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THE ROLE OF ATTRIBUTIONS ON VOTER RESPONSE TO POLITICAL ADVERTISING

By

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF ATTRIBUTIONS ON
VOTER RESPONSE TO POLITICAL ADVERTISING

By

Karen M. Lancendorfer

Political advertising has become an indispensable campaign medium as a way of reaching voters. Over the last twenty years, political advertising has surpassed news stories and other traditional political sources as the most important source of voting information, according to the majority of voters. Its role has been increasingly critical to election outcomes, as party-based campaigns have been transformed into media-based ones. Political advertisements, by focusing on certain issues and ignoring others, work to set the public agenda for the campaign; and advertisements help candidates promote particular impressions of themselves and alter the dynamics of elections. With the outcome of voting decisions having an enduring effect on public policies and elected officials, the role of advertising in the electoral system is becoming increasingly important. Bearing this in mind, the research presented in this dissertation addresses one of the major and long-standing issues in political communication research; namely, how campaign advertising influences voter attitudes and behaviors.

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether attribution theory could be used to explain the process by which voters exposed to political advertising messages form attitudes toward candidates for office. With this primary interest in the role of attributions in the formation of political advertising

attitudes, the current study proposed and tested a structural equation model with specific hypotheses in order to examine the role of both intrinsic and extrinsic attributions on voters' attitudes and voting intentions. Additionally, individual difference factors (gender and political party affiliation) were considered to see if they presented a moderating effect on voters' attitudes and intentions.

The results of the research suggest that attribution theory can be used to evaluate voter responses to positive and negative political advertising, and in particular that intrinsic attributions of candidate motive directly affect voters' evaluations of the sponsoring candidate, while mediating the effects of political advertising on voter attitudes and behaviors. Further, with regards to the moderating variables, findings suggest a moderating effect of gender in that, only for males, positive advertisements were more likely than negative advertisements to generate extrinsic attributions. Considering political party affiliation, when voters' of the opposing party generate intrinsic attributions toward the sponsoring candidate, voter attitudes become significantly unfavorable. However, attitude toward the candidate is not significantly affected when either Democrats or Republicans generate extrinsic attributions.

Given that an understanding of the processing of persuasive content in political advertising messages can provide important insights that will help researchers to explain why political advertising has certain effects, this dissertation has significant implications for the further development of attribution theory research. Implications for political candidates and campaign managers, along with suggestions for future research are presented.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family for their loving support and encouragement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the guidance and assistance of numerous individuals.

First and foremost I must thank my advisor, Dr. Bonnie B. Reece, for her unflagging support. She has been a source of insight and strength throughout my graduate studies at Michigan State University. I was able to enjoy and survive my graduate training through her encouragement and patience.

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I would also like to express my appreciation to the members of my committee. The encouragement and insightful comments provided by Drs. Sandi Smith, Nora Rifon, and Teresa Mastin were crucial to the final dissertation.

I must thank my friends, Byoungkwan Lee and Jungsun Ahn, who provided me with constant encouragement and assistance, without which this work could not have been completed.

Thanks also to my wonderful family and children for their emotional support throughout the long, long process. I will also never find words enough to express the gratitude that I owe to my husband, Jim. Each and every time I struggled, he found the magic words that helped me to finish.

Thank you again to everyone.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Political advertising has become an indispensable campaign medium as a way of reaching voters. Over the last twenty years, political advertising has surpassed news and other traditional political sources as the most important source of voting information, according to the majority of voters (Media Studies Center 2000). Its role has been increasingly critical to election outcomes, as party-based campaigns have been transformed into media-based ones (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). Political ads, by focusing on certain issues, and ignoring others, work to set the public agenda for the campaign (Atkin and Heald 1976; Bowers 1973), and ads help candidates promote particular impressions of themselves and alter the dynamics of elections (Kern 1989; Sabato 1981). With the outcome of voting decisions having an enduring effect on public policies and elected officials, the role of advertising in the electoral system is becoming increasingly important. Bearing this in mind, the research presented in this dissertation addresses one of the major and long-standing issues in political communication research; namely how campaign advertising influences voter attitudes and behaviors.

"Political advertising is now the major means by which candidates for the presidency communicate their messages to voters," states Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center. "As a conduit

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of this advertising, television attracts both more candidate dollars and more audience attention than radio or print," with the spot ad being the most used and most viewed of all forms of political advertising (Crawford 2004). This increased use of television as a tool for conveying candidate ideas and perspectives to voters has led researchers to explore the impact campaign advertisements have on both individual campaigns and for the political system as a whole (King and McConnell 2003).

The 2004 Presidential Race

The cost of candidates' commercials now consumes a greater portion of campaign budgets than ever. The Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan research and educational organization, reported that the cost of televised political advertisements has more than quadrupled since 1982 (Crawford 2004).

At $1.2 billion, the 2004 Presidential Election was the most expensive in history (Harper 2004). In the first quarter of that year alone, President George W. Bush's campaign spent $15.3 million, and Sen. John Kerry's spent $7 million according to Nielsen Monitor-Plus, a unit of Nielsen Media Research (Whitman 2004). By the time Election Day rolled around, spending reached $345 and $310 million for Bush and Kerry, respectively, according to figures released by the District of Columbia-based Center for Responsive Politics (2004).

Further analysis revealed that, according to Campaign Media Analysis Group, a nonpartisan organization, at least 70 percent of ads run by George W.

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Bush were critical of Kerry, while only 25 percent of ads run by John Kerry directly criticized President Bush (www.pbs.org). Although the Bush campaign ran a few positive advertisements early in March, the focus of his campaign was to portray the negative aspects of the Kerry campaign, with particular emphasis on Kerry's "flip flopping" with regards to taxes and defense spending. Political historians state that, while it is unusual for an incumbent president to run a primarily negative campaign, it is not unprecedented in certain situations. For example, Lyndon Johnson's 1964 campaign used attack advertising against Barry Goldwater to divert attention from the president's problems with Vietnam and civil rights legislation ("The Living Room Candidate" 2004).

Starting with the primaries, John Kerry's campaign messages were largely positive in tone, focused on the candidate's biography, and emphasized domestic issues such as jobs and health care. "The strategy was to draw attention to issues considered favorable to the Democratic candidate, and to introduce Kerry to a voting public that has already formed strong opinions about President Bush" ("The Living Room Candidate" 2004). However, as the campaign progressed, and as a result of strong attacks on the part of the Bush campaign, Kerry's ads became much more aggressive in tone, frequently attacking President Bush on the economy and Iraq ("The Living Room Candidate" 2004).

A recent twist with the 2004 election is due to the new McCain-Feingold law—which set rules on raising and spending campaign funds—resulting in the presidential candidates running a statement or appearing in their own ads to say "I approved this message". The idea behind this ruling was that candidates

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would take responsibility for what they claim in their ads, and engage in fewer attacks or "mud-slinging" against their competitor (www.pbs.org).

Significance of Current Research

Consumer behavior researchers have long been interested in both the marketing (Homer and Batra 1994; Newman and Sheth 1985) and the evaluation (Morwitz and Pluzinski 1996; Simmons, Bickart, and Lynch 1993) of political candidates. As political advertising has grown, a substantial body of research has considered the effects of positive and negative political advertising in the political process. However, little research has been undertaken to examine voters' cognitive responses to political advertisements, and, in particular, the concept of voter attributions of candidate motives in the political arena. Moreover, although political advertising's impact on campaign dynamics has been a much discussed and even overly discussed topic, relatively few empirical studies have been conducted, compared to studies on other political campaign media such as television news and newspapers. While a few studies have focused solely on political advertising, most survey studies examined the effect of political advertising in conjunction with other traditional campaign media, leaving aside the unique characteristics of advertising as a campaign medium.

The empirical question then is raised, how do prospective voters look at candidates in political advertising? Specifically, how do prospective voters process persuasive advertising messages that relate to political candidates? Do they attribute particular motives to the candidates? In addition, does the

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Chapter Th

message processing by voters and the attributions endorsed influence the voters' attitudes toward the candidate, and ultimately their voting intentions? These questions will provide the focus for the remainder of this dissertation. With these questions in mind and in order to address the previously noted research gap, the purpose of this study is to determine whether attribution theory can be used to explain the process by which voters exposed to political advertising messages form attitudes toward candidates for office.

Given that an understanding of the processing of persuasive content in political advertising messages can provide important insights that will help researchers to explain why political advertising has certain effects, an examination of the role of attribution theory might have a significant implication in the further development of attribution theory research. With this primary interest in the role of attributions in the formation of political advertising attitudes, the current study proposes and tests a structural equation model with specific hypotheses in order to examine the role of both intrinsic and extrinsic attributions on voters' attitudes and voting intentions. Through this method, the current study might substantially contribute not only to the theoretical accumulation of attribution theory literature but also to more effective design of political advertising. Thus, the study has relevance for academic researchers, political candidates, and campaign managers.

This manuscript begins with a review and discussion of political advertising, with emphasis on the effects of political advertising in Chapter Two. Chapter Three presents prior research in attribution theory which provides the

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general conceptual framework for studying this specific type of advertising. The remainder of Chapter Three is devoted to the presentation of hypotheses and a conceptual model based on the literature from Chapters Two and Three. In Chapter Four, details of an experiment designed and implemented to investigate the hypotheses and model are discussed. Results of the experiment are presented in Chapter Five. Finally, Chapter Six provides a discussion of the results, presents limitations of the current study, and proposes future research.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review the recent research on political advertising. For ease of understanding, this chapter has been divided into five sections. Section one presents a short conceptual background regarding political advertising and serves as an introduction to the general aspects of this topic. Research in political advertising in recent years has been examined from many different perspectives, from research examining effects of female candidate advertising (Hitchon and Chang 1995; Hitchon, Chang, and Harris 1997), media coverage of political advertising (Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson 2003; Lariscy et al. 2004), and political advertising in other countries (Chang 2003; O'Cass 2002), to content analyses exploring the differences and similarities among various kinds of political advertisements (Benoit, Pier, and Blaney 1997; Johnston and Kaid 2002). However, the current focus, in light of the preponderance of the research, is on the effects of general candidate political advertising as it occurs in presidential elections and national issue campaigns. In addition, because Faber (1992) provided a comprehensive review of political advertising, the current examination specifically focuses on research that has been conducted since that time.

In section two the effects of political advertising in general are considered, with an emphasis on negative political advertising research addressed in section three. Section four considers a specific subset of negative political advertising,

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namely, those studies based on the "demobilization" hypothesis. Chapter Two concludes with an assessment of the relevant research, a discussion of pertinent research in politics that has considered "attributions," and a delineation of important gaps in the literature that may be addressed by the current research.

Political Advertising

Since the appearance of televised political advertising in the 1950s, mass media advertising has emerged as the dominant form of communication in the United States between political candidates and voters (Kaid 2004). Political advertising has been deemed to have become so important that some researchers have suggested that modern political campaigns are being waged through political advertising (Pinkleton 1992). One reason may be that political advertising has the benefit of providing candidates with a method of reaching voters that is unmediated by the press, because the advertising message and timing remain under the control of the candidate or party (Perloff 2002). However, from a normative point of view, political advertisements are designed to inform voters about the issues in the campaign, in order for voters to make reasoned decisions (Perloff 2002).

Many conceptualizations and definitions of political advertising have arisen since the first review of research on political advertising in 1981. At that time, political advertising was defined as, "the communication processes by which a source (usually a political candidate or party) purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with the intended

effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors" (Kaid 1981, p. 250). In an effort to provide a much broader and more modern conceptualization of political advertising, Kaid (1999) suggested that "the defining characteristics of modern political advertising are (1) control of the message and (2) use of mass communication channels for message distribution" (p. 423). This interpretation of political advertising requires dissemination of the advertising message through a large variety of mass media channels, while disassociating it from interpersonal communication between voters and candidate political speeches (Kaid 2004).

Benoit, Pier, and Blaney (1997) reviewed prior research in political commercial advertising that had focused on comparisons of issue versus image ads, and positive versus negative ads, in an effort to define the functions of political commercials. As a result of their analysis, the authors proposed a typology of activities that are the functions of political advertising: "acclaiming (arguing that they have desirable accomplishments and traits), attacking (pointing to objectionable actions and characteristics of opponents), and defending (responding to attacks from opponents)" (Benoit, Pier, and Blaney 1997; p. 16). The authors applied their typology in an analysis of presidential political television commercials from 1980-1996. Results from an analysis of 206 campaign advertisements showed that attacks focused more on policy issues than did acclaims, suggesting perhaps that candidates wanted to minimize the appearance of mud-slinging by avoiding attacking their opponent's character.

Political advertising has arisen as the focus of modern contemporary campaigns and has been identified by political consultants as influencing the agendas for news, debates, and interpersonal discussions (Perloff 2002). This focus and importance of political advertising has contributed to the plethora of research concerning the particular effects of political advertising messages.

The Effects of Political Advertising

Over the years, political candidates have increasingly relied upon advertising to reach and influence voters; and, while advertising enables candidates to pursue multiple objectives, the overall goal of the politician is always to influence voter decisions (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). With the 50th anniversary in 2004 of the first use of political advertising on television in America, debates about the effects of political advertising still abound, with recent meta-analyses identifying over 50 research studies involving the impact of political advertising on voter participation (Allen and Burell 2002; Lau et al. 1999). While it is commonly accepted that political advertising represents a direct attempt by politicians to present their campaign messages and to package candidates to voters, the results are conflicting as to the intended effects or unintended consequences of political advertising. Over the past two decades alone, researchers have considered the role and influence of political parties in election campaigns, as well as the impact of candidate ads during campaigns.

A recent extensive review of political advertising research examined three distinct stages of development since the inception of political advertising

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research in the 1950s, from the pre-advertising stage where advertising was considered as a form of mass communication with little effect on voting intentions, through the advent of televised political commercials and subsequent analyses, to the most recent decade where specific individual level and situational variables have been considered (Faber 1992). Overall, Faber's (1992) research uncovered a number of variables that have been used in the past decades of research including: exposure, awareness, knowledge, candidate preference, and voting behavior, with various studies indicating that commercials had the ability to influence awareness, knowledge, and voter choice. This is similar to the high involvement hierarchy of effects model found in general product advertising, and may only apply to an election where involvement was high.

In particular, prior research identified by Faber (1992) showed that political ads can prepare many voters to make voting decisions by informing them about candidates and their issue positions (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; McClure and Patterson 1974; Patterson and McClure 1974). Negative advertising is most influential on those voters who support the source candidate, and least influential on independent and low involvement voters (Faber, Tims, and Schmitt 1990; Merritt 1984). Variables such as demographics, involvement (Faber, Tims, and Schmitt 1990), and partisanship (Faber, Tims, and Schmitt 1990; Garramone 1985; Merritt 1984) are important considerations in explaining political advertising effects.

Without evidence that political advertising has effects on voters, little additional research would have been conducted over the years since Faber's

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(1992) review. Such evidence is not hard to find, and it supports the decisions of candidates who spend millions on campaigns that they "are not completely off the mark" (Kaid 2004, p. 166). Perloff (1998, p. 374) states that "clearly, political spots can affect voters' evaluations of candidates and their interpretations of political events."

Various studies have proposed that paid advertising is a better predictor of candidate recognition and recall of candidate issue knowledge and salience than television news or newspapers (Brians and Wattengberg 1996; Holbert et al. 2002; West 1994). However, other studies suggest that television news may sometimes be a better predictor of voter knowledge levels (Chaffee, Shao, and Leshner 1994; Weaver and Drew 2001; Zhao and Chaffee 1995). Kaid (2004) suggests that, like all research in media effects, contradictory findings may have resulted from differences in measurement, particular concerning variables of exposure and attention.

Perhaps more relevant to the current study, a large body of research has used survey and experimental methods in a continuing examination of how voters assess candidates. Their findings confirmed that exposure to political spots can affect candidate image evaluations. Political advertising appears to be quite effective at promoting issue based evaluations of candidates (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Pfau et al. 2002; West 1994; Zhao and Chaffee 1995). Voters exposed to political advertising will vote as the advertising message advocates (Bowen 1994; Goldstein and Freedman 2000),

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particularly among those voters who are the least aware (Valentino, Hutchings, and William 2004) or late deciders (Bowen 1994).

Of particular note are two recent studies by Kaid (2002) and Tedesco (2002). Kaid (2002) experimentally tested channel effects for political advertising messages though a comparison of Internet versus traditional media channels in the 2000 presidential election. Channel effects were definitively noticed, in particular with undecided voters, in that undecided voters who were exposed to political commercials via the Internet subsequently indicated an intention to vote for Al Gore, while undecided voters who saw the same commercials on television indicated an intention to vote for George W. Bush.

Tedesco (2002) examined political advertising effects on candidate image evaluations, emotions, and cynicism during the 2000 Robb-Allen senatorial election in Virginia. He used a perception analyzer in order to track participants' second-by-second reactions to the commercials. As hypothesized, simply being exposed to an advertising message increased positive evaluations for both candidates, although cynicism did not influence evaluations of the candidates.

In recent years there has arisen a particular focus on negative political advertising effects, resulting in a substantial body of research that specifically considers the effects on candidate images and voting behavior from exposure to negative political advertisements. This research is considered in the following section.

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Negative Political Advertising

The most distinctive feature of contemporary political campaign advertisements is the negativity of their content and tone. Political advertisers frequently engage in so-called negative advertising in which the opposing candidate's program and performance are criticized and even ridiculed. Highlighting the opponent's liabilities and weaknesses usually takes precedence over identifying the sponsor's program and strengths. In the most comprehensive tracking of campaign advertising to date, scholars at the Annenberg School of Communication have found that such "negative" advertising has been on the upswing in recent years, and now makes up approximately one-third of all campaign ads used in presidential campaigns (Jamieson et al. 1998; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; Kaid 1994). Millions of dollars are spent each election year in the marketing of political candidates, with a great percentage of those monies being spent on negative advertising, because of the belief that negative information is more influential than positive information (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; Lau 1985; Pinkleton 1997). This has resulted in the majority of recent research debating the persuasiveness of negative ads. Researchers have attempted to provide typologies of negative advertising (Kaid and Johnston 1991; Koltz 1998), experimentally assessed the effects of negative advertising (Garramone et al. 1990; Kahn and Geer 1994; Thorson, Christ, and Caywood 1991), and surveyed voters concerning negative political advertising (Faber, Tims, and Schmitt 1993; Weaver-Lariscy and Tinkham 1996).

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While such advertising is consistently disliked by voters (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Hill 1989) and thought to alienate large numbers of potential voters (Freedland 1994; Rothenberg 1990), its effectiveness can be inferred by its continuing and increasing use at every level of political campaigns (Jamieson 1992; Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy 1997). In its simplest form, the purpose of negative advertising is to "create a less favorable image of and decrease the likelihood of voting for the targeted candidate" (King and McConnell 2003, p. 844). Negative advertising content is thought to be more persuasive than positive ads mainly because researchers have contended that negative content is noticed and processed more deeply so that it exerts more of an impact (Kernall 1977; Lau 1982, 1985). Research within this stream notes that exposure to negative political advertising results in higher levels of voter recall than positive ads (Basil et al. 1991; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1989; Kahn and Kenney 2000; Lang 1991; Newhagen and Reeves 1991), and that voters who recall negative political ads are subsequently more likely to use knowledge acquired from these ads in evaluating candidates (Brians and Wattenberg 1996).

Meta-analyses are split, however, concerning the relative influence and processing of positive and negative advertising, with the conclusion that there is still a need for further research. Lau et al. (1999) conclude that "there is simply no evidence in the research literature that negative advertisements are any more effective than positive ads" (p. 857). Allen and Burrell (2002), on the other hand, conclude that negative information produces a larger effect on opinion formation than does positive information.

As a recent meta-analysis/review examined much of the research from the 1990s and earlier, this section will review research concerning negative political advertising that has been published since the Lau et al. (1999) article. Although the focus then is on the extensive research from the past five years, a few additional articles that were not included in the Lau et al. (1999) meta-analysis have been included here in an effort to provide the broadest examination of the topic.

A broad range of research has arisen in recent years indicating that negative political advertising can influence candidate attitudes and voting behavior. Negative political advertising is thought to lower voter evaluations of targeted candidates (Budesheim, Houston and DePaola 1996; Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1993; Jasperson and Fan 2002; Pinkleton 1997, 1998), as well as to affect voting preferences (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995).

Faber, Tims, and Schmitt (1993) continued their work exploring the relationship between involvement and voting, with results from the 1988 Minnesota Senate race indicating that higher levels of involvement result in greater effects for negative ads on voter decisions. Eligible voters who responded to a telephone survey preceding the election were asked if they had seen each of four televised negative ads, two sponsored by the incumbent, and two sponsored by the challenger, and whether seeing each ad made them more or less likely to vote for the sponsor of the ad and the target of the ad. Hypotheses proposed that voter involvement in politics and attention to news about politics would moderate the impact of the negative ads. Results indicated

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that general interest in politics, interest in the current campaign, and attention to politics on television news were all associated with a stronger impact of negative advertising.

Budesheim, Houston, and DePaola (1996) utilized different types of negative campaign advertising in order to assess the persuasiveness of the different messages, including issue based, character based, and combination issue and character attack advertising. Respondents were asked to read and then evaluate speeches by candidates that both opposed and supported their own political ideology. Contrary to the hypotheses, subjects systematically processed all types of candidate advertising, with candidates who shared the respondent's political ideology being held to a higher standard, because their attacks were only persuasive if they were well justified.

In 2002, the *Journal of Advertising* presented a special issue on political advertising with a number of articles that are particularly relevant to the current research. To begin, Jasperson and Fan (2002), examined the dual effects (intended and unintended/ backlash) of negative political advertising in a real world campaign scenario by examining actual candidate commercial buy data in order to track media placement of political commercials from January to November 2000, and subsequent shifts in candidate favorability with voters. Results indicates that the effect of negative information was approximately four times greater than positive information when evaluating favorability of candidates with voters, but some evidence of backlash on the sponsoring candidate was also found.

Pinkleton, Um, and Austin (2002) experimentally assessed the effects of positive, negative, and negative comparative political print advertisements in order to determine the effects of the advertising messages on key variables of negativism, cynicism, efficacy, and apathy. Following exposure to the advertisements, a sample of 246 undergraduates listed the thoughts they had about each candidate in a thought listing procedure, as well as completing post-test scales. Contrary to the hypotheses, although participants found negative advertising less useful than positive advertising and were more negative toward the campaigns, there was no effect of the negative political advertising on participants' cynicism, efficacy, or apathy.

Meirick (2002) compared comparative and negative political advertisings from the 2000 Minnesota congressional race between Kline and Luther with the goal of identifying differences in responses between the two types of political advertising. Sixty undergraduate students viewed the commercials, which were embedded within a track with other consumer product commercials. Following the viewing, participants provided their thoughts regarding the commercials, as well as answered questions related to the measurement of candidate favorability and voting intention (while controlling for political affiliation). Overall, comparative ads provoked fewer source derogations, prompted more support arguments and positive affect, and were viewed more favorably than the negative ads.

However, the use of negative political advertising can also create backlash against the sponsor of the advertising message, resulting in the sponsors being

subject to negative responses themselves (Pinkleton 1998). Much of the research in past years has found evidence of a backlash or boomerang effect with candidates who sponsor negative ads being subject to negative responses themselves (Faber, Tims, and Schmitt 1990; Garramone 1984; Roddy and Garramone 1988). A recent study found that repeated exposures of negative advertising messages lead to increasingly negative responses among women as exposure increased (King and McConnell 2003). As Garramone (1984) cautions:

> "Negative political advertising may achieve its intended effects, but it may also produce boomerang effects. A strong attack on a candidate, if perceived by the audience as untruthful, undocumented, or in any way unjustified, may create more negative feelings toward the sponsor, rather than the target. Similarly, an attack perceived as unjustified may generate more positive feelings toward the target." (p. 251)

However, while there is abundant evidence that negative political advertising can influence candidate attitudes, there are a few experimental studies indicating that positive ads are more effective than negative or comparative ads in shaping attitudes toward candidates (Houston, Doan, and Roskos-Ewoldsen 1999; Kahn and Geer 1994; Shen and Wu 2002).

In particular, Houston, Doan, and Roskos-Ewoldsen (1999), in a similar procedure to that used by Budesheim et al. (1996), had subjects read six advertisements that were described as coming from two candidates (one a liberal, the other a conservative) in a U.S. Senate campaign, with each candidate conducting either a positive campaign or a negative campaign. Consistent with the hypotheses (which were based on approach-approach and avoidance-avoidance conflicts), both candidates received relatively high evaluations when

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they each ran a positive campaign, and they received relatively low evaluations when they each ran a negative campaign. Unfortunately, no tests where run with candidates running both a positive and negative campaign in order to examine a more realistic campaign scenario.

The Demobilization Hypothesis

Observers who decry the rise of negative advertising usually worry about its effect on the political process as a whole. The question of whether negative political advertising does in fact harm the democratic process has been debated in recent years, with the majority of research focused on whether negative advertising reduces voter turnout. Unquestionably, the possibility that negative advertising sets up a spiral of cynicism that drives people away from politics is important to researchers in the field (Perloff 2002). However, the results of recent research are equivocal.

In their classic article, Ansolabehere et al. (1994) first focused their sights on the effects of negative campaign advertising on voter turnout (the "demobilization" hypothesis) with a set of experimental studies and then an aggregate analysis of results of the 1992 U.S. Senate elections. Results of experimental conditions, with professionally produced advertisements featuring real candidates and themes, indicated that exposure to negative advertising lowers the percentage of intended voters by about 5 percent. These results were replicated in an analysis of the advertising tone of newspaper articles in each of the 34 states where 1992 U.S. Senate seats were contested. The dependent

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variables were actual voter turnout and ballot roll-off, "... a campaign-specific effect indicating the degree to which people who were sufficiently motivated to vote in the presidential election chose to abstain in the Senate race" (p. 833). Results again revealed that negative campaigns reduced voter turnout by 4 percent and increased roll-off by 1.2 percent. The authors suggested that a decrease in political efficacy associated with viewing negative ads is one possible mechanism by which those ads may affect turnout.

Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1996) followed up their initial experiment with a study that combined of experimental data from California campaigns and national election data. They again concluded that negative advertising reduces election turnout by approximately 4.5 percent. This result was most noticeable among non-partisans. Research following Ansolabehere's work by Kahn and Kenney (1999) also found that negative advertising suppresses turnout. Finally, a meta-analysis by Allen and Burrell (2002) revealed a slight diminishing of the voter desire to vote as a result of negative political advertising.

Kahn and Kenney (1999) analyzed a random sample of citizens in states with U.S. Senate elections in 1990 using the American National Election Study: Pooled Senate Election. As hypothesized by the authors, controlling for various factors normally associated with turnout, negative political ads stimulated interest in the campaigns and subsequent turnout. However, campaigns that involved a good deal of mud-slinging (as judged by the campaign managers) decreased turnout. The campaign effects were strongest on political independents, novices,

and those least interested in politics. The authors suggested that voters can discriminate between legitimate and unjust attacks, and they respond accordingly.

Few other studies, however, have found support for the conclusion that reduced voter turnout results from negative advertising exposure (Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Wattenberg and Brians 1999). In particular, three recent longitudinal studies (Finkel and Geer 1998; Geer and Lau 1998; Vavreck 2000) further dispute the Ansolabehere hypothesis of a demobilization effect.

Freedman and Goldstein (1999) introduced two methodological innovations to the study of political advertisements: (1) an "ad detector" technology that analyzes satellite transmissions to uniquely identify all advertisements broadcast in a particular media market and yields an accurate reading of how often, when, and where different ads were aired, and (2) a new set of survey items asking respondents about their typical television viewing habits to devise a highly individual measure of likely exposure to different campaign ads. This combination of methods was applied to a random sample of registered voters in the 1997 Virginia gubernatorial election, to show that exposure to negative political advertising had a strong mobilizing effect on turnout, even among political independents. Wattenberg and Brians (1999) directly contested the Ansolabehere et al. (1994) findings and disputed the generalizability of the "demobilization" effect outside of an experimental setting. They used National Election Study data to show that there was no demobilization effect from exposure to negative advertising.

The research by Finkle and Geer (1998) is important to the debate over whether negative political advertisements demobilize the electorate because it presents a set of theoretical arguments explaining why negative ads ought to stimulate, rather than demobilize, voters. In support of negative advertising, Finkel and Geer (1998) hypothesized that negative advertising can lead to greater knowledge of the candidates and higher levels of caring about the outcome of the election. A detailed coding of every political advertisement aired during the U.S. presidential elections of 1960 through 1992, combined with an analysis of both aggregate and survey data from these election years, revealed no relationship between degree of negativity in the campaign advertising and turnout. In particular, and in direct contrast to the results of Kahn and Kenney (1999), there were no differential effects of negative ads on independents, nor among those voters exposed to high amounts of mass media. In the same year, Geer and Lau (1998) again used a combination of aggregate data from presidential elections and National Election Study surveys and determined that the amount of negative advertising was, in fact, associated with greater, not less, voter turnout. Similarly, Vavreck (2000) used NES data from 1976 to 1996, with results indicating that negative political advertising did not appear to lower levels of interest in the campaign, attention to the campaign, nor participation in voting.

Overall, the demobilization hypothesis reasons that voters who are exposed to negative political advertising may become cynical toward politicians and the political process, feel that they do not have input into the running of the country, and ultimately decreasing their voting.

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A Review of Political Advertising

Given the clear ambiguity in the discussed research of political advertising, it seems sensible to look at the research findings in more detail, in order to discern possible explanations for conflicting conclusions. Three such reasons are proposed:

1. One explanation for the conflicting findings concerning negative political advertising effects may stem from the researchers' conceptualizations of "negative" political advertising. Richardson (2001) argues that the conceptualizations of negative advertising in the academic literature are entirely too broad. Some research considered negative advertising to be a multidimensional construct, consisting of direct attack, direct comparison, and implied comparison appeals (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; Perloff 2002), while others defined it simply as "attack advertising" or "mudslinging".

2. A second rationale for the conflicting results may be that researchers have not controlled for the responses based on different sectors of their audience, most importantly, political party affiliation. With some noted exceptions (Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1990; Meirick 2002; Tedesco 2002), much of the research in the past decade has not controlled results for partisanship.

3. Lastly, there are often problems in measurement of variables between studies such that, although the research may purport to be examining the same thing, actual measurement of the variables may be different, resulting in very different results. This is most notable in measurement of candidate

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Accordingly, the current study was motivated to revisit some of the previous findings about political advertising for both methodological and theoretical reasons. On the methodological side, much of the prior research has relied upon student samples, which may limit the generalizability of the results. From a theoretical standpoint, research has considered a number of rationales for the effects of political advertising, and while they have just begun to touch on cognitive responses and "attributions" in political advertising, the application of attribution theory (as discussed in Chapter Three) presents a relatively untapped avenue of research as applied to the field of political advertising.

As a media effects outcome, election "interpretations" of "attributions" about political messages represent a shift in the standard model of media effects presented by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948), which traditionally focuses on the direct impact of messages on attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors (Hall and Cappella 2002). Although these studies do not explicitly consider political "advertising," their focus on media messages is relevant in that "attributions" are considered in each context. For example, Iyengar (1990) experimentally examined the impact of the news media by assessing respondents' attributions, or causal explanations, of the causes of poverty. Iyegar (1991) followed his 1990 work with a set of experiments that discovered that the way in which news was framed influenced viewers' perceptions of responsibility for political, social, and economic conditions. Cappella and

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Jamieson (1997) investigated coverage of political candidates and policy issues in the media. Similar relationships were explored in Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) work on news coverage of the president, and in Kinder and Sander's (1990) research concerning the public's perceptions of affirmative action. In each case, attributions of responsibility or causality influenced respondents' understanding of the issues.

Only a few studies have begun to consider "attributions" as a rationale for how voters evaluate candidates and political outcomes, and they provide a prelude to the following section.

Hall and Cappella (2002) investigated audience attributions of the 1996 presidential election as a result of exposure to the frames they received in political talk radio. In particular, over a nine-month period, listeners of the Rush Limbaugh radio program, listeners to other political talk radio, consumers of mainstream news media, and non-consumers of news media were queried as to their understandings of the causes of the election results. Results indicated that Limbaugh radio listeners were more likely to discount substantive election outcome attributions than did other respondents, in that attributions of responsibility for the loss of the election by Dole were attributed to factors specifically addressed during Limbaugh's broadcasts.

Schenck-Hamlin, Procter, and Rumsey (2000) explored how framing of issues in negative political advertising influenced the extent to which the message influenced the public's attributions of responsibility for problems in the political system. Three hundred sixty undergraduate students were presented

with a variety of negative political advertisements and were asked to respond, using a thought listing procedure, to the following question, "When you hear or read about America's problems, what do you think are the most important causes of those problems?" As hypothesized, results indicated that political advertising was able to influence attributions made by the respondents, in that different frames emphasized in the advertising messages led to attributions of responsibility for problems in the political system.

Rudolph and Grant (2002) tested a mathematical model of economic voting in which attributions of responsibility for the economy and vote choice in the 2000 presidential election were analyzed. Specifically, the authors wanted to know, "To whom did the American electorate attribute responsibility for the nation's economy and what impact, if any, did these responsibility judgments have on presidential vote choice?" (p. 806). Results indicated that, as hypothesized, attributions of responsibility for the stability of the country did influence subsequent voting behavior.

As discussed above, limited academic research currently exists in which attribution theory is applied conceptually to political advertising. In addition, the problems noted with prior research in political advertising provide an incentive to continue the work. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to extend research in political advertising by applying attribution theory in order to illustrate the effects of attributional processing on voter attitudes and voting intentions, while addressing noted gaps in the literature. The following chapter outlines how attribution theory can be applied to examine political advertising.

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CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter details the conceptual framework of attribution theory for the study of political advertising. In the first section the foundations of attribution theory are reviewed in order to provide a strong theoretical background for the current research. Research that has utilized an attributional framework in recent years has been examined from many different perspectives, both psychological and marketing based, and has included research examining the effects of merging of third person perceptions and attribution theory (Hoffner et al. 2001; Rucinski and Salmon 1990), as well as the application of attributions in management, team, and sales scenarios (LePine and Van Dyne 2001; Taggar and Neubert 2001, 2004). However, the focus here is on the effects of attributions on respondents' attitudes towards communication messages and, more specifically, their responses to advertising messages.

Because Folkes (1988) provided a comprehensive review on attribution research in the realm of marketing and consumer behavior, the current examination specifically considers research that has been conducted since that time. Therefore, section two provides a review of the relevant literature, which includes discussions of current attributional research, the intersection of comparative advertising and attributions, and finally the modeling of attribution theory as applied to cause-related marketing. Section three discusses the applicability of attribution theory to political advertising. The chapter concludes

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with the proposal of hypotheses and a structural model that is consistent with the prior discussion of political advertising and the current review of attribution theory.

The Foundations of Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how these interpretations relate to their thinking and behavior. It is, in actuality, several theories that share core assumptions. Heider (1958) was the first to propose a psychological theory of attribution, by suggesting that people are like amateur scientists, trying to understand other people's behavior by piecing together information until they arrive at a reasonable explanation or cause. Building on the work of Heider, Jones and Davis (1965), Kelley (1973) and Weiner (1992) developed a theoretical framework that has become a major research paradigm of social psychology. Consumer behavior research suggests that attribution theory provides a valuable framework for predicting behavior. A synopsis of the main components of this theory looks something like this (each of these will be discussed in further detail below):

- Heider (1958) argued that people try to identify the causal properties that underlie observed behavior and do so by attributing behavior either to external or internal causes.
- Jones and Davis (1965) built on Heider's work and focused on the conditions under which people observe an agent's behavior and either do or do not attribute a causal explanation to the agent.

- Kelley (1967) theorized in detail about the information processing people engage in when explaining social events. His model describes the rational analysis of patterns of covariation among three elements—a *person* acting toward a *stimulus* in particular *circumstances*—and derives the conditions under which people make attributions to the person or the stimulus.
- In studying attributions for achievement outcomes, Weiner and his colleagues (1992) found that people rely not only on the person-situation dimension of causality but also on the dimensions of stability and controllability, and these three-dimensional causal judgments mediate some of people's emotions and motivations in response to social outcomes.

Heider's "naïve psychology". Heider's perspective is commonly known as "naive psychology" (Folkes 1988; Kelley and Michaela 1980). Focusing on interpersonal relationships, Heider believed people were "naive psychologists" who sought common-sense answers to understand the world around them and the behavior of others (Mizerski et al. 1979; Weiner 1990). Attribution theory is "based on the conviction that if we can capture the naive understandings of the person on the street, we can accurately infer . . . his other expectations and actions" (Jones 1985, p. 89). Attribution theory deals with how the "social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events" (Fiske and Taylor 1991, p. 23) through an examination of what information is gathered and

how it is combined to form a causal judgment. In other words, how a person explains other people's behavior is based on that individual's own perceptions.

Attribution theory assumes that people try to determine why people do what they do; i.e., attribute causes to behavior. Therefore, assuming that receivers are constantly scanning incoming information for the underlying motives of the behavior of others, it should be possible for receivers to infer the reason for that behavior based on characteristics related to the motives of the sender. Lacking direct knowledge of these motives, observers feel impelled to infer these motives so that they may better order, organize, and thus understand their environment (Smith and Hunt 1978).

Message recipients are assumed to continually generate expectancies about the position that a communicator will advocate on certain issues, and to believe that a certain aspect of the communicator's situation or personality is likely to influence the communicator's position and message. In simplest terms, Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken (1978) suggest that an individual's explanations regarding why communicators advocate particular positions affect message persuasiveness. An important consequence of this theoretical proposition is that inferences lead to behavior; i.e., you will or will not behave in certain ways toward the actor based on your inferences, and you will form expectations as to how the actor will behave.

It is believed that the average person is continuously and spontaneously generating inferences that link events through causal relationships; these inferences are beliefs that allow for understanding and prediction of the

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observable world. One key element of attribution theory that is particularly relevant here is the distinction between internal and external attributions. According to Heider (1958), these two types of factors can shape attributions of motive. Internal attributions occur when people attribute the causes of actions to internal, controllable, characteristics of the actor (intrinsic motives), while external attributions involve attributing causes of actions to situational factors external to the actor (extrinsic motives). Heider argued that both these personal forces and environmental factors operate on the "actor," and the balance of these determines the attribution of responsibility or motive for the actions (Lewis and Daltroy 1990).

This process holds true whether the attributor is observing his or her own actions or those of others in that individuals tend to attribute their own actions to external factors and the actions of others to internal characteristics. In fact, people in the U.S. are so prone to placing responsibility on the character of actors rather than on an interaction between character and environmental circumstances, social psychologists have named the tendency the FAE, or "fundamental attribution error" (Ross and Fletcher 1985). In situations where an observer observes an undesirable behavior, fundamental attribution error results in blaming the actor (or the victim) for the negative consequences of the action (Hindman 2003).

Jones and Davis' Correspondent Inference Theory. Correspondent Inference Theory was developed by Jones and Davis (1965) as a further conceptualization of Heider's causal inferences in an effort to describe particular

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types of attributions rather than causal inferences in general. According to this theory, Jones and Davis described how an "alert perceiver" might infer another's intentions and personal dispositions (personality traits, attitudes, etc.) from his or her behavior. Perceivers make correspondent inferences when they infer another's personal dispositions directly from behavior. For example, perceivers may infer a disposition of mean-spiritedness from a mean act. Inferences are correspondent when the behavior and the disposition can be assigned similar labels (e.g., mean).

Kelley's Model of Attribution Theory. Kelley (1967, 1973) has discussed some of the ways in which effects produced by an action are attributed to the various factors present in the situation. His addition to attribution theory concerns the subjective experience of attributional validity and asks the question, "how do individuals establish the validity of their own or of another person's impression of an object?" Under many circumstances, an individual will have access to multiple instances of the same or similar events. With information about multiple events, we can employ a covariation principle to infer the causes of events. Covariation is the observed co-occurrence of two events, or in other words, we observe an event's covariation with various potential causes and attribute the effect to the cause with which it most closely covaries. According to Kelley, people assess covariation information across three dimensions relevant to the entity whose behavior they are trying to explain. Consensus, consistency over time and modality, and distinctiveness influence whether people attribute an effect to the person, the stimulus, or the situation.

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1. Consensus: Do all or only a few people respond to the stimulus in the same way as the target person?
2. Consistency over time and modality: Does the target person always respond in the same way to this stimulus?
3. Distinctiveness: Does the target person respond in the same way to other stimuli as well?

Kelley (1973) argued that the ways in which people make causal attributions depend on the information available to them. When you have much relevant information from several sources, you can detect the covariation of observed behavior and its possible causes. However, in everyday life, we often only have information from a single observation to guide us in making a causal attribution, as consumers often lack the necessary time and motivation to make multiple observations. In these single inference situations, configuration principles, as opposed to covariation principles, are evoked. The covariation principle is most applicable for understanding how people learn to make attributions in extended information processing situations, but it is generally too unmanageable for understanding specific consumer responses (Mizerski, Golden, and Kernan 1979). However,

> "consumers rapidly learn to associate causes with events, and to generalize across similar attribution situations. These generalized causal expectancies and the attributional rules governing the inference procedure are captured in the derivatives of the covariance model referred to as causal schemata or 'configuration' concepts" (Mizerski, Golden, and Kernan 1979, p. 128).

In this case, if the only information is a single occurrence of the event, the observer must fall back on other strategies or rules of causal inference (Fiske

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and Taylor 1991). One such method of "configuration" is the discounting principle.

The discounting principle (Kelley 1973) represents one type of view about how causes are related. This principle explains that consumers discount or minimize an explanation if an alternative explanation exists, and further that intrinsic motivation is discounted when extrinsic motivation explains an event. Therefore, a person is more likely to attribute an internal motivation to an actor when there are no plausible external, alternative explanations for an action (Calder and Burnkrant 1977). For example,

> "when a product endorser has external reasons to account for favorable comments about a product, recipients of the communication often believe the product less worthy than when endorsement involves minimal or no external incentives. Thus internal reasons for liking the product are discounted when an alternative reason for endorsement is presented" (Folkes 1988, p. 553).

Weiner's Motivational Research. Weiner (1992) further advanced attribution theory by proposing a categorization scheme that classifies causes on the basis of three dimensions: locus of causality, controllability, and temporal stability. Locus is a reference to whether the cause of action is "internal" or "external" to the actor and closely mirrors Heider's distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Controllability, on the other hand, is based on whether an actor's action was in control of the actor or not. An action is considered volitional or controllable if it was perceived to be undertaken as a willful choice, whereas if an action was unavoidable or was constrained, then it is likely to be perceived as uncontrollable. Temporal stability is the third causal inference

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proposed by Weiner (1992), and it refers to whether a cause remains stable over time or is a temporary phenomenon.

In recent years, researchers have applied each of these components of attribution theory in different ways from Weiner's continued work in satisfaction, to other researchers applying small parts of the overall theoretical base (e.g., utilizing only the discounting principle). Additionally, much of the past research has focused on interpersonal situations. However, recent work in attributions has included organizational communications, and specifically advertising, as an antecedent of attributions. Despite the fact that some of the research reviewed below does not deal specifically with advertising, nevertheless, an investigation of it reveals implications for advertising.

Review of Attribution Literature

Attribution theory was first extended to a promotional situation by Settle and Golden (1974) who hypothesized that readers of advertising messages would evoke attributions to interpret the validity of the message claims. More specifically consumers were expected to attribute the promotional claims to either the advertiser's wish to sell the product (external) or to the actual characteristics of the product (internal). If the respondents made internal attributions, i.e., message claims were attributed to the actual characteristics of the product, consumers would be more confident in the advertising claims and develop more favorable attitudes toward the brand. On the other hand, if the message claims were attributed to the advertiser's desire to sell the product, i.e., external

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Using an experimental procedure with business majors, Settle and Golden (1974) presented two different versions of print advertisements for five different products to the respondents. One advertisement (non-varied product claims) promoted the product as superior on five preselected characteristics (three of which were thought to be important and two of which were thought to be relatively unimportant). The other advertisement (varied product claims) promoted the product as superior on the three important characteristics but not superior on the two unimportant characteristics. The advertisements for the five products were then combined to form a booklet and given to subjects to read. The booklet contained different combinations of varied and nonvaried product claims (i.e., there could be from zero to five varied product claim advertisements in the booklet, and all possible combinations were used). Following exposure to these treatments, measures were taken of the importance of each product claim to the respondents, and their confidence in each claim. The authors concluded that advertisers should be willing to disclaim ["discount"] superiority on an unimportant characteristic to increase the perceived credibility of the source. However, since Settle and Golden did not verify the existence of attributional processes, this conclusion cannot be confirmed.

Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson (1994) used attribution theory to suggest that multiple product endorsements result in differences in consumers' perceptions of the endorser. The authors utilized in-depth interviews in order to develop

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descriptions of the attributional processes that operate when consumers view advertising messages with a celebrity endorser endorsing multiple products. Results indicated that consumers' perceptions of liking for and expertise of the celebrity may be tied to the number of products endorsed by the celebrity through attributions of trust. In addition, in the advertising messages, consumers attributed the celebrity's motive for the endorsement to money, and for multiple product endorsements, more money. The money motive did not appear to engender negative attributes toward the endorser. While interesting in itself, it is important to note that the authors conducted the in-depth interviews with only ten participants, so the results may not be applicable to consumers at large.

Stern (1994) contrasted classical TV advertising from vignette (sequential "stories") advertising and proposed that the two have different effects on consumer attributions. In particular, Stern proposed that vignette advertising relies upon the three components (distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus) of Kelley's (1973) covariation principle to induce consumer attributions about a product. On the other hand, classical advertising utilizes the configuration principle to influence consumers to make attributions of products in that individuals assign causality on the basis of a single observation. This is important to the current research because the consumers in the current research are not exposed to vignette advertising, but rather to classical commercial messages. It is expected that the configuration (rather than the covariation) principles will be in effect.

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Davis (1994) utilized attribution theory to explore the relationships between consumers' attributions of advertiser motivations and consumer response using two types of attributions that relate to the perceived ethics of the advertiser (advertiser ethical attributions) and the advertising message (message ethical attributions) in environmental product advertising. A national mail survey indicated the existence of both advertiser and message ethical attributions. A significant impact of both types of attributions was found on measures of advertising response (attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intent).

Lee (2004) has recently added to the attribution research with her analysis of attributions of responsibility in crisis communication messages. Individuals from Hong Kong responded to hypothetical crisis communication messages describing a plane crash. Utilizing an internal (the crisis is perceived to be within the boundaries of the company) versus external (the crisis is perceived to be outside the realm of the company) locus of responsibility in the communication message, respondents were asked to attribute responsibility for the crisis event. As hypothesized, attribution of internal responsibility for the crisis resulted in a negative impression toward the organization, while external attributions of responsibility resulted in a degree of sympathy and trust in the company. As with some of the additional research discussed here, this study shows the applicability of attribution theory, although original formatted for an interpersonal context, to an organizational context.

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An additional stream of research has considered the intersection of comparative advertising and attributions. Although each study discussed here did not formally utilize attribution theory, they all employed the concept of the discounting principle. Coulter and Pinto (1995) reported that message recipients discount a guilt-provoking ad tactic when they associate manipulative intent with the advertiser, particularly when the advertiser attempts to instill high levels of guilt. Campbell (1995) similarly showed that, when an advertiser uses attention-getting tactics, such as brand name delay, consumers doubt the motives of the advertiser and are led to perceive the advertiser as manipulative, which affects persuasion negatively. Jain, Buchanan, and Maheswaran (2000) used a similar attributional framework specific to comparative advertising and reported that, in general, direct comparative advertisements are counterargued more than are noncomparative advertisements.

Lastly, Jain and Posavac (2004) reported the results of four studies (2 lab studies and 2 field studies) with each study examining the mediational role of consumer attributions of the advertiser (honest and objective versus unfair and biased) on consumer attitudes toward positive and negative comparative advertising. Results indicated that the effectiveness of comparative advertising is indeed mediated by consumer attributions about the advertiser and that negative attributions result from negative comparisons.

A recent stream of research assessing attributions of motives in cause-related marketing campaigns is applicable to the current research as models of consumer attributions of motives have been proposed and have laid the ground

work for the current research. In the initial study of this type, Webb and Mohr (1998) conducted in-depth interviews in order to explore how consumers think and feel about cause-related marketing. Using basic distinctions between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, the authors coded respondents' thoughts about the firms motives into one of four categories: "rewards sought for the firm itself, rewards sought mostly for the firm but partly for others (such as the community or the environment), rewards sought mostly for others but partly for the firm, and rewards sought solely for others." (p. 231). Almost half of the respondents indicated that they believed that companies engaged in cause-related marketing for selfish reasons, while the other half believed that companies had mixed motives (both self-interest and altruism). From this analysis, Webb and Mohr developed a typology of consumers (identified as skeptics, balancers, attribution-oriented, and socially concerned) based on attributions consumers make in relation to cause-related marketing.

Dean (2002) built upon Webb and Mohr's work by experimentally assessing consumer attributions of the motivations for sponsorships and how these attributions affect corporate community relations. On the basis of attribution theory, Dean (2002) proposed that consumers would employ negative attributions of company self-interest to explain the sponsorship activity, and that a structural equation model would indicate a path from the negative attributions to the outcome variable of perceived corporate community relations. Results indicated that consumers form both positive and negative attributions about

corporate motivations for sponsorships, and that the respondents' views of these motives do mediate their perceived views of the company's community relations.

In order to increase external validity for his 2002 study, Dean (2003) assessed consumer perceptions of consumer donations in a cause-related marketing scenario. He used a 3 (types of company: scrupulous, average, or irresponsible in social matters) x 2 (type of donation: conditional or not conditional upon corporate revenue) factorial design to examine corporate donations on the dependent variables of consumer regard for the company, perceived mercenary intent of the company, and whether the social performance of the company is perceived as "good" management. Results suggested that:

> "(1) firms with a sterling reputation for social responsibility have little to gain by engaging in a single episode of charitable donation; (2) firms with a reputation for social irresponsibility may significantly increase their favor with consumers by engaging in a single episode of charitable donation; (3) firms with an average reputation for social responsibility are perceived differently by consumers depending upon which type of donation the company pursues; and (4) a single charitable donation will not raise the image of an irresponsible company to that of a scrupulous company." (p. 101).

Rifon et al. (2004) utilized attribution theory to develop and test a structural equation model of sponsorship effects that builds upon the prior research by Dean (2002). The authors "evaluated the effects of the congruence between a sponsor and cause and the use of company versus brand names on consumer attributions of corporate motive for the support of a health cause and resulting consumer perceptions of the sponsor" (p. 39). Results of the experiment suggested that consumer attributions of altruistic sponsor motives

can result from a good fit between a company and the cause it sponsors, and ultimately enhances sponsor credibility and attitude toward the sponsor.

Application of Attribution Theory to Political Advertising

Folkes (1988) suggests that "because many commercials require viewers to make inferences about characters' intentions and goals, this sort of analysis [attributional] should provide guidelines for understanding advertising effects" (p. 559). Therefore, consumers' attributions as to why a communicator takes a particular position in a message is important in determining whether a consumer accepts or rejects the message (Gotlieb and Sarel 1991). In this regard, attribution theory would suggest that the recipients of a political advertising message would seek to explain the underlying motives of the candidate in the advertisement. Here, the advertising message represents an observed behavior, and consumers may attribute certain motivations to the actor (Smith and Hunt 1978). Attributions of motive may be a function of past experiences and individual characteristics, but they may also be a function of the characteristics of the advertising strategy and message (Rifon et al. 2004). While it is unlikely that consumers will have specific knowledge of a candidate's motives, voters are likely to understand that candidates produce advertising in order to influence voting behavior.

Hall and Cappella (2002) stress the importance of studying attributional interpretations because they may disclose relationships and consequences that would not be obvious to the researcher if attitudes were the only measures.

"Failing to consider interpretations can lead one to overlook an element of audience members' mental representations of an event that shapes their behavior or their evaluation of related targets" (p. 335). Certainly, analysis of the general principles of how people interpret motivations and actions of actors that are suggested by attribution theory offers important basic insights on consumers' interpretations of persuasion-related material, such as advertising (Friestad and Wright 1994). Further, Mizerski (1978) notes that causal attributions in much of the past research have seldom been measured directly, and that attribution measures have not allowed "for an examination of the number of perceived causes, nor the allocation of attribution among causes" (p. 221). It is the goal of the current research to address these gaps in the field.

Theoretical Concepts and Hypotheses

The purpose of the current study is to extend research in political advertising by applying attribution theory in order to illustrate the effects of attributional processing on voter attitudes and voting intentions through a controlled experiment. Although most analyses of political attitudes and behavior involve survey research, controlled experiments are sometimes chosen in political advertising as a more precise way to measure political advertising exposure (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Pfau et al. 2001; Pfau et al. 2002; Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams 2004). An experimental design was chosen in the current study because it enabled the researcher to manipulate the stimulus material rather than relying on participants' memory about the political

commercials they may have seen. Despite the great deal of research in political advertising, however, there is still the question of exactly how, how much, and under what conditions political advertising matters. It is believed that attribution theory will shed light on the effects of political advertising as a whole and begin to answer those unanswered questions.

Noting Jamieson's (2000) call for "scholarship that sheds light on the nuances of both media messages and voter reactions" (p. 17), this study addresses both discourse in the form of advertising and voter decision making in the 2004 presidential election.

Formation of Attributions of Candidate Motive from Candidate Advertising

Attribution theory proposes a cognitive process through which individuals might assign an underlying cause or explanation to an observed event (Kelley 1973), such as a political advertisement. A prominent assumption in attribution theory is that individuals regularly engage in attributional activities, based on the definition espoused by Heider (1976) that links attribution with spontaneous cognizing of the environment (Harvey and Weary 1984). Davis (1994) utilizes the explanation of Srull (1981) to describe how individuals move from observing an event to attribution formation:

"An individual:

(1) is exposed to, comprehends, and encodes a set of stimuli (such as overt behaviors, language, etc.). These stimuli are labeled the antecedent event.

(2) constructs or infers a tentative set of attributions which are felt to be the most probable explanation for the reasons or motivations underlying or causing the observed stimuli.

(3) evaluates the tentative attributions in light of additional information, observations, or past knowledge.

(4) modifies or adopts the attributions.

(5) stores the attribution in memory." (p. 874)

The above process results in the formation of attributions that may be applied to political advertising and, in the current research, to the development of attributions regarding political candidates. Therefore, it is proposed that by applying this general process to the formation of attributions, attributions of candidate motive may be formed in response to the advertising message. Attributions of candidate motive can be described as a voter's attempt to determine the underlying motivations of the candidate in the advertisement, in an effort to understand and predict the observable world, and may be either extrinsic or intrinsic. In accordance with attribution theory it is believed that attributions of candidate motives will be made as the voter sorts through and interprets incoming information and infers causality in order to make sense of his or her environment.

Prior research has shown that the formation of attributions requires an observed antecedent event (Kelley 1973). In addition, higher involvement with the event or communication, along with greater levels of perceived importance and relevance to an individual's life, increases the level of message processing

(Celsi and Olson 1988; Chaiken 1980; Petty and Cacioppo 1986) and the formation of attributions (Weiner 1986). As a result, it is believed that attributions of candidate motive are more likely to be formed when the voter regards the advertising as highly involving, important, and/or personally relevant. Furthermore, political advertising is highly prevalent in the days leading up to an election, with exposure on the part of the voters likely. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Voters who are exposed to political advertisements will attribute motives (both intrinsic and extrinsic) to the candidate who sponsors the ad.

Negative versus Positive Candidate Advertising

Political advertising has often been categorized into positive advertising and negative advertising based on whether the candidates advanced their own strengths or criticized their opponent's weaknesses (Chang 2003). A review of prior research indicates little agreement as to a specific definition for positive and negative ads (Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; Shapiro and Rieger 1992; Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy 1993). In this study, positive and negative advertising was conceptualized according to a recent study by Chang (2003) because this appears to be the most concrete operationalization of the concepts. Therefore, positive advertising was considered advertising that promoted "candidates' issue policies, thereby highlighting the candidates' capability," while negative advertising was viewed as "attacking opponents' issue policies, thereby revealing the opponents'

incompetence" (Chang 2003, p. 57). Such advertising is often termed "mudslinging" or "attack advertising" (Pinkleton 1998), but is distinct from that form of advertising which involves character assassination of one candidate against the other candidate's image.

When considering the effects of negative versus positive candidate advertising, we must take into account that prior research has noted that people tend to dislike negative ads, with 75% of respondents in Garramone's (1984) research and 65% of Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) participants expressing disapproval of negative ads. Further, a body of research has indicated that negative advertising may result in a "backlash effect" against the sponsoring candidate (Garramone 1984; Merritt 1984) with voters viewing the sponsoring candidate as mean spirited (Pinkleton 1998).

Prior research involving comparisons between positive and negative political advertising has revealed that participants exposed to negative advertising generated more source candidate derogations and were more negative toward the political candidate in general than were participants exposed to positive political advertising (Hill 1989; Pinkleton, Um, and Austin, 2002). Furthermore, a body of research in consumer products advertising has consistently indicated that consumers generate significantly more negative-related statements when exposed to negative versus positive ads because of differing perceptions of the advertisers' motivations (Belch 1981; Gorn and Weinberg; Swinyard 1981; Wilson and Muderisogle 1980). Specifically, consumers exposed to the negative advertising may focus their attention on the

negative information and may be more likely to see the advertiser (or candidate) as biased or "self-serving." Lastly, Kahn and Geer's (1994) experiment assessing the effectiveness of positive and negative advertisements showed that positive advertisements yielded warmer feelings toward the sponsoring candidate than the negative advertisements.

The findings of the prior studies suggest that negative advertisements should yield attributions of intrinsic candidate motive more than would positive ads (Meirick 2002), because they would be attributing the cause of the advertisements to the "mean spiritedness" of the candidate, rather than outside forces contributing to the commercial messages. The rationale behind this is that intrinsic motivations are seen as internal to the candidate and controlled by the candidate, whereas extrinsic motivations are seen as external or situational (i.e., beyond the control of the candidate). Therefore,

H2: Voters who are exposed to negative political advertisements will attribute different motives to the candidate who sponsors the ad than voters who are exposed to positive political advertisements.

More specifically,

H2a: Voters who are exposed to negative political advertisements will be more likely to attribute intrinsic motives to the candidate who sponsors the ad than voters who are exposed to positive political advertisements.

H2b: Voters who are exposed to negative political advertisements will be less likely to attribute extrinsic motives to the candidate who sponsors the ad than voters who are exposed to positive political advertisements.

Political Cynicism

Political cynicism is perhaps one of the most frequently explored aspects of political disaffection and is often defined as "a person's perception that his or her opinion is not important to political leaders, that governmental institutions and political leaders are not trustworthy, or that leaders do not always act in the interests of their constituents" (Tedesco 2002, p. 39). Prior research suggests that cynical citizens have given up on the political process based on their lack of confidence in and a feeling of distrust toward the political system (Crotty and Jacobson 1980; Dionne 1991; Perloff and Kinsey 1992; Schenck-Hamlin, Procter, and Rumsey 2000). Further, there is increased concern that cynicism contributes to low voter turnout as shown through correlational studies by Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar (1993), and Crotty and Jacobson (1980). According to Scheneck-Hamlin, Procter, and Rumsey (2000), once cynicism was activated, voters who were exposed to political advertising regarded politicians as being responsible for the country's problems and treated politicians as a whole with greater contempt.

While prior research has proposed that a spiral of cynicism may exist in which negative election attributions increase voter cynicism, while positive political advertising tends to decrease cynicism (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995), limited research has considered political cynicism as an antecedent variable that may impact voter attitudes and attributions. In one exception, Tedesco (2002) reported that pre-test cynicism levels served as a predictor of post-test evaluations of candidates. It is conceivable that as voters become

more informed about the "dark side of politicians" they may become more cynical (Bowen, Stamm, and Clark 2000).

Political consultants agree and worry that negative advertising increases distrust of politicians (Perloff and Kinsey 1992). Cynicism as a variable is often used to refer to a lack of confidence and a feeling of mistrust toward politicians (Austin and Pinkleton 1995; Dionne 1991; Perloff and Kinsey 1990; Pinkleton, Um, and Austin 2002; Tedesco 2002), which may result in a differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic attributions.

Furthermore, research has shown effects of other individual difference variables, such as existing preferences, partisanship, and general attitudes toward negative ads, on voter responses to political advertising. Therefore, in order to further explore how political cynicism as an individual difference variable may impact voter attitudes, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Regardless of ad type, political cynicism is directly related to the type of attributions of candidate motive voters make for the sponsoring candidate.

Further,

H3a: Political cynicism will have a positive impact on the attributions of intrinsic candidate motives for the sponsoring candidate.

H3b: Political cynicism will have a negative impact on the attributions of extrinsic candidate motives for the sponsoring candidate.

Relationship between Candidate Attributions and Outcome Variables

A central component of attribution theory is that, once attributions are formed, there is a relationship between those attributions and subsequent

attitudes and behaviors. This belief that attributions have consequences for attitudes and behaviors is explicated in the three-stage model of attribution theory presented by Kelley and Michaela (1980), in which consequences of the attributions (which include changes in affect and behavior) proceed directly from the attributions themselves. Harvey and Weary (1984) indicate in a review of attribution research that "attribution theorists typically assume, either explicitly or implicitly, that attributions directly influence behavior or *mediate* the relationship between other factors and behavior" (p. 445, emphasis added). Kelley (1973) further articulated the general position that attributions affect related attitudes and behavior, by stating that "[c]ausal attributions play an important role in providing the impetus to actions and decisions..." (p. 127). Thus, if candidate attributions are formed, we would expect them to exert an influence on relevant attitudes and behavior. Therefore, it is hypothesized that,

H4a: Intrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate advertisements will have a negative impact on voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate.

H4b: Extrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate advertisements will have a positive impact on voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate.

H4c: Attributions of candidate motive (both intrinsic and extrinsic) for the sponsoring candidate will mediate the relationship between exposure to political advertising and voter attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate.

There is a substantial body of research that specifically addresses the effects of attitudes toward candidates on voting behavior with receiver variables (such as attitude toward the candidate) playing a role in voting behavior (Bowen

1994; Goldstein and Freedman 2000; Kaid 2004; West 1994). In his study of 1992 California Senate races West (1994) identified effects of exposure to ads on voter attitudes and subsequent voter preference. Therefore, it is expected that voter attitudes will affect voter intentions.

H5: Voter attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate will be positively related to intentions to vote for that candidate.

Individual Difference Variables as Moderators: Gender and Political Affiliation

This study also proposes two individual difference variables that may affect the interpretation and evaluation of the political advertisements. These factors are gender and political party affiliation. Each variable is described below and additional hypotheses offered.

Prior research has noted evidence of a "gender gap" between parties, with women more often voting for Democratic candidates (Chaney, Alvarez, and Nagler 1998; Mattei and Mattei 1998) and reacting more strongly to campaign advertising than men (King and McConnell 2003). In a national study by Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2000), women were more strongly affected by political broadcasts. Kern and Just (1997) concluded that, "women were more responsive than men to negative attack messages; in particular they were more likely to blame the author rather than the object of the attack" (p. 111). Considering the effects of gender, the following hypotheses are offered:

H6a: Women will be more likely to attribute intrinsic candidate motives for the sponsoring candidate than will men.

H6b: Gender will moderate the effect of political advertising on generation of attributions of intrinsic and extrinsic candidate motive for the sponsoring candidate.

Partisanship and political party affiliation have often been mentioned as variables impacting voter decisions. In previous studies, the persuasiveness of political ads varied depending on viewers' political party affiliation (Pfau et al. 2001), with the direction of change in candidate vote choice as a result of exposure to advertising messages highly related to partisanship (Faber, Tims, and Schmitt 1990; Merritt 1984; Robideaux 2002). Voters' evaluations of ads were also impacted by party affiliation (Robideaux 1998, 2002). Merritt (1984) observed that those voters who identified with a targeted candidate's political party were more likely to evaluate the sponsoring candidate lower. Considering the possible effect of political party affiliation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

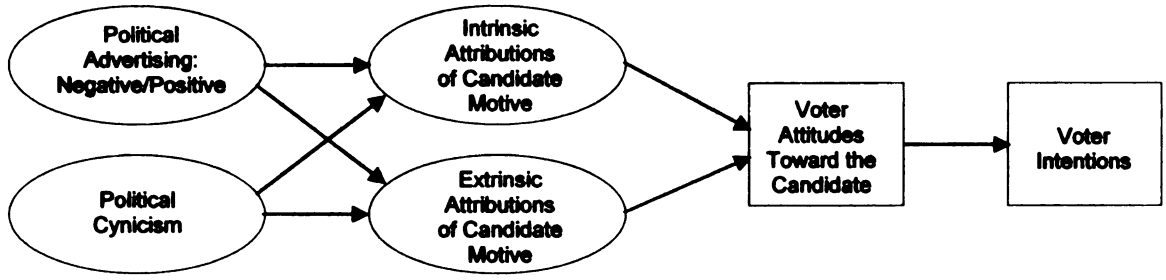
H7: Political affiliation will moderate the effects of attributions of candidate motive for the sponsoring candidate on voter attitudes and voter intentions.

Proposed Model

In light of the literature on political advertising that has been reviewed here and the hypotheses that have been developed, attribution theory will serve as a foundation for proposing and testing a causal model of the effects of attributions of candidate motive on voter attitudes and voting intentions (the dependent variables). Figure 1 depicts the relationships among the variables. In sum, this model posits direct relationships between political advertising, political cynicism, and intrinsic and extrinsic attributions of candidate motive, and indirect relationships between political advertising and their subsequent effects on voter

reactions to the advertisements. In addition, this effect is dependent on gender and political affiliation (moderators).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



On a conceptual level, a study of attributions can extend our understanding of the types of inferences consumers make about political advertising messages and the relationships between these inferences and attitude and behavior change. From a practical standpoint, research indicating that voters do evaluate candidates based upon their advertising messages, and that these evaluations affect voting attitudes and intentions, provides candidates with a strong motive for carefully considering the content and tone of their advertising messages. Although previous research has confirmed the effect of political advertising on voters' evaluations and intentions, it is believed that attribution theory can help us to understand the process better.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the method used to investigate the study's hypotheses and structural model. Specifically, this chapter will cover the experimental participants and procedures, a pre-experiment focus group, stimulus materials, and independent and dependent variables of interest.

Participants and Experimental Design

External validity of an experiment is realized if its findings are readily generalized to the population at large. In general, external validity can be improved when naturally occurring rather than artificial stimuli are used, when the situation is representative rather than atypical of the range of situations of that type, and by ensuring that the sample of participants is representative of the population of interest. Typically, group research employing randomization will initially possess higher external validity than will studies (e.g., case studies and single-subject experimental research) that do not use random selection/assignment (Campbell and Stanley 1963). In order to increase the external validity of this experiment, registered voters were recruited to serve as participants. Additionally, full-time undergraduate students were specifically excluded in an effort to tap the potential of a final sample that had a vested interest in the presidential election and, therefore, may be more likely to actively process the advertising messages.

Registered voters were recruited from community groups throughout Michigan (church groups, work groups, parents involved in scout groups, school PTAs, etc.) using a technique in which contact was made with each group leader or administrator in order to recruit during group meetings or through the group listserv. A target sample of 300 participants was desirable for the experiment, so a pool of volunteers in excess of this number was recruited. Through a combination of personal contact at group meetings and introductory e-mails, 510 registered voters provided e-mail addresses to the researcher with the understanding that they would be contacted in the later months of the presidential election and asked for their evaluation of political advertising messages.

An e-mail experiment and data collection procedure have the benefit of combining "the most advantageous features of postal communications, such as eliminating synchronous interaction and interviewer effects, with the most advantageous features of telephone communications, such as the ability to experimentally manipulate questions and secure rapid response time" (Best and Krueger 2002, p. 73). Because these features can often be obtained with little personnel and expense, it is an attractive alternative to postal or telephone communications. In the past, e-mail surveys have been used successfully to investigate topics such as electronic democracy (Fisher, Margolis, and Resnick 1996), government elections (Taylor et al. 2001), and news sources for political involvement (Althaus and Tewksbury 2000). In the current experiment, e-mail

transmission facilitated the transmission of text, graphics, and video, so that e-mail users were able to assess campaign commercials.

In the week immediately preceding the presidential election in November, 2004, the potential participant pool of 510 registered voters was transmitted an e-mail message encouraging recipients to participate in the study and providing a hyperlink to the actual survey written in Hypertext Markup Language (html) accessible by most current browsers. The e-mail also included a name and e-mail address for recipients to contact if they were unable to access the experiment and questionnaire, or if they had questions about completing the questionnaire. As an incentive to encourage participation, each participant was entered into a lottery for a chance to win one of five $20 gift certificates from Amazon.com. Once participants accessed the webpage, they were asked to provide an on-line informed consent, after which they were able to proceed with the experiment.

Focus Group Procedure

In order to construct scale items of attributions of candidate motives as perceived by voters (a dependent measure discussed below), an informal focus group was conducted. A convenience sample of prospective voters (4 female, 4 male) from the same general population as that used in the final experiment viewed twelve candidate television commercials and discussed their feelings about the advertisements. A focus group method was utilized in order to provide rich, qualitative data that facilitate opinion-sharing and in-depth responses. The

focus group discussion lasted approximately 1 and ½ hours, and was held in an informal environment in order to promote social group interaction. Each advertisement was played multiple times upon the request of the participants in order to completely explore all possible attributions that might be generated from the advertising messages.

An initial list of attributional statements was developed from this focus group. A panel of consumer behavior researchers reviewed this list in order to be certain that it included the widest possible range of reasonable attributional statements. Subsequently, seventeen, five-point, Likert-type scale items were created (see Table 1) and divided into intrinsic attributions (motivations internal to the candidate) and extrinsic attributions (motivations external to the candidate or situational).

Table 1. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Attributions of Motives

Variable	Items
Intrinsic Motives	1. The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the voters to know all the facts about the issues. 2. The candidate ran this commercial to discredit the opposing candidate. 3. The candidate ran this commercial because he cares about the country. 4. The candidate ran this commercial because he doesn't want the opposing candidate to win the election. 5. The candidate ran this commercial because he is trying to mislead the voters about the issues. 6. The candidate ran this commercial to persuade me to vote for him. 7. The candidate ran this commercial because he believes he is the best person for the office of President. 8. The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the voters to question or doubt the opposing candidate. 9. The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the power of the presidency and will say anything to get there.
Extrinsic Motives	10. The candidate ran this commercial because a PAC pressured him do it. 11. The candidate ran this commercial to respond to allegations made by the opposing candidate. 12. The candidate ran this commercial because the opposing candidate made misleading statements that had to be corrected. 13. The candidate ran this commercial to discuss an issue that voters think is important. 14. The candidate ran this commercial because a PAC was attacking him. 15. The candidate ran this commercial because he was behind in the polls. 16. The candidate ran this commercial because his political party wanted him to do it. 17. The candidate ran this commercial to tell the voters what they wanted to hear.

Note: The above items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale for agreement with the following statements (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

Stimulus Materials

Original Evaluation of Advertising Stimuli.

Initially, forty campaign television commercials (20 for each candidate) were identified and subsequently reviewed by the researcher in order to determine a set of possibilities for the final experiment. The spots were downloaded from a number of sites, including Bush and Kerry campaign websites, from www.politicsUS.com, which features links to television commercials run by the presidential candidates, and from www.c-span.org. During the course of the review, it was determined that each candidate was running a very different campaign, with Bush having few straight issue advertisements, and Kerry having few commercials that spoke negatively of Bush.

Ultimately, however, it was possible to narrow this pool of commercials down to a final group of 12 (6 for each candidate), which were comprehensively issue-based and provided a good subset of both positive and negative advertising messages. Although image advertising plays a strong part in the political process, the current research focused primarily on issue-based advertising messages with the belief that they might generate the greatest number of attributional responses. According to West (1997) approximately half of the broadcast advertisements from 1952 to 1996 provided statements about the candidates' positions on issues; and, contrary to the speculation that ads have become less policy oriented and more personality based in recent years, the prominence of issues in political advertising campaigns has increased since 1980. Lastly, commercials were eliminated from consideration if they were not in

English (Kerry ran a few Spanish speaking commercials) and if the messages were limited to a particular geographical area rather than running in national media (Bush run a subset of commercials in Ohio only).

Pre-testing of Advertising Stimuli. An additional function of the focus group discussed above was to conduct a pre-test prior to the main stage of the consumer research in order to clarify and identify the respondents' perceptions of the commercials and to explore attributions made based on the messages they were exposed to. The pre-test informed the choice of television advertisements clips to use in the main study.

Final Advertising Stimuli. The final stimulus materials consisted of two spots each for the major 2004 presidential candidates, George W. Bush and John Kerry (one negative and one positive advertisement for each) (see Appendix A for the transcripts of the commercials). Spot ads provide information about candidate positions on various issues, while also attempting to influence voters' impressions of the candidates and their voting intentions. When using real advertisements, the researcher runs the risk that participants may have already been exposed to the advertisement and that they may have pre-existing knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about the advertisement or the candidate. Although the use of existing advertisements introduces these potentially confounding factors, the use of a naturalistic context enhances realism and generalizability, because a specifically designed advertisement may be deemed too artificial. In addition, the research was conducted during an ongoing political

campaign and featured real candidates who were relying heavily on television advertising.

Administration

Based upon a randomization algorithm written in JavaScript and embedded within the online survey page, the participants were assigned to one of the four conditions (positive Kerry ad, negative Kerry ad, positive Bush ad, or negative Bush ad) after they completed the first section of the questionnaire, which contained pre-exposure questions related to the measurement of political cynicism and voter attitudes toward the candidate. While it may seem as though a fifth condition with no commercials might have been used as a control, such a condition would not test attributions as a result of exposure to political advertising. After exposure to the stimulus, participants answered questions relative to the measurement of the dependent variables.

To insure the confidentiality of the participants, all identifying information was replaced with a serial number after eliminating multiple submissions.

Measures

The independent variables were ad type (positive ad/negative ad for each candidate) and political cynicism. Because there were both positive and negative ads for each candidate, candidate may be considered another independent variable and as such some of the subsequent analyses reflected this distinction. Voter attitudes toward the candidate were measured both pre- and post-

exposure to the stimulus. The remaining dependent variables, attributions of candidate motive and voter intentions, were measured after exposure to the stimulus. The moderating variables (gender and political party affiliation), along with additional general demographic information, were measured after exposure to the stimulus.

Independent Variables

In order to capture voter's political cynicism, this study employed a well-used Political Cynicism Measure, which had been adapted from the National Election Studies and which included measures of political efficacy and distrust (Kaid 2002; Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco 2000; Rosenstone, Kinder, and Miller 1997). This scale provides the most representative and highly reliable measure currently being used in political cynicism. Participants were asked to strongly disagree or strongly agree on a five-point Likert-type scale, which was summed to form a unidimensional measure of political cynicism, with higher scores indicating higher levels of political cynicism. This scale has achieved acceptable reliability in prior research (.75 at a minimum). It consists of eight items: (1) Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do, (2) One never really knows what politicians think, (3) People like me don't have any say about what the government does, (4) Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on, (5) One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing (reverse coded), (6) Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political

campaign is over, (7) Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think, and (8) One cannot always trust what politicians say.

Dependent Variables. There are several dependent measures incorporated in the experimental design.

As discussed above, seventeen, five-point, Likert-type scale items of attributions of candidate motive as perceived by voters were created.

In order to measure voter attitudes toward the candidates a semantic differential scale of candidate image was utilized. This scale included 12 bipolar adjective pairs (Kaid, Leland, and Whitney 1992; Tedesco 2002): qualified-unqualified, sophisticated-unsophisticated, honest-dishonest, sincere-insincere, successful-unsuccessful, attractive-unattractive, calm-excitable, aggressive-unaggressive, strong-weak, passive-active, friendly-unfriendly, and believable-unbelievable, and was applied to both candidates for president. Each pair had five intermediate points, and higher scores indicated more favorable traits, with one item (passive-active) being reverse coded to minimize response bias. This scale has achieved acceptable reliability in prior research (.82 at a minimum) and was summed to create a total score to use in the statistical equations. A traditional feeling thermometer scale (0-100), which has been used in past research (Tedesco 2002), was not utilized, as it did not fit with the nature of the current research.

As a measure of voter intention, participants were asked "how likely" it was that they would vote for each candidate (Chang 2003).

Other Variables. The posttest questionnaire also contained several demographic and individual difference variables including age (an open ended question); marital status ("What is your current marital status? Single, Married, Divorced, Widowed); ethnicity ("What racial or ethnic group best describes you?" Caucasian, African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or other); gender (female, male); occupation (Professional, White Collar, Blue Collar, Student (part-time), Retired, Other); and political party affiliation ("Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?").

A copy of the measurement instrument is attached as Appendix B.

The following chapter details the results of the experiment.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

The results of the experiment are presented here in several sections. The first section presents general sample characteristics. The second section contains reliability measures for the scales used in the experiment. Hypotheses are tested in order in the next section. Lastly, the fit of the proposed structural model is discussed.

General Sample Characteristics

Registered voters were recruited from community groups throughout Michigan (church groups, work groups, parents involved in scout groups, school PTAs, etc.) and represented a cross section of Michigan voters who, on Election Day, would have to choose between the candidates whose political commercials they viewed. A total of 326 respondents participated in the study. The original sample was 336; however, 10 respondents experienced technical difficulties and did not complete the study. They were dropped from further analysis. Of the overall recruiting list of 510 potential participants, 326 actual participants represents a 64% response rate. Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample[a]

Characteristic	N	Percent
Gender		
Male	165	50.6
Female	158	48.5
Age		
20-30	83	25.4
31-40	93	28.5
41-50	76	23.3
51-60	52	15.9
61-70	10	.03
71+	8	.02
Marital Status		
Single	79	24.2
Married	221	67.8
Divorced	26	8.0
Widowed	0	0.0
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	285	87.4
African-American	15	4.6
Asian	17	5.2
Hispanic	3	.9
Native American	1	.3
Other	5	1.5
Occupation		
Professional	158	48.5
White Collar	62	19.0
Blue Collar	14	4.3
Student (part-time)	19	5.8
Retired	21	6.4
Other	52	16.0
Political Party Affiliation		
Republican	141	43.3
Democrat	89	27.3
Independent	69	21.2
Other	27	8.3

[a]The Ns within characteristic groupings do not add up consistently to the sample N because of missing data for some respondents.

One hundred sixty-five males (50.6%) and 158 females (48.5%) participated in the study (3 participants did not indicate gender). Their ages ranged from 20 to 77 years (2 participants did not indicate age), with an average of 39 years. Further, the participants were predominately married (67.8%) and Caucasian (87.4%). Republicans represented the largest group in the current study at 43.3%, with Democrats and Independents represented at 27.3% and 21.2%, respectively. Although the sample was not randomly selected, the participants were generally representative of Michigan demographics (49% male, 51% female, with a median age of 35.5 years old according to Michigan census data).

Scale Construction and Reliability

Before addressing the specific hypotheses and research questions, the scales used to measure the independent and dependent variables were checked for internal consistency and unidimensionality. Cronbach's reliability analysis was used for internal consistency and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test for scale unidimensionality (Hunter and Gerbing 1982). Table 3 summarizes the mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's coefficient alpha for each independent and dependent composite variable.

Table 3
Scale Descriptives for Independent and Dependent Variables

Independent Variable	**Scale Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**α**
Political Cynicism	25.63	4.503	.714
Dependent Variables			
Attitude Toward the Candidate:			
George W. Bush	33.03	9.924	.919
John Kerry	32.87	7.732	.867

It is important to note that all of the measures used here are summated scales, not averages across items. Since cynicism was a 5-point, 8-item scale, scores could range from 8 to 40, with the sample mean of 25.63 being slightly above the midpoint of the range. Additionally, attitude toward the candidates was a 5-point, 12-item scale and scores could range from 12 to 60. Scores of 33.03 and 32.87 for George W. Bush and John Kerry, respectively, represent scores above the mean. Additionally, it is interesting to note that the mean for George W. Bush is higher than that for John Kerry, representing a slight advantage.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One

This study tested H1 predicting that exposure to political advertisements would lead voters to make both intrinsic and extrinsic attributions of candidate motive. This prediction was constructed based on the *a priori* theoretical assumption of the previous conceptualization of the nature of the intrinsic and extrinsic attributions, rather than the exploratory statistical classification. Therefore, the present study performed a confirmatory factor analysis to obtain

more stringent discriminant validity between the two constructs with AMOS 5.0 (Arbuckle 2003) using maximum likelihood estimation.

As expected, the two theoretically distinct factors were confirmed, supporting H1. However, eleven items either had low factor loadings or indicated a high modification index (showing a possibility of being cross-loaded on two factors), so they were removed in this confirmatory factor analysis process. Thus, only three items were found to be valid for each construct. Multiple fit indices were used for evaluating this two-factor model. The fit of this model (and all subsequent analyses) was evaluated using the chi-square statistic, which is sensitive to sample size, as well as additional multiple fit indices. The GFI is considered an absolute fit index as it measures the proportion of model fit improvement in the hypothesized model compared to no model at all. The GFI is roughly similar to the square multiple correlation in SEM (or the R^2 in multiple regression) as it attempts to explain the proportion of observed correlations in the model. The goodness-of-fit index [GFI] was .98 and the adjusted goodness-of-fit index [AGFI] was .95. The data in the present study yielded a comparative fit index [CFI] of .97, a normal fit index [NFI] of .95, and a root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] of .07. In general, values of .8 or above for GFI and AGFI, higher than .9 for NFI, closer to 1.0 for CFI, and less than or equal to .08 for RMSEA are considered to be indications of a good fit (Kelloway 1998; Kline 1998).

All factor loadings on the two factors were also statistically significant and ranged from .40 to .86 ($p < .0001$), indicating that the two-factor model was found

to be consistent with the data very well. The internal reliability of each factor also indicates that both intrinsic attributions (α = .79) and extrinsic attributions (α = .58) were internally reliable. Although the value for extrinsic attributions falls below the usual threshold of acceptable reliability, values below .70 have previously been deemed acceptable when used in exploratory research (Hair et al. 1995). Thus, the items of each factor were summed into a single score for the subsequent analyses. Table 4 summarizes the means and standard deviations of the scales and their component items, along with their alpha coefficients. Also included in Table 4 are the loadings for each of the items that were dropped from further analysis.

Table 4
Scale and Items of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Attributions

Scale/Item	α	Mean	SD	Factor loading
Voter Attributions (χ^2 = 21.5 df = 8, *N*=326)				
Intrinsic Attributions	**.79**	**9.67**	**2.88**	
The candidate ran this commercial because he is trying to mislead the voters about the issues.		3.28	1.17	.82
The candidate ran this commercial to discredit the opposing candidate.		2.79	1.07	.70
The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the voters to question or doubt the opposing candidate.		3.61	1.17	.64
**The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the power of the presidency and will say anything to get there.*				*.79*
**The candidate ran this commercial because he doesn't want the opposing candidate to win the election.*				*.43*
**The candidate ran this commercial to persuade me to vote for him.*				*.24*
**The candidate ran this commercial because he cares about the country.*				*-.80*
** The candidate ran this commercial because he believes he is the best person for the office of the President.*				*-.26*
**The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the voters to know all the facts about the issues.*				*-.21*
Extrinsic Attributions	**.58**	**8.97**	**1.94**	
The candidate ran this commercial because his political party wanted him to do it.		3.43	.92	.52
The candidate ran this commercial because a PAC pressured him to do it.		2.62	.81	.45
The candidate ran this commercial to respond to allegations made by the opposing candidate.		2.93	.91	.40
**The candidate ran this commercial because he was behind in the polls.*				*.71*
**The candidate ran this commercial to tell the voters what they wanted to hear.*				*.59*
**The candidate ran this commercial because a PAC was attacking him.*				*.25*
**The candidate ran this commercial to discuss an issue that voters think is important.*				*-.26*
**The candidate ran this commercial because the opposing candidate made misleading statements that had to be corrected.*				*-.19*

*Indicates items that were removed after CFA because modification indices of the CFA indicated that either their loading was low or indicated a high modification index (showing a possibility of being cross-loaded on two factors).

In addition to the CFA procedure illustrated above, one sample t-tests were also performed to test if the averaged mean scores on each of the intrinsic

and extrinsic attribution scales were significantly different from the default position of 1, indicated by "Strongly Disagree." The results of the t-tests showed that the final three-item scale used as the intrinsic attribution measure (M=3.23, SD=.96) and the final three-item scale used as the extrinsic attribution measure (M=2.99, SD=.65) were significantly different from the default position of 1 (t=41.88, df=325, p<.001 and t=55.64, df=325, p<.001, respectively). Table 5 summarizes the results of the one sample t-tests.

Table 5
One Sample T-tests for Intrinsic and Extrinsic Attributions

	Test Value = 1					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Intrinsic Attributions	41.879	325	.000	2.22495	2.1204	2.3295
Extrinsic Attribution	55.640	325	.000	1.99080	1.9204	2.0612

Hypothesis Two

H2a and H2b predicted that those participants exposed to negative candidate advertisements would make more intrinsic attributions and fewer extrinsic attributions than those exposed to positive candidate advertisements, respectively. As hypothesized in H2a, an independent sample t-test showed that intrinsic attributions (M=11.16, SD=1.92, *N*=170) of the sponsor's negative candidate advertisements were significantly greater than the intrinsic attributions (M=8.05, SD=2.88, *N*=156) of the sponsor's positive advertisements (t(324)=11.59 , P<.001). Consistent with the prediction of H2b, another t-test also demonstrated that extrinsic attributions (M=8.61, SD=1.56, *N*=170) of the

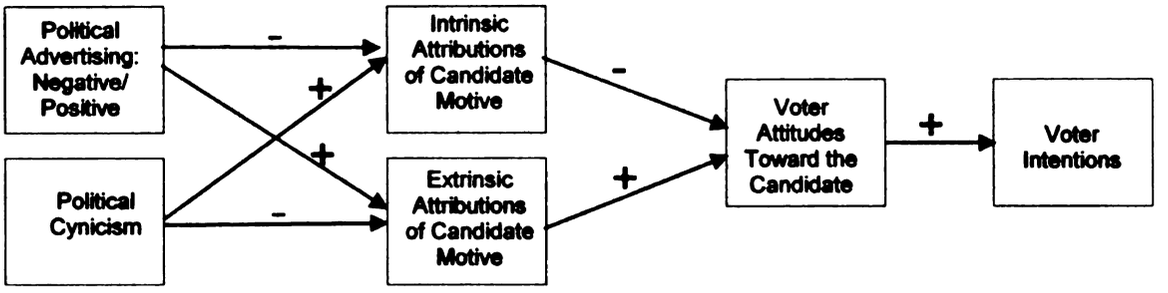
sponsor's negative candidate advertisements were significantly lower than of the extrinsic attribution (M=9.37, SD=2.23, N=156) of the sponsor's positive advertisements) (t(324)=-3.57, P<.001). Consequently, these findings supported H2a and H2b.

In order to examine the relationships hypothesized by H2a and H2b, this study also performed a path analysis using AMOS 5.0 and examined the hypothesized relationships. Structural equation modeling has many advantages over traditional analytical techniques for assessing measurement issues. First, SEM allows researchers to use observed variables to construct unobserved (latent) constructs, which have the strength of correcting for measurement and thus creating a "true score" of a construct. Second, using maximum likelihood (ML) estimation, SEM generates parameter estimates for multiple variables in a model, which are calculated simultaneously, allowing testing of a causal model and of predictive validity between measures. Finally, multiple group analysis in SEM allows the researcher to test the equality of models across multiple population groups (e.g. men versus women, Democrats versus Republicans) by testing for group invariance.

In the proposed structural model (See Figure 2), political advertising type (negative vs. positive ads being dummy-coded 0 and 1, respectively) and political cynicism are proposed to directly affect both intrinsic and extrinsic attributions, which have an influence on voter intention indirectly through voter's attitudes toward each candidate (Bush vs. Kerry). In order to assess this model, the proposed model is also divided into two sub-models, specifying the effects of

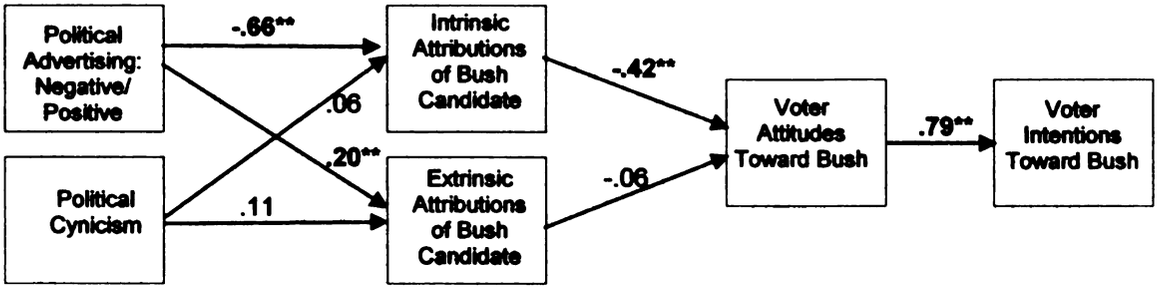
positive vs. negative ads on voter attributions, attitudes, and intention toward each candidate: one model is for Bush and the other is for Kerry.

Figure 2
Proposed Structural Model



In the first structural model, Bush-negative advertisements (coded 0) were found to lead to more voter attributions of intrinsic candidate motives than Bush-positive advertisements (coded 1) (β = -.66, p< .01), while Bush-negative advertisements (coded 0) were found to produce fewer voter attributions of extrinsic candidate motives than Bush-positive advertisements (coded 1) (β = .20, p< .01) (See Figure 2a).

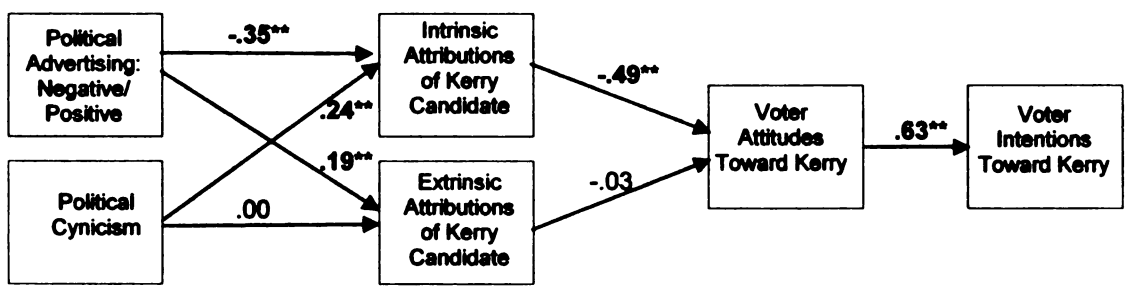
Figure 2a
Bush-Sponsoring Structural Model (N=166)



Note: * Coefficients are statically significant at P <.05 level.
** Coefficients are statically significant at P <.01 level.
Chi-Square = 39.0, df = 6, P < .01, GFI = .93, AGFI =.76, CFI = .90, NFI =.89, and RMSEA = .18

Consistent with the first model, the second model also showed that Kerry-negative advertisements were more related to voter's attributions of intrinsic candidate motives than were Kerry-positive advertisements ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .01$), while Kerry-negative advertisements were found to produce fewer voter attributions of extrinsic candidate motives than Kerry positive advertisements ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$). Thus, along with the t-tests above, the path analyses also confirmed H2a and H2b (See Figure 2b).

Figure 2b
Kerry-Sponsoring Structural Model (N=160)



Note: * Coefficients are statically significant at P <.05 level.
** Coefficients are statically significant at P <.01 level.
Chi-Square = 51.2, df = 6, P < .01, GFI = .92, AGFI =.70, CFI = .80, NFI =.79, and RMSEA = .22.

Hypothesis Three

H3a and H3b hypothesized that, regardless of the advertisement type, political cynicism would be positively related to intrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate advertisements and negatively related to extrinsic attributions of the sponsoring advertisements, respectively. A bivariate correlation analysis demonstrated that political cynicism had a significant positive relationship with intrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate advertisements

(r =.19, p<.01), supporting H3a. However, another bivariate correlation analysis demonstrated that political cynicism was not significantly associated with extrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate advertisements(r=.02, p>.10), disconfirming H3b.

Hypothesis Four

H4a and H4b hypothesized that voter attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate would be negatively related to intrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate advertisements and would be positively related to extrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate advertisements, respectively. As expected, the path analyses showed that, for those who were exposed to either Bush-sponsoring advertisements (β =-.42, p< .01) or Kerry-sponsoring advertisements (β =-.49, p< .01), their intrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate was negatively related to their attitude toward the sponsoring candidate. However, the path analyses showed at the same time that, for those who were exposed to either Bush or Kerry sponsored advertisements, their extrinsic attributions did not have a significant relationship with their attitude toward the sponsoring candidate, disconfirming H4b (See Figures 2a and 2b above).

H4c states that both intrinsic and extrinsic attributions mediate the effect of advertisement type (negative vs. positive) on voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate of the advertisement. Based on the findings of H2a, H2b, H4a, and H4b, the path analyses suggest that voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate becomes unfavorable (lower) only when voters develop intrinsic

attributions about the sponsoring candidate of the advertisements. However, the non-significant effect of extrinsic attributions on voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate indicates that extrinsic attributions do not mediate the effect of advertisement type on the voter attitude. Thus, these findings partially support H4c.

Hypothesis Five

H5 hypothesized that voter attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate would be positively related to voter intention. As expected, the path analyses showed that, for those who were exposed to either Bush-sponsored advertisements ($\beta = .79$ $p < .01$) or Kerry-sponsored advertisements ($\beta = .63$, $p < .01$), their attitude toward the sponsoring candidate had a positive impact on their intention to vote for the sponsoring candidate (See Figures 2a and 2b above).

Hypothesis Six

H6a posited that, regardless of advertisement type, women would make more attributions of intrinsic candidate motives for the sponsoring candidate than will men. An independent samples t-test was employed to test this hypothesis for positive and negative ads. As a result, the t-test demonstrated that women ($M=10.27$, $SD=2.63$, $N=158$) endorsed more intrinsic attributions than men ($M=9.15$, $SD=2.98$, $N=165$) when exposed to both advertisements, confirming H6a ($t(321)=3.59$, $P<.001$).

Further, H6b predicted that gender differences would moderate the effects of political advertisement type (negative versus positive) on attributions of candidate motive for the sponsoring candidate. To test the moderating effect of gender on intrinsic and extrinsic attributions, multiple-group structural equation analyses (Bollen 1989; Joreskog and Sobrom 1993; Scott-Lennox and Lennox 1995) were applied for each sponsoring candidate group (Bush and Kerry) to examine whether the parameter estimate between advertisement type (a dummy variable being coded 0 for negative and 1 for positive advertisement) and attributions (intrinsic and extrinsic) differs across gender type (female vs. male). Multiple-group structural equation modeling deals with moderators indirectly. In other words, the empirical criterion is whether there are different values for structural parameters at different values of a moderator. Thus, in order to test H6b and H7, the subjects were divided into groups according to their gender (female vs. male) and political party affiliation (Republican vs. Democrat).

The procedure for H6 is as follows: First, the sample was divided into the two gender groups. For each subsample, AMOS calculated a covariance matrix and then estimated the parameters for each subsample using maximum likelihood estimation. Then, the pairwise comparison of the path coefficients between political advertisement type (negative/positive) and attributions (intrinsic and extrinsic) was conducted, particularly based on the chi-square difference between the two models. Specifically, the two path coefficients between political advertising type and intrinsic attributions and between political advertising type and extrinsic attributions were constrained to be equal across females and males

in one model, whereas the two path coefficients were allowed to be freely different across the gender type in the other model. The difference of the two model's statistical significance was used as a test for the equal path coefficients by gender type, that is, whether the unconstrained model produced a better fit than the equality constrained model. If this was the case, then, the hypothesized moderating effect of gender type is supported.

Following this procedure, the pairwise comparison between females and males was conducted for each sponsoring candidate group (Bush and Kerry). For the group that saw Bush commercials (*N* for female = 80 and *N* for male =83), the pairwise comparison between females and males demonstrated that the chi-square for the unconstrained path coefficients between advertising type and attributions was 46.5 (df=12) and the chi-square for the constrained path coefficients was 59.3 (df=14). Given that the critical value of chi-square statistical difference with two degrees of freedom at the .05 level is 7.68 (e.g., critical value for one degree of freedom at the .05 level is 3.84), the chi-square difference between the two models (12.8 for two degrees of freedom) indicates that the chi-square estimate was better when the two parameters were allowed to be different rather than constrained to be equal. Thus, gender was found to moderate the effect of political advertisement type (positive/negative) on attributions in the Bush sponsoring candidate model.

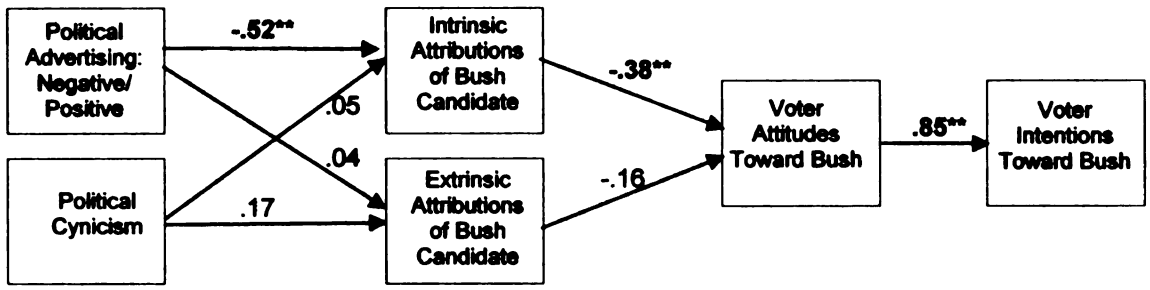
In order to test which path coefficient (between advertisement type and intrinsic attributions vs. between advertisement type and extrinsic attributions) plays a critical role in the moderating effect of gender, two pairwise comparisons

were further conducted separately. The findings of the analyses indicated that gender type significantly moderates the relationship between advertisement type and intrinsic attributions toward Bush (chi-square = 55.0, df=13) as well as the relationship between advertisement type and extrinsic attributions toward Bush (chi-square = 50.3, df=13).

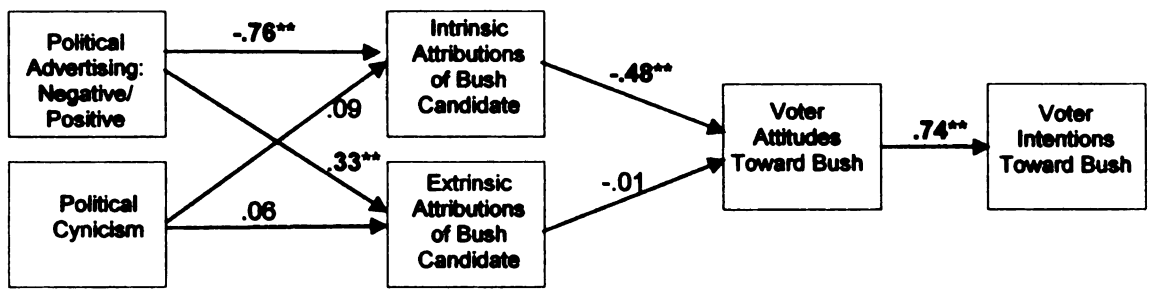
Specifically, in the unconstrained model (chi-square = 46.5, df=12), the path coefficients between political advertisement type and intrinsic attributions was -.52 ($p < .001$) for females and -.76 ($p < .001$) for males and the path coefficients between political advertisement type and extrinsic attributions was .04 ($p > .10$) for females and .33 ($p < .001$) for males. The two path coefficients between political advertisement type and intrinsic attributions across gender were statically significant, while only one coefficient between advertisement type and extrinsic attributions across gender was statistically significant (See Figure 3a). As indicated by these findings, males are more likely than females to endorse intrinsic attributions when both males and females were exposed to the negative advertisements, even though both males and females tend to endorse intrinsic attributions when both were exposed to the negative advertisement. At the same time, interestingly, the findings also suggest that, only for males, positive advertisements were more likely to generate extrinsic attributions than negative advertisements, when both males and females were exposed to positive political advertisements. However, for females, the two ad types did not make any difference in the level of extrinsic attributions.

Figure 3a
Gender-Based Multiple Comparison Analysis
For Bush-Sponsoring Structural Model

(For Female: N = 80)



(For Male: N = 83)



Note: * Coefficients are statically significant at P <.05 level.
** Coefficients are statically significant at P <.01 level.
Model Fit: Chi-Square = 46.5, df = 12, P < .01, GFI = .92, AGFI =.72, CFI = .90, NFI =.87, and RMSEA = .13.

The similar pattern of gender moderating effect was found in the Kerry sponsoring candidate model (*N* for female = 78 and *N* for male =82). Specifically, for the group exposed to Kerry commercials, the pairwise comparison between females and males demonstrated that the chi-square for the unconstrained path coefficients between advertising type and attributions was 59.0 (df=12) and the chi-square for the constrained path coefficients was 69.2 (df=14). Given that the critical value of chi-square statistical difference with two degrees of freedom at

the .05 level is 7.68 (e.g., critical value for one degree of freedom at the .05 level is 3.84), the chi-square difference between the two models (10.2 for two degrees of freedom) indicates that the chi-square estimate was better when the two parameters were allowed to be different rather than constrained to be equal. Like the Bush-sponsored ad model, gender was found to moderate the effect of political advertisement type (positive/negative) on attributions in the Kerry ad model.

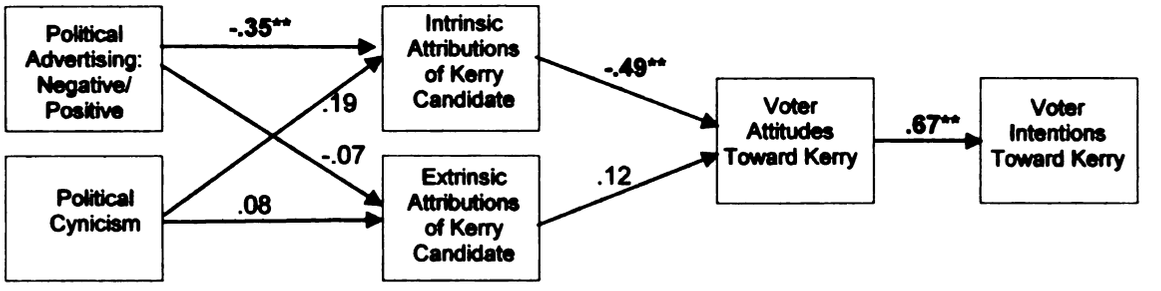
In order to test which path coefficient (between advertisement type and intrinsic attributions vs. between advertisement type and extrinsic attributions) makes a contribution to the moderating effect of gender, the same pairwise comparison procedures as above were also employed. The findings of the analyses indicated that gender type significantly moderates the relationship between advertisement type and extrinsic attributions toward Kerry (chi-square = 68.6, df=13) while gender type did not moderate the relationship between advertisement type and intrinsic attributions toward Kerry (chi-square = 59.0, df=13).

Specifically, in the unconstrained model (chi-square = 59.0, df=12), the path coefficients between political advertisement type and intrinsic attributions was -.35 ($p < .001$) for females and -.33 ($p < .001$) for males and the path coefficients between political advertisement type and extrinsic attributions was -.07 ($p > .10$) for females and .39 ($p < .001$) for males. The two path coefficients between political advertisement type and intrinsic attributions across gender were statically significant, while only one coefficient between advertisement type and

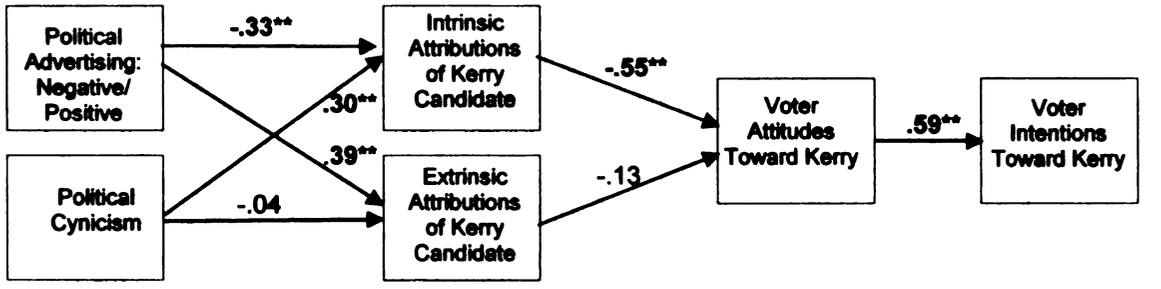
extrinsic attributions across gender was statistically significant (See Figure 3b). As a result, like the Bush-sponsored advertisement model, the findings also suggest that only males tend to endorse extrinsic attributions when both males and females were exposed to positive political advertisements. However, unlike the Bush-sponsored advertisement model, these findings suggest that both males and females would not endorse different levels of intrinsic attributions when both were exposed to Kerry-sponsored negative advertisements. Thus, based on these multiple group analyses, this study partly confirmed H6b predicting gender differences would moderate the effects of political advertisement type (negative versus positive) on the attributions of candidate motive for each sponsoring candidate.

Figure 3b
Gender-Based Multiple Comparison Analysis
For Kerry-Sponsoring Structural Model

(For Female: N = 78)



(For Male: N = 82)



Note: * Coefficients are statically significant at P <.05 level.
** Coefficients are statically significant at P <.01 level.
Model Fit: Chi-Square = 59.0, df = 12, P < .01, GFI = .91, AGFI =.68, CFI = .81, NFI =.78, and RMSEA = .16.

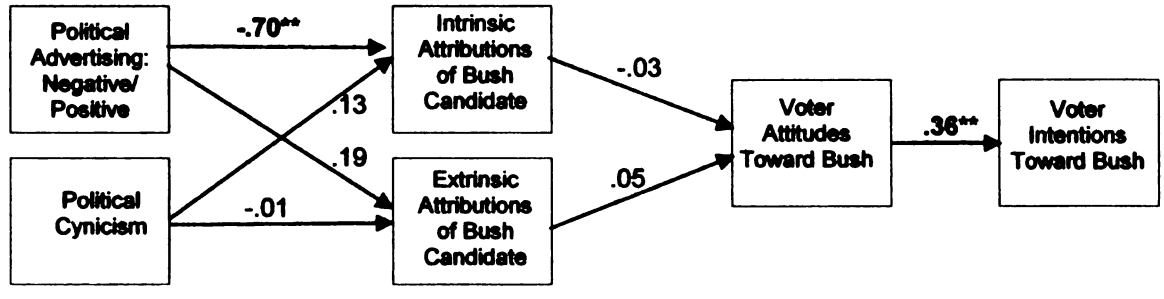
Hypothesis Seven

H7 hypothesized that differences in political party affiliation would moderate the effects of attributions of candidate motive for the sponsoring candidate on voter attitude. The same multiple-group comparison analyses procedure as conducted for gender was applied for testing this hypothesis. Specifically, for the Bush sponsoring candidate model (*N* for Republican = 72 and *N* for Democrat = 47; see Figure 4a), the pairwise comparison between those

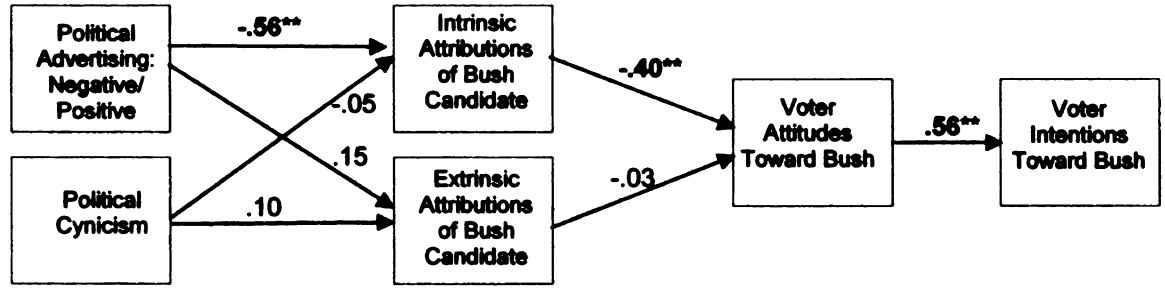
affiliated with the Republican party and those with the Democratic Party demonstrated that the chi-square for the unconstrained path coefficients between attributions and voter attitude was 56.7 (df=12) and the chi-square for the constrained path coefficients was 64.6 (df=14). The chi-square difference between the two models (7.9) is greater than the critical value of chi-square statistical difference with two degrees of freedom at the .05 level (7.68), which indicates that the chi-square estimate was better when the two parameters were freely calculated rather than being constrained to be the same.

Figure 4a
Political Party-Based Multiple Comparison Analysis
For Bush-Sponsoring Structural Model

(For Republican: N = 72)



(For Democrat: N = 47)



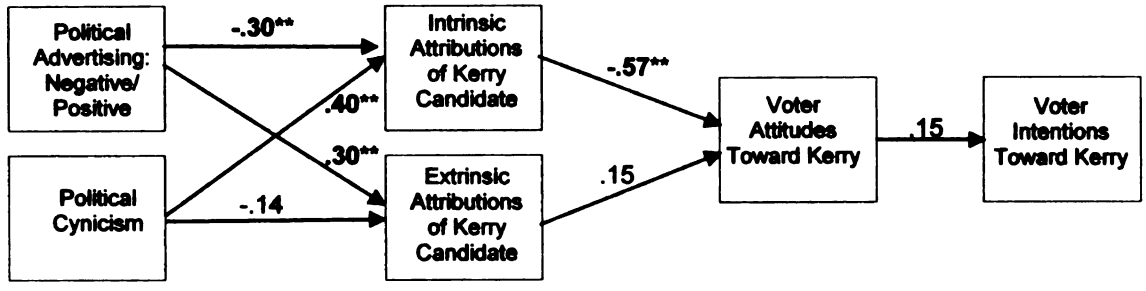
Note: * Coefficients are statically significant at P <.05 level.
** Coefficients are statically significant a P <.01 level.
Model Fit: Chi-Square = 56.7, df = 12, P < .01, GFI = .88, AGFI =.58, CFI = .66, NFI =.65, and RMSEA = .18.

In order to test which path coefficient (between intrinsic attribution and voter attitude vs. between extrinsic attribution and voter attitude) plays a critical role in the moderating effect of the political party affiliation, two pairwise comparisons were further conducted separately. The findings of the analyses indicated that political party significantly moderates the relationship between intrinsic attributions and voter attitude toward Bush (chi-square = 64.4, df=13) while political party does not significantly moderate the relationship between extrinsic attributions and voter attitude toward Bush (chi-square = 56.8, df=13). Specifically, in the unconstrained model (chi-square = 56.7, df=12), the path coefficients between intrinsic attribution and voter attitude was .03 ($p > .10$) for those of the Republican party and -.40 ($p < .01$) for those of the Democratic party and the path coefficients between extrinsic attribution and voter attitude was -.05 ($p > .10$) for those of the Republican party and .03 ($p > .10$) for those of Democratic party. In addition, the findings also indicate that the path coefficient from intrinsic attributions to voter attitude was only statistically significant when the political party was Democratic ($\beta = -.40$, $p < .01$), while the rest of the path coefficients between intrinsic attributions and voter attitude and between extrinsic attributions were not statistically significant (See Figure 4a above). These findings suggest that voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate, Bush, becomes significantly unfavorable when a Democratic rather than a Republican voter endorsed intrinsic attributions. However, the voter attitude toward Bush would not be significantly affected when either Democrats or Republicans endorsed extrinsic attributions.

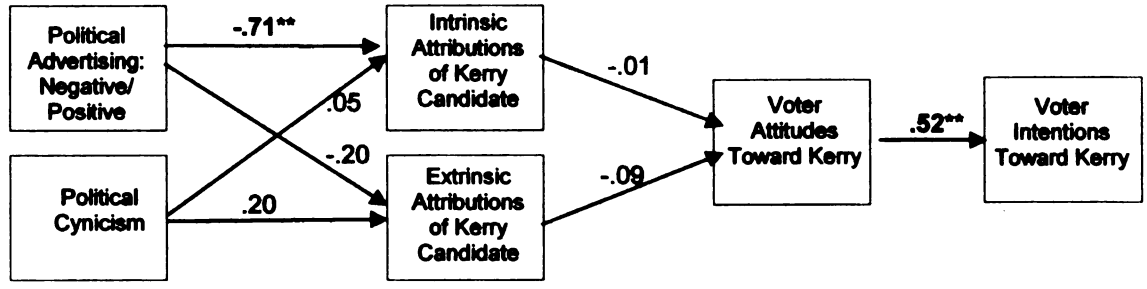
The same multiple-group comparison analyses procedure was also applied to the other sub-model of the Kerry sponsoring candidate model (*N* for Republican = 69 and *N* for Democrat = 42; see Figure 4b) in order to test whether political party affiliation would moderate the effect of attributions on voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate, Kerry. Specifically, for the group exposed to Kerry commercials, the pairwise comparison between those affiliated with the Republican party and those with the Democratic party demonstrated that the chi-square for the different path coefficients between attributions and voter attitude was 16.1 (df=12) and the chi-square for the equal path coefficients was 26.6 (df=14). The chi-square difference between the two models (10.5) is greater than the critical value of 7.68 for two degrees of freedom at the .05 level. This indicates that the chi-square estimate was better when the two parameters were unconstrained rather than being constrained to be same.

Figure 4b
Political Party-Based Multiple Comparison Analysis
For Kerry-Sponsoring Structural Model

(For Republican: N = 69)



(For Democrat: N = 42)



Note: * Coefficients are statically significant at P <.05 level.
** Coefficients are statically significant at P <.01 level.
Model fit: Chi-Square = 16.1, df = 12, P > .10, GFI = .96, AGFI =.84, CFI = .97, NFI =.92, and RMSEA = .06.

Subsequently, two pairwise comparisons were separately conducted to test which path coefficient (between intrinsic attribution and voter attitude vs. between extrinsic attribution and voter attitude) significantly moderated the effect of attribution on voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate. The findings of the analyses indicated that political party significantly moderates the relationship between intrinsic attributions and voter attitude toward Kerry (chi-square = 26.4, df=13) while political party does not significantly moderate the relationship

between extrinsic attributions and voter attitude toward Kerry (chi-square = 18.9, df=13). Thus, in the unconstrained model (chi-square = 16.1, df=12), the path coefficients between intrinsic attribution and voter attitude were -.57 ($p < .01$) for those of the Republican party and -.01 ($p > .10$) for those of the Democratic party, and the path coefficients between extrinsic attribution and voter attitude were .15 ($p > .10$) for those of the Republican party and -.09 ($p > .10$) for those of the Democratic party (See Figure 4b above). These findings suggest that voter attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate, Kerry, became significantly unfavorable particularly when Republicans endorsed intrinsic attributions but not when Democrats did. However, voter attitude toward Kerry was not significantly affected when either Democrats or Republicans endorsed extrinsic attributions.

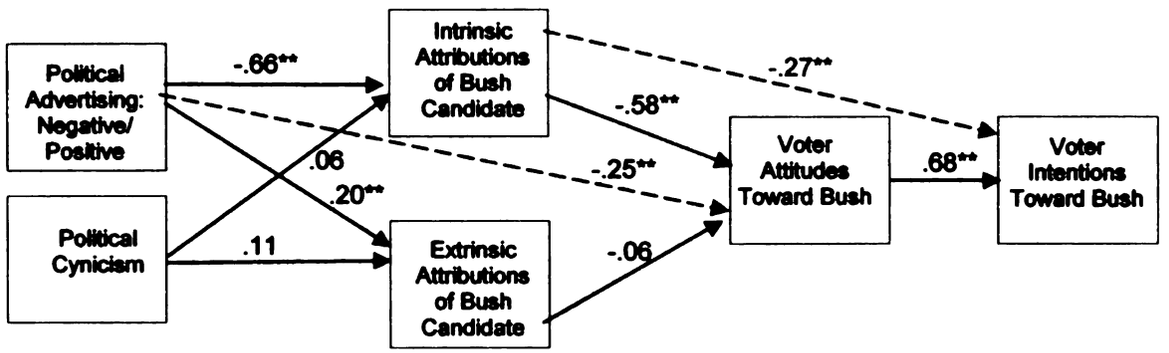
Fit of the Structural Model

The multiple fit indices suggest that the proposed structural model did not fit the data very well. Specifically, first, for the Bush-sponsored ad model, chi-square was 39 (df=6), $P < .01$, GFI was .93, AGFI was .76, CFI was .90, NFI was .89, and RMSEA was .18 (See Figure 2a above). Secondly, the multiple fit indices for the Kerry-sponsored ad model also suggest that the proposed structural model was not consistent with the data: chi-square was 51.2 (df=6), $P < .01$, GFI was .92, AGFI was .70, CFI was .80, NFI was .79, and RMSEA was .22 (See Figure 2b above). Thus, the proposed model was re-specified to fit the data.

To respecify a recursive or nonrecursive model, there are two ways to test the model: model trimming and model building (Klein 1998). Model trimming refers to a strategy where the researcher begins a path analysis with a just-identified model and by eliminating paths, simplifies it. The chi-square increases as paths are trimmed, indicating that the fit of the model becomes worse. In the second method, model building, paths are added to a null model. The chi-square decreases as paths are added to the model, indicating an improved model fit. With either strategy, the eliminating (or adding) of paths is determined based on theoretical considerations or face validity, although it may be guided by empirical information obtained from a statistical program (i.e., a modification index or the chi square difference test).

In the re-specification process, two new significant paths emerged in the Bush-sponsoring candidate model; from political advertising type to voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate and from intrinsic attributions to voter intention to vote for the candidate (See Figure 5a). Now, the multiple fit indices suggest the revised model is consistent with the data very well: chi-square was 1.8 (df=4), P>.10, GFI was .99, AGFI was .98, CFI was 1.0, NFI was .99, and RMSEA was less than .001. These findings suggest that political advertisements (negative vs. positive) affect voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate directly as well as indirectly through the attributions that voters endorse. Also, these findings suggest that the attributions influence voter intention directly as well as indirectly through the voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate.

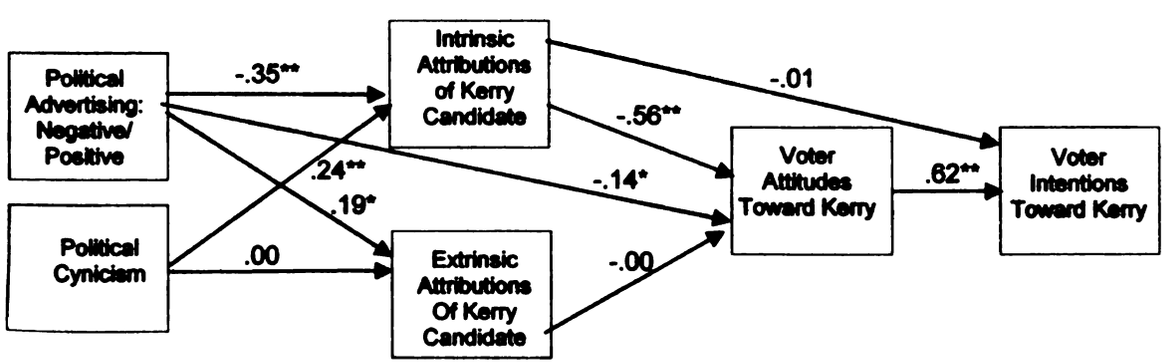
Figure 5a
Revised Bush-Sponsoring Structural Model (N=166)



Note: * Coefficients are statically significant at P <.05 level.
** Coefficients are statically significant at P <.01 level.
—> paths emerged
Model Fit: Chi-Square = 1.8, df = 4, P >.10, GFI = .99, AGFI =.98, CFI = 1.00, NFI =.99, and RMSEA <.001

However, as opposed to the Bush-sponsoring candidate model, adding the same two paths to the Kerry-sponsoring candidate model did not improve the model fit (See Figure 5b). The multiple fit indices suggest the revised model is still not consistent wit the data: chi-square was 47.9 (df=4), P<.01, GFI was .92, AGFI was .58, CFI was .81, NFI was .80, and RMSEA was .263.

Figure 5b
Revised Kerry-Sponsoring Structural Model (N=160)



Note: * Coefficients are statically significant at P <.05 level.
** Coefficients are statically significant at P <.01 level.
Model Fit: Chi-Square = 47.9, df = 4, P < .01, GFI = .92, AGFI =.58, CFI = .81, NFI =.80, and RMSEA = .263

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine whether attribution theory could be used to explain the process by which voters exposed to political advertising messages formed attitudes toward candidates for office. Although most analyses of political attitudes and behavior involve survey research, controlled experiments are sometimes chosen in political advertising as a more precise way to measure political advertising exposure (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Pfau et al. 2001; Pfau et al. 2002; Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams 2004). An experimental design was chosen in the current study because it enabled the researcher to manipulate the stimulus material and to control exposure rather than relying on participants' memory about the political commercials they may have seen. Despite the considerable amount of research in political advertising, however, there are still the questions of exactly how, how much, and under what conditions political advertising matters. It was believed that attribution theory would shed light on the effects of political advertising as a whole and begin to answer those unanswered questions.

With this primary interest in the role of attributions in the formation of political advertising attitudes, the current study proposed and tested a structural equation model with specific hypotheses in order to examine the role of both

intrinsic and extrinsic attributions on voters' attitudes and voting intentions. Additionally, individual difference factors (gender and political party affiliation) were considered to see if they presented a moderating effect on voters' attitudes and intentions toward the candidate. Through this attempt, the current study might substantially contribute not only to the theoretical accumulation of attribution theory literature but also to the practical issues of designing more effective political advertising.

Before discussing the results of the present study, it should be noted that it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of political campaigns (Thorson, Christ, and Caywood 1991). Ultimately, the final measure and bottom line for political campaigns is whether the candidate won or lost. Further, because many things happen simultaneously in a real election, "it is difficult to isolate the impact of political advertising" (Thorson, Christ, and Caywood 1991, p. 483). The present study, however, revealed many interesting effects of political advertising.

Discussion and Implications

Overall, the results of Hypothesis One are consistent with the application of attribution theory in that individuals are believed to regularly engage in cognitive processes in which they assign underlying causes or explanations to observed events. Most relevant to the current research is that individuals also apply these attributional activities to advertising messages (Davis 1994; Folkes 1988; Gotlieb and Sarel 1991; Settle and Golden 1974; Smith and Hunt 1986) in order to explain the underlying motives of the source of the advertisement. In the

current study, it was believed that attributions of candidate motive would be formed in response to the political advertising message when voters' attempted to determine the underlying motivations of the candidate in the advertisement. After being exposed to political advertising commercials, respondents did indeed endorse attributional statements of candidate motive, supporting H1. Furthermore, it was believed that in response to the candidate messages that a two-factor model of attributions (intrinsic and extrinsic) would emerge. The results of a confirmatory factor analysis supported this premise with factor loadings on the two factors being statistically significant, and multiple fit indices indicating that the two-factor model fit the data very well. However, it should be noted that all of the intrinsic attributions that were retained through CFA were negatively phrased statements. They represent adverse views of the sponsor as a person. This unfavorable orientation should be kept in mind as the other results of the study are considered. Furthermore, the results of the factor analysis indicate that the attributions endorsed by voters may not simply fall into theoretical categories of intrinsic and extrinsic, but instead there are subtleties within each of these categories. As mentioned above, because the intrinsic attributions were negative, it had an overall effect on the model. Future research should consider and more fully explore the factors that may emerge.

Hypothesis two proposed that, as a result of exposure to negative candidate advertisements, voters would endorse more intrinsic than extrinsic attributions. This hypothesis was proposed on the basis of prior research involving comparisons between positive and negative political advertising which

revealed that participants exposed to negative advertising generated more source candidate derogations and were more negative toward the political candidate in general than were participants exposed to positive political advertising (Hill 1989; Pinkleton, Um, and Austin 2002). The findings of the prior studies suggested that negative advertisements would yield attributions of intrinsic candidate motive more than would positive ads (Meirick 2002), because they would be attributing the cause of the advertisements to the "mean spiritedness" of the candidate, rather than outside forces contributing to the commercial messages. The rationale behind this was that intrinsic motivations would be seen as internal to the candidate and controlled by the candidate, whereas extrinsic motivations are seen as external or situational (i.e., beyond the control of the candidate). The current research supported Hypotheses 2a and 2b through two different analyses: t-tests and structural equation modeling, indicating that the results were consistent for both candidates.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b proposed that, regardless of the advertisement type, political cynicism would be positively related to intrinsic attributions of the sponsoring candidate advertisements and would be negatively related to extrinsic attributions of the sponsoring advertisements, respectively. Although results indicated that political cynicism was significantly related to intrinsic attributions of sponsoring candidate motive in support of H3a, no support was found for a relationship between political cynicism and extrinsic attributions. Cynicism as a variable has often been used to refer to a lack of confidence and a feeling of mistrust toward politicians specifically (rather than the political system

as a whole) (Austin and Pinkleton 1995; Dionne 1991; Perloff and Kinsey 1990; Pinkleton, Um, and Austin 2002; Tedesco 2002). This may have resulted in the differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic attributions, such as was found in the present case. Although cynicism directly related to increased intrinsic attributions (in effect "blaming" the candidate), cynicism did not relate to extrinsic attributions in which the blame was placed on external factors, such as the political system as a whole.

Garramone et al. (1990) has argued that political advertising and cynicism would not be significantly related for two main reasons: first because political advertising may be deemed informative, and second because political advertising may increase involvement. Other researchers have argued that "blame-placing" messages provide a basis for evaluation of candidate performance and useful criteria in making voting choices so that political information could be viewed as a useful source of criteria for making political choices (Bowen, Stamm, and Clark 2000; Jones and Davis 1965; Lau 1982), rather than contributing or being related to cynicism. This prior research provides one explanation for why cynicism was related to intrinsic attributions, which place the blame on the candidates themselves, rather than an increase in extrinsic attributions, which attribute motives for actions to the overall political process. This finding provides an important note for political consultants and candidates in that as voters become increasingly cynical, there is the tendency to "blame" the political candidates personally for actions during the campaign, and particularly for the political advertising messages being broadcast. Candidates should

remember this propensity for "blame" on behalf of the voting public when preparing political messages.

Hypotheses 4a, 4b, and 4c proposed that both intrinsic and extrinsic attributions would affect related attitudes toward the candidates and voting behavior through a mediation process such has been found in prior attributional research in which consequences of the attributions (which include changes in affect and behavior) proceeded directly from the attributions themselves (Harvey and Weary 1984; Kelley 1973). As hypothesized, when exposed to either Bush or Kerry advertisements, intrinsic attributions of candidate motive were related to voters' attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate. This supports the belief that voter attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate in the advertising message become increasingly unfavorable when voters endorse intrinsic attributions about the sponsoring candidate, in effect blaming the candidate personally for the advertising message. However, H4b was disconfirmed in that extrinsic attributions of candidate motive did not affect voters' attitudes toward the candidates. Further, in connection with H4c, while path analyses support a mediation effect of intrinsic attributions on voter attitudes, a similar effect of extrinsic attributions on voter attributes was not found. As discussed in connection with Hypothesis three, it appears that, although voters' do agree with extrinsic attributions of candidate motive in which they acknowledge that external forces (such as the political process, a particular political party, or PACs) have a role in the content of political advertising messages (see discussion of hypothesis one above), these extrinsic attributions do not affect their attitude toward the

sponsoring candidate. The voters in the current research were more likely to attribute responsibility for the advertising content to the politicians themselves, ultimately leading to negative attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate. This finding may suggest that it would be more appropriate for negative political ads to be visibly sponsored by political parties or PACs rather than the candidate themselves due to a lack of correlation between extrinsic attributions and attitudes. In prior research, ads sponsored by groups other than the candidate themselves (i.e. "soft-money" or "issue advocacy" ads) enhanced overall attitudes toward those candidates supported in the advertisements, and they elicited more positive perceptions of those candidates' competence and character (Pfau et al. 20002). Further research has shown that these ads are seen as more credible and persuasive than candidate-sponsored versions of the same appeal (Groenendyk and Valentino 2002).

Hypothesis five supported an oft-found result in political advertising research, that attitudes toward candidates will affect voting behavior. This finding is important to note because, although prior research has indicated a strong correlation between attitudes and intention, it is important that researchers continue to investigate under which conditions such correlations exist.

Hypotheses six and seven considered whether individual difference variables, gender and political party affiliation, would moderate the effect of the attributions on voter attitudes and intentions.

Hypotheses 6a and 6b proposed that, because women are more strongly affected by political advertising and are considerably more likely to blame the

sponsoring candidate for the political message, women would be more likely to endorse intrinsic attributions than men, and that a moderating effect of gender would emerge. As expected women were more likely to endorse intrinsic attributions than men when exposed to either positive or negative advertisements, confirming H6a. Of interesting note are the results of H6b, which explored the moderating effect of gender through structural equation analysis, and specifically considered whether ad type (positive vs. negative) would interact with gender. Findings indicated that *men* were more likely than women to endorse intrinsic attributions when both males and females were exposed to the *negative* advertisements, even though both males and females tend to endorse intrinsic attributions when both were exposed to the negative advertisement. At the same time, interestingly, the findings also suggested that, only for males, positive advertisements were more likely to lead to extrinsic attributions than negative advertisements when both males and females were exposed to positive political advertisements.

One explanation for this gender gap might be as a result of gender-related differences in socialization (Kern and Just 1997; King and McConnell 2003) or the different political attitudes of women and men as a consequence of different life experiences (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 2000). Quite often the issues that are focused on in political campaigns are among those that demonstrate gender differences, such as social security in the current campaign. "The keys to any successful advertising campaign—in the political arena or elsewhere—are reaching the right target audience and 'pushing the right buttons'" (King and

McConnell 2003, p. 854). As men and women react differently to the personalities/images of the candidates and to campaign advertising, candidates and campaign managers would be well advised to plan their campaign strategies with these differences in mind.

Hypothesis seven further explored an individual difference variable, that of political party affiliation. Partisanship and political party affiliation have often been mentioned as variables impacting voter decisions. In previous studies, the persuasiveness of political ads varied depending on viewers' political party affiliation (Pfau et al. 2001), with the direction of change in candidate vote choice as a result of exposure to advertising messages highly related to partisanship (Faber, Tims, and Schmitt 1990; Merritt 1984; Robideaux 2002). Voters' evaluations of ads were also affected by party affiliation (Robideaux 1998, 2002). As expected, political party affiliation did moderate the effect of attributions on voter attitudes in both the Bush and Kerry models.

Further analysis was conducted in order to identify whether intrinsic or extrinsic attributions played a more critical role in moderating the effect of the political party affiliation. On the basis of additional pairwise comparisons it was found that voter attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate, Bush, became significantly unfavorable particularly when Democratic rather than Republican voters endorsed intrinsic attributions. However, the voter attitude toward Bush was not significantly affected when either Democrats or Republicans endorsed extrinsic attributions. This result was the same for the Kerry model in that voter attitudes toward the sponsoring candidate, Kerry, became significantly

unfavorable particularly when intrinsic attributions were endorsed by Republican rather than Democratic voters, and not affected when either Democrats or Republicans endorsed extrinsic attributions.

Fit of the Model

Because the results of initial path analyses showed that the hypothesized model did not fit the data, the model was respecified. The current research proposed an alternative model based on the respecification of the original model. In the re-specification process, two new significant paths emerged in the Bush ad model; from political advertising type to voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate and from intrinsic attributions to voter intention to vote for the candidate (See Figure 5a). These findings suggest that political advertisements (negative vs. positive) affect voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate directly as well as indirectly through the attributions that voters endorse. Also, these findings suggest that the attributions influence voter intention directly as well as indirectly through the voter attitude toward the sponsoring candidate. However, as opposed to the Bush ad model, adding the same two paths to the Kerry-sponsoring candidate model did not improve the model fit (See Figure 5b). This result is interesting in that it points out possible differences between either (1) the advertisements run by the candidates, or (2) something fundamentally different between Bush/Kerry supporters. Further research should continue to explore these differences in an effort to identify possible rationales.

Limitations

The current research is subject to the usual limitations of experimental research. In the "real world" of political campaigns, voters have many different sources of information about the candidates—television news, newspapers, peer groups, etc., with competing messages transmitted via different channels amid a variety of social and cultural influences. It is improbable that potential voters would see only negative or positive advertising sponsored by one candidate. A more likely occurrence would feature a mix of positive, negative, and comparative political advertising, along with commentary in the news media regarding the accuracy of campaign messages aired by the candidates. In an experimental setting, each of these influences and messages are necessarily limited in order to examine the relationships between independent and dependent variables. This lack of context hinders the external validity of experimental research. By controlling for extraneous variables, important sources of influence and their interaction with other campaign elements are eliminated. The result is an increase in internal validity at the expense of external validity.

A second limitation involves measurement issues. One important dependent variable (Voter Intentions) was measured utilizing a single-item measure. When considering that multi-item measures are more reliable and valid than single-item measures, the weaknesses of this measure's reliability and validity arises as one of the limitations of this study.

In addition, subject responses to test items cannot be accepted as the equivalent of their political behavior or attitudes. While scaled items may be taken as indications of behavior and attitudes, there is a substantial difference between projecting responses onto five-point scales and the actual behavioral and attitudinal outcomes that are likely to result from exposure to political advertising. In addition, these measures are collected at a single point in time, immediately after exposure to experimental stimuli. Such measurement, while a necessary part of the design of the experiment, may not be accurate in its attitudinal and behavioral representation.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research examining the application of attribution theory to political advertising should attempt to provide a greater depth of understanding concerning the findings disclosed in this study. Further information needs to be gathered in order to confirm or disconfirm these results and provide additional information concerning this important field of research. At the most basic level, additional research should be conducted in an attempt to replicate these findings, correcting for the weaknesses existing in this study.

An important aspect of replication involves the use of alternative media, such as radio and print, to study political advertising effects. In this instance, an examination of different types of political advertising messages would provide additional information concerning the role of communication modality in political advertising effects.

Finally, research efforts should be made that attempt to examine the influences of comparative political advertising, in addition to the standard comparisons of positive and negative political advertising. While some social scientists have suggested that comparative advertising is necessarily negative advertising (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1989, 1991), it is reasonable to expect that are differences in voter responses among the three. In this instance, a three-way comparison among positive, negative, and comparative advertising would be useful in separating the effects of comparative information from the influences of positive and negative information in political advertising.

Conclusion

How voting decisions are made and whether political campaigns matter are long-standing questions in the field of politics. Perloff (2002) laments that researchers have not sufficiently probed the mechanisms that mediate political ad effects on candidate attitudes. Although the "minimal effects" model has had a strong influence on the field, an emerging consensus holds that, given the right conditions, political campaigns and political advertising can have an influence on individual voting behavior and electoral outcomes.

One of the aims of the current study was to further explore a theoretical basis for the effects of political advertising on voter attitudes and behavior, namely that of attribution theory. In addition, important mediating and moderating variables were proposed and explored. The primary conclusion that follows from the research presented here is that attribution theory can be used to

evaluate voter responses to positive and negative political advertising, and in particular that intrinsic attributions of candidate motive directly affect voters' evaluations of the sponsoring candidate, while mediating the effects of political advertising on voter attitudes and behaviors.

As mentioned above, although decisive conclusions are not drawn to determine the impact of negative and positive political advertising, the findings of the present study have implications for politicians, political consultants, and advertising agencies. The findings raise doubts about the wisdom and value of using negative political advertising in a political campaign. As Merritt (1984) noted, respondents' negative attitudes toward both candidates and their overall disapproval of negative political advertising resulted from the increasing use of negative political advertising during the 80's, producing cynicism toward politics and declining political participation. Because negative political advertising that identifies the sponsor and the target hurts both candidates, when a candidate uses such advertising, it would be better not to identify the sponsor. However, the law now requires that the sponsor be identified. Garramone (1984) suggested that "independent political action committees sponsoring negative advertising offer the candidates they help this anonymity advantage. Independent sponsors may contribute the additional benefit of greater credibility" (p. 259).

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Transcripts

Bush Positive Ad

Full screen shot of George Bush Supertext: WWW.GEORGEWBUSH.COM	I'm George W. Bush and I approved this message.
Full screen shot of George Bush	GEORGE W. BUSH: One of the most important parts of a reform agenda is to encourage people to own something.
Full screen sot of house.	To own their own home.
Full screen shot of woman turning on open sign in coffee shop.	Own their own business.
Full screen shot of older woman and man talking with children.	Own their own health care plan.
Full screen shot of George Bush.	Own a piece of their retirement.
Two shots of workers smiling into camera.	Reforms that trust the people.
Full screen shot of George Bush.	Reforms that say government must stand on the side of people.
Full screen shot of factory workers	Cause I understand that if you own something
Full screen shot of George Bush	You have a vital stake in the future of America.

Small print: Approved by President Bush and Paid for by Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.

Bush Negative Ad

Full screen shot of George Bush Supertext: WWW.GEORGEWBUSH.COM	I'm George W. Bush and I approved this message.
Small shot of John Kerry. Supertext: KERRY ECONOMIC RECORD.	VOICE OVER NARRATOR: John Kerry's economic record. Troubling.
Medium shot of two elderly men Supertext: TAXES ON SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS	Kerry voted to increase taxes on social security benefits.

Full screen shot of woman turning on open sign in coffee shop. Supertext: OPPOSED TAX CREDITS FOR HEALTH CARE.	And he voted against giving small businesses tax credits to buy health care for employees.
Full screen shot of person pumping gas Supertext: SUPPORTED 50¢/GAL GAS TAX.	Kerry even supported raising taxes on gasoline. 50 cents a gallon.
Medium shot of young couple. Supertext: RAISE TAXES.	Now John Kerry's plan will raise taxes by at least $900 billion dollars
Title: $900 BILLION	his first 100 days in office.
Small screen shot of John Kerry. Supertext: THE FIRST 100 DAYS. $900 BILLION.	And that's just his first 100 days.

Small print: Approved by President Bush and Paid for by Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.

Kerry Positive Ad

Medium shot of John Kerry Supertext: JOHN KERRY	JOHN KERRY [to camera]: As President, I'll set a few clear national priorities for America.
Supertext: KEEP AMERICA SECURE	First, we will keep this country safe and secure.
Supertext: DEFEND AMERICAN JOBS	Second, I'll put an end to tax incentives that encourage American companies to ship jobs overseas.
Title: LEARN MORE ABOUT JOHN KERRY'S PLAN FOR AMERICA JohnKerry.com	VOICE OVER: And third, we'll invest in education and healthcare. KERRY: My priorities are jobs and healthcare. My commitment is to defend this country. I'm John Kerry and I approved this message because together we can build a stronger America.

Small print: Approved by John Kerry and paid for by John Kerry for President

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Kerry Negative Ad

Closeup of small girl swinging on swing.

Small shot of George Bush superimposed over picture of factory	VOICEOVER NARRATOR: Under George Bush and Right Wing Republicans we've

Supertext: JOBS LOST	lost 2.7 million manufacturing jobs.
Supertext: GEORGE BUSH AND RIGHT WING REPUBLICANS: WORST RECORD SINCE HOOVER	The worst jobs record since Herbert Hoover.
Shot of woman looking into camera Supertext: NEW JOBS PAY $9000 LESS.	New jobs pay $9000 less.
Closeup of small girl swinging on swing.	
Shot of factory worker looking into camera. Supertext: HEALTH CARE COSTS SKYROCKET.	Health care costs skyrocket.
Screen shot of older couple Supertext: HIGHER DEDUCTIBLES AND CO-PAYS	Higher deductibles and co-pays.
Screen shot of person pumping gas Supertext: GAS PRICES SOAR	Gas prices soar.
Small shot of George Bush superimposed over picture of office Supertext: GEORGE BUSH AND RIGHT WING REPUBLICANS	George Bush and Right Wing Republicans
Screen shot of factory worker on the line Supertext: EXPORT JOBS	Give tax breaks for companies that export jobs.
Closeup of small girl swinging on swing	
Screen shot of Enron logo Supertext: CORPORATE HANDOUTS	Handouts to Hallaberton and Enron
Screen shot of couple with baby Supertext: SQUEEZE THE MIDDLE CLASS	But they put the squeeze on the middle class.
Closeup of small girl swinging on swing	
Small shot of John Kerry Supertext: IT'S TIME FOR A NEW DIRECTION	It's time for a new direction. I'm John Kerry and I approved this message.

Small print: Approved by John Kerry and paid for by John Kerry for President

Appendix B
Instrument

WELCOME. SELECT YOUR ANSWERS BY CLICKING ON THE APPROPRIATE CIRCLE NEXT TO EACH QUESTION.

Political Cynicism

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Select your answers by clicking on the appropriate circle next to each question.

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree/Disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do	O	O	O	O	O
One never really knows what politicians think	O	O	O	O	O
People like me don't have any say about what the government does	O	O	O	O	O
Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on	O	O	O	O	O
One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing	O	O	O	O	O
Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over	O	O	O	O	O
Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think	O	O	O	O	O
One cannot always trust what politicians say	O	O	O	O	O

Attitudes about Advertising

Below is a set of word pairs. Please click the circle closest to the adjective which you believe best reflects your feelings about advertising in general. The more appropriate that adjective seems, the closer to the adjective you click the circle.

Advertising in general

Good	O	O	O	O	O	Bad
Unpleasant	O	O	O	O	O	Pleasant
Favorable	O	O	O	O	O	Unfavorable
Unconvincing	O	O	O	O	O	Convincing
Believable	O	O	O	O	O	Unbelievable
Biased	O	O	O	O	O	Unbiased

Candidate Evaluations

Below is a set of word pairs. When thinking about the **Republican presidential candidate, George W. Bush**, click the circle closest to the adjective which you believe describes the candidate better. The more appropriate that adjective seems, the closer to the adjective you click the circle.

GEORGE W. BUSH

Qualified	O	O	O	O	O	Unqualified
Sophisticated	O	O	O	O	O	Unsophisticated
Honest	O	O	O	O	O	Dishonest
Sincere	O	O	O	O	O	Insincere
Successful	O	O	O	O	O	Unsuccessful
Attractive	O	O	O	O	O	Unattractive
Calm	O	O	O	O	O	Excitable
Aggressive	O	O	O	O	O	Unaggressive
Strong	O	O	O	O	O	Weak
Passive	O	O	O	O	O	Active
Friendly	O	O	O	O	O	Unfriendly
Believable	O	O	O	O	O	Unbelievable
Unconvincing	O	O	O	O	O	Convincing
Biased	O	O	O	O	O	Unbiased

Below is another set of word pairs. Now, when thinking about the **Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry**, click the circle closest to the adjective which you believe describes the candidate better. The more appropriate that adjective seems, the closer to the adjective you click the circle.

JOHN KERRY

Qualified	O	O	O	O	O	Unqualified
Sophisticated	O	O	O	O	O	Unsophisticated
Honest	O	O	O	O	O	Dishonest
Sincere	O	O	O	O	O	Insincere
Successful	O	O	O	O	O	Unsuccessful
Attractive	O	O	O	O	O	Unattractive
Calm	O	O	O	O	O	Excitable
Aggressive	O	O	O	O	O	Unaggressive
Strong	O	O	O	O	O	Weak
Passive	O	O	O	O	O	Active

Friendly	O	O	O	O	O	Unfriendly
Believable	O	O	O	O	O	Unbelievable
Unconvincing	O	O	O	O	O	Convincing
Biased	O	O	O	O	O	Unbiased

We have some further questions about specific candidates. We would like to know how you perceive them. In the following questions, you will see the name of a candidate and then read a series of statements about that candidate. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Select your answers by clicking on the appropriate circle next to each question.

GEORGE W. BUSH

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree/Disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
The candidate has a great amount of experience.	O	O	O	O	O
I trust the candidate	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate is skilled in what he does	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate has great expertise	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate is honest	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate does not have much experience.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate makes truthful claims	O	O	O	O	O
I do not believe what the candidate tells me	O	O	O	O	O

JOHN KERRY

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree/Disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
The candidate has a great amount of experience.	O	O	O	O	O
I trust the candidate	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate is skilled in what he does	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate has great expertise	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate is honest	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate does not have much experience.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate makes truthful claims	O	O	O	O	O
I do not believe what the candidate tells me	O	O	O	O	O

Welcome back. The next set of questions has to do with the commercial you just viewed.

Voter Attributions

Please read each statement and select your answers by clicking on the appropriate circle next to each question.

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree/Disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the voters to know all the facts about the issues.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial to discredit the opposing candidate.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because he cares about the country.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because he doesn't want the opposing candidate to win the election.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because he is trying to mislead the voters about the issues.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial to persuade me to vote for him.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because he believes he is the best person for the office of President.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the voters to question or doubt the opposing candidate.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because a PAC pressured him do it.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial to respond to allegations made by the opposing candidate.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because the opposing candidate made misleading statements that had to be corrected.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial to discuss an issue that voters think is important.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because a PAC was attacking him.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because he was behind in the polls.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate ran this commercial because his political party wanted him to do it.	O	O	O	O	O

The candidate ran this commercial to tell the voters what they wanted to hear.	O	O	O	O	O	
The candidate ran this commercial because he wants the power of the presidency and will say anything to get there.	O	O	O	O	O	

Attitude toward the Commercial

Below is a set of word pairs. Please click the circle closest to the adjective which you believe best reflects your feelings about the commercial you just saw. The more appropriate that adjective seems, the closer to the adjective you click the circle.

The Commercial

Informative	O	O	O	O	O	Uninformative
Believable	O	O	O	O	O	Unbelievable
Persuasive	O	O	O	O	O	Unpersuasive
Like	O	O	O	O	O	Dislike
Pleasant	O	O	O	O	O	Unpleasant
Truthful	O	O	O	O	O	Deceptive
Accurate	O	O	O	O	O	Inaccurate
Ethical	O	O	O	O	O	Unethical
Good	O	O	O	O	O	Bad

Candidate Evaluations

Below is a set of word pairs. When thinking about the **Republican presidential candidate, George W. Bush**, click the circle closest to the adjective which you believe describes the candidate better. The more appropriate that adjective seems, the closer to the adjective you click the circle.

GEORGE W. BUSH

Qualified	O	O	O	O	O	Unqualified
Sophisticated	O	O	O	O	O	Unsophisticated
Honest	O	O	O	O	O	Dishonest
Sincere	O	O	O	O	O	Insincere
Successful	O	O	O	O	O	Unsuccessful
Attractive	O	O	O	O	O	Unattractive
Calm	O	O	O	O	O	Excitable
Aggressive	O	O	O	O	O	Unaggressive
Strong	O	O	O	O	O	Weak
Passive	O	O	O	O	O	Active

Friendly	O	O	O	O	O	Unfriendly
Believable	O	O	O	O	O	Unbelievable
Unconvincing	O	O	O	O	O	Convincing
Biased	O	O	O	O	O	Unbiased

Below is another set of word pairs. Now, when thinking about the **Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry**, click the circle closest to the adjective which you believe describes the candidate better. The more appropriate that adjective seems, the closer to the adjective you click the circle.

JOHN KERRY

Qualified	O	O	O	O	O	Unqualified
Sophisticated	O	O	O	O	O	Unsophisticated
Honest	O	O	O	O	O	Dishonest
Sincere	O	O	O	O	O	Insincere
Successful	O	O	O	O	O	Unsuccessful
Attractive	O	O	O	O	O	Unattractive
Calm	O	O	O	O	O	Excitable
Aggressive	O	O	O	O	O	Unaggressive
Strong	O	O	O	O	O	Weak
Passive	O	O	O	O	O	Active
Friendly	O	O	O	O	O	Unfriendly
Believable	O	O	O	O	O	Unbelievable
Unconvincing	O	O	O	O	O	Convincing
Biased	O	O	O	O	O	Unbiased

We have some further questions about specific candidates. We would like to know how you perceive them. In the following questions, you will see the name of a candidate and then read a series of statements about that candidate. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Select your answers by clicking on the appropriate circle next to each question.

GEORGE W. BUSH

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree/Disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
The candidate has a great amount of experience.	O	O	O	O	O
I trust the candidate	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate is skilled in what he does	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate has great expertise	O	O	O	O	O

The candidate is honest	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate does not have much experience.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate makes truthful claims	O	O	O	O	O
I do not believe what the candidate tells me	O	O	O	O	O

JOHN KERRY

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree/Disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
The candidate has a great amount of experience.	O	O	O	O	O
I trust the candidate	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate is skilled in what he does	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate has great expertise	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate is honest	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate does not have much experience.	O	O	O	O	O
The candidate makes truthful claims	O	O	O	O	O
I do not believe what the candidate tells me	O	O	O	O	O

Political Involvement

Below is a set of statement pairs. Please click the circle closest to the statement which you believe best reflects your feelings.

Is news about politics something you try to pay attention to, or is it something you just happen to learn about because it is in the media?

I try to pay attention to politics O O O O O Politics is just something I learn about because it is in the media.

Is politics something you like to talk about or do you only discuss it if someone else brings it up?

I like to talk about politics O O O O O I only discuss politics if someone else brings it up.

How closely have you followed the current U.S. presidential race?

Very closely O O O O O Not at all closely

How concerned are you with who wins the race for the President?

Very concerned O O O O O Not at all concerned

Voter Intentions

How likely is it that you will vote for republican presidential candidate, George W. Bush?

O Very likely
O Likely
O Undecided
O Unlikely
O Very unlikely

How likely is it that you will vote for democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry?
O Very likely
O Likely
O Undecided
O Unlikely
O Very unlikely

If the 2004 Presidential Election were held today, who would you vote for?
O George W. Bush
O John Kerry
O Ralph Nader
O Undecided

How satisfied are you with your choice for President?
O Very satisfied
O Satisfied
O Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
O Dissatisfied
O Very dissatisfied

About You. Now just a few personal questions to help us classify your responses.

Are you?
O Female
O Male

What is your age? _____

What is your current marital status?
O Single
O Married
O Divorced
O Widowed

What is your occupation?
O Professional
O White Collar
O Blue Collar
O Student
O Retired
O Other

What racial or ethnic group best describes you?
O Caucasian
O African-American
O Asian
O Hispanic
O Native American
O Other

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?
O Republican
O Democrat
O Independent
O Other

How strong is your attachment to your political party?
Very strong O O O O O Not very strong

Thank you for participating in this study.

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