a live shot with a misty mountain as his backdrop. Whereas in the first part of the ad Feinstein is pictured with a distorted expression

in drained colors, in the second part of the ad, Huffington is wearing a leather jacket and jeans and appears vibrant and healthy. The contrast between the two parts of the ad is striking and effective. Although the ad is strongly negative with statements such as “By a single vote, the Senate passes the biggest tax increase in American history. That single vote was Dianne Feinstein's,” this negativity is skillfully managed so that it does not reflect on Huffington, the ad’s sponsor.

Although I only received one ad that was released in the latter stages of the campaign, this ad, titled “Future,” is an excellent representation of an ad intended to wrap-up a campaign by providing resolution and reflection. Amid sweeping, majestic music and visuals, this ad, sixty seconds in length, sought to end the campaign on an almost sugary sweet, sentimental note. It’s images and use of actors and symbolism is so strong that it could very well stand on it’s own without a voiceover. Although it is lengthy, it is worth viewing it frame by frame in order to fully appreciate it’s form and content.

Visual	Voice
Aerial shots of brush fires with slow sad music in the background	It’s been a time of pain for Californian’s from the fires and floods,
Shots of collapsed homes and highways	to the earthquakes and a terrible recession,
Shot of man being rescued from swirling flood waters by helicopter	the recent years have tested the will

2 ranchers leading cattle,
both are Caucasian

of the people who make
California great . . . the
ranchers,

3 farm workers in a
field, one is Latino,
two are Caucasian

the farmers,

Teacher, Caucasian
at desk in a classroom

the teachers,

1 African-American and
1 Caucasian factory worker
wearing hard hats walking
in front of a factory

the factory workers,

2 senior citizens in front of
small store with going out of
business sign

and small business owners.

Huffington family walking
across grass holding hands
on a sunny day. Close-up of Huffington
holding daughter, both are smiling

And while nearly 1 million
packed up and moved away,
Mike Huffington and his wife
came home. Home to the
state that educated him and
is the birthplace of his two
daughters.

A direct to camera live shot
of Huffington speaking
front of old house

“It’s time for new solutions
to old problems because in
more of the same just isn’t
working for California”

Huffington in short sleeved shirt
outdoors shaking hands with
senior citizens

As California Congressman
he voted no time and time
again on new taxes

Huffington speaking directly
to the camera outdoors in cream
colored suit on a porch of a big house

“It was easy. Government
didn’t earn that money, the
people did.”

Computer generated black screen with white letters that say "Michael Huffington. U. S. Senate. Finally. A Reason to Believe."

Mike Huffington. U.S. Senate. Finally. A Reason To Believe.

Live direct to camera shot of Huffington kneeling

"This election isn't about who you're going to send to Washington next year,

Shot of Huffington children

it's about our children and their future."

The combination of music, symbolism, and compelling, emotional images turns this political ad into a striking production. Undoubtedly, the shots of the fires, earthquake destruction, and floods triggered deeply felt emotions in all viewers of this ad, regardless of social class or partisanship. By including such emotional subjects in the ad set against a background of swelling, emotive music, Huffington projects an image not of a politician, but of a man who cares and understands the pain that Californians have endured.

Secondly, this ad is particularly striking for its blatant use of actors as instruments of strategic targeting. For example, Huffington continues a trend from his previous ads of focusing on senior citizens. From the still shots of senior citizens to shots of Huffington interacting and conversing with senior citizens, it becomes obvious that Huffington is seeking the vote of this important social group. Also, it is interesting to note the careful use of different minorities in different environments. In contrast to his other ads, African-American's and Latino's are depicted as not only working but hard

working as factory workers and farmers. Although these are not white collar jobs and are a far cry from the small business owners and nuclear families in which Caucasian actors are presented, these presentations are a sharp contrast to the homeless, welfare dependents of which minorities were depicted in previous ads.

In short, this ad is a textbook example of televised political advertising as a tool for social group targeting. At first it may seem that ranchers, farmers, factory workers, teachers and small business owners are a somewhat eclectic group. However, when one considers the importance of the 'Inland Empire' which is home to many farmers and ranchers, it becomes apparent that Huffington is producing the ad with a strategic purpose in mind. Remembering the importance that Californians have recently placed upon Middle American, middle class values such as strong morals, hard work, and enterprise, it is fitting that Huffington would highlight images of teachers, factory workers, and small business owners - people who might think of themselves and who may be viewed by the electorate as the embodiment of these values.

Finally, this ad is also notable for how it evades political discourse entirely and instead seeks to make the viewer 'feel good' about the quality of life in California. By stating "Michael Huffington - Finally. A Reason to believe," the ad tacitly suggests that with Michael Huffington in the U.S. Senate, Californians will be lifted up from their present state of despair and placed into the secure world of this ad. By showing his children playing outdoors in a grassy area as the last image in the ad, Huffington reinforces this message by suggesting that in Huffington's California, the world will be such a

safe that place that one could once again trust their children to play outside. Hence, the statement, "This election isn't about who you're going to send to Washington next year, it's about our children and their future."

'Videostyle' - How Huffington Measures Up

For my analysis, I was able to view seventeen of the twenty-nine ads that the Huffington campaign released. Although I was unable to view all of the ads, the ones that were made available to me were representative of each stage of the campaign with one exception. From various newspaper articles I know that there was more than one ad released that dealt with the controversy concerning the illegal immigrant that Huffington employed as his children's nanny. However, none of these ads were included among the tapes that were sent to me by Gannon McCarthy Mason, the media consulting firm that produced the ads. Nonetheless, I did receive ads that were released in the beginning, middle, and end of the campaign.

In order to more easily study the ads I classified them according to the four categories described by Bates and Diamond that I reviewed in the first section of this paper. The seventeen ads were distinguished into four basic and simple categories that described the general purpose of the ads. These four categories were identification, rationalization, attack, and wrap-up. I feel that this method of classification produces results that would enable other analysts to arrive at similar conclusions. I also classified the ads on the basis of their tone and the issues upon which they focused.

Based upon my analysis, I classified two of the ads as identification ads, two of them as rationalization, twelve as attack ads, and one as an ad intended to wrap-up the campaign(See Appendix A.1). I also found twelve of the ads or 70%, to be negative in tone while the remaining five or 30%, were positive in tone(Appendix A.2). In terms of the issues, crime, taxes, illegal immigration, a focus on self-reliance/charity/and values, as well as an attack on special interests/career politicians were the more frequently mentioned topics in Huffington's ads. 35% of the ads focused on special interests/career politician, 35% focused on taxes, 23% focused on self-reliance/charity/values, 17% on crime, and 12% focused on illegal immigration(Appendix A.3).

Moreover, I further evaluated the ads on the basis of more detailed uses of technique. For example, while reviewing the literature concerning the techniques involved in producing televised political advertising, I read that candidates will not usually include live shots of themselves in negative ads for fear of experiencing a 'backlash' effect where the viewer associates the negativity of the ad with the ad's sponsor rather than the opposing candidate. Consequently, I looked to see if Huffington used shots of himself in his ads and if so, were they live shots, photos, or a combination of the two. I then compared the use of these shots with the tone of the ad.

Similarly, my research also showed that candidates will often utilize a compare and contrast format in their negative ads. Hence, when analyzing the Huffington ads, I noted whether the ad used a compare and contrast format rather than making direct accusations. Building on this, I also compared the ad's technique, i.e., if it used a

compare and contrast or more direct communication, the ad's tone and whether or not the ad used live shots or photos of the candidate.

Out of the twelve ads that I classified as negative, only two used live shots of Huffington, seven used photos, and three used no shots at all. On the other hand, out of the five ads that I classified as positive, three used live shots and two used both live shots and photos of the candidates. Hence, where only 10% of the negative ads used live shots, all of the positive ads used live shots, either alone or in combination with photos, and 60% of the positive ads used just strictly live shots. Moreover, 40% of the negative ads used no shots of the candidate while 58% used a photo representation of Huffington(See Appendix B).

Analyzing the tone and technique, I found that out of the twelve negative ads, seven or 58%, used a compare and contrast format and five, or 42%, used a more direct form of communication. However, all of the five positive ads used a direct format. Moreover, a majority of the negative ads used the technique of a compare and contrast format with photos of the candidate where only two of the negative ads were of a direct format. Interestingly, both of these ads also used live shots of the candidate. The remaining three negative ads were of a direct format and they failed to include any shots of the candidate, live or photo(Appendix B).

Although without having all of the ads it is impossible to state any overall conclusion with certainty, based upon the ads that I did have, newspaper and news magazine articles, and research from other studies, I was able to make some general conclusions based upon this data. First of all, it is apparent that Michael Huffington's

ads were indeed overwhelmingly negative. Secondly, in accordance with the research from other studies, a majority of these negative ads used a compare and contrast format to distinguish the policies of the two candidates. On this same line, Huffington also avoided including a live shot of himself within his negative ads choosing instead to include small photo representations. If he did include a live shot, he set himself apart from the ad's negativity by presenting himself in sharp contrast to the rest of the ad. As I showed in the first section of this study, this technique is commonly used among advertising producers to avoid a 'backlash' effect upon the ad's sponsor. It is interesting to contrast this result with the fact that all of the positive ads featured Huffington speaking directly to the camera for large parts of the ad.

Conclusion

The ads that Michael Huffington used in his 1994 campaign for the U.S. Senate are an excellent representation of how a candidate can create and target an image that is developed within a specific cultural context. The political environment for the 1994 elections featured a strong blend of anti-incumbency and cultural conservatism that came to form the core of the Huffington message. The communication of this message was achieved through the skilful use of symbolism and actors. For example, symbols such as the American Flag, The Book of Virtues, and aerial shots of the Pentagon were complemented with shots of ranchers, homeless minorities, senior citizens, and warm Huffington family gatherings; the

combination of which defined the focus of Huffington's campaign. A focus that intended to attract middle income, unaffiliated voters who, in 1994, were feeling frustrated and cynical towards government and its social programs.

The style of presentation in these ads also facilitated attacks upon Diane Feinstein. Repeatedly, Huffington used a compare and contrast format to exploit Feinstein's liberal ties and support of President Clinton. This theme enhanced another of Huffington's themes, that of the dreaded and evil career politician. Feinstein's extensive experience provided much ammunition for this charge and Huffington relentlessly capitalized upon it. With statements such as "Feinstein uses taxpayer paid chauffer to get to work, Huffington drives himself. Can you tell who the career politician is?" or this attack on Feinstein's decision not to support President Clinton's health care plan: "Feinstein flip-flopped and deserted the health plan. It's the only principle of a career politician. Save your own skin." Huffington attempted to present Feinstein as the embodiment of this image.

Huffington also used his televised political ads to counteract Feinstein's accusation that he was attempting to use his wealth to buy the election, to present himself as tough on crime, and to make general statements on the importance of lower taxes and welfare reform. All of these issues were identified in exit polls as important issues in the campaign. It is interesting to remember that among those who voted for Huffington, crime and taxes were cited as prominent concerns. Similarly, these same voters cited their view of Feinstein as a tax and spend liberal as one of the primary reasons for

supporting Huffington. In light of the fact that Huffington made great efforts to include senior citizens in several of his ads, it is interesting to note that senior citizens were indeed among his strongest supporters.

Nonetheless, for all of his skillful targeting, strategy, and most of all, money, Huffington was unable to capture Feinstein's seat. However, considering that his 2:1 spending ratio over Feinstein helped him to overcome a twenty-five point deficit in the polls, it is quite possible that if it were not for the last minute disclosure of the illegal immigrant that he employed as a nanny, Huffington may have won the election. With this in mind, it is indisputable that Huffington's skillful use of televised political advertising had a positive impact upon his chances of winning the election. However, as a final thought, one wonders if the real problem with Huffington's candidacy wasn't the insufficiency of his televised image or maybe even the effects of the nanny disclosure, but rather the candidate himself. Perhaps, as Biocca notes, Huffington and his consultants attempted "to make up for the shortcomings of the product with a campaign which oversells[sold] its virtues."(155). It is ironic to think that the immense effort that Huffington made to capture the electorate's faith with a well-crafted image fell short of its stated goal because the candidate lacked real substance. As Huffington stated in his first ad, "Virtue," that's a good lesson, albeit an expensive one, for all of us.

Appendix A

1. The Purpose of the Ad

Identification: 2
Rationalization: 2
Attack: 12
Wrap-up: 1
N=17

<u>ID</u>	<u>Rationalization</u>	<u>Attack</u>	<u>Wrap-up</u>
Virtue	Plain Speaking	Single Vote	Future
Hard Work	Willie	Heroic	
		What's Your View	
		Every Penny	
		Skin	
		Get What You Want	
		Terminator	
		Left	
		Can You Tell	
		Free	
		Stake	
		Controversial	

2. The Tone of the Ad

Negative: 12
Positive: 5
N=17

<u>Negative</u>	<u>Positive</u>
Single Vote	Virtue
Heroic	Plain Speaking
What's Your View	Hard Work
Every Penny	Willie
Skin	Future
Get What You Want	
Terminator	
Left	
Can You Tell	
Stake	
Controversial	
Free	

3. Primary Issues in the Ads*

Crime	3
Special Interests/Career Politician	6
Self-Reliance, Charity, and Values	4
Taxes	6
Immigration	2

*More than one issue in some ads

Free:	Crime
Virtue	Self-Reliance
Plain Speaking	Crime
Hard Work	Special Interests
Single Vote	Taxes
Heroic	Taxes
What's Your View	Crime, Career Politician
Every Penny	Taxes
Skin	Career Politician, Taxes
Get What You Want	Special Interest/Career Politician
Terminator	Immigration
Willie	Taxes, Values
Can You Tell	Special Interests, Values
Future	Taxes
Stake	Special Interests
Controversial	Special Interests
Left	Immigration

Appendix B

1. Tone v. Live or Photo

	<u>Live</u>	<u>Photo</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>No Shots</u>	<u>Total</u>
Negative	2	7	0	3	12
Positive	3	0	2	0	<u>5</u> N=17

2. Tone v. Technique

	<u>Compare/Contrast</u>	<u>Direct</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Total</u>
Negative	7	5	0	12
Positive	0	5	0	<u>5</u> N=17

3. Tone v. Live/Photo v. Technique

	<u>Compare/Contrast</u>	<u>Direct</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Total</u>
Negative/Live	0	2	0	2
Negative/Photo	7	0	0	7
Negative/No Shots	0	3	0	3
Positive/Live	0	3	0	3
Positive/Photos	0	2	0	<u>2</u> N=17

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