

Section 2 Module 2 Reading Response

Silverstein's article analyzes the political 'message' that is used during presidential campaigns and gives examples of its effects on the public image of candidates. The author claims that while it seemed like political messages were starting to not be important, they played a large role in both 2008 primaries.

Political message is like a brand for a candidate as well as characters in fiction who might or might not do something in the future. Every part of a politician's life is part of their brand even parts, like 'back stage moments.' Political messages are so similar to brands that people from advertising often run presidential campaigns.

Messages can be both good and bad. Candidates, especially as it gets close to election time, work hard to create their positive message and their opponent's negative message. The amount of effort that is put into how a candidate's message is controlled and managed is compared to a sporting event in the eyes of the author.

An important part of a candidate's message is that it does not really anything to do with the opinions of the candidate but with what parts of identity they illustrate or what the author refers to as 'emblems of identity.' Even if it is normal for people to change their opinions about issues, since it is not consistent with their message, it ends up looking worse for the candidate.

There are many side figures who contribute to a candidate's message. Examples are given from both Republicans and Democrats of famous politicians who supported candidates and said racist comments that (the author believes) were meant to paint a negative view of their opponent's message. Endorsements are the positive version of these relationships.

Both candidates in the 2008 election spoke in ways that reflected the kind of message they were trying to give. For Obama, it was a 'plain style' eloquence while McCain was a 'maverick.'

McCain's campaign tried to portray him as straight talking and as pleasing the public. An example, would be that McCain would claim not to things about economics or political issues in the middle east yet he would still spout various views on both issues. The author argues that since his incarceration and torture in Vietnam, and becoming a war hero played a significant role in McCain's success and led him to have a more flexible persona. A Republican debate between McCain and Romney both showed parts of their messages. McCain's showed him as a plain talk type of person while Romney's showed him as a business man who likes to 'clean things up.' McCain's campaign did not seem to have calculated negative messages for Romney but McCain did on stage point out Romney's flaws. McCain's message did not have as much structure as in the past.

The Democratic primary was a bit different because Clinton's campaign was all about message but Obama's seemed to be more of a post message era. Obama's 2004 DNC speech helped shift his campaign from the message era of campaigning because his speech was reminiscent of important speeches. Obama was able to accomplish through criticizing the press for linking his political campaign to non-political activities like the pastor of his church. Even though many people tried to make negative messages out of his campaign, Obama's post message tactics of not 'over reacting' to them worked.

While both candidates seemed anti-message, at the end of the 2008 presidential campaign, both sides ended up going back to the message tactics. McCain used hardcore anti-message tactics to paint Obama in a negative light and many of Palin's comments added to her (inaccurate) brand.

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