Critiquing the Image: Testing Image Adwatches as Journalistic Reform
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Critiquing the Image

Testing Image Adwatches as Journalistic Reform

Television political advertising has been criticized for focusing too much on candidates' image rather than on their issue positions. Yet, image advertising has been largely ignored by the press as a source for news stories. This study examined the effects of a proposed type of television adwatch story—one that critiqued political advertisements that focused on a candidate's image. Image adwatches produced less positive candidate evaluations than the control group, which saw no adwatches. This pattern did not hold for issue adwatches. Participants did not apply information from either the issue or image adwatch to ads that were different from those critiqued in the adwatches. Recall of the ad was lower for issue adwatches, but only when they critiqued a different ad. Participants did not penalize journalists for their image adwatch stories. Findings are discussed in an information processing perspective.

Media scholars and news professionals have long been interested in how the press covers political campaigns. An area of research that has garnered increasing attention is news coverage of political advertisements. Since the arrival of television as a popular medium, candidates running for public office have used television ads to communicate to citizens their positions on issues and attributes about their character. Political journalists have become interested in these ads as potential sources for news stories during the past decade and, as a result, have developed the so-called adwatch story (Jamieson, 1992).

Journalists embarked on this type of political coverage during a time when attacks in political advertising were on the rise and when presidential candidates appeared in nontraditional media forums, such as late-night talk

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shows (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; Drew & Weaver, 1998). Some speculated that those in the news media felt that candidates were trying to bypass the political press corps and communicate directly to voters (Ailes, 1991). One way for journalists to regain a measure of relevance in political campaigns was to examine the claims candidates were making in their advertising.

The modern form of political adwatches arose in large part as a reaction to the 1988 Bush ads that attacked Dukakis (Pfau & Louden, 1994). The most notable attacks were on Dukakis’s record on crime and the environment, while he was governor of Massachusetts, and his position on military spending. The news media were criticized for providing extensive coverage of candidate ads, and some felt that this coverage legitimized the ads by airing them on television news programs (Jamieson, 1992). There were calls from the press itself for more scrutiny of political ads in future campaigns (Broder, 1989), which led to media adwatches in the 1990 election (Pfau & Louden, 1994).

An adwatch is “a media news critique of candidate ads designed to inform the public about claims that are either exaggerated or false” (Pfau & Louden, 1994, p. 326). The type of ad that is critiqued is generally referred to as an issue ad, that is, an ad that describes a candidate’s position on one or more issues. The development of adwatch journalism reflected the journalistic value of relying on factual statements about issue positions or past voting behavior. It also reflected the concern about the truthfulness of attack advertising that was prevalent in the 1988 presidential campaign.

Yet, a large percentage of candidates’ advertising focuses on their images, which have no truth claims per se. These ads, often called image ads, are designed to communicate a message to the electorate just as directly as issue ads. The candidate may be shown shaking hands and smiling, and the audio track may refer to the candidate growing up on a farm, or spending 4 years in the military, or attending the state’s primary university. These facts, though true, are not the “facts” that journalists are interested in checking. Furthermore, image ads cannot be as easily critiqued as issue ads because a candidate’s image cannot be independently verified.

Must image ads be off-limits to political coverage? Can journalists cover these types of ads as they do issue ads? Is there nothing that voters can learn from critiques of image ads? This study proposes a new type of adwatch—one that critiques candidates’ image ads. It then tests the image adwatch’s effectiveness on candidate evaluation and memory for the ad and compares these effects to those of the more traditional issue adwatch. In addition, this study tests whether an adwatch can mediate the effect of a noncritiqued ad to determine if information a viewer learns in an adwatch is transferred to a different
ad. Finally, judgments of the journalistic qualities of the image adwatch will be compared with those of the issue adwatch to determine if journalists might suffer citizen backlash as a result of the new adwatch style.

Ad Types and Adwatch Coverage

In early research on political advertisements, researchers often categorized ads as either image or issue (Devlin, 1995; Garramone, 1986; Louden, 1994; Shyles, 1986). The traditional view was that issue ads were good for voters because they communicated candidates’ positions on important issues. Image ads were shallow because they communicated nothing important about a candidate’s stand on any issue. Rather, image ads were thought to focus merely on superficial attributes, such as the candidate’s appearance (Perloff, 1998). Researchers now realize that image ads can address a candidate’s personal attributes, such as character, honesty, integrity, and so on, which many voters may consider important issues (Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997). Since the 1960s, voters learned that judging a candidate on issue positions was not necessarily a reliable predictor of what the candidate would do if elected. The candidate’s personal character became increasingly important to voters (Jamieson & Campbell, 1992).

Typically, political image ads address the candidate’s personal characteristics and background, essentially what Benoit et al. (1997) call character. Shyles (1986) defined image ads as those that focus on the “candidate’s perceived or projected personality traits and character attributes” (p. 114). Other definitions are similar, such as Garramone’s (1986), which is “the sum of the perceived personal and professional characteristics of the candidate” (p. 236).

Image ads are a staple of political campaigning and have been shown to be a common advertising technique across elections and race levels (Hofstetter & Zukin, 1979; Joslyn, 1980; Kaid, 1994; Kaid & Johnston, 1991; Patterson & McClure, 1976; West, 1993). Yet, image ads—ads that include statements or visual cues that accentuate a candidate’s personality or personal characteristics (e.g., Faber & Storey, 1984; Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Kaid & Sanders, 1978)—have increased in frequency in modern political campaigns (Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Boiney & Paletz, 1991; Jamieson, 1992). Although the ad type depends largely on the researchers’ definition of what constitutes an image and issue ad, image ads have been found to occur in the 35% to 60% range of all candidate ads (Benoit et al., 1997; Boiney & Paletz, 1991). Clearly, image ads are a prevalent form of political discourse.

Yet, the press has largely ignored image ads in its election coverage. McKinnon, Kaid, Murphy, and Acree (1996) analyzed 126 newspaper adwatch
stories in five major U.S. dailies and reported that only 4% of these stories focused on image ads. Gobetz and Chanslor (1999) analyzed the ads shown in stories on CNN’s *Inside Politics* program between August 1, 1996, and November 6, 1996, and found that only 7% of the ads covered in the program were “positive.” To the extent that image ads are a subset of positive ads, it can be reasoned that very few image ads were covered. A major focus of this study was to design and test the effectiveness of television news stories that critiqued image ads.

**Adwatch Research**

A content analysis of political ads between 1972 and 1992 showed that the number of ads rose dramatically during the 1980s and reached its zenith in the 1990s (West, 1993). Subsequently, Kaid, Gobetz, Garner, Leland, and Scott (1993) found a large increase in the coverage of political ads during the 1988 election.\(^1\) Research indicated that journalists had planned to continue such civic-minded coverage (Wicks & Kern, 1993), although some have found that such coverage recently declined (Bennett, 1997; Lariscy & Tinkham, 1999). There has even been a recent attempt to help journalists “build a better adwatch” (Richardson, 1998).

Research that examined the effects of adwatches has shown relatively modest, and sometimes mixed, results. These studies tended to examine the effects of adwatch content, the effects of the adwatch format, or the effects of the presentation order of an ad and its adwatch. In one of the first publications on adwatch effects, Jamieson (1994) suggested that adwatches may in fact have a boomerang effect, such that exposure to adwatches that criticize a candidate’s negative ad may lead to better recall of the ad than of the fact that the ad was misleading or unfair.

A boomerang effect was reported by McKinnon and Kaid (1999), such that viewers seeing a television adwatch reported more positive evaluations of its ad than viewers who saw the ad only (no such difference in ad evaluation was found for print adwatches, however). But seeing an adwatch (television or print) did not change viewers’ evaluations of the candidates or the reported likelihood that they would vote for the candidate.

Cappella and Jamieson (1994) tested the possible effects of adwatches on such traditional variables in persuasion research as attitudes toward the source of the ad, the ad’s target, the ad itself, ad recall, and the interpretation of the ad’s message. Their study showed that (a) the adwatches did not lead to a more positive attitude toward the candidate who had been criticized in the ad by his opponent, (b) the adwatches affected viewers’ attitudes toward the critiqued ad such that the ad was perceived to be less fair and less important.
(compared with the attitudes of a control group), and (c) an adwatch's content was best remembered by people who had the least exposure to the original ad.

Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1996) claimed to have found a boomerang effect such that the criticized candidate received increased support among those who saw the adwatch. However, Jamieson and Cappella (1997) argued that the adwatch used in the study largely supported the claims made in the critiqued ad, and therefore the increased support of the critiqued candidate should have been expected.

Pfau and Louden (1994) tested the effects of different adwatch formats (full screen, in which the adwatch shows part of the critiqued ad full screen, versus boxed, where the ad is shown in a small graphic television set that is turned slightly to the side, versus a situation where the ad is talked about but not shown at all). For one candidate, they found that the full-screen adwatches produced a boomerang effect, increasing the persuasiveness of the ads criticized in the adwatch. However, this result was found for only one of the two candidates, and when the data were examined as a function of gender, the boomerang effect for the one candidate was caused mostly by responses from females.

O'Sullivan and Geiger (1995) conducted an experiment using newspaper adwatches for television ads. They found that evaluations of candidates persisted even when an adwatch presented disconfirming information. Although candidate evaluations changed in concert with whether an adwatch confirmed or disconfirmed the claims in the ad, candidates presented first fared better.

Thus far, adwatches have been concerned solely with policing the veracity of the claims made in a political ad. Whether the ad focuses on the issue positions of the sponsoring candidate or whether the ad attacks the opponent's issue positions or the opponent's past voting record, the critiqued ads have been almost exclusively issue ads.

Certainly, a sizeable portion of political ads are a blend of issue and image information. For example, many so-called issue ads contain image information. Voters see what the candidate looks like making a speech, greeting a group of voters, or casting the deciding vote in the state house. Seeing and hearing a candidate, even in an issue-dominated ad, provide information about the candidate's personal qualities. Also, an image ad may contain issue information (Joslyn, 1980). A candidate who says she cares about the elderly because she loves her parents may be thought to support funding Social Security, even if such a position is merely implied. The designation of an ad as "issue" or "image" can therefore be somewhat misleading because it implies that an ad has all of one type of information and none of the other. In reality, many ads have some of both. For the purposes of this study, image ads were
defined as high in image information but low in issue, whereas issue ads were defined as high in issue information and low in image. Ads high on both or low on both would not comport with this definition of ad type. Normative data were obtained on a range of ads to arrive at a set that were ultimately used as image and issue ads in this study.

**Viewer Processing of Ads and Adwatches**

In designing adwatches, it is important to consider the psychological processes that these ad types demand. The dichotomy between image and issue advertising has been hypothesized to distinguish between the two different ways political information on television is processed. Geiger and Reeves (1991) suggested that image ads are processed affectively whereas issue ads are processed cognitively. Image ads are intended to be felt—they are meant to stimulate an affective response from viewers that conveys positive feelings about the candidate. Issue ads, however, communicate meaning that is to be “comprehended rather than felt” (Geiger & Reeves, 1991, p. 127). These ads elicit more rational responses associated with attempts to persuade voters to favorably judge candidates on their positions. As a result, Geiger and Reeves (1991) say that issue ads require greater mental effort to process than image ads. It is interesting that issue ads have been shown to produce significantly more positive candidate evaluations than image ads in several studies (Conover, 1981; Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Kaid & Sanders, 1978; Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991a). The focus of effective adwatches, whether they critique issue ads or image ads, must consider the different processes required by the different ad types.

Adwatch stories work to reduce the effectiveness of a political advertisement, presumably because they can inoculate viewers to the persuasive information the ads contain (O’Sullivan & Geiger, 1995). Inoculation theory suggests that exposure to a weak version of a persuasive message generates counterarguments and, therefore, increases resistance to a subsequent persuasive message (McGuire, 1961, 1970). An adwatch story weakens an ad because the viewer is able to counterargue and ward off the persuasive information in the ad (Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau & Kenski, 1990). This assumes that the adwatch does not reinforce the claims made in an ad, such as when a reporter finds that the claims made in the ad are essentially “true” (Jamieson & Cappella, 1997).

However, if a television news story critiques an ad that makes no truth claims, can it still reduce the ad’s effectiveness? If image ads are designed to evoke positive feelings, can an adwatch that shows how ads do this reduce the
ad's effectiveness? The first set of research questions this study addressed asked if image adwatches work, and if they are as effective as issue adwatches.

**Research Question 1a:** Can image adwatches reduce the effectiveness of image ads?

**Research Question 1b:** Do image and issue adwatches reduce ad effectiveness similarly?

Another issue this study addressed with regard to adwatches is whether viewers learn skills that can be applied to ads other than those critiqued in the adwatch. This process is called transfer, which occurs when a person's "prior experience and knowledge affect learning or problem solving in a new situation" (Mayer & Wittrock, 1996, p. 48). For a viewer to have this opportunity, an adwatch must critique an ad in such a way that permits and encourages transfer of the knowledge learned in the adwatch to a different ad. By their nature, issue ads may work against such transfer because issues can vary from candidate to candidate and from election to election, making their generalizability difficult. That a candidate's issue position is mischaracterized in an ad could have little bearing on a viewer's interpretation of a different candidate in a different ad. An image adwatch, however, may afford the opportunity for journalists to provide knowledge that may be transferable to other image ads. An image adwatch that critiques what are common audio/visual techniques that candidates use to portray themselves as likeable, may bear on other image ads.

For an adwatch's knowledge to transfer, it should develop critical viewing skills. Critical viewing of advertising provides viewers with skills "that extend the sense making beyond the message" (Potter, 1998, p. 72). Critical viewing of political advertisements would suggest that viewers are (a) knowledgeable about the audio/visual techniques that are intended to be persuasive, and (b) able to apply that knowledge to increase cognitive resistance or counterarguing to other advertisements (Messaris, 1997; Roberts, 1983). An adwatch designed to enhance critical viewing of political advertisements might be able to reduce the impact of not only the critiqued ad but of other ads as well.

However, literature on critical viewing suggests that transfer may not be typical. Messaris (1997) discussed the results of two master's theses that inform this issue. First, Ebong (1989) tested a type of visual juxtaposition that is common in political image ads. Specifically, a candidate was juxtaposed with shots of rural landscapes, military symbols, family members, or flags. Although some viewers showed contempt for the candidate who employed
this type of juxtaposition, most viewers saw these types of images as positive, even while acknowledging that the images were concocted. Second, Tatlow (1992) found that students with formal training in media analysis (film history students) were no more likely than students with no such formal training (students in a physics course) to critically view television advertisements that employed potentially misleading visual syntax.

However, several studies have found that critical viewing can lead to increased counterarguing among children (Brucks, Armstrong, & Goldberg, 1988) and adolescents (Slater et al., 1996). Hence, an adwatch that instructs viewers about the persuasive intent of a particular image ad by discussing sets of techniques used in these ads may be instrumental in reducing the effectiveness of other image ads—those that presumably employ similar techniques. Because the evidence for knowledge transfer in a media context is equivocal, no specific prediction is made. Rather, a set of research questions is asked:

**Research Question 2a:** Can image adwatches reduce the effectiveness of different image ads?

**Research Question 2b:** Do image and issue adwatches reduce the effectiveness of different ads similarly?

**Adwatches and Memory**

One of the concerns about constructing a television adwatch is that the adwatch may increase memory for the critiqued ad by the additional ad exposure the adwatch would produce. The concern about repeated newsplay of a political ad is exemplified by the “Daisy Girl” spot run by Johnson’s 1964 presidential campaign. The spot was designed to elicit voters’ fears about a Goldwater presidency’s use of nuclear weapons. The spot aired only once but received repeated airings through television news coverage (Pfau & Louden, 1994). Jamieson (1992) designed a visual grammar for adwatches to reduce such a “boomerang” effect—the likelihood that the adwatch would enhance the critiqued ad and make it more memorable. There is very little research that examines the influence of adwatches on memory for a political ad. Cappella and Jamieson (1994) found evidence that an adwatch that critiqued a Pat Buchanan ad increased reported recall for the ad. Their focus with regard to recall, however, was on recall of the adwatch, not of the ad.

Mere repetition has been shown to somewhat increase memory for information (see Baddeley, 1990, for a summary; Condroy, 1989). However, in real viewing situations it is likely for a viewer to see an ad within a commercial
pod in a newscast that is different from the ad critiqued in the program’s adwatch(es). This question has yet to be tested. The expectation is that,

*Hypothesis 1:* Seeing the same ad-adwatch pair will increase ad recall compared with seeing a different ad-adwatch pair.

The final research question addresses the issue of participants’ judgments of the adwatches themselves—a concern to journalists. If participants react negatively to the image adwatch stories (i.e., if they rate image adwatches more negatively and less credible than issue adwatches), then any useful effects the stories may have in helping participants judge the value of the image ads may be mitigated. To test this, a research question was asked:

*Research Question 3:* Is there a difference between the evaluations of the image and issue adwatches?

**Method**

**DESIGN AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

This study was a 2 × 2 mixed design with a control group. The within-subjects factor was the type of ad and adwatch viewed (image/issue). Each candidate image ad was paired with an image adwatch, and each candidate issue ad was paired with an issue adwatch. The between-subjects factor was the ad-adwatch pair (same pair/different pair). In the same pair condition, participants watched the candidate ad that was critiqued in the adwatch. In the different pair condition, participants watched a different candidate’s ad than the one critiqued in the adwatch, although it was the same ad type as the critiqued ad. The presentation order for ad and adwatch was balanced across all conditions. Half of the participants saw a candidate’s ad first, the other half saw an adwatch first. A control condition was included, in which participants saw one image ad and one issue ad, but no adwatches.

The combination of these two factors was balanced across candidates and conditions. Each participant saw two ads and two adwatches (except for the control group, which saw only two ads). A Latin-square design was used to ensure a balanced distribution of image and issue ads and adwatches across eight candidates (four in image ads and four in issue ads). This was done to control possible confounds of a particular candidate’s ad or of the candidate’s adwatch story.
The study was conducted in the early autumn during a year when there was no national or statewide political campaign.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

There were seven dependent variables measured in this study, four that measured ad effectiveness responses to the candidates and the ads and three that measured responses to the adwatchers. The dependent variables that measured responses to the candidates and ads were attitude toward the candidate, attitude toward the ad, likelihood of voting for the candidate in the ad, and ad recall. The dependent variables that measured responses to the adwatchers were attitude toward the adwatch, newsworthiness of the adwatch, and perceived credibility of the adwatch.

Attitude toward the candidate was measured with five 7-point semantic differential scales, anchored by intelligent/not intelligent, wise/foolish, has integrity/has no integrity, favorable/unfavorable, and acceptable/unacceptable (α = .87). Attitude toward the ad (α = .86) and attitude toward the adwatch (α = .91) were measured with five 7-point semantic differential scales, anchored by good/bad, unpleasant/pleasant, irritating/not irritating, interesting/boring, and liked it/disliked it (scales adapted from Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991b). Participants in the control group were not asked about the adwatchers. Vote likelihood was measured by asking participants to rate the likelihood that they would vote for the candidate, given the opportunity, on a scale of 0 (would never vote for the candidate) to 100 (certain to vote for the candidate). Ad recall was measured by asking three questions about the candidate in each ad: candidate's name, candidate's gender, and the office for which the candidate was running. Number of correct answers constituted the ad recall score. Newsworthiness (scale adapted from Nass, Reeves, & Leshner, 1996) was measured with four items on 7-point response scales about each adwatch story, anchored by not at all and very: important, interesting, informative, and serious (α = .92). Credibility (scale adapted from Newhagen & Nass, 1989) was measured with seven items on 7-point response scales about each adwatch story, anchored by not at all and very: fair, accurate, balanced, thorough, factual, comprehensive, and biased (α = .94). All variables measured on response scales or as semantic differentials were coded so that higher values indicated more positive evaluations or attitudes.

To control for prior familiarity, participants were asked if they were familiar with any of the candidates portrayed in the ads or adwatchers they saw. Two participants who reported that they were familiar with, and who had the opportunity to vote for, one of the candidates were eliminated from the

190
analysis. Demographic variables (age, education, income, race, gender), if the participants were registered to vote, and their interest in politics were also asked.

**Pretest of Ads**

A sample of 51 ads was obtained from the “Best of 1996 Non-Presidential Political Commercials” produced by *Campaign & Elections*. Nonpresidential ads were sought to eliminate prior participant familiarity with the depicted candidates. A total of 20 ads were eliminated from the pretest because they were either (a) ads that attacked the opponent, (b) ads for a nationally recognizable candidate, (c) ads that could not be duplicated on videotape at high quality, or (d) ads that included the political party of the candidate. A total of 31 ads were identified as being suitable for pretest. A total of 32 journalism students at the University of Missouri, Columbia volunteered to participate in the pretest. Each student received class extra credit for participation.

Participants watched all 31 ads in small groups seated approximately equidistant from a 19-inch color television monitor. Participants were supplied with written definitions of an image ad and an issue ad, which were adapted from Geiger and Reeves (1991, p. 126). An issue ad was defined as an ad that “concentrated on a specific policy advocated by the candidate or a past accomplishment that reflected a policy stand.” An image ad was defined as an ad that “focused on a quality or characteristic of the candidate as a person.” After seeing each ad, participants were asked to rate the ad on two 7-point scales on how much issue information the ad contained and how much image information the ad contained. Means of each dimension were calculated for each ad, then t tests were calculated for each ad on the two means. The four ads with the greatest t values (representing the largest disparity between issue and image content) and with the highest mean for issue content were selected and used as issue ads in the experiment. Similarly, the four ads with the greatest t values and with the highest mean for image content were selected and used as image ads in the experiment. Four exemplars of each ad type (eight ads total) helped to ensure generalizability to the stimulus dimension of adwatches and ads (Jackson & Jacobs, 1983; Reeves & Geiger, 1994).

**Participants**

For the experiment, 158 people were recruited from a list of registered voters in Boone County, Missouri. The Center for Advanced Social Research, located in the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, recruited...
the sample using random-digit dialing procedures. Participants were paid $15 each for their participation in the study.

**Stimulus Materials**

All adwatches, both image and issue, were written and produced by the researcher. The adwatches were produced on VHS videotape using professional editing and graphics equipment at KOMU-TV, an NBC-affiliated television station. In concert with the adwatch visual "grammar" of Jamieson (1992), the ad portion shown in each adwatch was visually boxed to cue participants that they were watching an adwatch rather than the ad itself. A professional television news anchor at KOMU-TV voiced all adwatches and a different anchor read the lead-ins to the adwatches on camera. Important text was visually added to each adwatch that corresponded to the audio track, including labels for the ad type (see appendix for sample scripts for issue and image adwatches). The evaluation of the claims in the issue adwatches was controlled so that the only evaluation was that a claim was "misleading." No claim in any adwatch was portrayed as a "lie" or as "true." Ads, adwatches, and lead-ins were edited into a videotape of an actual KOMU-TV local newscast. The target ads were edited into the second position between two product commercials in one of two commercial pods. A total of 16 videotapes were created representing eight random combinations of a same pair (four image first/four issue first) and a different pair (four image first/four issue first) of the ads and adwatches. Four tapes representing four random combinations of ads for the control group were also created (two image first/two issue first).

All of the ads were for candidates who ran for office 2 years before the administration of the experiment from states other than Missouri. The offices sought were for the U.S. Congress (both House and Senate), one for judge, and one for governor.

**Procedures**

Participants watched the newscast that contained the ads and adwatches in small groups (10 maximum) approximately equidistant from a 19-inch color television monitor. Participants were asked to watch the newscast as they would normally watch a televised news program. They were not asked to pay particular attention to any of the news stories (including the adwatches) nor to any of the commercials (including candidates' ads). They answered the pencil and paper questionnaires after they had viewed the entire newscast. Participants were given as much time as they needed to complete the
Table 1  
Demographic Comparison Between Sample and Population (in percentages)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Sample (N = 156)</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>18-29</td>
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<td>50-59</td>
<td>10.9</td>
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<td>60-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

Note. All population demographic data are from Sourcebook of Zip Code Demographics (1992).

questionnaires, usually about 5 minutes. Participants were then debriefed, thanked, and paid. The entire experiment session lasted about 30 minutes.

Results

Before reporting the results of the analyses, the sample was compared to the population characteristics (see Table 1). Efforts were made to obtain a somewhat representative sample, most notably by random-digit dialing and payment for participation. However, these data are purely informative—they are not intended to accurately reflect distributions of demographic characteristics in the community because the participants were drawn from registered voters (a biased sample of the community) and because the best available data were nearly a decade old. The study sample had more females, higher income, and a smaller proportion of African Americans than did the population, according to 1990 census data.

The primary data analysis for Research Questions 1 and 2 was a series of planned comparisons using orthogonal contrasts for (a) attitude toward the candidate, (b) attitude toward the ad, and (c) vote likelihood. Separate tests were computed comparing the control group to adwatches that critiqued the same ad that was seen and to adwatches that critiqued a different ad that
was seen. In addition, a series of ANOVAs was computed to test for ad recall and the journalistic evaluations of the adwatches.

Research Question 1a asked if image adwatches would reduce the effectiveness of image ads. For each of the three candidate evaluations (attitude toward the candidate, attitude toward the ad, and vote likelihood), the set of analyses compared candidate evaluation between the control group and the image ads and adwatches (same pair).

This pattern was then compared with the same comparison for issue adwatches to address Research Question 1b (see Figure 1). A planned comparison that tested the means for image adwatches ($M = 4.47$) and the control group ($M = 4.81$) approached significance ($t_{(146)} = 1.79, p = .075, d = .31$). The planned comparison that tested the issue adwatches ($M = 4.00$) and the control group ($M = 4.03$) showed no significant difference ($t_{(141)} = .31, p = ns$). These results suggest that the image adwatches caused participants to rate the candidate less positively than those who saw the ads without the adwatch. There was no such change in attitude toward the candidate when issue adwatches were seen.

Figure 1 also clearly shows a main effect for ad type such that candidates shown in image ads were evaluated more positively than candidates shown in issue ads (Image $M = 4.58$ versus Issue $M = 4.07$, $F_{(1,138)} = 15.87, p < .001$,
\( \eta^2 = .10 \), which is counter to prior research that showed that candidates in issue ads were evaluated more positively than candidates in image ads (Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Kaid & Sanders, 1978; Thorson et al., 1991a).

Figure 2 shows the same comparisons for attitude toward the ad. The planned comparison for image adwatches shows a significant difference for attitude toward the ad between the control group (\( M = 4.50 \)) and the adwatch (\( M = 3.91; t_{(146)} = 2.61, p < .01, d = .42 \)). There was no such difference for issue adwatches (control group \( M = 3.50 \), issue adwatch \( M = 3.60; t_{(143)} = -0.17, p = ns \)). Again, the image adwatch worked to mediate the attitude toward the ad, but the issue adwatch did not. There was also a main effect for ad type such that attitude toward the image ads (\( M = 4.11 \)) was more positive than attitude toward issue ads (\( M = 3.65; F_{(1, 141)} = 15.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10 \)).

Figure 3 shows the same comparisons for vote likelihood. The planned comparison for image adwatches shows a significant difference for vote likelihood between the control group (\( M = 51.76 \)) and the adwatch (\( M = 41.15; t_{(147)} = 2.16, p < .05, d = .41 \)). There was no such difference for issue adwatches (control group \( M = 38.07 \), issue adwatch \( M = 36.92; t_{(144)} = 0.20, p = ns \)). Participants said they were less likely to vote for a candidate whose ad was critiqued in an image adwatch than those who saw the image ad only. There was also a main effect for ad type such that participants were more likely to
vote for candidates in image ads ($M = 46.14$) than candidates in issue ads ($M = 38.44$; $F_{(1,137)} = 8.93$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$).

Research Question 1a was answered in the affirmative—image adwatch reduced the effectiveness of the ad they critiqued. Research Question 1b was not affirmed, not because the issue adwatch worked differently than the image adwatch but rather because issue adwatch did not work at all. Evaluations of the candidates in the issue ads were not affected by their adwatch.

Research Question 2a asked if image adwatch would reduce the effectiveness of image ads other than the ones critiqued in the adwatch. For each of the three candidate evaluations (attitude toward the candidate, attitude toward the ad, and vote likelihood), the set of analyses compared candidate evaluation between the control group and the image adwatch (different pair). The second set of analyses makes the same comparison for issue adwatch.

The image adwatch for different ads did not reduce attitude toward the candidate ($M = 4.63$) from the control group ($M = 4.81$; $t_{(146)} = 1.04$, $p = ns$). Nor did they reduce attitude toward the ad (image adwatch $M = 4.15$ versus control group $M = 4.50$; $t_{(146)} = 1.66$, $p = ns$), nor vote likelihood (image adwatch $M = 49.29$ versus control group $M = 51.76$; $t_{(147)} = 0.49$, $p = ns$).
This pattern was maintained for issue adwatches that critiqued different ads as well: for attitude toward the candidate, issue adwatches, $M = 4.22$ versus control group $M = 4.03$ ($t_{(141)} = -0.49, p = ns$); for attitude toward the ad, issue adwatches $M = 3.83$ versus control group $M = 3.50$ ($t_{(143)} = -0.93, p = ns$); for vote likelihood, issue adwatches $M = 42.29$ versus control group $M = 38.07$ ($t_{(140)} = -0.60, p = ns$). Thus, Research Questions 2a and 2b were answered in the negative. Neither image adwatches nor issue adwatches had any effect on evaluations of candidates who appeared in ads other than those the adwatches critiqued. There was no evidence that participants applied anything they may have learned from an adwatch to an ad that was not critiqued in the adwatch, regardless of whether the adwatch critiqued an image or an issue ad.

**MEMORY**

Hypothesis 1 predicted that ads that were paired with their adwatch would be better recalled than ads paired with a different adwatch because of the advantage that repetition has on memory. A main effect emerged such that ads paired with a different adwatch ($M = 1.48$) showed a lower recall score than ads paired with their adwatch ($M = 2.00$; $F_{(2, 141)} = 8.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$), which suggests support for the hypothesis. However, if seeing the ad twice increases recall, then the same pair condition should show higher recall over the control group, which it did not.

Figure 4 shows the interaction between ad type and pair type ($F_{(2, 143)} = 4.34, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$). Recall was lower when an issue ad was paired with an adwatch for a different issue ad. A post hoc orthogonal contrast was computed for issue ads that tested the effect of different pair ($M = 1.36$) against the same pair ($M = 2.16$). The contrast showed a significant difference for issue ads ($t_{(86)} = 4.65, p < .001, d = .82$). The means for the same pair condition did not differ from the control group for both image and issue ads, nor did the different pair condition differ from the same pair condition for the image ads. Therefore, the primary effect on recall was for issue ads, where seeing a different ad critiqued in an adwatch reduced recall compared with seeing the same ad critiqued or compared with seeing no adwatch.

The final set of analyses tested the effects of ad type on evaluations of journalistic qualities (attitude toward the adwatch, newsworthiness, and credibility) to determine if participants showed a backlash against image adwatches. There were no significant main effects for ad type or ad-adwatch pair on participants’ attitude toward the adwatch. That is, participants did not rate the image adwatches differently than the issue adwatches, nor did their attitudes toward the adwatches depend on whether the adwatch critiqued the same ad or a different ad.
Figure 4. Effect of Pair Type on Ad Recall

There was a significant main effect for newsworthiness such that issue adwatchs were rated more newsworthy than image adwatchs (issue adwatch $M = 5.21$ versus image adwatch $M = 4.91$; $F_{(1, 112)} = 8.97, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$). There was also a main effect for pair on credibility, such that credibility was higher for adwatchs that critiqued the same ad shown during the newscast than it was for adwatchs that critiqued a different ad (same pair $M = 4.88$ versus different pair $M = 4.31$; $F_{(1, 115)} = 6.59, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$). Finally, there were no other significant main effects or interactions for ad type or pair on attitude toward the adwatch, newsworthiness, or credibility, nor were there significant main effects or interactions for presentation order.

Discussion

The findings for the planned comparisons are clear and consistent: watching a television image adwatch story affected how participants evaluated the candidates and their ads. When a news story critiqued techniques used in an image ad that were designed to make the viewer feel positive about a candidate, participants evaluated the candidate less positively than when only the image ad was seen. Participants also rated the critiqued ad less positively and were less likely to vote for the advertised candidate when an image
adwatch was seen. Surprisingly, and counter to previous research, there were no such effects for issue adwatches. When a news story critiqued the truth claims made in an issue ad as "misleading," participants rated the candidate about the same as the group that saw only the issue ad. Also, the issue adwatches produced no differences for attitude toward the ad and the likelihood of voting for the advertised candidate. In short, the image adwatches worked to mediate the effects of the image ad, but the issue adwatches did not.

However, transfer did not occur for either image or issue adwatches. Information contained in the image adwatch was not applied to a different candidate's image ad. Perhaps the image adwatches themselves were problematic. Although efforts were taken to critique similar techniques across the four image adwatches, there was no attempt in the adwatches to explicitly state that image ads generally apply the same techniques. Hence, participants may not have been willing to generalize such principles to other image ads. Perhaps a different type of image adwatch could be tested in future research— one that critiques several image ads at once, showing the advertising techniques that are common to image ads. Using generalizing principles with multiple examples should aid in the transfer process.

These data also showed that repeating the ad in the adwatch did not increase ad recall. Although same ad-adwatch pair did not increase recall for the ad, recall was reduced (compared to the control group) when participants saw an issue ad that was different from the one critiqued in the adwatch. It appears that the issue adwatch for a different ad interfered with the processing necessary to recall candidate information in the issue ad. There was no evidence for such interference caused by the image adwatch for a different ad. It seems that issue adwatches required greater processing resources than the image adwatches, reducing the elaboration that would occur while processing the ad. This finding indicates that image ads do indeed require more affective but less cognitive processing than issue ads, as Geiger and Reeves (1991) discussed.

Participants did not differentially rate their attitudes toward the adwatches based on whether the adwatches were image or issue, or whether they were paired with their critiqued ad or with a different ad. Given that image adwatches dealt with persuasive tactics rather than truth claims that could be verified, one might have expected that participants would think less of the image adwatch story. But these initial null findings suggest that TV news operations need not worry about a public backlash for producing image adwatches.

Participants did, however, rate the image adwatches as less newsworthy than the issue adwatches. Perhaps participants felt that the persuasive
tactics displayed in image adwatches were not particularly unique or unexpected, and thus, not worthy of news coverage. There was no difference in how participants rated the credibility of the image and issue adwatches. But participants rated the adwatches that critiqued an ad seen in the newscast as more credible than the adwatch that critiqued an ad other than the one seen during the newscasts’ commercial block.

This study employed several strategies to enhance validity. To increase external validity, registered voters from the local population were recruited by using random-digit dialing procedures and by payment for participation. Even with these procedures, the study sample varied from the best available (1990) population data in important ways, most notably, income and gender. The sample in this study was likely highly involved in politics—participants were registered voters and were motivated to come to a central location to participate in a study about news. Also, real candidate ads were used as stimulus materials and as the subjects of the adwatches. To increase internal validity, ads were pretested to better ensure that ad type (image/issue) was manipulated. Four exemplars of each ad type were chosen as stimuli, which reduced the possibility of confounding an ad type effect with unique attributes of any single ad. These ads came from nonpresidential races to reduce the chance that participants would be familiar with any of the candidates. No candidate was blatantly identified in an ad as belonging to any political party, thus reducing the likelihood of a participant responding to the candidate’s party rather than to the type of ad.

But using this methodological control strategy may have proved problematic for the issue adwatches. The candidate advertisements used in this study were from candidates who ran for offices in states other than the one in which this study was conducted. Given that there were no effects for the issue adwatches and the consistently low level of candidate evaluation in the issue ads (Figures 1 through 3), perhaps the issues these ads addressed did not transport well to this study’s location or context. The issue stances addressed in the four issue ads were the following: tough on crime, protect Social Security, right to carry concealed weapons, and cutting taxes. Although these issues seem to be important across time and across state lines (except perhaps right to carry), it is possible that they may not have been salient to the participants during the time in which the study occurred—at the beginning of the campaign season in an off-year election.

There are some important limitations of this study. The adwatches—both issue and image—were created by the researcher rather than using existing ones. This was done for two reasons. First, creating messages provides the researcher with greater control over the stimulus materials, thus increasing the confidence that alternative explanations of the results could be eliminated.
Leshner • Image Adwatches

(Reeves & Geiger, 1994). Second, image adwatches had to be created because journalists had not yet produced many of them.

In general, image adwatches appreciably contributed to participants' political toolbox, whereas issue adwatches did not. The results here support some previous experimental research and suggest questions for future research. For example, the image and issue ads used in this study did not include attack ads. Adwatches that critique image ads that attack an opponent's character may produce effects that differ from adwatches that critique issue attack ads.

Another question that should be investigated is the extent to which the effects of adwatches change over time. Cappella and Jamieson (1994) reported that accuracy of an ad's interpretation, which requires accurate recall, decayed over time. Would a similar pattern of decay occur for image adwatches?

A basic premise of this study was that journalists ought to find ways to provide citizens with tools that would encourage critical evaluation of image ads. The need for this type of adwatch is evidenced by candidates' reliance on image ads as a form of political messages. The image adwatch significantly decreased the reported vote likelihood and attitude toward the ad when the image ad was paired with its critiqued ad. Given that no apparent backlash occurred in response to image adwatches, journalists may want to incorporate this type of critique so citizens can make better-informed political decisions.

Appendix
Sample Adwatch Scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate: Issue Adwatch</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ad:</strong> Social Security is not a welfare program, it's an insurance program.</td>
<td><strong>Super:</strong> Political ad for candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voiceover (VO):</strong> Political experts call this an issue ad. Candidate is telling you how she stands on Social Security, but how accurate is the information in her ad?</td>
<td><strong>Super:</strong> Issue ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ad:</strong> It's a contract between working people and the government. People have paid their taxes over the years and they have earned the benefits they receive under Social Security.</td>
<td><strong>Super:</strong> Political ad for candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VO:</strong> Candidate discusses this issue in generic terms, but does not provide any information on the specific measures she supports. She also fails to tell you her position on any other issue.</td>
<td><strong>Super:</strong> No specific measures she supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ad:</strong> As long as I'm in the Senate, I will never vote to cut Social Security.</td>
<td><strong>Super:</strong> Political ad for candidate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMUNICATION RESEARCH • April 2001

VO: This statement implies that candidate never voted to cut Social Security in the past. And that implication is misleading. Candidates’ past voting record has been hard on Social Security. Although she never voted for cuts, she did vote for bills that would have cut already approved increases. In fact, Candidate never voted to increase Social Security.
Ad: Candidate for Senator.
VO: The point of this ad is to get you to vote for candidate, but beware. What you see isn’t always what you get. Dave Price, Newscenter8.

Candidate: Image Adwatch
Ad: I’m embarrassed to say I didn’t vote for candidate last time.
VO: Political experts call this an image ad. Candidate uses this long-term care worker to show a positive image of himself to make you like him, but you don’t learn anything about his position on any issues. Rather, this type of ad is designed to evoke positive emotions in you, the viewer. The ad’s goal is to get you to have positive feelings and emotions toward the candidate.
Ad: But after 4 years, I’ve been proven wrong.
VO: Here, candidate is shown at this long-term care facility shaking hands with elderly people. The ad is trying to show you how well he gets along with these groups of voters. Candidate wants you to think that he is very much like you and like other people you know.
Ad: I’ve had the opportunity to work with candidate as a long-term care administrator. He’s one of those rare people that has a balance of financial responsibility and a compassion for people.
VO: Candidate is shown here at work and at the hospital with an elderly patient. His backers believe that he needs support from older voters and health care workers, so they show him as a caring person who has the support of these groups of voters. But candidate doesn’t tell you what he will do once he gets elected.
Ad: He has a commitment to older North Dakotans like I’ve never seen before. He wants to make sure we take care of our own.
VO: In this ad, candidate doesn’t mention where he stands on any issue. Instead, he wants you to see him with people in informal, comfortable settings so that you will associate him with ordinary people. The idea is not that you learn anything about candidate’s positions, but that you like him as a person.
Ad: We have a strong tradition of taking care of our own here in North Dakota and candidate stands for that. That's what he's all about.

VO: The point of this ad is to get you to vote for candidate by presenting him as someone like you . . . and someone you will like. Dave Price, Newscenter8.

Notes

1. For a discussion about the development of adwatches, see Jamieson (1992), or Tedesco, McKinnon, and Kaid (1996).

2. Campaign & Elections is a magazine published by Congressional Quarterly, Inc., in Washington, D.C., that compiles and sells videotapes of candidates' television spots.

3. The author credits this interpretation to one of the reviewers of an earlier version of this article.

4. The name of the candidate was removed from the following adwatch scripts and replaced with "candidate" to protect the identity of the actual candidate. The adwatches were produced solely for this study and may have contained information that was not true. Adwatches were created merely to simulate news stories that critique such commercials. Actual candidate names were included in the study, and participants were debriefed accordingly.

References


