Spring 1987

A Comparative Study Of The Role Of Certain Political Communications Strategies Contrasting The 1980 Incumbent Campaign Of Jimmy Carter And the 1984 Incumbent Campaign Of Ronald Reagan

Brian Canady
Carroll College, Helena, MT

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.carroll.edu/communication_theses

Part of the American Politics Commons, and the Social Influence and Political Communication Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.carroll.edu/communication_theses/38

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Communication Studies at Carroll Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Studies Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of Carroll Scholars. For more information, please contact tkratz@carroll.edu.

A thesis submitted to the Department of Communication Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with Honors at Carroll College in Helena, Montana

Brian Canady
March 30, 1987
This thesis has been approved for graduation with honors from the Department of Communication Studies.

Mr. William Huber

Mr. Henry Burgess

Mr. Harold Smith

3-31-87
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION................................................................. 1

CHAPTER

I. METHOD OF STUDY: CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES.................. 4
II. CARTER'S USE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES......................... 17
III. REAGAN'S USE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES....................... 27
IV. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS................................................... 35

END NOTES........................................................................ 37

BIBLIOGRAPHY.................................................................... 40
INTRODUCTION

. . . If you contrived, from the heavens, to view a set of prison bars, detecting one man on one side of those bars, another man on the other side of those bars. And you comment, simply, that the two men are separated by bars: Nothing else is distinct. It is only when you come down from the clouds that suddenly the focus clears, and you can see that one man is the criminal and the other man, his jailer.¹

William F. Buckley illustrates for us that often there exists a thin line between those who are socially accepted and those who make the decision of what is socially acceptable. Those bars he speaks of are often the only separation in physical terms. On a different level those same bars could represent the social norms which separate criminal from jailer. In the political realm, a similar situation exists. On one side we have those who are able to convince the voting public of their ability to lead--the winners, and those who are unsuccessful in that attempt--the losers. If we were to use Mr. Buckley's analogy, the loser is one who is enclosed within his or her mobility to persuade the voting public, and the winners are those enjoying the freedom of success at persuasion. The "bars" could be seen as channels of communication which are available to all candidates. The ways in which the candidate chooses to use those channels determines the role which the "bars" play in their political career. The candidate
who is able to effectively use those channels of communication, or the "bars," chooses to use them as a safeguard, a method of protecting what they have accomplished. This can be compared to the way in which a jailer uses the bars to safeguard society from criminals, and therefore protects his freedom. The candidate who is ineffective in using communication channels encloses him or herself in a cell of political isolation and failure.

We see that now a candidate who chooses to use the channels of communication which are available to him or her has quite an impact on political success. The images and messages which are transmitted to the voting public through these channels are the keys to how the candidate is perceived by that public. The way in which a candidate is perceived is one of the most important determinants of whether he or she will be elected into the desired office. According to Walter Fisher, the images projected "must be visionary and dramatic, and must evoke the vision of the American Dream." ²

In this study, we will examine the effects that strategies, for the use of available political communication channels, can have on potential and existing political careers. Using the incumbent campaigns of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, we will discuss the ability of each to utilize these strategies in their campaign communication, and the effect which those abilities had on their political success, or lack thereof. Mr. Reagan, we will see, has
been extremely successful in his use of communication channels. Mr. Carter, on the other hand, attempted, but was unsuccessful at communicating a positive public image.

In order to be thorough in our investigation, we will employ the use of several approaches to the issue of political communication strategies. We will begin by examining a list of campaign communication strategies, provided by the works of Judith S. Trent and Robert V. Friedenberg, and the effects that each can have on political campaigns. Secondly, we will analyze the 1980 incumbent campaign of Jimmy Carter, as it compares to the set of strategies that Trent and Friedenberg have given us. Thirdly, we will analyze Ronald Reagan's 1984 incumbent campaign according to the same criteria. Lastly, we will come to some general conclusions about the roles which communication strategies can play in a political campaign.
CHAPTER ONE

METHOD OF STUDY

CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The major criteria on which the conclusions of this study will be based is a list of incumbent campaign communication strategies. These criteria have been compiled by Trent and Friedenberg, in their book *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices*. Excerpts from the work of Theodore White and Daniel J. Boorstin, as well as other respected political experts, will be used to justify the Trent-Friedenberg list.

To begin this study, the Trent-Friedenberg list will be discussed in detail, in order to clarify the intent of each strategy. Please note that, although the Trent-Friedenberg criteria is listed in complete form, for our purposes the incumbent campaigns of Carter and Reagan justify the application of only the first eight.

The Trent-Friedenberg Strategies for Campaign Communication

(1) The creation of pseudo-events.
(2) Appointments to jobs and committees.
(3) The appropriation of grants and funds.
(4) The creation of special task forces and commissions.
(5) Conciliation with world leaders.
(6) The manipulation of domestic issues.
Emphasizing accomplishments.
Endorsements from other leaders.
An "above the trenches" campaign style.
The use of surrogates on the campaign trail.
Intensifying foreign policy into international crisis.

Each of these strategies plays a very important role in the building of a successful master plan for the use of communications and communication channels in a political campaign. Through the application of these criteria, we will be able to draw conclusions from the Carter campaign of 1980 and the Reagan campaign of 1984. However, an understanding of the role each strategy plays must first be established.

Pseudo-events

The term "pseudo-event" has its origins in the works of Daniel J. Boorstin. In his 1962 classic The Image, Boorstin explains a pseudo-event as one's ability to "... make news happen. ... a created event." More than twenty years later, Trent and Friedenberg expand on Boorstin's definition explaining that a pseudo-event is different "... from 'real' events in that they are planned, planted or incited for the primary purpose of being reported or reproduced." For our purposes a pseudo-event can be seen as any event which a politician or political team plans and organizes ahead of time with the specific intention of drawing attention to a candidate and his or her campaign. By this process of deliberately "making news" a politician seeks to capture public awareness, through the media which
captures and communicates the event, and to sway opinion to favor that campaign. The success of a pseudo-event can be measured by how widely it is reported, and how well it is received by the viewing public. Boorstin gives a fine example of a pseudo-event which, although staged for purposes outside of political communications, can still illustrate the effectiveness with which pseudo-events call attention to institutions which require public recognition.

The owners of an aging hotel consult a public relations counsel, asking the man how they can increase the prestige and business of their establishment. After careful thought, the counsel decides to create a pseudo-event which will shed positive light on the hotel and its patronage. It is decided that the hotel will hold a well-advertized and reported banquet, in which the city will honor the hotel for the "thirty-five years of excellent and unselfish community service." As the media coverage increases, the general public begins to feel as though this old hotel has something special about it. They also see the hotel as being prestigious and upstanding in the community. Hence, the pseudo-event planted the idea of prestige and associated it with the hotel. Business began to pick up, and the owners were thoroughly convinced of the power of communication strategies in the business world.

Similarly, the political candidate who uses well-planned pseudo-events can shed a positive light on his
or her campaign. A direct result is often increased public popularity; a commodity of which a candidate can never get enough. By creating a simple event which depicts the candidate in a positive role, and "tapping into" the resources of the advertising and broadcast media, a candidate can do a great deal to improve the chances of victory.

Trent and Friedenberg stress the importance of the use of pseudo-events in political campaigns. Boorstin showed us that these "created realities" can be used for advantages in many areas. At any rate, pseudo-events are most definitely a political advantage; in a world where every advantage counts.

The next three strategies can be placed under one title: "Making Friends in the Right Places," which refers to the relative similarities of their intentions and final results.

Appointments

Every candidate, especially the incumbents, controls many governmental positions and offices. Use of the power to name the individuals who will hold various governmental positions allows a candidate to lobby for the support of powerful individuals and groups. An example of the necessity for such action can be seen in the growing need for candidates to enlist the support of sizable minority groups which can have substantial effects on election results. Theodore White acknowledges the need to use the appointments to governmental position to lobby ethnic
support by stating that, "the "...recognition of the various communities which had already changed the quality and composition of American life and thus, necessarily had to change the quality and composition of American government." White continues on to cite examples which began more than a century ago, he says

...changes in the kind of people...appointed to leadership in the United States government...changes that Carter brought to a climax in his administration, had been swelling for over a century...1877 Rutherford B. Hayes had named Carl Schure as Secretary of the Interior, recognizing the new and powerful German-American voters. 

White, as well as Trent and Friedenberg, recognized that by appointing certain people to high government positions, compromises and goals can be more easily accomplished. By appointing members of certain ethnic groups, Presidents are able to capture a substantial portion of that ethnic group's vote. Similarly, the candidate who appoints a respected businessman to a position, may obtain the support of corporate America. Corporate support is not only important because of the voter population of corporate America, but also because of potential financial support, and potential lobbying power in Congress.

The support of powerful individuals and groups is a major determining factor of a candidate's victory or defeat. One of the most powerful tools for enlisting this support is the power to appoint people to government jobs, committees and positions. There are arguments as to the ethical quality of such methods. However, in today's
world, especially in the area of politics, it is "dog-eat-dog" and the usage of every available resource is quite necessary. The ethical quality of this strategy is left up to the individual candidates, and how they choose to use it.

**Fund Appropriation**

Much like the power to appoint people to jobs and committees, each candidate has a great deal of money at his or her disposal. Candidates may find it beneficial to use grants and/or funds to enlist the support of individuals or groups. Trent and Friedenberg sum up the power of this strategy by contending that: "Absolutely no... strategy is less subtle or more powerful than appropriating special grants/funds to 'cooperative' (politically supportive) public officials..." They contend that this strategy alone has the most immediate effect on a candidate's ability to enlist powerful support for his or her campaign. Theodore White seems to agree with Trent and Friedenberg on the power of the money available to politicians. White says that, "Money buys attention. It buys, above all, television and radio time, it buys expertise..." It is the ability of the appropriation of grants and funds to buy influence and expertise which gives a candidate the greatest advantage. The most influential sources can be obtained through the effective use of available money. However, the need for responsible decision-mak-
ing by a candidate is a serious necessity. This strategy is not only more powerful, but is also more easily abused than the other Trent-Friedenberg strategies. Candidates must use financial influence for responsible causes, and only groups or individuals which can be trusted to use the money appropriately should be given grants and/or funds. The power that lies within the appropriation of grants and funds can be a great influencing factor for any political candidate. However, this power can also be abused. If it is so abused, a candidate risks his or her political career, and his or her moral, ethical and legal character. Good judgment on the part of the candidate is essential.

Special Task Forces

There are many issues which face each candidate as he or she moves along the campaign trail. Each individual, each group, each city, everyone has an issue with which they are concerned. Often they come to the candidates for solutions. Any candidate who hopes to be victorious must be able to answer to the major concerns of the voting public. If he or she is able to do so, the public perception is of a "candidate of action." Those who take action towards resolving public concern move a step closer to political success. As Trent and Friedenberg explain: "Modern candidates [must] understand the need not only to determine which issues are of a concern to the voters
...but to speak to those concerns." One of the most effective ways to do so is to create special task forces or committees to investigate the issue, and to recommend solutions by which the candidate can best deal with it. Trent and Friedenberg state that the purpose of creating task forces is to "create the illusion that the candidate is concerned about the problem." At the very least, assigning a special commission buys a candidate time to better deal with the issues and their related implications. In any case, this strategy enables a candidate to communicate direct evidence of his or her concern with the public issues. Hence, a positive image is transmitted through the channels of communication.

Meeting World Leaders

In his book, *War and Peace in the Global Village*, Marshall McLuhan speaks of the effects which modern technological advancements have had on our world.

Today, electronics and automation make mandatory that everybody adjust to the vast global environment as if it were his little home town.

The ease with which we can communicate with and about each other, through modern technology, has created a "Global Village." We are connected through technological advancement. It has brought our entire world together into a "village" of communications. Old boundaries between nations bend under the weight of new strains, brought on by the "closeness" of world population. National
and social boundaries are more difficult to define. Conflicting ideologies, both political and social, clash as we are inevitably drawn closer to one another.

These conflicting ideologies increase tension, and with this tension comes an increased danger of violent confrontation in our world. Most people are frightened by this possibility. We wish to feel secure and safe. Because of this desire, we tend to search for leaders who can provide this feeling of security. Hence, it becomes necessary for a candidate to provide the public with some sense of conciliation between governments. As White explains, the candidate who can do this has great power of persuasion over the voters: "A President talking about foreign affairs to...fellow Americans can almost always hold their hushed attention. And if what he tells them is what they want to hear...they become almost worshipful."15 What they want to hear is that the world is safe and that there are efforts being made at keeping it that way.

One of the best ways to show effort at keeping the world safe, and thereby telling the people what they want to hear, is to communicate one's conciliation with other world leaders. By arranging meetings to discuss issues, and by making sure of solid media coverage of such meetings, a candidate is able to communicate his or her ability to work toward global peace and security. This strategy is one of a candidate's most powerful tools for communicat-
ing a positive image to the voting public.

**Domestic Issues**

It is necessary for a candidate to have the ability and resources to manipulate existing domestic issues in such a way that those issues shine a positive light on his or her administration and its policies. Without the ability to keep constant communication about the reasons for domestic situations a candidate places himself or herself in a vulnerable position. A failing domestic policy can be blamed entirely on a candidate, and the credit for domestic success can be taken away by someone who is more willing to communicate with the public. If, however, a candidate is able to use the media and other resources to manipulate public perception of domestic issues, the outcome would more than likely be more positive. An excellent example of how a candidate can manipulate an existing domestic issue to reflect his campaign positively can be found during the 1972 Nixon campaign for reelection:

Checks went out in October 1972, one month before the elections, with the following memo enclosed and personally approved by President Nixon...: "Your Social Security payment has been increased by 20% starting with this month's check by a new statute enacted by Congress and signed into law by President Richard Nixon on July 1, 1972. The President also signed into law a provision which will allow your Social Security benefits to increase automatically as the cost of living goes up."16

Nixon had taken a hot, election-year issue (the status
of Social Security benefits) and turned it into a banner waving to the voting public the Nixon willingness to sign a law helping the elderly. This is a prime example of how a candidate can use domestic issues to assist him or her in a campaign. On the other hand, a candidate who takes office at the beginning of a recession created by circumstances previous to his or her administration, and does not attempt to manipulate public perception of the causes of this domestic crisis, will most often be blamed by that public for the occurrence of the recession. Later in this study we will see how this very phenomenon occurred during the Carter administration. We will also see that the Reagan administration has made successful attempts at manipulating the public perception of domestic issues.

Endorsements

It may seem that in the largest democratic nation in the world, a mature adult should not need the approval of social groups or powerful individuals before undertaking a serious political campaign. However, the democratic environment and the competition it breeds, is exactly what makes this approval necessary. In major elections, the political competition is so intense, and the campaigning so extensive, that candidates must make use of powerful outside influences to obtain large numbers of the popular vote.
Trent and Friedenberg tell us that endorsements are an attempt to identify and link the candidate with already established, highly respected, and generally acknowledged leaders. In other words, candidates can receive credibility by association with well-known leaders or groups, which represent certain ways of thinking, acting or living.

It is this role which endorsements from leaders and groups serve in the electoral process. By obtaining an endorsement from the NAACP, a candidate stands to gain a substantial amount of the American black vote. The League of Women Voters, the National Education Association, and various labor unions have, or have had, similar persuasive power in general elections. In close elections, these endorsements and the large number of votes that come with them can be the difference between political victory, or political defeat.

**Accomplishments**

This strategy forms the core of the Trent-Friedenberg criteria. "Candidates must be able to demonstrate tangible accomplishments...the strategy is simple as long as the deeds exist. The difficulty occurs when there have been few accomplishments, or when major problems have arisen that overshadow positive contributions." As we will see later, this is what Carter allowed to occur to his presidency. The emphasis should be placed on the fact that he allowed this to occur. We will also find
that the Reagan administration did not allow problems to overshadow accomplishments.

In a media-oriented world, such as ours, it is necessary for a candidate to communicate positive images to the public at every possible opportunity. The candidate who does not take advantage of accomplishments, will most often be blamed for the negative, and forgotten when it comes to positive. The candidate who uses communication channels to emphasize his or her accomplishments will most often be victorious.

Each of these strategies of campaign communication, given to us by Trent and Friedenberg, plays an important role in political success. Yet, why is it that they are so important and so effective? This question raises one of the central focuses of this study:

In our "Global Village," it is necessary for anyone who hopes to be politically successful to use the multifaceted media to his or her communicative advantage. The image which a candidate projects to the voting public may very well be the difference between winning or losing.

Each of the Trent-Friedenberg strategies is a tool by which any candidate can build and use communication channels to create a positive public image. The key force behind the use of these campaign communication strategies is the media. It is through today's technological media that a candidate will project the desired images to millions of potential voters.
CHAPTER TWO
CARTER'S USE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

In his 1980 campaign for re-election, James Earl Carter was unsuccessful. Not only was he unsuccessful at getting the American vote, but underlying this fact he was unsuccessful in his use of communication channels and the strategies which make these channels politically advantageous. It is imperative that a candidate work toward establishing both a positive public image, and a positive image among political peers, if he or she can ever hope for success. To better understand Carter's failure to do so, an examination of his political campaign communication framework, as compared with the Trent-Friedenberg strategies, is necessary.

Pseudo-events

In his campaign for re-election in 1980, Mr. Carter was almost completely unsuccessful at the staging of useful, productive pseudo-events. He seemed to have failed at even making serious attempts at doing so. The Carter campaign team chose to maintain the usage of "The Rose Garden Strategy." Theodore White informs us that, "Carter's strategy was simple: to act as President sheltered in the White House, appearing on the evening news as a non-
participant from his Rose Garden. . ." Carter and his advisors chose to communicate the message that the President was busy dealing with the Iran Hostage Crisis, and had no time to spend on the campaign trail. However, the plan backfired. When facing a skilled communicator like Ronald Reagan such a passive strategy became harmful to the re-election campaign. By allowing Reagan to stand center-stage, and to perform a political campaign "soliloquy," the Carter team greatly handicapped their ability to capture public attention and to communicate positive images. The Carter re-election campaign greatly needed the active role of pseudo-events to strengthen their election day chances. As it was to be, Carter was continually upstaged by Reagan in 1980, and as the election drew closer, he suffered the consequences. Defeat was inevitable, in part due to the lack of a positive and active communication image.

Appointments to Jobs and Committees

Hedley Donovan of Time Magazine expresses quite completely Carter's failure to carry out this ever-important group of Trent-Friedenberg strategies:

On Capitol Hill, Carter failed to forge strong alliances, he made no close friends among Congressmen. . . . This was curious enough, but more revealing, he still had none four years later.21

Jimmy Carter came to the White House in 1977. A successful campaign, in which he promised to stay clear
of the "inner circle" of Washington influence, had brought him to office in the years of post-Watergate political mistrust. His goal, as were most of his goals, was a noble one. However, like many of his other goals, this one was taken to an extreme which made it unrealistic, and ultimately destructive to his Presidency. Carter alienated himself on Capitol Hill, and in doing so, damaged the effectiveness of his programs, and later his ability to gain support for re-election.

An excerpt from the Congressional Quarterly, Inc. publication, *Carter 1980*, shows how Carter failed to combine the power to appoint powerful people to positions, or to use the great wealth of experienced politicians already in Washington.

*When he came to town in 1977 Carter proudly billed himself as an outsider, with no Washington connections. He appointed long-time Georgia colleagues as his closest advisors and spurned offers of help from older Washington hands.*

By spurning the offers of such experienced and powerful politicians, Carter did two things: (1) he denied himself the benefit of the experience of those persons already acquainted and in place within the Washington system; and (2) sent a negative message to the Washington political machine which offended them. Both would haunt Carter for the rest of his presidency.

**Fund Appropriation**

This strategy is powerful, and is necessary to ensure
the success of any politician, but especially for a newcomer with little influence of his own. Carter, for the most part, failed to take advantage of this strategy also. He was not willing to sacrifice some of his honorable intentions for the sake of gaining the support necessary to make his programs more successful. Carter was not willing to swap influence on the Hill.

What Carter would not or could not do was to send an aide to Capitol Hill with this admonition: "Here's two dams and three grants---you go up there and spend them. You bring me back thirteen votes in the Senate and forty-two from the House." By this, he sacrificed potential influence for his programs in Congress.

Carter also failed to take advantage of the appropriation of grants and funds to win public support. Money is equally as influential when used to support certain groups which carry political influence in the form of votes. Presidential Advisor Anne Wexler, speaking to a 1978 conference of city planners and urban development officials, exemplified the administration's unwillingness to make use of available money to its own advantage:

The President is committed to dealing with inflation. It will be a time of austerity. . . . There will not be a lot of new money for urban aid during the next few years.

Again, Carter's intentions were noble. However, by so blatantly passing the message on, he alienated the urban interest. This action certainly influenced the urban vote in 1980 to some degree. In our political
system, lobbying and swapping is necessary to develop political success.

Special Task Forces

The Carter administration did succeed in using this strategy. Many special task forces were created. For example, on February 28, 1978, Carter announced that, "I have instructed the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to work with Congress on legislation needed to establish a Department of Education which will [deal with the major issues facing education]." Education was certainly of major concern in the U.S. in 1978. Carter did well to assign a special task force to deal with it. However, Carter failed in the most important part of this and other uses of this strategy. He did not communicate the establishment of such commissions to the public. Hence, general knowledge of his action was limited, and he was not credited with taking such positive action.

Had Carter gone to Washington more willing to negotiate within the system, he may have been more successful at obtaining Congressional support for his policies. He may also have been perceived by the public as a more successful leader, and he may have been re-elected in 1980. As it was, this cooperation never occurred, and Carter was defeated in 1980 by a man who was willing to work within the system.
Meeting World Leaders

Carter was most successful at using this strategy. However, as with the creation of special task forces, he failed to communicate his successes enough to override failures that would surface later. Hedley Donovan outlines the greatest conciliatory achievement of the Carter Administration:

The Camp David agreements... This was the finest hour in Carter Administration foreign policy...Camp David was Carter at his best.26

Carter played the key role in what was probably the most important, and most amazing, foreign relation achievement of our time. He brought together the leaders of two countries that had been ideological and social enemies for decades, and was able to negotiate a peace treaty between them. Carter was the "go-between," the man that kept things moving. He showed a mastery of conciliation. Without him the Middle East peace talks (Camp David accords) would never have occurred, let alone succeeded.

However, they did succeed, and through this success, Carter captured the attention of the world media, and therefore the people of the world. Carter was presented with an unprecedented opportunity to project his conciliatory abilities to the American public. However, as with other Carter achievements, this was allowed to fall by the wayside, and to be forgotten in the face of coming failure in foreign and domestic policy. David Calleo of The New York Times Book Review shows the accomplishments that
were overshadowed, and the major failure that would rise over the Carter administration:

In 1977 the administration seemed off to a fast start. The year 1978 saw an apparent harvest of achievement, the Panama Canal Treaty. . . ., the Camp David accords. . . ., full relations with China, the Salt II treaty. But 1978 also saw ominous signs of impending failure: the Iranian revolution. . . .27

It would be this impending failure that would override the president's accomplishments as a truly conciliatory leader. As will be discussed later, this was largely due to the Carter team's inability to emphasize and capitalize on their accomplishments.

**Domestic Issues**

Carter's inability to manipulate the public's perception of domestic issues was another contributor to the fact that he would soon become buried by circumstances and failures surrounding his administration. He came into office with many impending negative domestic issues on the horizon. In such a situation, a politician must use open communication channels to make sure that the blame for such occurrences does not land on his or her administration. Calleo outlines the circumstances which Carter faced:

He [Carter] inherited an economy suffering from a long-gestating inflation--the product of the accumulated effects of Vietnam spending and the first and second oil shocks. His remedies could not restore prosperity in time to win the election.28

Carter allowed this long-failing economy to be blamed
on him, despite evidence to the contrary. He needed to have made concentrated efforts, through channels of communication, to convince the voting public of why the recession was occurring, and that his programs were bringing recovery. Instead, Carter received the blame, and Reagan would, upon entering the White House in 1981, inherit the economic recovery that lay just around the corner all along.

"In the end the gentle persona hurt Carter—-it seemed to convey a lack of force and contributed to the view that he was not presidential."29 His unwillingness to take action on the manipulation of public perception of domestic issues created an aura of weakness around him. Jimmy Carter paid the price of this lack of action in the 1980 election.

Accomplishments

A candidate must, above all other strategies, be able to emphasize their accomplishments through communication channels. This, more than any other, was Carter’s greatest failure. Emphasis of accomplishments never seemed to be a priority, and the cloud of darker days would rain on the Carter administration. Calleo answers the inevitable question:

Why did Mr. Carter fail?... The Administration's accomplishments, like the Panama Canal Treaty or the Camp David accords, failed to capture the public's imagination.30

Yet, how could this have happened? These accomplishments were two of the most impressive works of American
statesmanship in decades. These did not capture the public's imagination? Why? Because the Carter administration did not emphasize them, through the open channels of communication, to the voting public. The public should never have been allowed to forget the impact of these great achievements. Instead the Carter administration produced rhetoric such as the following statement made by the President:

Inflation has...been a serious problem for me ever since I became President. We have tried to control it, but we have not been successful.31

Rather than emphasizing precedent-setting diplomatic achievements, Carter used communication channels to admit and emphasize complete failure. With accomplishments forgotten, the failures of the coming years would easily bury Carter and his presidency.

Endorsements

The comment of a former Democratic Senator illustrates Carter's failure to use this strategy: "There was no one up on the Hill who would go the last mile for him."32 Partially because of his unwillingness to work within the system, and partially because of his perceived weakness as a leader, Carter was unable to obtain the endorsement or support from any other major leaders, or of any powerful groups. He could not even enlist the total support of his own party. A good example of this lack of support even from within the Democratic Party was the persistence
of the presidential campaign by fellow Democrat Ted Kennedy. The party was split, and the constant opposition from within further weakened Carter's base. As the following quote illustrates, the divisions were allowed to go far too deep:

Some of the people that Senator [Ted] Kennedy is listening to now [are] convinced that Carter is such a bad man that he has to be defeated even if it means a Reagan presidency.33

Such deep divisions made a Carter victory almost impossible. As a result, he was left in the cold in November of 1980. Many disenchanted Americans, some of them Democrats, voted for a change.

In an election which was very close until the final days, the ability of a candidate to project positive images can distinguish between victory and defeat. According to Hamilton Jordan, one of Carter's top aides:

Many Americans saw nothing to choose between Reagan and Carter. ... When no differences are perceived between candidates, the voting decisions are increasingly oriented towards personal qualities and characteristics. ... This [was] the first time that "personal" qualities [were] not a basic strength of ours.34

Carter's inability to stand up to Reagan's positive image cost him a potentially close election. In the words of Newsweek's Meg Greenfield, he was a "passionless president."35
CHAPTER THREE

REAGAN'S USE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

A new future awaits us. The time is here, the moment is now.36

This statement, made by Ronald Reagan, exemplifies the attitude with which the Reagan administration has taken on its task. Unlike Carter, Reagan has been enormously successful in his attempts to project a positive image through strategies of political communications. To better understand this success a comparison of his communication programs with the Trent-Friedenberg criteria follows.

Pseudo-events

In his 1984 bid for re-election, President Reagan had the media eating out of his hands. He was able to stage events, manipulate perceptions, and used the power of the media to his own advantage. He allowed no one to upstage him, and kept the majority of media focus on the positive aspects of his presidency. Public perception reflected these repeated positive messages. Past mistakes were forgotten and were swept under the proverbial rug.

Pseudo-events were one of the Reagan team's major focuses. In fact, the basic plan for the 1984 campaign
was to, ". . . show America in an upbeat mood again. . . people taking pride in their country. . . "37 By creating pseudo-events to associate his image with this revitalized American spirit, Reagan enabled himself to be perceived as the creator of the improved national situation.

A typical example of a Reagan pseudo-event can be seen in the following. In a proclamation made on December 9, 1983, (in the middle of the '84 campaign) Reagan declared "National Bill of Rights Day and Human Rights Day and Week." His statements illustrate that Reagan used the occasion, which he created not only to reflect the patriotic image of his administration, but also as a chance to attack the Eastern block's human rights policies:

On December 15, 1791, our founding fathers rejoiced in the ratification of . . . a Bill of Rights which has helped guarantee all Americans the liberty we so cherish.

One hundred and fifty-seven years later. . . the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an effort aimed at securing basic human rights for the people of all nations.

Still, the fact remains as we celebrate Bill of Rights Day and Human Rights Day, human rights are frequently violated in many nations. In the Soviet Union. . . in Poland. . . throughout Eastern Europe and the Baltic States.38

By creating an opportunity to celebrate basic human rights, Reagan grasped another opportunity: to attack the Soviet Union's human rights policies. The message was clear, and the pseudo-event can be seen to be a success.

Appointments

Like Carter, Reagan came to Capitol Hill as an outsid-
er, having never served a day in Washington. But, unlike Carter, he came prepared to look for support for himself and his programs. He came prepared to work within the system. As a result, many more of his policies were successful. This success was in direct attribution to the lobbying efforts of Reagan and his administration. He had been able to make and use "friends" in Washington.

One of the ways that Reagan was best able to bargain was by using his power to appoint powerful and influential people to positions within his political "team." By doing this, Reagan was able to enlist support of those in power, and also to lessen the influence of those who opposed him. For example, in 1980 Alexander Haig had a fairly strong constituency supporting him for the Republican nomination for President. Reagan, at the time needed to gain more support if he was to secure the nomination himself. Rather than continue the struggle against Haig, Reagan chose to use the promise of an appointment for Haig, if Reagan were to win. In his book Caveat, Haig explains how Reagan used the position to ask for his support.

I had been invited to come here [to Reagan's ranch]...because we were both perceived to be candidates for the Republican nomination for the office of President...Reagan asked me if I would support him.----"Al, [Reagan said]...I'd like you to join my team and to be my Secretary of State." (Caveat, Alexander M. Haig, New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1984, pp. 5-12).
Unlike Carter, Reagan had not spurned the experience of powerful men in Washington. Instead, he chose to use the influence and experience of such men to better his chances for re-election.

Fund Appropriation

Carter failed to take full advantage of this strategy. Reagan, on the other hand, has been more willing to use the power of appropriating funds more to his own advantage. He has been willing to bargain, and to "wheel and deal" to both lobby support for his programs and public image. In his 1984 State of the Union Address, Reagan gives us an example of how he can use such funding to gain public support for the way his programs are dealing with a serious issue:

On the question of acid rain, which concerns people in many areas of the U.S. and Canada, I am proposing a research program that doubles our current funding. . . . [and] we'll ask Congress for $157 million beginning in 1985 to acquire new park and conservation lands [to further protect the environment]. (Vital Speeches, "1984 State of the Union Address," Ronald Reagan, February 15, 1984).

Special Task Forces

Reagan not only came prepared to bargain, but made use also of other strategies. He listened for what concerns the public, appointed special task forces, and most importantly communicated to the American public this action. For example, in a speech delivered on April 9, 1984, in the heat of the '84 elections, Reagan outlined the formation...
and results of such a commission:

On January 3, 1983, I established a bipartisan commission to examine issues raised by Congress concerning the strategic modernization program, especially the Peacekeeper (MX) missile. On April 9, 1983, I was very pleased to report to the Congress that the commission unanimously agreed on...recommendations, which I strongly endorsed.39

As a result of such action, and the accompanying communications with the public, Reagan accomplished much more and received credit for more, than the uncompromising Carter could have ever hoped for.

Meeting World Leaders

Reagan was not more successful than Carter in his conciliation with world leaders. In fact, he had no accomplishments with the impact of the Camp David accords. Reagan did, however, hold a greater number of actual meetings with world leaders, and was certainly more vocal about his conciliatory abilities. Communication channels were kept open, and flooded with messages of the conciliatory leadership of Reagan. In a statement made in September of 1984, in which he welcomed Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, Reagan exemplified his flare for communicating a conciliatory image:

I believe it's important to use the opportunity provided by Mr. Gromyko's presence...to confer on a range of issues of international importance...to reduce the level of arms and to improve our working relationship with the Soviet Union.40

The list of Reagan's meetings with foreign leaders is impressive. A sampling of some from the election year
of 1984 follows:

(1) Portuguese Prime Minister Mario Soares, March 14, 1984.
(2) West German Chancellor Kohl, March 5, 1984.
(3) Irish Prime Minister Garrett Fitzgerald, March 22, 1984.
(4) Botswana President Quett K.J. Masire, May 9, 1984.
(5) Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, October 9, 1984.

Such willingness to meet with the leaders of the world sent a message to the American people that Reagan was working towards that safety and security of all people desire. In 1984, the Reagan's communications team spent considerable time "trying to convince the voters that Reagan is a conciliatory leader, who has won international respect. . ." Again, Reagan was incredibly successful at projecting this image to the voting public.

Domestic Issues

Reagan's own words illustrated the lengths to which the Reagan administration was willing to go to create campaign dialogue which manipulated the public perception of domestic issues to favor the President.

Today, of all the major industrial nations of the world, America has the strongest economic growth, one of the lowest inflation rates, the fastest rate of job creation. . .and the largest increase in real, after-tax personal income since World War II."42

Through direct speech to the American public Reagan attempted to manipulate perceptions so that the administration was associated with existing economic strengths.
Accomplishments

As we have seen, Reagan was successful at communicating to the public the things that he had done well. This was a major factor in the consistent popularity of the Reagan presidency. In his 1984 State of the Union Address, Reagan gave us an example of the emphasis of administration accomplishments:

Nineteen eighty-three was a banner year for political courage, we have strengthened our partnerships and our friendships. . . . we are committed to dialogue, deterrence and promoting prosperity.43

Unlike Carter, Reagan was able to override his failures by overemphasizing his accomplishments. Instead of allowing the media to "butcher" him about the Lebanon-U.S. Marine tragedy, or on his increased military budget, Reagan emphasized the growing economy, the "dream of the American vision," and the overwhelming need to protect both. He could not, of course, shut off all opposition, but he could and did attempt to offset attacks with emphasis on existing accomplishments. Carter was unable to do this in 1980, and he was crushed. Reagan used this strategy in the 1984 campaign, and communicated this to the American public. He emerged the winner.

Endorsements

We saw that Carter's inability to gain endorsement severely handicapped his ability to gain large numbers of the American vote. Reagan did not experience similar
problems in 1984. Examples from two prominent leaders of the U.S. should exemplify Reagan's ability to attract the necessary endorsements which did much toward assuring him victory in 1984.

Jeane Kirkpatrick (A life-long Democrat)
Reagan's foreign policies have silenced talk of inevitable American decline and reminded the world of the advantages of freedom.

Sen. Barry Goldwater
We have a leader—a real leader—a great Commander-in-Chief—President Ronald Reagan. And in your hearts, you know he's right.

Ronald Reagan was definitely successful in using most of the Trent-Friedenberg strategies. He was very competent at the political communication process. As the following quote from Henry Z. Scheele shows, Reagan was able to use many different methods to incorporate these strategies to positively reflect his leadership.

Reagan asked for a moment of silent prayer. Speaker and audience were united together in thought about the cherished value "freedom," as the speech was brought to a dramatic close.

Reagan was able to use political campaign communication strategies to his advantage. He was re-elected in 1984. Carter, for the most part, failed in the usage of these strategies. He was soundly defeated in 1980.
CHAPTER FOUR
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

After comparing the incumbent campaigns of Carter and Reagan, employing the Trent-Friedenberg criteria, five conclusions can be made about what a candidate can do to increase the likelihood of victory in an incumbent campaign.

First, the candidate should employ a system of campaign communication strategies. The Trent-Friedenberg strategies can be extremely effective. However, there are many criteria for communications in politics. Most important is the implementation of an organized system which will ensure that all communication bases are covered. Ronald Reagan is proof of what such systems can do to boost incumbent campaigns.

Secondly, the candidate must communicate the results of using such strategies to the voting public. Carter proved that merely using the strategies is not enough to ensure victory. To better prepare the road to victory the candidate should make sure that the advantages of communicating strategies to the public are used effectively.

Thirdly, the channels of communication must be kept open in all directions. Positive images should constantly
be communicated to the voters. A willingness to cooperate should be continually communicated to one's political colleagues. Equally as important, the channels should be kept open for feedback of all kinds.

Fourth, the candidate who uses strategies of campaign communication should develop a strong team, and a solid "game plan" for how the strategies can best be used. One person cannot do all. A strong communication organization is the key to obtaining the most influence from these strategies. Reagan's team is one of the major factors which has created the success of his presidency.

Lastly and most importantly, a candidate should maintain good relations with the media. It is the media which transmits the messages to the voters. The strategies which we have discussed depend on the media to keep communication channels open. Should a candidate develop poor relations with the media, those channels could easily be closed. In this case most campaign communication strategies would be useless.

We have seen examples from the 1980 Carter campaign and the 1984 Reagan campaign which express the extremely important role that political campaign communication strategies play in determining the level of success of any campaign. When used correctly these strategies have the power to effectively influence public opinion, and often can be the difference between the success and failure of a candidate for public office.
END NOTES


6Boorstin, The Image: Or What Happened to the American Dream, p. 11.

7Ibid., pp. 12-13.


9Ibid., p. 214.

10Trent and Friedenberg, Political Campaign Communications: Principles and Practices, p. 93.

11White, America In Search of Itself, p. 426.


13Ibid.

15 White, America In Search of Itself, p. 43.


17 Ibid., p. 96.

18 Ibid., p. 97.

19 Ibid.

20 White, America In Search of Itself, p. 296.


25 Ibid., p. 41-A.


28 Ibid.

29 Donovan, "The Enigmatic President," p. 25.

30 Calleo, "Getting Tough Too Late," p. 18.


32 Donovan, "The Enigmatic President," p. 32.


34 Ibid.

35 Meg Greenfield, "The Passionless President," Newsweek, August 11, 1980, p. 84.


41 Mashek, "Reagan Readies Campaign Juggernaut," p. 46.


44 Ed Magnuson, "There Are Great Days Ahead," Time, February 20, 1984, p. 56.

45 Ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Greenfield, Meg. "The Passionless President." Newsweek, August 11, 1980, p. 84.


