

**THE POWER OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING ADVOCACY: A CASE STUDY
EXAMINATION OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS IN 2006 MISSOURI**

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ABSTRACT

The authors used a case study analysis to examine celebrity endorsements in advertising that supported or opposed the 2006 Missouri amendment on embryonic stem cell research. The spots in this case received considerable coverage in the national news media that the authors selected for analysis. Not only do the authors conclude that using celebrities in this case was effective, but also that these spots helped focus the national news agenda on the Missouri race and on the embryonic stem cell research issue.

INTRODUCTION

Although using celebrities in marketing and advertising has been commonplace, celebrities have recently erupted in the political arena. Popular celebrities have appeared in political advertising to endorse specific candidates and election issues. Political advertising research has indicated that voters learn both image and issue information from political ads. Indeed, political advertising has often aided in voter decision making. As candidates move from the political campaign sidelines to the forefront of the campaign through political advertising, it becomes important to examine this new political role. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine whether using celebrities in advertising could be effectively to swaying votes on a specific issue.

According to Walkosz (2003), the growth of advocacy advertising has been exponential and explosive in recent years. Walkosz suggested that issue advocacy in recent federal elections could be characterized (a) by expending soft money for issue electioneering; (b) by targeting ads toward competitive races influenced by the content, tone, number, and timing of issue advocacy campaigns; and (c) by minimal network news coverage of federal races.

Walkosz (2003) pointed out that a major concern about issue advertising was that, as advocacy money was spent on Senate and House races, the nature of those races might be altered. For example, the campaign dialogue might shift its focus to the agenda of the party or of the sponsoring group. In fact, during the 2006 Missouri midterm elections, a great deal of popular media attention focused on the state Senate candidates in relation to their support of or opposition to Amendment 2, an embryonic stem cell funding initiative on the state ballot.

Controversy is widespread over embryonic stem cell research because of some of the techniques that the researchers often employ. Embryonic stem cell research is particularly controversial because current technology requires the destruction of the human embryos subject in the process of retrieving its stem cells. Nevertheless, many scientists believe embryonic stem cells can be used to help cure or treat diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

According to the Pew Forum's Religion and Stem Cell Research Fact Sheet (2005, pp. 1–3), the tide of opinion over embryonic stem cell research is changing; nevertheless, it remains contentious. In light of this fact sheet, the authors believe that more Americans continue to say that it is more important to conduct embryonic stem cell research that might create cures for diseases than it is to avoid destroying human lives. Both supporters and opponents of the Missouri state ballot question, Amendment 2, used celebrity endorsers in their campaign advertising. The Amendment 2 campaign further polarized the electorate and refocused the campaign dialogue of the state Senate race between the Democrat Party candidate, Claire McCaskill, and Republican Party incumbent Jim Talent.

CELEBRITY POLITICS

Indeed, celebrities are broadening their interests beyond candidate buttons, rallies, and the occasional sound bite for entertainment news programs. Increasingly, a rising number of celebrities are now hosting fundraising parties, posing for staged photos, and participating in multimillion dollar advertising campaigns to endorse their favored candidate or a favored political issue.

Celebrities can be defined as persons who enjoy an exaggerated amount of publicity and public recognition from the media and most citizens. Such celebrities have traditionally been actors, musicians, professional athletes, models, and entertainers. Consequently, a celebrity endorser could be defined as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p. 310).

As companies frequently use spokespersons to promote their brands, products, or services, so celebrities have become a widely used and popular type of spokesperson (Tom, Clark, Elmer, Grech, Masetti, et al., 1992). Using celebrities as spokespersons has become so commonplace in traditional advertising that the image of a famous, popular singer promoting a soft drink is no longer considered avant garde. Going beyond traditional product branding, celebrities are now embracing political advertising to campaign for political candidates--and voters, political ad watchers, and the media are taking notice. Celebrities have become to politics what product

placements have been to major movies: marketing ploys to win viewers and humanize issues (Wood, 2000).

Street (2004) describes celebrity politicians as entertainers who become involved in politics and claim the right to represent people and causes, but who do so without seeking or acquiring elected office. In addition, these celebrities use their status and the media to speak out on specific causes and for particular interests to influencing political outcomes.

Celebrity politicking is not new, for stars such as Frank Sinatra, Humphrey Bogart, and Lauren Bacall began the phenomenon decades ago (Kennedy, 2004). However, celebrities are increasingly shedding their behind-the-scenes roles to campaign for candidates in front of the camera. In the 2004 presidential election, celebrities such as Bruce Springsteen, Dave Matthews, and Moby stumped for John Kerry while Stephen Baldwin, Bo Derek, and Angie Harmon campaigned for George W. Bush. Nevertheless, none of these celebrity spokespersons garnered the media attention that a state election in November 2006 received.

Few political advertisements have ever dominated the national press and generated such tremendous buzz as Michael J. Fox's pitch for McCaskill (Hellinger, 2006). In fact, Hellinger said the Fox ad would go down in the history of political advertising as the equal of Lyndon Johnson's "Daisy" ad in 1964 that featured a little girl picking petals off a daisy during a countdown to a nuclear explosion, and the "Willie Horton" ad that helped sink the presidential campaign of Michael Dukakis in 1988.

Unquestionably, these celebrity-endorsed political advertisements garner hype and media attention for candidates, but are they effective? One function of celebrity endorsements in advertising was to capture viewer attention. By using celebrities whom viewers recognized and could relate to, the ad source hoped to make the message stand out (Pfau & Parrott, 1993). In fact, a content analysis by Kaid and Davidson (1986) of political spots found that incumbent Senate candidates were most likely to use testimonials in their political advertising.

According to Pfau and Parrott (1993), another function of using celebrities as spokespersons is to establish an emotional bond with viewers. Campaigns often seek to transfer viewers' feelings about the celebrity to the issue advocated. The authors indicate that the ability to create such a bond might be enhanced by using television advertising because of the medium is intimate.

Felchner (2004) found that celebrity endorsements rarely made or broke elections, and that after garnering some attention from the media, they usually were discounted. If so, what effect then does attention that the media gives celebrities have on the electoral process?

West and Orman (2002) said that using celebrities in the American political system was all part of entertaining America, stating, "No longer does the argument of whether pop culture influences political change or vice versa matter. Politics is pop culture" (p. 2).

Barney (2001) said that using celebrities to create spectacle during the 2000 election was a trend that contributed to society's distrust in politics by lowering the style and focus of the news to that of market-driven media in search of a share of audience attention.

Although some might want to place the blame squarely on the shoulders of the media, others have argued that the celebrities are as responsibility for creating citizen distrust in politics.

Alter (1999) wrote,

Celebrities, with the help of the media, tend to trivialize politics by turning it into entertainment. Their presence further subordinates substance to performance, and encourages the media to review how something ‘plays’ rather than to analyze what’s being said. Most famous people have nothing original to contribute to politics. But sometimes, theatrical arts can be used to advance serious political ideas. If other celebrities want to trade on their fame to join the debate, they must figure out how to touch not just our fantasy lives, but also our real ones. (p. 43)

On the contrary, it might be argued that involving celebrities in politics could strengthen the relationship between the Government and its citizens. Celebrity endorsements might help politicians to reach a wider audience, which, in turn, might effectively make citizens, who might not otherwise attend to issues, be more aware of them.

Street (2004) argued that some forms of popular culture (e.g., celebrity endorsements) might resonate with people in ways that traditional forms of political communication might not. Celebrities might speak and behave in ways that might appeal to citizens who might traditionally feel that politicians intimidate them.

Regardless of their effectiveness, a growing number of celebrities use their status to engage in politics by making expensive campaign advertisements. Weiskel (2005) found that millions (perhaps billions) of dollars were spent during the 4-year electoral cycle to influence voters’ choices. Weiskel argued that perhaps the “free” elections in America were among the most expensive the world had ever witnessed.

ADWATCH COVERAGE

Although the news media have often argued that political advertising might be too costly, too negative, and too likely to diminish the quality of political discourse, it is clear that political advertising can benefit today’s electorate. Political advertising can affect voter learning and decision formation. To monitor political advertising, many news sources have taken a watchdog role via adwatch coverage. In adwatches, the media report on ad content and the accuracy of its claims (Kaid, Tedesco, & McKinnon, 1996).

Seib (1994) suggested that journalists should cover campaign advertising as they cover other campaign experiences. He explains, “If a candidate’s speech to a thousand people merits a news story, so does a candidate’s ad that reaches a million people” (p. 94). Thus, the news media can shape voters’ perceptions of political advertising and, in turn, shape their government.

Scholars and journalists agree that adwatch coverage might help voters understand political advertising. However, Jamieson (1992) pointed out that only if reporters questioned the legitimacy of claims could a watchdog role aid the political process. Unfortunately, a study of

televised political adwatch coverage revealed that the media attempted some level of analysis only in about half of all network news stories (Kaid, Tedesco, & McKinnon, 1996). Jamieson (1992) warned that, if the news media failed to reframe political advertising, the ad's messages might be enhanced.

Experimental research has indicated that adwatch coverage might benefit the campaign by providing to voters unpaid access and by reairing the spot within a credible news environment (McKinnon & Kaid, 1999). In addition, research on video style suggests that the way spokespersons are presented in ads might affect the effect of ads on viewers (Kaid & Davidson, 1986). Indeed, visual images can often have a greater impact on voters than can the verbal content. McKinnon and Kaid (1999) found that the content of a political ad when presented as news might be more powerful than the media commentary accompanying it.

Moreover, research showed that most news attention was devoted to ads that were evocative, humorous, or controversial (Jamieson, 1992; Kaid, Gobetz, Garner, Leland, & Scott, 1993; Kaid et al., 1996; West, 1993). Indeed, such spots have often contained elements that emphasized video style. Wicks and Kern (1993) suggested that advertisements provided news directors with ready-made images. Indeed, political advertisements have often contained strong visuals and dramatic elements that were attractive to television news.

Some have argued that a single media critique might be compared to an advertisement that had been repeated time and again (Hinerfeld, 1990; Wolinsky, Sparks, Funk, Rooney, Lyon, et al., 1991). Indeed, today's political ads are replayed and critiqued online and on demand.

As political ads with celebrity endorsements continue to capture voter attention, the spots also capture media attention and garner increased exposure. Indeed, the news media help to transmit to the voters the candidates' messages about issues. Graber (1997) indicated that the media were "inextricably intertwined...those who aspire to elective office must play the new politics, which is media politics" (p. 264).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When the media covers political ads as news, it has the opportunity to frame the issue, the candidate's image, and the commercial content—thereby setting the political agenda.

Nimmo and Combs (1990) argued that modern politics is a mediated reality. Indeed, the images that the citizens have of politics are rarely from direct involvement. As voters' first-hand experiences with social and political institutions decrease, voters are increasingly more likely to turn to the mass media to tell them how to vote.

Agenda-setting attempts to determine the relationship between the press and citizens by examining the influence of the media on its audience. McCombs and Shaw (1972) based their studies on the assumption that the audience learns what issues are important from how the media places them in the news. In their benchmark studies of 1968 and 1972, they hypothesized that "the mass media set the agenda of issues for a political campaign by influencing the salience of

issues among voters” (McCombs, 2004, p. 4). Since their initial agenda-setting research, over 400 empirical studies have been conducted on this topic.

One of the earliest works to link agenda setting and political advertising was Bowers’ (1973) study on newspaper advertisements for 1970s senatorial and gubernatorial races. Rank order correlations between voter emphasis and advertising emphasis (+.97 for all candidates) lent support to the agenda-setting hypothesis. However, Bowers suggested a different direction of causality than was posited in McCombs and Shaw’s original studies (1972). His alternative explanation indicated that, during the short-term campaign, voters might set the media agenda indirectly through the candidate. Bowers (1977) also applied this notion to television ads.

In a conceptual piece, Southerland and Galloway (1981) questioned the role of the advertiser as the agenda-setter. Associating marketing, advertising, and agenda setting, they compared political advertising issues to the emphasis on issues as determined by the news agenda. They suggested, “Ad frequency or media weight is analogous to the media emphasis that is given to a news item over a period of time” (p. 27).

Examining the 1984 North Carolina senatorial campaign, Ghorpade (1986) found that transfer of issue salience from advertisements that emphasized what candidate attributes viewers should think about could lead to desired voting behavior. He concluded that the reasons voters gave for selecting particular candidates were positively associated with both television newscasts and televised political advertisements. These findings suggested a two-step process: (a) from advertising salience to voter salience, and (b) from voter salience to intended voter behavioral outcome.

In addition, Roberts (1992) conducted a panel design study of the ability of gubernatorial advertisements in Texas in 1990 to set the public agenda. Roberts found support for the two-step process suggested by Ghorpade (1996). Results of a two-group, discriminate analysis indicated that political advertising and general editorial content shared the agenda-setting function in their ability to create issue salience among the electorate. In fact, specific groups of voters could be identified according to issue concerns. Advertisers could target such concerns and, in turn, might influence the actions voters take.

Likewise, Roberts and McCombs (1994) found that political advertisements influenced the news agenda. According to the authors, “One highly specialized source, the political consultant, is greatly skilled at manufacturing pseudoevents to obtain beneficial news coverage and photo opportunities for the candidate” (p. 250). Replication of this study in Spain revealed additional support for the influence of political advertising on the news agenda (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998).

In political news coverage, gatekeepers select from various framing strategies. The tone, context, and placement of the news story might affect the way voters interpret the political process. Literature on framing and campaign news indicates that the news media positions political communication as a strategic game (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; D’Angelo & Esser, 2003; Patterson, 1993).

News media can and do serve an influential role in the political process, providing much of the background for American political realities. Reporters have taught us about candidates' backgrounds, personalities, strategies, and goals (West, 1993).

Capella and Jamieson (1994) cautioned that how a reporter frames a political adwatch might affect voters' attitudes toward the ad, its perceived fairness, and its perceived importance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first question for this study was, How did celebrity endorsements help to focus the debate of the issue concerning embryonic stem cell research in the 2006 Missouri election? The underlying question was, Could celebrity endorsements in advertising be effectively used to promote a political candidate or sway votes on a specific issue? Thus, do celebrity endorsements help set the political agenda?

To determine how these spots were covered by the news media, this study traced adwatch coverage in broadcast, print, and online sources. This study asked, Does the medium or media outlet that a voters turns to for information about an issue make a difference their understanding of political advertising claims?

These political spots, like many other pieces of political information, were covered in many different formats. The diversity of coverage prompts the question: Are all of these media responding to or presenting the ad content in the same way?

METHODOLOGY

Using a case study approach, the authors traced issue advocacy advertisements from their original presentation across media outlets. They also assessed the consistency and validity of the coverage by competing news sources.

The authors focused on the advertisement as the unit of analysis, tracing the variables news outlet, placement, analysis, and inclusion or exclusion of advertisement.

The televised spots that were selected for this study were ads that used celebrity endorsers who commented on the embryonic stem cell research debate as it pertained to Missouri State Amendment 2 as a 2006 ballot issue. The two Missouri Senate candidates were on opposite sides of the debate. The pro-Amendment 2 ad for the Democratic Party Senate candidate, Claire McCaskill, featured actor Michael J. Fox and focused on McCaskill's support of embryonic stem cell research. In response, an anti-Amendment 2 advertisement, sponsored by Missourians Against Human Cloning (2006), featured professional baseball players Jeff Suppan and Mike Sweeney, NFL quarterback Kurt Warner and actors James Caviezel and Patricia Heaton.

To assess the media coverage of the two political ads, a simple content analysis was performed. The adwatch coverage was coded for source, date, placement, and inclusion or exclusion of the advertisements. All available coverage in the Lexis Nexis database for selected media outlets ($n = 91$) was analyzed from October 20, 2006, through the day of the midterm elections held on

November 7, 2006. The period analyzed also included the Major League Baseball World Series played from October 21 to October 27 during which the two advertisements in question began airing.

Media outlets were selected to give a cross-section of the national media coverage of the state ballot question spots. The media used in this case study were (a) the *New York Times* ($n = 6$) and the *Los Angeles Times* ($n = 3$), representing traditional print sources; (b) CBS ($n = 12$) and ABC ($n = 7$), representing the network television stations; (c) CNN ($n = 46$) and Fox News ($n = 13$), representing the cable television stations; and (d) CBS.com ($n = 4$), an Internet news site for the CBS television network.

For an in-depth look at how multiple media outlets covered the same advertisements, the authors conducted a case study analysis. Particular attention was given to the media coverage of the spots. Selected coverage from these media sources was included to add descriptive information to this case study.

The advertisements and their coverage as political adwatches were traced in this paper. Both the verbal and visual content of the advertisements were examined throughout these media, looking for patterns of consistency or inconsistency between the media and how they covered the advertisements.

FINDINGS

Undoubtedly, the mass media played an important role in mediating political communication, and this fact was certainly the case in the Missouri election where the campaign rhetoric centered on the embryonic stem cell research issue. An advertisement for the Democratic Party Senate candidate Claire McCaskill featured Fox and focused on McCaskill's support of embryonic stem cell research. In this race, McCaskill attempted to unseat Republican Party incumbent Jim Talent who opposed Amendment 2. Missourians Against Human Cloning (2006), a group that opposes embryonic stem cell research and that galvanized opposition to Amendment 2, produced a celebrity-laden advertisement in response to the Fox spot.

PRO AMENDMENT 2 ADVERTISING

In support of Amendment 2, a 30-second spot was produced by the McCaskill campaign featuring Fox. In this spot, Fox, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, appeared unable to remain still because of the degenerative disease and gave an emotional appeal to voters in an effort to draw support for McCaskill.

Although the authors' research focused on the advertisement produced for the 2006 Missouri Senate race and the embryonic stem cell ballot initiative, readers should note that, in addition to the McCaskill spot, Fox also appeared in advertisements for pro-embryonic-stem-cell candidates in Maryland and Wisconsin. All three candidates that Fox supported in 2006 won their respective races.

The Fox advertisement for McCaskill began airing across Missouri during the first three games of the Major League Baseball's World Series featuring the St. Louis Cardinals on October 21, 22, and 24.

According to the transcript available on the Media Matters County Fair media blog, during an October 23 radio broadcast, conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh told his listeners that he believed the symptoms, including a continual rocking motion that Fox displayed in the McCaskill spot, were not real. Limbaugh said, "Either he didn't take his medication or he's acting" (Boehlert & Foster, 2006, p. 1).

Limbaugh's criticism (Boehlert & Foster, 2006) of Fox and of the McCaskill spot generated a great deal of media attention, for thousands of people turned to the popular video-sharing Web site, YouTube, to view the 30-second spot.

In an interview with CBS News on October 25, McCaskill credited Limbaugh with focusing the national media spotlight and the public's attention on her Senate race and the embryonic stem cell issue. Almost overnight, a limited television ad campaign gained national recognition as the spot was aired during news broadcasts.

Limbaugh apologized on air for saying Fox's symptoms were not real, but the talk show host continued to attack Fox. Limbaugh said, "Michael J. Fox is allowing his illness to be exploited and in the process is shilling for a Democratic politician" (Stanley, 2006, p. A15).

The popular media were drawn to the advertisement and, in the column "The TV Watch," Stanley (2006) put the spot on the same level as some of the nation's most memorable political ads. Stanley writes, "But one reason candidates rely so heavily on 30-second spots is that they appeal to visceral emotion, not reason. In the recent past, it has been the Republican advertisements that have tended to be bolder and more memorable: the Willie Horton advertisements that George Bush used against Michael S. Dukakis in 1988 or the specter of stalking wolves that his son, George W. Bush, used to make Senator John Kerry seem weak on terrorism. Democrats usually have to go back to 1964 and Lyndon B. Johnson's 'Daisy' attack on Barry Goldwater to find comparably vivid ads. Until now, that is" (p. A15).

ANTI-AMENDMENT 2 ADVERTISING

In response to the Fox spot, an anti-embryonic-stem-cell advertisement, sponsored by Missourians Against Human Cloning (2006), was produced to air during the fourth game of the World Series on October 26. The ad featured St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Jeff Suppan, who was pitching in World Series games that week. Also included were Kansas City Royals player Mike Sweeney and NFL quarterback Kurt Warner of the Arizona Cardinals. In addition, the spot featured actors James Caviezel, who played Jesus in the film, "The Passion of the Christ," and Patricia Heaton of the television series, "Everybody Loves Raymond."

Each of the celebrities cautions against Amendment 2, warning viewers to beware of loopholes in the law and other misguided intentions (Missourians Against Human Cloning, 2006). Opponents of embryonic stem cell research also argued that the research was exploitative

because scientists pay women to donate their eggs. In the ad, several of the celebrities asserted that the measure would open the door to human cloning and lead to the exploitation of low-income women because scientists pay women to donate their eggs. According to the spokesperson for the Missourians Against Human Cloning spokesperson, Cathy Ruse, the ad was already in production, but the initial airdate was moved up once the Fox ad was released.

MEDIA COVERAGE

To assess the media coverage of the two political ads, these researchers performed a content analysis. All available coverage in the Lexis Nexis database ($n = 91$) for selected media outlets was analyzed from October 20, 2006, through the day of the midterm elections held on November 7, 2006. Media outlets were selected to give a cross-section of the national media coverage of the state ballot question spots. The following tables, divided by media type, will be used in the discussion of the research questions.

The amount of print coverage ($n = 9$) was minimal compared to the broadcast coverage during the same time frame ($n = 78$). The *New York Times* ran six news stories during this time, while the *LA Times* ran three.

TABLE 1. PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE

Media source	Print date	Placement	Images shown
NY Times	10/24/06	A23	Screenshot of Fox in ad
NY Times	10/25/06	A15	None
NY Times	10/26/06	D3	Screenshot of Rebuttal ad; photo of Suppan
NY Times	11/5/06	Sect. 1, pg. 32	None
NY Times	11/5/06	Sect. 4, pg. 4	None
NY Times	11/7/06	A1	None
LA Times	10/26/06	A17	Snapshot of Fox in ad
LA Times	10/28/06	E1	Screenshot of Fox in ad; photo of Limbaugh
LA Times	11/5/06	M1	None

Note. To look at broadcast coverage during this period, these researchers selected two national news sources, CBS news ($n = 12$) and ABC news ($n = 7$), and two cable news channels, Fox news ($n = 13$) and CNN news ($n = 46$).

TABLE 2. BROADCAST MEDIA COVERAGE

Source	Air date	Placement	Images shown
CBS	10/24/06	The Early Show	Clip from Fox ad
CBS	10/25/06	The Early Show	No clip shown
CBS	10/25/06	CBS Evening News	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from

Source	Air date	Placement	Images shown
			Rebuttal ad
CBS	10/26/06	CBS Morning News	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CBS	10/26/06	The Early Show	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CBS	10/26/06	CBS Evening News	Clip from Fox ad
CBS	10/27/06	CBS Morning News	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CBS	11/3/06	CBS Morning News	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CBS	11/3/06	The Early Show	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CBS	11/4/06	The Saturday Early Show	Clip from Fox ad
CBS	11/6/06	CBS Morning News	Clip from Fox ad
CBS	11/6/06	CBS Evening News	Clip from Fox ad
ABC	10/24/06	World News with Charles Gibson	Clip from Fox ad
ABC	10/25/06	Nightline	Clip from Fox ad
ABC	10/29/06	This Week	Clip from Fox ad
ABC	10/29/06	World News Sunday	No clip shown
ABC	10/31/06	Nightline	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
ABC	11/7/06	World News with Charles Gibson	No clip shown
ABC	11/7/06	Nightline	No clip shown
Fox News	10/24/06	The Big Story with John Gibson	Clip from Fox ad
Fox News	10/24/06	The O'Reilly Factor	Clip from Fox ad
Fox News	10/25/06	Fox Special Report with Brit Hume	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
Fox News	10/25/06	On the Record with Greta Van Susteren	Clip from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
Fox News	10/26/06	Hannity & Co.	Clips from Rebuttal ad
Fox News	10/27/06	The Big Story with John Gibson	Clip from Fox ad

Source	Air date	Placement	Images shown
Fox News	10/28/06	The Beltway Boys	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
Fox News	10/29/06	Fox News Sunday	Clip from Fox ad
Fox News	10/30/06	The Big Story with John Gibson	Clip from Fox ad
Fox News	10/30/06	Fox Special Report with Brit Hume	No clip shown
Fox News	10/30/06	Hannity & Co.	No clip shown
Fox News	11/1/06	Hannity & Co.	No clip shown
Fox News	11/7/06	Fox Special Report with Brit Hume	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CNN	10/22/06	CNN Newsroom	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/23/06	Showbiz Tonight	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/24/06 (5 p.m.)	The Situation Room	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/24/06 (7 p.m.)	The Situation Room	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/24/06	Larry King Live	No clip shown
CNN	10/25/06 (7 a.m.)	American Morning	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/25/06 (8 a.m.)	American Morning	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/25/06 (9 a.m.)	CNN Newsroom	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/25/06	Your World Today	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/25/06 (1 p.m.)	CNN Newsroom	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CNN	10/25/06 (2 p.m.)	CNN Newsroom	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/25/06 (3 p.m.)	CNN Newsroom	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CNN	10/25/06 (4 p.m.)	The Situation Room	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/25/06 (5 p.m.)	The Situation Room	Clips from Fox ad; Clips from Rebuttal ad
CNN	10/25/06	Glen Beck	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/25/06	Larry King Live	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/26/06	The Situation Room	No clip shown
CNN	10/27/06	Showbiz Tonight	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/28/06	Saturday Morning News	No clip shown
CNN	10/28/06	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown

Source	Air date	Placement	Images shown
CNN	10/29/06	CNN Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer	No clip shown
CNN	10/29/06 (5 p.m.)	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	10/29/06 (10 p.m.)	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	10/30/06 (7 a.m.)	American Morning	No clip shown
CNN	10/30/06 (8 a.m.)	American Morning	No clip shown
CNN	10/30/06 (4 p.m.)	The Situation Room	No clip shown
CNN	10/30/06 (5 p.m.)	The Situation Room	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/30/06 (7 p.m.)	The Situation Room	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	10/30/06 (8 p.m.)	The Situation Room	No clip shown
CNN	10/30/06	Lou Dobbs Tonight	No clip shown
CNN	10/30/06	Larry King Live	No clip shown
CNN	10/31/06	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	11/2/06	The Situation Room	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	11/2/06	Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	11/3/06	American Morning	No clip shown
CNN	11/3/06 (9 a.m.)	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	11/3/06 (10 a.m.)	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	11/3/06 (2 p.m.)	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	11/4/06	House Call with Dr. Sanjay Gupta	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	11/4/06	Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	11/5/06	Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	11/6/06	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	11/7/06 (9 a.m.)	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	11/7/06 (3 p.m.)	CNN Newsroom	No clip shown
CNN	11/7/06	Lou Dobbs Tonight	Clip from Fox ad
CNN	11/7/06	The Situation Room	No clip shown

Finally, these researchers considered online media coverage by CBSnews.com ($n = 4$). Although this one source did not provide a comprehensive look at online coverage, it did provide a snapshot of the type of coverage one might find online.

TABLE 3. ONLINE MEDIA COVERAGE

Media source	Print date	Placement	Images shown	Links available
CBSnews.com	10/23/06	Politics	Photo of Fox	Clip of Fox ad shown in video news report
CBSnews.com	10/25/06	CBS Evening News	Photo of Fox; Photo of Limbaugh	Clips of Fox ad and Rebuttal ad shown in video news report
CBSnews.com	10/26/06	Politics	Photo of Fox; Photo of Limbaugh	Clips of Fox ad and Rebuttal ad shown in video news report
CBSnews.com	10/23/06	CBS Evening News	Photo of Fox	Clips of Fox ad and Rebuttal ad shown in video news report

CAMPAIGN DIALOGUE

The first set of research questions in the authors’ study related to the campaign dialogue (as presented by the news media) concerning the Missouri Senate race and the campaign ads that focused on Amendment 2. The authors asked whether the endorsements helped to focus the debate on the embryonic stem cell research issue, whether using celebrities helped to promote the candidates and to sway voters, and whether these ads helped to set the news agenda.

The advertisements themselves were covered as news items. Previous research on adwatch coverage indicated that the most controversial advertisements often received national news attention. In this case, the Amendment 2 issue, embryonic stem cell research, was very controversial. In addition, celebrities who held extreme views on the issue were used to support or oppose it.

Clearly, the Missouri advocacy advertisements for embryonic stem cell research were picked up by the national news network and Limbaugh’s lambasting of the Fox ad drew even more media attention to the compelling spot. In this case, Fox’s celebrity status focused the campaign dialogue and media attention on the issue of embryonic stem cell research; therefore, Fox set the agenda for media coverage of the state ballot issue. His celebrity status caused the state issue to become a national agenda issue and drew attention to the local race and ballot initiative. If Fox had not been a celebrity, the spot would likely not have been pushed into the national spotlight, would not have been ridiculed by Limbaugh, and would not have caused the Missourians Against Human Cloning (2006) to speed up their ad production.

CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION

McLuhan (1964) once argued, “The medium is the message” (p. 7). In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan explained that the medium itself should be the focus of mass communication studies.

The authors found that the channel or medium that a receiver uses to experience a message might affect that experience. Therefore, thesecond question in their study was, “Does the medium or the media outlet make a difference in voter understanding?”

In this case, the pro-Amendment 2 television spot, featuring Fox, originally aired during the first three games of the World Series on October 21, October 22, and October 24. The anti-Amendment 2 rebuttal ad first aired on October 25 during game four of the World Series. It is important to remember that these spots would have been couched in the commercial content during breaks from game play. Thus, viewers did not necessarily choose to view these spots. Indeed, some sports viewers might have been distracted during the commercial breaks and might not have devoted full attention to the ads. In addition, sports fans might have left the room during the commercial break and might have viewed only a portion of the ads.

Both ads were available online prior to and after their original airdates. In fact, thousands of people viewed the spots online via the candidates' Web sites, online news sources, blogs, and video-sharing sites such as YouTube. In the case of online ads, it is more likely that a viewer was looking for the spots and made a conscious decision to view the ad.

The controversial advertisements featuring high-profile celebrities were then picked up via adwatch coverage. Adwatch research tells us that voters might be just as likely to be exposed to advertisement via media coverage as to view it firsthand. In fact, adwatch coverage, which brought the ads and the embryonic stem cell research issue into the national spotlight, potentially exposed millions of viewers to the spots.

In our analysis, the broadcast media ($n=78$, 86%) provided more extensive coverage than did traditional print outlets ($n = 9$, 10%). In addition, broadcast (56%) and online media (100%) were more likely than print publications (44%) to include clips or images from the actual advertisements. However, most news outlets did not show the spots in their entirety. Thus, the medium or media outlet with which voters were exposed to political advertising might indeed have made a difference in their understanding of the issue advocated.

COMMENTARY

The final question we asked was, "Is the content presented by the media the same in all news coverage?" In the authors' content analysis of 91 instances of media coverage, the news coverage varied greatly from short news segments about Limbaugh's comments to substantial segments, including clips of the spots and an interview with Fox. The broadcast media often chose to use the compelling ad footage as part of its newscasts.

Nearly 80 percent ($n = 49$) of the broadcast media that the authors analyzed included a clip from one or both spots, while 37 percent ($n = 29$) did not include any ad clips. The Fox ad was the most popular clip; however, 44 percent ($n = 34$) of the television news segments included a clip only from the Fox ad, while only 1 percent ($n = 1$) of the television news segments exclusively used the rebuttal ad from *Missourians Against Human Cloning* (2006).

About half of the segments chose to include a clip from one of the ads, a link to the spot, or a screen shot from an ad. In the period analyzed, CNN aired 46 segments about the embryonic stem cell issue in the Missouri midterm elections while another 24-hour news network, Fox News, aired only 13. Viewers tuning in to CNN had a greater chance of being exposed to information about the race than those who tuned into Fox News.

A segment on an October 26, 2006, *The Early Show* (Bass, 2006) on CBS included clips from both ads and a critique of the spots by Barbara Lippert, an advertising critic for *Adweek Magazine*. Lippert said the Fox ad was far more effective than the Republican rebuttal ad, which did not have as high a production quality and was not an effective spot. In the same segment, Gloria Borger is a CBS News national political correspondent spoke about the sheer reach of the Fox spot: “Well, obviously, the echo chamber’s at work. It’s very effective. You know, originally, Hannah, this was just supposed to be shown in Kansas City and St. Louis to bring out Democratic voters, because there’s still a 8 or 10 percent undecided vote out there. But obviously, this is an ad that kind of breaks through the clutter of all of those other advertisements out there because it’s so compelling to watch. So I really think it’s served its purpose” (p. 2).

McCaskill also appeared on the program, but Talent declined an invitation to be on *The Early Show* (Bass, 2006). Later that same day on the CBS *Evening News* (Hartman, 2006) anchor, Katie Couric interviewed Fox about his support ad for McCaskill and about Limbaugh’s comments. Fox said that one of the best things to come out of the ad controversy was the media focus on Parkinson’s disease.

Incumbent Senator Jim Talent responded, as a guest on a November 1 edition of the *Fox Hannity & Co.* on the Fox News, to the Fox ad and discussed his views on human cloning. He said, “I think the commercial was over the top. You know, and it’s pretty clear, I think, that he wasn’t informed about what’s really happening in Missouri, but I don’t know what his motives were” (Hannity, 2006, p. 3). McCaskill declined an invitation to appear on the same show.

Print sources were less likely to use an image from either of the ads in its coverage. In the *Los Angeles Times*, Simon (2006) described the rebuttal ad as less emotional, but he explored the personal passion against embryonic stem cell research held by the celebrities (e.g., baseball player Suppan) in the spot designed to encourage voters to cast their ballots against Amendment 2. Suppan was so eager to appear in the spot that he filmed his segment himself.

The online media coverage by CBSnews.com included stories generated by both the Associated Press and CBS. While the coverage itself was unbiased, like most traditional newspaper and television news reports, it also included an open-comments section where online visitors were permitted to comment freely on the news report. These comments were documented alongside the original news report. Although the comments were user-generated and not endorsed by CBS, the commentary turned into compelling content when visitors add their own thoughts, analysis, and preferences on the issue. In turn, it provides a lasting source of additional information that traditional print and broadcast news do not have.

DISCUSSION

In performing the case study analysis of the Missouri spots, the authors found some common and important elements. First, all media attempted some analysis of the spots. This analysis centered on the fact that high-profile celebrities were used in advertising to support or oppose the Missouri state ballot initiative on embryonic stem cell research. Initial coverage of the Amendment 2 initiative focused on the images of Fox including his noticeable shakiness. This

spot was covered by numerous news outlets and criticized on Limbaugh's radio show as being staged. In turn, the Fox-Limbaugh debate became a key part of subsequent media coverage. In fact, McCaskill credited Limbaugh for focusing the national media spotlight on her race and the embryonic stem cell research issue. Less coverage was provided of the response advertisement and the position of Talent.

Adwatch coverage suggests that it is the most evocative, most humorous, and most controversial ads that receive coverage. In this case, there was a controversial issue, strong visuals, and celebrity involvement. These elements made the spots particularly appealing to broadcast outlets as they added to the visual nature of the newscasts. The authors' research on video style indicated that the way celebrities were portrayed in ads might affect the effect of the ad on viewers. In this case, the shaky image of Fox not only shaped image coverage, but it also focused issue attention on the embryonic stem cell research issue. In this study, over half of all media outlets included some portion of the actual ads—for broadcast, video clips; for print, still shots of the advertisements; and for online, clips or links to the ad itself.

In our analysis, the broadcast coverage far surpassed print coverage. However, it should be noted that broadcast coverage included two, 24-hour news stations that provided the bulk of coverage. When political ads are covered as news items, the media has the opportunity to frame the coverage of issues and candidate images coverage. In turn, the spot coverage might set the news agenda. In the authors' case study, a viewer of CNN news might think that these spots were a major campaign issue, for more than half of all the broadcast coverage the authors examined was generated by CNN. Thus, the source and the channel receivers selected for news coverage might affect how and to what extent they might have been exposed to the political advertisements.

Some journalists have argued that a single media critique cannot compare to advertising that has been frequently repeated. However, adwatch coverage tells the authors that by getting one's ad covered as a news item, one might actually get more exposure. In fact, one's spot might become couched in a credible news environment. In this case, the initial ads received considerable coverage. In fact, they were frequently repeated by the news media. Although the authors' study did not focus on local news coverage of the issue, it is clear that the Amendment 2 spots were featured prominently in national news coverage. In turn, the advertising coverage might have helped to focus national attention on the issue of embryonic stem cell research and on the Missouri senate race. The attention given to the Fox spot and Limbaugh's comments increased attention not only on McCaskill's race, but also on the issue of embryonic stem cell research and raised awareness of Parkinson's disease.

Unquestionably, celebrity endorsements help to generate hype and media attention in political advertising. Indeed, in this case, using celebrities in both spots to support and to oppose Amendment 2 added to the drama of the advertisement coverage. In fact, these ads were consistently covered throughout the 3-week period that was analyzed in this study and they included some form of coverage almost daily. Celebrities were used in the campaign ads; therefore, they brought national attention to a state issue. Had the spots featured noncelebrities, they might not have garnered the same level of attention and might not have set the agenda for national news.

The findings from this study reinforce the notion that celebrities are powerful tools in the marketing arsenal. Whether marketing a product, a brand, or a political candidate, celebrities bring their spotlight to whatever they endorse. Examining celebrity endorsements through the political lens further suggests that, for a campaign to be successful, just as celebrity endorsers and products or brands must be well-matched, celebrity endorsers and political candidates must be well-matched. As successful celebrity product endorsements by celebrities boost sales, so successful political endorsements by celebrities pay dividends with votes for political candidates. Conversely, unsuccessful campaigns, whether they promote political candidates or consumer products, might have a negative impact on viewers and could damage the product image or political candidate image.

Although further research should be conducted on the use of celebrities as political endorsers, the authors feel that celebrity endorsement could be an effective campaign tool. In this case, using celebrities to promote a political agenda was effective. Not only did they help to capture voter attention, but they also worked to capture media attention.

These findings might show a trend in the use of celebrity advocacy advertising and might foreshadow the future of political advertising. This research might be applied to studies of advertising for larger scale races (e.g., the 2010 presidential campaign) to discern whether using celebrities to promote political candidates is a growing trend.

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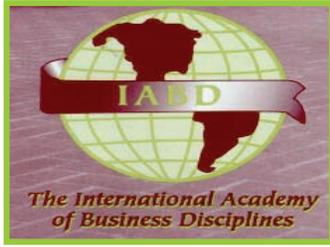
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