Strat com in politics

J201: Introduction to Mass Communication

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OUR DEFINITION OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Communication *designed to effect a change in belief, attitude or behavior*

In political communication, those are typically beliefs, attitudes, behaviors *with political consequences*
BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, BEHAVIORS

- Beliefs:
  - Are human activities causing global warming?
  - Did Hillary Clinton run a child sex ring out of a pizzeria?
  - Did Barack Obama wiretap Donald Trump?

- Attitudes
  - Is Hillary Clinton “likeable”?
  - Do I trust the Republican party?

- Behaviors
  - Is a person going to vote?
  - Will a person come to a rally?
WHO MIGHT USE STRATEGIC POLITICAL COMMUNICATION?

Candidates, politicians and parties during campaigns

Politicians and parties outside of campaigns “permanent campaign”

Interest groups and think tanks (people who want to advance a policy goal)

Corporations and trade groups (may want to avoid regulations, or gain approval for projects)
5-STEP STRATEGIC THINKING

Research the landscape

Define goals

Develop strategies and tactics
  • What is our message? Where will we place it?

Execute campaign

Evaluate results
MARKET RESEARCH IN POLITICS

Often thought of as “opinion research”; or public opinion

Finding out what people think now

And how they might think about something they haven’t encountered yet (message testing)

Really, the art of listening

- Frank Luntz
HOW DOES POLLING WORK?

The magic of **random sampling** and **inferential statistics**

If you take **random samples** from a **population**, you can say quite accurate things about the **whole population** based on that sample.

**Random-digit dial (RDD) surveys**: randomly select telephone numbers; call those people and ask their opinions.
POLLING SUCCESS AND LIMITS

From 1960s-1990s:
Polling worked pretty well

Good: Democratic: what people think!

But pollsters did notice:

• Large variation in response based on question wording, even order
• Response inconsistency: do most people have an informed opinion right when they’re called?
POLLING PROBLEMS TODAY

Falling response rate to polls
Difficult to call mobile phones
→ Sampling is becoming more difficult, less random
Requires considerable weighting, modeling of data
Estimation of who is going to turn out
NATE SILVER AND 538

Pioneer in poll aggregation:

• Take all the polls being done
• Evaluate them over time; assign weights
• “average” them and use weights to determine your own estimate

For example, realclearpolitics’ polls are here:
Hillary Clinton has an 85% chance to win.
POLLS: WHAT HAPPENED IN 2016?

Context: polls’ success in 2012
Nate Silver correctly predicted outcome in every state
A feeling that aggregators were solving core problems

Differential non-response:
College-educated Republicans less likely than usual to answer the phone
Also, Many news organizations gave percentile likelihoods of outcomes that probably underestimated uncertainty and the correlation of “unlikely” events
For example: if Trump were to do very well in Pennsylvania, he probably would also in Wisconsin, Michigan
THE ART OF LISTENING

Is really what the study of public opinion is about

Can we listen closely enough to people to really understand what they want?

Or, can we listen closely enough to design our policies so that it sounds like what they want?

Frank Luntz and the focus group

Message testing
FRONTLINE: FRANK LUNTZ

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py_DP9HXiW0
TARGETING IN POLITICS

Use your research to identify a “moveable” target, and what will move them:

Who are your supporters? What will it take for them to turn out?

Who is on the fence? What will it take to get them on your side?

Who favors your opponent? Can they be encouraged to sit out?
MESSAGE DESIGN

Similar to message design in commercial advertising:

Addressed at a well-defined target
With a well-defined goal of change in a belief, attitude or behavior
Less room for creativity
SOME VARIETIES OF POLITICAL ADS

Introduction/biography
Positive
Comparison
Negative/attack
Defense
Supporters’ videos
WELLSTONE INTRODUCTION AD

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTiW0YCMqM0g
REAGAN (1984): MORNING IN AMERICA

Positive ad

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU-IBF8nwSY
POSITIVE: BARACK OBAMA

Yes We Can by will.i.am (2008):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsV2O4fCgjk

Obama Girl by Barely Political (2007):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU
ATTACK

Johnson’s Daisy Girl ad (1964):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDTBnsqxZ3k

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LyYD166ync

Barack Obama’s 47 percent ad (2012):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMDVQh0WrQs
DEFENSE

Christine O’Donnell: I’m not a witch (2010):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxJyPsmEask
# 2016: The Advertising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Est. Cost (in Millions)</th>
<th>Airings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>609,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>233,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US House</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>143,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Senate</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>280,416</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Federal and Governor Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>934</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,267,298</strong></td>
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</table>
2016: WHO SPENT?

First, massive inequality in spending on TV:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Ads</th>
<th>Est. Cost (in Millions)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton, Hillary</td>
<td>340,745</td>
<td>219.3</td>
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<td>Sanders, Bernie</td>
<td>128,494</td>
<td>76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trump, Donald</td>
<td>101,849</td>
<td>76.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Priorities USA Action</td>
<td>76,965</td>
<td>75.3</td>
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<td>Right To Rise USA</td>
<td>35,558</td>
<td>62.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cruz, Ted</td>
<td>30,262</td>
<td>16.8</td>
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Source: [http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/releases/nov-2016/#table4](http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/releases/nov-2016/#table4)