

Analyzing Political Advertising

In many ways, political commercials are like miniature movies. As in movies, great care is taken to make certain each detail of production--lighting, editing, music--work together to convey a particular mood. At the movies, we want to enter the world the filmmakers have created, to suspend our disbelief and be caught up in the story. But political ads need to be approached more cautiously. They are not fictional stories but expressions of political opinion. Political commercials express their opinion not simply through words. Just as music and editing help convey mood in movies, in ads they reinforce the impression the makers want you to have. Consider what happens when an ad is created FOR or AGAINST a candidate.

Find examples of each. Identify the candidate being endorsed and who created the ad.

FOR

1. *Video:* The video shows your candidate in a positive setting before supporters, so manipulating the video is unnecessary and would take away from the 'real-life' quality. If you have the chance to reshoot the video, you might try shooting the candidate close-up from a flattering low angle, and put more decorations, perhaps flags, in the background.

2. *Sound Effects:* The candidate appears before a small crowd applauding politely. Adding some crowd noise can make the event seem more exciting, and supporters more enthusiastic.

3. *Music:* Music has perhaps the most emotive power of any production element. See how the spot plays now with added patriotic music.

4. *Graphics:* On-screen graphics grab attention and reinforce the ad's message, often by simplifying issues into key phrases. Add a graphic stating: "Make a Difference."

5. *Voice-over:* Without a word being spoken, you've used the elements of production to create a strong message. Now add a voice-over to pull it all together: "People everywhere are cheering John Smith. Join the John Smith team and make a difference."

AGAINST

1. *Video:* With today's production technology, ways to manipulate visual images are virtually limitless. One common technique to make an opponent look old or out of touch is to take the color out of the picture. Another technique to make an opponent look threatening, or just creepy, is to manipulate the playback speed of a tape. Slow motion and strobing effects are often used.

2. *Music:* Music has perhaps the most emotive power of any production element. See how the spot plays now with added threatening music.

3. *Graphics:* On-screen graphics grab attention and reinforce the ad's message, often by simplifying issues into key phrases. Add a graphic stating: "Can you really trust him?"

4. *Voice-over:* Without a word being spoken, you've used the elements of production to create a strong message. Now add a voice-over to pull it all together: "What do you really know about John Smith? Where did he come from? What does he want? Can you really trust him?"

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