

Case 16.1 Great Political Ads: Which Do You Remember?

consumer, if you live in one of the states where presidential primaries are hotly contested, you get your fill of ads before the official nominations and general campaign really get rolling. The fact that there are so many political ads says something about the way presidential candidates are marketed in the United States. During the most recent presidential election, more than \$800 million was estimated to be spent on TV ads alone, shattering the record of \$500 million in the previous race. TV networks benefited from the dramatic increase, as auto manufacturers, real estate firms, and financial service advertisers cut back on their advertising budgets. "Every month, every quarter we're setting records," reported CBS chief financial officer Fred Reynolds in regard to political advertising.

Of course, some presidential campaign ads are memorable, and others are not. Some are memorable for their creativity, wit, or ability to persuade voters in the candidate's favor. Others are memorable for their lack of taste or their inability to convey a positive message. Some are humorous, while others are unintentionally funny. The most recent crop is no exception. Several candidates

tried to portray their physical fitness by jogging for the camera, while others focused on what they supposed were their own unique qualifications. But certain words and images linked all of the ads for the recent election. Barack Obama is said to have used the word *change* in 37 percent of his ads. Flags were a popular symbol in TV ads. John McCain's ads included the American flag 77 percent of the time.

TV ads have not always been the cornerstone of U.S. presidential elections. In fact, they didn't become prominent until the early 1950s, when Dwight D. Eisenhower's campaign hired the marketer who wrote the M&M line, "Melts in your mouth, not in your hands," to create advertisements for their candidate. Since then, independent organizations have compiled lists of the best and worst ads—understanding that a good or bad TV ad could turn a campaign around. The Independent Film Channel cites an ad by President Lyndon Johnson's campaign that depicted his opponent, Barry Goldwater, as an extremist ready to use nuclear bombs at a whim as the most effective political ad in history. The ad was

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actually pulled from the air by Johnson, but it was aired so many times by new broadcasts because of its controversial nature that voters remembered the ad when they went to the voting booth. Another ad on the IFe's top ten list is John Kennedy's as "Is Nixon Experienced?" The tagline certainly resonates with viewers who watched commercials through the most recent election, as John McCain repeatedly questioned his opponent Barack Obama's experience and readiness to lead.

In a new trend, more and more political ads appear online: Interest groups, not-for-profit organizations, and candidates have all jumped into the Internet advertising arena. Reviewers cite the online ads as funnier, sharper, and more intelligent than those made for television. While they may not yet reach enough voters to decide an entire election, they are entertaining and the Internet quite likely represents the campaign advertising medium of the future.

Questions for Critical Thinking

1. Which advertisements do you remember from the most recent presidential election? Which were most effective? Which were the least effective? Why?
2. How do political advertisements compare with advertisements for goods and services? How are they similar? In what ways are they different?

Not for Broadcast: [Slate, www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com)
Sources: Alexander Barnes Dryer, "Did Willie Rabbe, IFC List Month: Top accessed August 11, 2008; sar~ Scu Yanent ~ Channel, July 9, 2008, ifc, 10 president~~~~;g~~~~ t::~:ord in Presidential Race: Reuters, July 2, com/pol/UCS, p~ Presidential Campaign Ads Top \$100 Million: US News 2008, www.reuters.com, news.com/ Rick Klein 'The Year's Best & World Report, February 4, 2008, w: '~~~7 abcne:"ygo.com; 'Top of the Ticket' Political Ads: ABC News, December, Los Angeles Times, October 2007, www.latimesblogs.latimes.com