



Information on Political and Business Communications

Introduction

For the past twenty years, I have considered the commodification of our lives imposed on us by business thinking and resultant ethical conflict. A central issue in this process has been the creation of an advertising/marketing industry focused on convincing individuals that a particular “brand” of thought is to be valued more greatly than another. This branding process, embedded in over 50 years of social psychology, communications, and public relations discourse has created a consulting industry that has globally transformed political and economic thought in the modern age.

A leading practitioner of this emerging consulting practice has been Dr. Frank Luntz (see his dissertation abstract in the Appendix). As this communication consultant has gained influence over partisan political practices in this country his advice on language use has become crucial to the recent electoral successes of the Republican Party. My purpose in writing this ongoing observational paper is to begin reflecting on how both media and message creation distort reality.

I have never met a living American President. The only President I know is the one I see on TV or other media. For all I know the President is a digitized faux human being. This may sound silly but for most Americans the decisions we make about presidents or commercial products are interchangeable. Each, human or product, are mediated by countless professionals’ intent on molding our thought into a particular, constructed reality. Key to understanding this mediation are the following concepts (I will add others in time).

Definitions

Framing = a process by which a communicator manipulates textual information to create a specific reality in the mind of the reader. Within this context, proper “framing” promotes a “certain definition, interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendations” (Entman, p. 52).

Metaphor = defined as “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them”. (Webster)

Simile = defined as “a figure of speech comparing two unlike things this is often introduced by like or as (as in cheeks are like roses)”. (Webster)

Authors

A leading intellect in communications theory has been the long-standing work of George Orwell. It is not the purpose of this paper to go into a historic overview of either Orwell or Luntz. I am concerned with using this document to foster discussion in the classroom. Therefore, please read the following admonitions to writers, speechmakers, and commercial marketers listed below.

George Orwell

Orwell provides a set of rules to assist writers with avoiding the typical pitfalls of language.

These are:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech, which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything barbarous.

Frank Luntz

In contrast to Orwell is Luntz (see Appendix). He provides his own set of rules for successful communication and they build on Orwell's observations. The bracket comments are my own:

1. Simplicity: Use Small Words [see Orwell]
2. Brevity: Use Short Sentences [see Orwell]
3. Credibility Is As Important As Philosophy – People have to believe it to buy it. [seek to build trust]
4. Consistency Matters – Repetition, repetition, repetition. [never stray from message]
5. Novelty: Offer Something New [novelty challenges fixed beliefs]
6. Sound and Texture Matter (musical jingles) [people with Alzheimer's remember music when they have lost other memories]
7. Speak Aspirationally – Messages need to say what people want to hear
8. Visualize – Paint a vivid picture.
9. Ask a Question [to provoke thought]
10. Provide Context and Explain Relevance [to contextualize the need to ask the question in the first place]

(Luntz, pps. 4-27)

Questions for Discussion

1. To what extent do these admonitions make sense?
2. To what extent can the admonitions be interpreted as manipulative?
3. If you believe they are manipulative, why do you believe so?
4. How would you use these concepts in your work?
5. How would you ethically challenge their use?

6. Other thoughts and observations.

References

Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

Luntz, F. (2007). *Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear*. New York: Hyperion.,

Orwell, G. (1946). *Politics and the English Language*; located at http://wikilivres.info/wiki/Politics_and_the_English_Language, retrieved on 9/7/10.

Appendix

CANDIDATES, CONSULTANTS, AND MODERN CAMPAIGN TECHNOLOGY

[Luntz, Frank](#). University of Oxford (United Kingdom), 1987. 1987. D-86567.

Abstract (summary)

[Translate Abstract](#)

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Although much scholarly attention has been focused on voter behavior in contemporary American elections, there has not been comparable research into the candidate's role in an election campaign. The strategy, techniques, and hardware available to candidates in the 1980s have drastically transformed the environment in which elective office is sought.

The federal election campaign laws, the development of television as a political medium, and the rapid advances in computer capabilities have substantially reduced the more traditional modes of electioneering. Party bosses have become irrelevant, and have been replaced by a cadre of professional campaign consultants--the image makers of politics--who are primarily responsible for the growth of modern campaign technology.

Modern campaign technology embraces the recent electronic innovations in electioneering, as witnessed by new and sophisticated methods of polling, advertising, and direct mail. It also encompasses the development of political action committees (PACs) and the resurgence of the national party organizations in the elections of their candidates.

As campaign procedures have become more complicated, the practitioners of this technology--the political consultants--have increased their political influence. The candidate, however, has become a less significant participant in the election process, and the role he plays in his own campaign is under threat from the continuous cycle of campaign innovations.

The thesis will examine the campaign process itself, with special reference to candidates, consultants, and modern campaign technology. Using an extensive amount of original interview material with the leading practitioners of the political technology, this study aims to make a contribution to the understanding of contemporary American elections.