

**MASS MEDIA AND U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF
1992 AND 1996**

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "MASS MEDIA AND U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 1992 AND 1996" submitted by MR. RAHUL MISRA in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (M.Phil.), has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university. This is his original work.

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We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Dedicated to.....

Mummy and Papa

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PREFACE

The principle purpose of this study is to explore the role played by mass media, in the presidential campaigns particularly in the decade of nineties. The study focuses on the 1992 and 1996 elections, when the industry has witnessed major technological boom. The study would attempt to unravel the various facets of the relationship of the media and the politics. To gain a better understanding of this functional relationship an analytical description of the evolution of media industry, is also undertaken. The study will proceed to describe the role played by the media in the 1992 and 1996 elections. Finally, the role of media will also be studied and analyzed through a focus on two specific presidential elections of the year 1992 and 1996.

The influence of different factors on the election of the head of the state has been a topic of research in political science for the greater part of this century. In particular the role-played by the media, especially, electronic media in recent campaigns in the U.S. Presidential Elections is a powerful and pervasive one. The enhancement in the role of media has passed through several phases in the past and has brought about major changes in the traditional political setup viz. the weakening of the influence of the political parties and other political actors, the domination of the campaign strategies and schedules by media demands, and the emergence of the media as king makers in political recruitment and promotion of candidates, particularly at the Presidential level.

The claims that media influences elections in a very insignificant way, rest on election studies undertaken in the 1940s and 1950s, which have now become obsolete. Those early views predate the age of television dominance and hence were concerned primarily with massive changes in individual voting decisions. Today the television has changed the rules of the game in U.S. elections, especially the Presidential elections. The power and status of the media in America reached new heights after spectacular reporting triumphs in the segregated south, in Vietnam, and in Washington during the Watergate years. Then new technologies created instantaneous global reporting, which left the government unable to control the flow of information to the nation. The media thus became a formidable rival in critical struggles to control what the people should know and when they ought to know it.

Today, the voter's perception of the candidates and the campaign are affected by media's portrayal. When the voter seeks information about the campaign, the media is the major source of information. Most voters are unfamiliar with most of the candidates when a nomination race starts; they depend on the news media to inform them about the contenders and the issues. The Presidential candidates, aware of the media's role, have come to rely upon the media in crafting an acceptable image of themselves. They pay special attention, not only to the paid political advertising but also to the regular news coverage, as it is the most important factor in communicating with the voters here media wields considerable influence.

As a result of this increasing reliance on mass media, the role of the media as the gatekeeper for news coverage in campaigns has grown. More news organizations today, and many more metropolitan newspapers and local broadcast stations- cover Presidential campaigns. Changes in media business have also increased its role in campaigns. The electoral system has become dependent on the media for the conduct of campaigns and elections. Campaigns have become oriented towards media coverage. Media moguls such as Rupert Murdoch and Bill Gates and corporate conglomerates such as Time-Warner and Disney, increasingly dominate the mass media - from TV and radio to newspapers and books, movies, and even the Internet. Where once there were hundreds of independent media owners and producers, now a mere handful of media organizations overwhelmingly control the media.

In 1952, when the first political convention was televised nationwide, the party's nominees were still chosen at the conventions; the 1976 conventions were the last at which there was even a hint of mystery over who the nominees would be. With the final selections now obvious months in advance, conventions have lost their news value and become political extravaganza shows. But in trying to tightly script their conventions for the television audience, political operatives have outsmarted themselves: the conventions have become so canned, so staged, and so devoid of any spontaneity that in 2000 it's possible the only live coverage will be of the nominees' acceptance speeches.

We also see a progression in the relationship between the media and politicians. The reference to Plissner's argument is only

indicative of a rather simplistic understanding of the interest of media conglomerates involved. Even granting his contention that televisions election-coverage agenda is commercial rather than political he does not deny the possibility of media's biasness in its projections. Indeed, the idea that televisions power is wielded without regard to its considerable political impact is most pertinent; more introspection on this subject is required.

This study is organized in five chapters. The first chapter is titled "First Amendment Clause, Freedom and Information Act". It will trace the origin and evolution of the First Amendment Act through various stages. It goes on to describe the Act in lieu of interpretation by the Supreme Court of the United States and how this interpretation has transformed the Act.

The second chapter is titled "Development and Growth of Mass Media". This chapter traces the history of the mass media in the United States and how the media evolved to the present form.

In the third chapter, titled, "1992 Presidential Campaign and Media", a case study of the campaign of 1992 elections is taken up. In this chapter an attempt is made to identify the core issues in the elections and thereby studying the role of the media in the reporting of those issues and thereby influencing the opinion of the voters. The attempt is also made to study the impact of the media on the results of the elections.

The fourth chapter, titled, "1996 Presidential Campaign and Media", also follows the pattern of the third chapter and is the

second case study. The last chapter would be the concluding chapter discussing the overall relationship of the campaigns and media based on the above two case studies.

For this study, historio-analytical method, descriptive method and case-study method have been adopted. Both primary and secondary sources have been consulted. Various polls and reports of prior to elections have proved a valuable source for this study.

CHAPTER-1
FIRST AMENDMENT

“Without an informed and free press there cannot be an enlightened people.”

Justice Stewart

The first American constitution, the Articles of Confederation, adopted in 1781, did not contain a guarantee of freedom of speech or press. While under British law for more than 100 years, American colonists enjoyed freedom of expression to some extent. Censorship laws existed before the first printing press arrived in North America but they were enforced erratically or not at all. Colonial legislatures and assemblies used to punish dissident printers by using their contempt power. By the time the American colonists began to build their own governments in the 1770s and 1780s, they had the history of a three hundred year struggle for freedom of expression on which to build.

Those who drafted and adopted the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights were well aware of the situation in Great Britain where the repression of ideas antithetical to the government was in operation by the 13th century. Between 1476 and 1776 the British devised and used several means to limit or restrict the press in England. Seditious libel laws were used to punish those who criticized the government or the crown, and it did not matter whether the criticism was truthful or not. The press suffered under licensing laws as well, which required printers to get prior approval from the government or the church, before printing their handbills or

pamphlets or newspapers. Printers were also often required to deposit with the government large sums of money called bonds. This money was forfeited if material appeared that the government felt should not have been published. The British also granted special patent and monopolies to certain printers in exchange for their cooperation in printing only acceptable works and in helping the crown ferret out other printers who broke the publication laws.

British control of the press during these three hundred years was generally successful, but did not go unchallenged. As ideas about democracy spread throughout Europe it became tough for the government to limit freedom expression. The power of the printing press in spreading ideas quickly to masses greatly helped foster the democratic spirit. Although British law regulated American printers as well during the colonial era, regulation of the press in North America was never as successful as it was in Great Britain.¹

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

The meaning of the First Amendment today is largely determined through interpretation by the Supreme Court of the United States.

¹Chaffee, S. H. and Kanihan, S. F., *Learning About Politics from the Mass Media*. Political Communication, 14, 1997, pp.421

Although the First Amendment specifically mentions only the Federal Congress, this provision now protects the press from all government, whether local, state or federal. The founders of the United States enacted the First Amendment to distinguish their new government from that of England, which had long censored the press and prosecuted persons who dared to criticize the British Crown. As Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart explained in a 1974 speech, the "primary purpose" of the First Amendment was "to create a fourth institution outside the government as an additional check on the three official branches"² (the executive branch, the legislature and the judiciary).

The Supreme Court handed The New York Times a landmark First Amendment victory, in a seminal libel case, *New York Times Co. vs. Sullivan*, (1964). This action was brought by an elected official who supervised the Montgomery, Alabama police force during the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The official claimed that he was defamed by a full-page advertisement, published in the *New York Times*, which accused the police of mistreating non-violent protestors and harassing one of the leading figures in the Civil Rights Movement, the Rev. Martin Luther King.

The Supreme Court found that even though some of the statements in the advertisement were false, the First Amendment nevertheless protected the *New York Times* from the official's suit. The court considered the case "against the background of a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues

²Chaffee, S. H. and Kanihan, S. F., *Leaning About Politics from the Mass Media*. Political Communication, 14, 1997, pp.421

should be uninhibited, robust and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials."³ In light of this commitment, the court adopted the rule that a public official may not recover damages for a defamatory falsehood related to his official conduct "unless he proves that the statement was made with 'actual malice' -- that is, with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not."⁴ The court later extended this rule beyond "public officials" to cover libel suits brought by all "public figures."

Although the Sullivan case is best known for the "actual malice" rule, the Supreme Court's decision included a second holding of great importance to the press. Noting that the challenged advertisement attacked the police generally, but not the official specifically, the court held that an otherwise impersonal attack on governmental operations could not be considered a libel of the official who was responsible for the operations.

The Pentagon Papers case, a top-secret history of the United States government's decision-making process regarding the war in Vietnam, suggested that the government had misled the American people about the war. On the basis of the leaked copy of the report the Times began publishing series of articles, criticizing the government. The government then took Times to court, and convinced a judge to issue a temporary restraining order, which

³ Graber, D. A., McQuail, D., & Norris, P. (Eds), *The Politics of News: The News of politics* (Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington, DC, 1998, p.27.)

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 43.

prohibited the New York Times from continuing to publish the series. Following a whirlwind series of further hearings and appeals, it ended up before the Supreme Court. The court ruled that the Times publication of the Pentagon Papers could continue. The court held that any prior restraint on publication "bear[s] a heavy presumption against its constitutional validity,"⁵ and held that the government had failed to meet its heavy burden of showing a justification for the restraint in *New York Times Co. vs. United States* (1971). Times immediately resumed the publication of the series, and they eventually won a Pulitzer Prize, the profession's highest honor.

The First Amendment also protects the right to parody public figures, even when such parodies are "outrageous," and even when they cause their targets severe emotional distress. In *Hustler Magazine, Inc. vs. Falwell*, (1988), the court considered an action for "intentional infliction of emotional distress" brought by Jerry Falwell, a well-known conservative minister who was an active commentator on political issues, against Larry Flynt, the publisher of *Hustler*, a sexually explicit magazine.

The *Hustler* case arose from a parody of a series of Campari liqueur advertisements in which celebrities spoke about their "first times" drinking the liqueur. The *Hustler* magazine parody, titled "Jerry Falwell talks about his first time," contained an alleged "interview" in which Falwell stated that his "first time" was during a drunken, incestuous encounter with his mother in an outhouse.⁶ The parody also suggested that Falwell preached only when he was drunk.

⁵ Fisher, Glen H., *American Communication in a Global Society* (Chatham House, New Jersey, 1979).

⁶ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History 1690-1960*, (Macmillan, New York, 1962), 3rd Ed.

The Supreme Court held that the First Amendment barred Falwell's contention that a publisher should be held liable for an "outrageous" satire about a public figure. The court noted that throughout American history, "graphic depictions and satirical cartoons have played a prominent role in public and political debate."

Although the Supreme Court opined that the Hustler parody at issue bore little relation to traditional political cartoons, it nonetheless found that Falwell's proposed "outrageousness" test offered no principled standard to distinguish between them as a matter of law. The court emphasized the need to provide the press with sufficient "breathing space" to exercise its First Amendment freedom. The court added, "if it is the speaker's opinion that gives offense, that consequence is a reason for according it constitutional protection. For it is a central tenet of the First Amendment that the government must remain neutral in the marketplace of ideas."⁷

The protection of the First Amendment extends beyond press reports concerning major government policies and well-known public figures. The Supreme Court has held that if the press "lawfully obtains truthful information about a matter of public significance then [the government] may not constitutionally punish publication of the information, absent a need to further a state interest of the highest order," *Smith vs. Daily Mail Publishing Co.*, (1979).

Applying this principle, the Supreme Court has employed the First Amendment to strike down state laws which threatened to

⁷ Graber, Doris A., *Mass Media and American Politics* (CQ Press, Washington, D.C., 1993).

punish the press for reporting information regarding confidential judicial misconduct hearings, *Landmark Communications, Inc. v. Virginia*, (1978); the names of rape victims, *Cox Broadcasting Corp. vs. Cohn*, (1975); and the names of alleged juvenile offenders, *Smith v. Daily Mail Publishing Co.*, (1979). The court also struck down a law which made it a crime for a newspaper to carry an election day editorial urging voters to support a proposal on the ballot, *Mills v. Alabama*, (1966).

The First Amendment also prevents the government from telling the press what it must report. In *Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo*, (1974)⁸, the Supreme Court considered whether a state statute could grant a political candidate a right to equal space to reply to a newspaper's criticism and attacks on his record. The court struck down the law, holding that the First Amendment forbids the compelled publication of material that a newspaper does not want to publish. The court held that the statute would burden the press by diverting its resources away from the publication of material it wished to print, and would impermissibly intrude into the functions of editors.

The Supreme Court has not, however, afforded similar protection to the broadcast media. In a pre-Tornillo case, *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*, (1969), the Supreme Court upheld a Federal Communications Commission rule that required broadcasters to provide a right of reply under certain circumstances. The court

⁸ Graber, Doris A., *Mass Media and American Politics* (CQ Press, Washington, D.C., 1993).

justified this regulation by citing the scarcity of the broadcast spectrum and the government's role in allocating frequencies.

Today, the scarcity problem is much reduced in light of technological advances in the division of the spectrum, and the rise of new media outlets such as cable television and the Internet. Although many issues regarding the reach of the First Amendment to these new media remain unresolved, First Amendment advocates hope to convince the Supreme Court to provide these media with the highest level of First Amendment protection.

Although the First Amendment generally prevents the government from restraining or punishing the press, the First Amendment usually does not require the government to furnish information to the press. However, the federal government and the state governments have passed freedom of information and open meetings laws which provide the press with a statutory right to obtain certain information and to observe many of the operations of government. In addition, the First Amendment does furnish the press with the right to attend most judicial proceedings.

The First Amendment also provides journalists with a limited privilege not to disclose their sources or information to litigants who seek to use that information in court. In *Branzburg v. Hayes*, (1972), the Supreme Court held that reporters did not have a privilege to refuse to answer a grand jury's questions that directly related to criminal conduct that the journalists observed and wrote about.⁹

⁹ Iyengar, S., and Reeves, R. (Ed.), *Do the Media Govern? Politicians, Voters, and Reporters in America* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1997).

However, the court's opinion noted that newsgathering does have First Amendment protections, and many lower courts have applied a qualified First Amendment privilege to situations in which the need for the journalist's information was less compelling than in *Branzburg*. These courts require litigants to prove that the material sought is relevant to their claim, necessary to the maintenance of the claim, and unavailable from other sources. In addition, more than half of the states have adopted statutes called "Shield Laws," which provide a similar privilege to journalists.

Although the press normally must obey generally applicable laws, the First Amendment prevents the government from enforcing laws, which discriminate against the press. For example, the court has struck down a law which imposed a special tax on large newspapers, *Minneapolis Star & Tribune Co. v. Minnesota Commissioner of Revenue*, (1983), and a law which imposed a tax on some magazines but not others based on their subject matter, *Arkansas Writers' Project, Inc. v. Ragland*, (1987).¹⁰

As the cases discussed above illustrate, over the course of the 20th century the Supreme Court has breathed life into the text of the First Amendment by upholding the right of the press to pursue its mission, no matter how odious that mission might seem to those in power. The courts have imposed some limits on this liberty, and questions remain as to how far this liberty will extend to new media, and to some of the more aggressive efforts employed by journalists to obtain the news. Still, I am confident that the Supreme Court will

¹⁰ Bennett, W. L., *An Introduction to Journalism Norms and Representations of Politics*, Political Communication, Vol. 13, 1996, pp. 37

continue to recognize that, as Justice Stewart wrote in the Pentagon Papers case, "without an informed and free press there cannot be an enlightened people."¹¹

¹¹ Bennett, W. L., *An Introduction to Journalism Norms and Representations of Politics*, Political Communication, Vol. 13, 1996, pp. 37

CHAPTER-2

The mass media is widely recognized as providing the primary sources of political information for most of the citizens. To understand the role of mass media in contemporary society, it is necessary to examine its development with specific economic and political conditions of American society. The power of the mass media to affect, mould and shape the political process in modern society must be seen against the backdrop of their own development. The first hundred years of this history is the history of individuals, who through their creativity and innovation and motivated by the desire for personal wealth and power, gave the present shape to the mass media and thereby laid the foundation for the modern communication industry.

In the early days, most of the political news was spread by word of mouth or small, opinionated, local newspapers. Thomas Paine presented ideas to the public in his pamphlet *Common Sense* during revolutionary times¹². Mass media did not exist then and, therefore, votes were cast on the basis of knowledge of the qualifications of the candidates and by opinionated conversations.

In the 1800s, presidential candidates were chosen by the leaders of their political parties. In those days, the political parties, newspapers, and magazines discussed the issues and the candidates' plans for the workings of the government. But in the early 1900's,

¹² Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News*, Basic Books, New York, 1978, pg. 58.

primaries began and these same political parties began to lose their power to the media.¹³

No two presidential candidates have been more different than the men who opposed each other in 1828. Andrew Jackson, the candidate of the new Democratic Party, was a tough frontiersman and a military hero. John Quincy Adams, the candidate of National Republicans, was a Harvard-educated Boston lawyer and diplomat. As a politician, Jackson was armed with personal charisma and widespread popularity as the great hero of the battle of New Orleans. But his most powerful weapon was an aggressive, publicity-wise political machine. Jackson's campaign set a new pattern in American politics and many historians consider it the first modern presidential campaign. Jackson bombarded the newspapers with images showing him as a friend of the common man and Adams as a friend of the rich. Jackson supporters organized rallies, barbecues, parades, and demonstrations. After Jackson's win, it became difficult for any politician to win the presidency without presenting himself as a friend of the common man and without a party affiliation.¹⁴

The media in the 18th century was completely biased. Almost all forms of the primitive, yet fledgling, mass media were controlled and owned by politicians with their own private agendas, of which the truth usually had little part. Those early newspapers were primarily interested in swaying readers towards the paper's, and ultimately the editor's, political philosophy or party.¹⁵ They featured extremely

¹³ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News*, Basic Books, New York, 1978, pg. 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 59.

¹⁵ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A history 1690-1960*, 3rd ed., Macmillan, New York, 1962, pg. 184.

prejudiced articles whose sole intent was the degradation of any opposing party or opinion. But due to the rather severe viewpoints these newspapers held, very limited influence.

PRINT MEDIA

The beginning of the mass communication revolution can be marked with the first issue of Benjamin Day's *New York Sun*, on September 3, 1833.¹⁶ This was the first time when newspaper was sold on the streets of New York City for the price of one penny. The penny press did not appeal to any specific interest, but aimed at the newly literate and growing middle and working classes and it developed as part of the emerging urban-industrial society of the 19th century. The penny press offered local news, human-interest stories and sensational reports of crime, disaster and other lurid happenings. He began to publish an objective newspaper that printed articles on a wide range of subjects - crime, accidents, gossip, etc. - that would appeal to all readers. Day's paper covered many different viewpoints, especially concerning politics and government. Soon many other newspapers with the same publication formula began to dominate the newsstands. The day of the blatantly biased newspapers was gone.

The earliest media event can be traced back to 1896. Mark Hanna, campaigning for McKinley, did most of the work from his candidate's home in Canton, Ohio. He even included marching bands, parades, and pilgrimages by local supporters. Hanna kept in mind that his constituents consisted of urban workers who grew up on

¹⁶ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A history 1690-1960*, 3rd ed., Macmillan, New York, 1962, pg 211.

farms and suffered from the first major industrial-era depression. He named the campaign, McKinley and a Full Dinner Pail.¹⁷

A historian of American journalism, Frank Luther Mott suggests four reasons for the growth of the audience for the mass press: population growth, increase in literacy, widened political participation and reduced price.¹⁸

The emerging and increasingly prosperous middle class led to the growth of public education and the extension of political and economic rights.¹⁹ This was the age of the skilled craftsmen, the merchants, and the tradesmen, who constituted the audience for the penny press of the 1830s. The penny press quickly spread to other urban commercial centres: Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore.

Another major step in the communication system occurred with the advent of telegraphs. The first 'wire' story was sent in 1844. In 1846, Polk's presidential message was transmitted by wire. The Associated Press was launched in 1848 as a co-operative enterprise by six New York newspapers.²⁰ The main objective of the enterprise was to cut the costs of newsgathering. They each had equal access to the pooled news, and they sold news to clients in other cities.

The popularity of the press led to the beginning of advertising through the medium and the foundation of the link between

¹⁷ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A history 1690-1960*, 3rd ed., Macmillan, New York. 1962, pg 213

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pg. 214.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pg. 214.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pg 219.

advertisers, media professionals and audience was laid down. In order to attract advertisers the papers needed to increase circulation and this led to the competition among various newspapers to be the most sensational. Amidst this growing popularity of *The New York Tribune* the Press, various news agencies started flooding the market of which by Horace Greely in 1841 and *The New York Times* by Henry Raymond in 1851 were primes. Most of these early newspapers were reported as part of general news. "Politics was news, and the newspaper competed as 'scoop', the inside story, in much the same way as they covered any event'.²¹

At the end of the 19th century, two more newspapers rose to prominence in the information industry: *The World*, which was established in 1859 and revived by Pulitzer in 1883, and *The Journal*, which was established in 1882 by Pulitzer brothers, but was later bought and revitalized by William Randolp Hearst in 1895. With these publications, American information industry entered a new era, which is referred to as 'yellow journalism'.²² *The Journal* and *The World* came to be the embodiment of news as entertainment.

In the same period advertising was developing into an independent institution, as an intermediary between the press and the business, and as a result of this development, the press started earning big money both from the advertisers and the manifold increase in circulation and readership. The press became commercial in nature and the owners were always looking forward for the means

²¹ Ronald Berkmen and Loura W. Kitch, *Politics in the Media Age*, Tata Mcgraw Hills, New York, 1986, pg. 22.

²² *ibid.* pg. 36.

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and ways to enhance their profits. Nature of the news coverage also underwent drastic changes in these circumstances. Newspaper changed its role as entertainer to major source of information.

While Pulitzer and Hearst were competing, another type of newspaper was developing and beginning to thrive, *The New York Times*. The Times added a new dimension to the American journalism by being an exclusive Republican newspaper. It targeted the wealthier classes and regarding content laid stress on the financial reporting, real estate transactions, produced a weekly financial review and included more financial advertisings. "The prestige and influence of *Times* grew over the years making it a must for the better-educated classes and the politicians."²³ However, by the turn of the century, American journalism had to confront new realities that had profound effect on the nature of reporting. This was the period when the industry felt the governmental interference with the source of information. Hence, during World War I, a new relationship between the mass media and politics emerged. Government news management during the war was seen as necessary to the war efforts. Journalists accepted the notion of secrecy when it came to such things as the movement of troops.

With the emergence of public relations, the publicity agents started filtering the news in favor of their employers. The business used the publicity agent for the first time to sell its image and products. Politicians and government agencies did not take much time to understand the advantages of this new media professionalism

²³ Ronald Berkmen and Loura W. Kitch, *Politics in the Media Age*, Tata Mcgraw Hills, New York, 1986Op.cit. p.25

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and this led to the ready availability of information. The idea of the scoop, the inside story was replaced by the press release and press conference.

While *The New York Times* was the dominant newspaper in America, it did not completely dominate the news industry. In the late 1960s, the Washington Post, under the leadership of Ben Bradlee, became an important political force. During the period of Watergate scandal, in 1973, the Post's investigative reporting set the political agenda across the nation and it became a rival to *The New York Times*.²⁴

The New York Times and *The Washington Post*, along with *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times*, dominate the news industry. Though these newspapers are not largest in circulation or the profits, they are the most prestigious and politically influential newspapers in America. Now these newspapers set the political agenda.

BROADCAST AND TELEVISION

Broadcasting in the United States began in 1920. The basic system of U.S. broadcasting is an amalgam of commercial free enterprise and limited governmental regulation.²⁵ These were regulated by the first Communication Act called the Radio Act of 1921. The commerce clause, Art. I, section 8, of the Constitution was

²⁴ Meyer Berger, *The Story of the New York Times 1851-1951*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1951, P. 109.

²⁵ Frank J. Kahu, Ed., *Documents of American Broadcasting*, New York, 1968, pg. 3-17.

subsequently interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the regulation of interstate communication, of which broadcasting is an example. The first amendment to the constitution is echoed by section 29 of the Radio Act of 1927 and section 326 of the communication Act of 1934, which facilitated the nationwide telecast.²⁶

Following the election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, the communication act of 1934 was enacted, creating a Federal Communications Commission (FCC), composed of seven commissioners appointed by the President, 'with advice and consent of the senate'²⁷. The new commission was given the responsibility for the regulation of interstate and foreign communication by wire as well as radio thus took over the regulation of telephone and telegraph communication. First and foremost, it is typical regulatory agency created by the Congress and the President designates the Chairman. Not more than four of seven commissioners could be members of the same political party. Commissioners are appointed for a term of seven years on a staggered basis so that each year one commissioner's appointment expires. What this means, of course, is that each newly elected President is able to appoint the Chairperson of his choice. Further over a four-year period, the political scenario of the agency can be significantly moulded.

As a regulatory agency, the FCC's powers are defined by the communications act of 1934, including the broad discretion to define

²⁶ Frank J. Kahu, Ed., Documents of American Broadcasting, New York, 1968, pg. 3-17

²⁷ Attorney Katherine, M Galvin, Media Law: A Legal Handbook for the Working Journalist, Berkely, 1984, pg. 175.

and shape the public interest doctrine. But, because of its changing membership and its broad discretion to interpret the act, it is important to remember that today's rule may be tomorrow's history.²⁸

The primary function of the FCC under the Act is licensing. The commission grants the television stations licenses for five-year period, renewable each subsequent five year. In order to obtain or renew a license, an applicant must be a U.S. citizen. An application may be denied if there is evidence of bad character, which would interfere with the responsible operation of the station. The applicants must have sufficient funds to construct the station and operate it for three months following construction without relying on advertising revenues. All applicants must demonstrate that they will meet all of the technical requirements necessary to broadcast.

If a broadcast station appears to have violated the law during its license time, the commission may decide to grant it only a short-term probationary renewal. If the commission thinks the violation was more serious, it may conduct a hearing to determine whether to renew the license at all or revoke it. Hearings are held before the commissions' administrative law judges and usually hearings are long and expensive.²⁹

²⁸ Attorney Katherane, M Galvin, *Media Law: A Legal Handbook for the Working Journalist*, Berkely, 1984, pg. 175.

²⁹ William B. Roy, *FCC: The Ups and Downs of Radio-TV Regulations, U.S.A.*, Iowa State Univ. Press, 1990, pg xvii.

AMERICAN TELEVISION NETWORKS

The network broadcasting in United States started on 27th October 1922 when New York and Sehenectady broadcast a World Series game. The following year the telephone company inaugurated network broadcasting and by the end of 1925 the network had 26 interconnected stations.³⁰

Most of the television stations in the country are joined during viewing hours by one of the four National Television Networks: The National Broadcasting Company (NBC); Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS); American Broadcasting Company (ABC); and Public Broadcasting Services (PBS). The four networks provide much of the programming broadcast over the affiliated stations. The networks do not broadcast anything themselves. They primarily send programmes through wires to a local affiliated station, which then broadcast them. The networks exist as programming units to provide television and other services that are then broadcast by local stations.³¹

Thus the networks are the dominant force in television broadcasting, and all the networks are subject to FCC regulation.³² Although it has never been clear how much control the FCC exert over network directly. In addition to the television networks of ABC, CBS and NBC, there are other radio and television networks in operation on a continuous or intermittent basis- these are National

³⁰ Sonali Chattopadhyay, *Impact of Television on Urban Working Women: A Comparative Study of Delhi and New York*, p. 93.

³¹ R. Terry Ellmore, *Broadcasting Law and Regulation, U.S.A.*, 1982, pg. 241-257.

³² William K. Jones, *Cases and Materials on Electronic Mass Media: Radio, Television and Cable*, New York, 1976, Pg. 8.

Black Networks, United Press International Audio Network, Hughes Television Network, Spanish International Network and Public Broadcasting Service.³³

MEDIA AND INFORMATION

The road to White House still rolls through Iowa and New Hampshire, but now it also races through cyberspace. For the first time, all the major presidential candidates are using the *Internet* to raise money, recruit supporters and shape their images. Candidates are still figuring out what works and federal election rules complicate the collection of donations online, but every campaign has an active Web site. Most candidates believe the *Internet* is a powerful gateway to prospective donors and voters.

"The Web will be for Steve Forbes what television was for John Kennedy in 1960," says Bill Dal Col, manager of Forbes' campaign for the Republican presidential nomination.³⁴

In the 1996 presidential campaign, some candidates had Web sites, but they were essentially electronic billboards that were rarely updated. The use of the *Internet* as a political tool is still evolving, but all the major candidates, even those who haven't decided whether they're in the race to stay, have sites featuring their positions, invitations to volunteer and contribute and an array of features designed to draw Internet users in and to keep them visiting back.

³³ R. Terry Ellmore, *Broadcasting Law and Regulation, U.S.A.*, 1982, pg. 25.

³⁴ Chaffee, S. H. and Kanihan, S. F., *Leaning About Politics from the Mass Media. Political Communication*, 14, 1997, pp.421.

Besides the standard candidate biographies and photo scrapbooks of their appearances, some candidates are using nonpolitical features to hook Web surfers.

The growing popularity of the *Internet* gives candidates a new target audience. In some states, such as California, more than half the registered voters use the *Internet*. In Iowa, about 30% of voters can go on line. And through the *Internet*, candidates can reach eligible voters, particularly younger people, who don't vote regularly, says Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins, President of the League of Women Voters, which is developing its own Web site to include all the presidential candidates' stances - and may be even a debate.³⁵

MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Until a few decades ago, political media consisted almost exclusively of broadcast and print mass media. Individuals and groups who wanted to disseminate a message to a broad spectrum of citizens were limited to newspapers, magazines, books, radio, film, and, later on, television. Proponents of unpopular or dissenting political messages were essentially at the mercy of mass media operators who were firmly entrenched in the very establishment which were likely being criticized. History does tell of powerful dissident political movements, which effectively distributed underground literature in spite of limited access to media channels,

³⁵ Chaffee, S. H. and Kanihan, S. F., *Learning About Politics from the Mass Media*. Political Communication, 14, 1997, pp.427.

however for the most part, dissident messages have remained with small audiences.³⁶

Following World War II, a number of technological developments resulted in a proliferation of electronic media. Citizens' band radio emerged in 1940s, followed by transistor radios and reel-to-reel audio tape in 1950s, dry copiers, audiocassettes, and reel-to-reel video in 1960s, portable video recorders, video cameras, and satellite dishes in 1970s, and personal computers, personal fax machines, and camcorders in 1980s. These innovations, which diffused quickly into western society, have arguably widened the ranks of individuals and groups who might spread political messages. It is no coincidence that, along with this development of media, Americans have moved into an economically post-industrial society in which the information service sector accounts for more than half of our gross national product.³⁷

The impact of personal media technologies on the political and social landscape can be both deliberate and accidental. The Zapbruder film, which graphically recorded President Kennedy's assassination, and the more recently videotaped Rodney King beating were non-orchestrated personal media artifacts, which had great influence. The deliberate production of politically charged personal media was instrumental in the Iranian uprising of 1979 (Ganley, 1992). The heart-rending scenes of the US soldiers being dragged through the streets of Somalia also seriously impacted American

³⁶ Graber, Doris A., *Mass Media and American Politics* (CQ Press, Washington, D.C., 1993).

³⁷ Barber, J. D. *The Pulse of Politics: Electing Presidents in the Media Age* (Transaction Publication, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1988).

decision in pulling its troops back from the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Somalia in early 1990s. During 1980s and 1990s, the practice of political kidnapping entered a new dimension, using emotionally charged videotaped pleas by victims for fulfilling the demands of the perpetrators. In this fashion, the politically disenfranchised used media in disseminating political messages.

Reductions in size and price have made the personal computer practically available to individuals. In its present form, it is also arguable that computers are widely used for purposes of communication as well as mathematical calculation and other data processing. Word-processing and graphic information presentations are among the most common personal computer functions. Configured with inexpensive laser printers and dry copiers, computers often fill the function of typewriters and offset printing systems, providing easy, convenient ways of composing printed messages. While the personal computer has joined the ranks of media, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has qualities of interconnectivity and interactivity, which provide the user with far greater power in sharing messages on a global scale.

Aside from the text-only characteristic, there is the matter of asynchronous communication, which is afforded by CMC. Synchronous communication refers to the simultaneous presence of communicants on the communication channel, as in FTF, telephone, live radio/TV broadcasting, and teleconferencing situations. In debates and call-in shows, candidates and decision-makers must answer on the spot and are often found preoccupied with issues as to how to cope with such confrontational situations and conceptually

address the issues involved. The accent is on image and performance in the immediate sense rather than meaningful discourse.

The 1996 political campaign marked the emergence of a new political reporting medium based on technologies that barely existed during the previous presidential race. The World Wide Web had just been invented when Bill Clinton took on George Bush in 1992. At that point, Web use was still confined to the world's science laboratories and a handful of high-tech hobbyists. But by the start of the 1996 campaign, tens of millions of people had embraced the Web for its extraordinary ease of use and its power as a tool to navigate the labyrinth of the Internet.

CHAPTER-3

MASS MEDIA AND 1992 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

At the beginning of the 1992 presidential campaign, George Bush had several advantages vis-à-vis the democrats consolidating his chances for re-election. He enjoyed a big lead in the popularity ratings. Bush's leadership of the allied coalition during the war against Iraq had propelled him to the highest level of popularity.

The presidential campaign unfolds in stages for the voters. In the early phase, for the months or so voters hear about the campaign on national news. Mass media news coverage is the vehicle that candidates require to provide needed visibility during the primary campaigns. Everyday reporting of the political happenings and their analysis thereof goes on to seriously impact the voter choices. Apart from the role of the print media, television news exerts more intimate impact on voters and, therefore, is more influential during the election. Television news, more than newspapers, permits voters to glimpse candidates' person in finer detail, which weigh heavily with voters in formation of their opinion about the candidates. This eventually reflects on a candidate's electoral performance in the final phase.

In the second phase campaign localizes, candidates make personal appearances and launch their television spots. This phase is brief but more intense and the voters are much more likely to decide on a candidate at the last moment. Apart from this, the media's agenda setting power focuses voters and candidates on certain key issues which finally decide the fate of the candidates.

The popularity to which President Bush was propelled during the gulf war left no doubt regarding his re-election. In March 1991 his approval rating in a CNN/ Time poll was nearly 90%, and this was two months after the same ratings had given him 50% popularity rating.³⁸ Clearly this had something to do with the war and its fall out in the media. In the context of American politics, it has been observed that if the President proves himself to be an expert in foreign policy matters, he commands tremendous influence and his popularity is always high. This was due to a Cold War phenomenon where a president was supposed to lead the nation. A survey published in the Los Angeles Times on March 9, 1991 found that Bush had strong leadership qualities.³⁹ Their judgment was again based on his coordination of the allied forces in the war against Iraq. These are valuable statements, and on the eve of an election year, very crucial.

This honeymoon with media was not to continue for long as we shall see, but Bush did gain some initial points in the race from the very positive coverage that the war gained in the media. This initial phase of popularity had the effect of disheartening his opponents and led big names among democrats like Mario Cuomo, Bill Bradley and Jay Rockefeller to decide not to enter the 1992 race.

In May 1991, Bush's thyroid problem⁴⁰ had become public, an event of some importance. However, the democrats failed to

³⁸ Yankelovich, D. Opinion Outlook, National Journal, June 6, 1992, Pg. 1376.

³⁹ Gerald, M. Pomper, The Election of 1992: Reports and Interpretations, Chatham, New Jersey, Chatham House, 1993, Pg. 41.

⁴⁰ Stanley, A. Renshon. (Ed.) The Clinton Presidency: Campaigning, Governing, and the Psychology of Leadership. Westview Press, Colorado, 1995, Pg. 11.

capitalize on this. The opposition camp, on the other, hand had not even decided on whom to field. This was a lost opportunity. They were also trying hard to sell newer concepts and ideas when they should have used their energy for better purposes considering that Bush was now on a weak footing with the news of his poor health becoming public. Leading democrats fueled the media with insinuations and implications over Bush's poor health. By August 1991 with only six months left for the presidential nomination, Paul Tsongas was the only committed democratic contender.

The issue that was to finally charge the elections and its results was the issue of the economy. Ironically, the first salvo was fired by the Republicans themselves pointing to Bush's poor management of the economy.⁴¹ In the primaries of the Republicans, the issue of the economy had come up. Patrick Buchanan had gone on to criticize the economy under the Bush administration. The issue of the economy was something that the media had raised even during the primaries. This was something that was to be picked up by the Democrats later.

Meanwhile, apart from Tsongas, five other major democratic candidates had entered the race. They were Bill Clinton, Tom Harkin, Bob Kerry, Douglas Wilder and Jerry Brown. However, it was clear from the beginning that there were two front-runners, Tsongas and Clinton. Neither man seemed particularly formidable at that time. Tsongas had no charisma and his health was a matter of concern. On the other hand, Clinton suffered politically damaging charges that he had an extramarital affair with Jennifer Flowers, that he had avoided

⁴¹ Dan Goodgame, 'Anatomy of a Fumble', TIME, October 26, 1992, Pg. 28.

the 'Draft'⁴² during the Vietnam War and that he had smoked marijuana while he was a student at Oxford. All these charges were splashed all over media. Questions started being raised among the electorate about his character and trustworthiness.

Under these circumstances, Bush decided to rely on campaign strategies that had worked either for him or for other Republican leaders in the past. First, he used the Oval office strategy, through which he highlighted his victories in Panama and Iraq, the end of the Cold war, his disarmament successes with the Soviet Union and a deficit reduction plan.

“In a meeting with campaign aides at Camp David in August 1991, Bush decided to follow this policy, running on his record and using the same ‘feel good’ model for the campaign that had sent Reagan back to the White House in 1984”. At that point in the administration, Bush was higher in the popularity ratings than Reagan had been at the same point in his first term⁴³.

It was not until January 1992, when Patrick Buchanan in New Hampshire challenged Bush that the President came out of the White House to meet voters personally on the campaign trail. Even then he did so only for a limited time. It was not until after the last Presidential debate on October 19th that he seemed to wake up and become an aggressive campaigner.⁴⁴

⁴² Draft: the process of recruiting able bodied men of a certain age for a period of compulsory military training and action.

⁴³ Betty Glad. How George Bush Lost the Presidential Elections of 1992 in Stanley A. Rhenson edited, *The Clinton presidency*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1995, Pg. 13.

⁴⁴ Bartels. M. Larry, *Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure*, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 2, June 1993.

Bush had started the elections well, the media gave him that he had wanted. It was upon him and his campaign to utilize the goodwill created. Two main issues neutralized the advantage turning the tide in Clinton's favour. Firstly, the issue of the economy and secondly, the foreign policy. That these were to prove pivotal to the elections was evident from the kind of coverage that these events and debates got in the media. Clinton, as was to be expected, was to pursue these issues later.

MEDIA AND ECONOMY

The economy had stagnated and government spending was high. There was, however, still no consensus and much needed reforms could not be undertaken. The 1981 tax cuts had permanently unbalanced the federal budget and the Republican refusal to raise taxes combined with the refusal of the Democratic-led Congress to support drastic programme cuts created a situation in which no corrective actions could be taken. The ultimate consequence was an explosive increase in the federal deficit as a share of the Gross National Product and thus in federal debt. By 1992 the U.S. debt had quadrupled to more than \$4 billion. To compound Bush's difficulties, the U.S. was in a recession during the campaign.⁴⁵

According to Labour Department figures, unemployment jumped from 7.2% in April to 7.5% in May 1992. T.E. Hitchens observes that these figures were the highest since August 1984.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Barret. I. Laurence and Elizabeth Taylor observes in TIME article 'Wake-Up Call', Time, November 18, 1991.

⁴⁶ Hitchens, T.E. Facts on File, vol. 52, no. 2675, 1992, New York, Facts on File.

The American Economy was going through a bad patch in late eighties and early nineties. Further media reports on downsizing of major corporations in response to major structural changes in the economy indicated that those who had jobs no longer felt secure.

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the recession that began in July 1990 had already ended by March 1991⁴⁷, a full twenty months before the election. According to the data compiled by Stanley Niem (1994), during the campaign period in 1992, the GNP growth in the election year was more than 2%.⁴⁸ Neither inflation nor unemployment was high. Both were lower than in 1984 when Ronald Reagan won by a landslide. So how was it that the economy came to occupy such a dominant role in the elections?

According to a study conducted by Marc J. Hetherington on 'The Media's Role in Forming Voter's Evaluations'⁴⁹, it is obvious that although the economic data indicated improvement by March 1991, much before the campaign started, the media's coverage of the recession followed a different pattern. Edward Mitchell and Welch (1995) points out that it was not until November 1991, eight months after the end of the recession, that the press shifted its focus from the Gulf War to the economic crisis. Thus due to this agenda setting power of the media, the public concern about the economy was alarmed. So, ironically again, much to the disadvantage of Bush, the

⁴⁷ Alvarez. R. Michael, and Jonathan Nagler, Economic Issues and Perot Candidacy: Voter choice in 1992 Presidential elections, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No. 3, August 1995, Pg. 724.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pg. 731

⁴⁹ Hetherington. J. Marc, The Media's Role in Forming Voter' National Economic Evaluations in 1992, *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 40, no. 2, February 1996, pg. 372-95.

public was concerned about the economy after the economy had actually started recovering.

“The tone of the media’s focus on the economy was almost exclusively negative,” feels Thomas Patterson. During the course of the general election campaign, media coverage of the economy was predominantly negative. “The network’s portrayal of the economy got worse as the economy improved.”⁵⁰

Nixon’s advisor Ray Price once observed, “Historical untruth may be a political reality.”⁵¹ One startling sequence of events from the 1992 campaign illustrates the converse of this rule: Historical truth can be political unreality. On October 27, 1992, the Department of Commerce reported that the Gross Domestic Product had grown at a rate of 2.7 percent in the third quarter of 1992, a healthy pace. News reports in the Washington Post and the New York Times quoted President Bush and his advisors trumpeting the figures as evidence that things were getting better and the Clinton camp debunking the news. A week before the election, none of this was surprising; but the Post’s and the Times’ use of outside experts certainly was. It was to them that the ordinary reader might look to break the impasse of competing claims and all of the quotes from outside experts were negative. Typical was the comment by Donald Rataczjak of Georgia State University in the Post; “Anyone who says that 2.7 percent is our new growth rate is crazy.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Quote by Thomas Patterson in Lynne V. Cheney, *Telling the Truth*, 1995, Simon and Schuster, New York, pg. 184.

⁵¹ Denton, Robert E. Jr. and Hahn Dan F., *Presidential Communication: Description and Analysis* (Praeger Publication, New York, 1986, p. 167.)

⁵² Germond, J., and J. Witcover, *Mas ac Hell : Revolt at the Ballot Box* (Warn, New York, 1993).

Bush was now forced to run not only against a bad economy but also against negative coverage of an economy that was, in fact, getting better. In addition, in making economic performance the focal point of the then campaigns, Perot and Clinton painted the bleakest possible picture of economic conditions. The news media was agog with the criticism of Bush. Much ahead of the start of campaigns for the election, media news became dominated by various stories reviewing the term of President Bush. NBC's Tom Brokaw described the 2.7 percent growth rate as "an economic number [President Bush] can brag about."⁵³ But ABC's Peter Jennings said it was "more than economists had projected, but in many cases, less than meets the eye." CBS's Dan Rather introduced the 2.7 percent growth rate by saying, "There is some doubt about the accuracy of the figures."⁵⁴

The euphoria regarding economy soon started fading after Bush came to power in 1988. His most memorable campaign promise in the 1988 election, "Read my lips: no new taxes" was highlighted by the media as an assessment pledge for him, as soon as his programmes for the economy started unveiling, this statement was picked up and scrutinized. Media in all its reporting highlighted his promise of 'no new taxes' and the opposition also geared him to stick to his promise.

The carry off of the media on the read-my-lips was taken as far as Music Television. Long seen as a youth channel, its projection was of Clinton as a knight as against the negative portrayal of Bush. Music Television has not been the comfortable home of any politician, it's happy-go lucky attitude to serious statements made by

⁵³ Lynne. V. Cheney', *Telling the Truth*, 1995, Simon and Schuster, New York, pg.. 184.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* pg. 185.

Politicians has in a way made it the cartoon of the Electronic media. The fact that the read my lips issue was raised here thus carries much more meaning thus. It was a statement on what American youth thought of Bush. The read-my-lips statement was now almost a joke.⁵⁵

As late as October 1992, *Time magazine* carried an article on the beleaguered President seeking to clear up the mess. The tone that was set by the article is indicative of how serious this issue was and how cornered the President felt. No doubt, the media sensed this. The tone was almost accusatory. "He always publicly stood behind them, but he seldom led them anywhere".⁵⁶ Bush was now trying to get rid of his advisors and thus placate whatever accusations were now being thrown at him. The article goes on to systematically strip his arguments of any force by showing that he was as responsible for the turn of events as much as his advisors were. "But the record makes clear Bush's economic missteps were less the fault of his advisors than of his own political strategy and economic philosophy which held that even in the midst of recession, Washington should, in his words, let the economy right itself".⁵⁷ This was serious and the accusation could not have been more direct than this. The article then goes on to systematically look at his record starting with the now famous 'read-my-lips' statement. As if to compound the sense of judgement, the article ends with a quote from one of Bush's own campaign officials, "We look desperate".⁵⁸ "In the end, Bush had

⁵⁵ Brians, L. Craig and Martin P. Wattenberg: Campaign Issue, knowledge and Salience, *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 40, no. 2, February 1996, pg. 177.

⁵⁶ Dan Goodgame, *Anatomy of a Fumble*, TIME, October 26, 1992, Pg. 28.

⁵⁷ Dan Goodgame, *Anatomy of a Fumble*, TIME, October 26, 1992, pg. 29.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pg. 29.

failed not only to maintain the growing economy that the Americans expected but had also failed on his own terms politically.”⁵⁹

“Even as he unveiled that pledge in August 1988, Bush knew and was reminded by Darman that he, like Ronald Reagan would end up raising taxes to avoid cutting popular middle class spending programmes.”⁶⁰ Dan Goodgame, *Time* journalist covered a story in which he described Richard Darman, the then budget director in the Bush administration, that he was opposed to Bush’s ‘no new taxes’ pledge as unrealistic and that he asked the President to negotiate a deficit cutting plan that would trade higher taxes for restraints on spending.

Goodgame further reports that John Sununu, the Chief of the Staff in the Bush administration had a clash with Michael Boskin, Stanford economics professor, in the midst of recession when Boskin proposed a stimulative package of \$60 billion to \$ 75 billion in new spending and tax cuts. John Sununu believed that Bush’s stand on the economy had no flaws and he agreed with Bush that the economy would recover by itself.⁶¹ This story explains that the missteps during recession were less the fault of his advisors than of his own political strategy. Media here helped the public perception that Bush was bad in handling the economy and had he understood and acted on the advice of the experts and advisors, he could have avoided the worsening of economy. News media here also tried to further this

⁵⁹ Ibid. pg. 30.

⁶⁰ Dan Goodgame, Votes Count, Debts Don’t, TIME, February 10, 1992, Pg. 17.

⁶¹ Dan Goodgame, Votes Count, Debts Don’t, TIME, February 10, 1992, Pg. 19.

view that just in order to keep his campaign promise of 'no new taxes', 1992, Bush ignored the worsening situation of the economy.

Further, when the time arrived for the decisions on budget, economic crisis made the tax hike inimical. Bush was reportedly confused regarding the decision as his primary goal of winning the second term was at risk and he felt that tax hike would distract him from opportunities to establish his reputation...policy. But it didn't seem inimical to his designs and was forced to break his 'no new tax' pledge to avert a budget crisis. He had to formally agree in June to negotiate an agreement that would include tax revenue increases.⁶²

To counter the Bush's rhetoric, "Read my lips: No new Taxes", the Clinton campaign team came up with a slogan "It's the Economy, Stupid!".⁶³ The media latched on to the new emphasis on the economy. Repeated attempts by the Bush camp to skirt the issue only served to bring this issue into focus among the many issues that the elections wove itself around.⁶⁴ This as it turned out was much in favour of Clinton. The media was again used to subtly play up the issue. The simplicity of the statement was what probably brought it down hard on Bush. It was, so to speak, the 'stupidest' of evident facts.

⁶² Betty Glad. *How George Bush Lost the presidential elections of 1992* in Stanley A. Rhenshon edited, *The Clinton presidency*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1995, Pg.14.

⁶³ George Stephanopoulos, who was communication director of Clinton's Presidential campaign, coined this rhetoric. The reference to this is given in Artherton, F. Christopher. 'Campaign '92: Strategies and Tactics of the Candidates' in Gerald M. Pomper ed. 'The Election of 1992'. Chatham House, 1993, p. 78.

⁶⁴ Artherton, F. Christopher. 'Campaign '92: Strategies and Tactics of the Candidates' in Gerald M. Pomper ed. 'The Election of 1992'. Chatham House, 1993, p. 78.

The New York Post's front page captured the prevailing reaction of the Bush's critics with a headline that screamed, "Read my lips: I lied". As the election came closer, reports and articles on Bush's failure in economy started gushing. Media took the charge and the propaganda role started. Critics after critics were given coverage by the media. This role of propaganda continued till the campaigns for the 1992 elections came knocking. Later, when media had succeeded in making economy the main issue, several polls conducted by various popular magazines started building opinion on the mass level, lending accent to its portrayal of the economy.

MEDIA AND FOREIGN POLICY

The 1991 Gulf War was certainly a momentous event in recent history and its impact on the American public was multifaceted. This definitely affected the process by which Americans evaluate their President's job performance. In the wake of 1992 elections, the way media handled the foreign policy of the Bush administration is worth consideration. How the reporting on the Gulf War was done and what was media's assessment of the successes claimed by the administration and how the mainstream media presented the overall foreign policy of the United States and how media helped in formulating opinion of the voters on the issue and finally, how all this helped the voters in President Bush's evaluation on the foreign policy front.

Public opinion about presidential performance exerts powerful influence on policy formation and implementation in US. Opinion polls document a President's popularity across the country and

perceptions of his popularity in turn regulate his ability to control political events. Public opinion becomes more important when the President has to seek reelection and in such cases opinion regarding his decision making and handling of several issues in the past, holds tremendous impact on the voters' decision, whether to give him the second chance or not. Thus, its here where media influences the public opinion and the way media projects the issue or turns the issue moulds the public opinion.

Public opinion polls by CBS/*NY Times* reflected that the Gulf War had profound impact on American view of George Bush's performance. According to this poll, Bush's approval ratings were moderate just before the war began in October 1990 at about 55 %. When, after a gradual massing of the allied troops in the Middle East, the U.S. initiated air attacks on Iraq in mid-January 1991, approval ratings began to rise. And in March, by the time military efforts were completed, approval ratings shot to nearly 90%. Although the following months saw a gradual decline in these positive sentiments, they were still near 70 % even three months later.⁶⁵

John A Krosnick and Laura A. Brannon, in their study of the impact of Gulf War on public evaluation of the President, questions this dramatic hike in the ratings in early 1991 and suggests that perhaps it was simply the military success at ending the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

⁶⁵ Krosnik A. Jon and Laura A. Brannon, The Impact of the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Multidimensional Effects of Political Involvement, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 87, no.4 December, 1993.

Thus this is quite obvious from the study that Bush scored initial successes and his popularity among the voters was no doubt exceptionally well and this gave him an edge vis-à-vis the other candidates in the contest. Then what happened in the days to come for the campaigns that the opinion got changed, and in spite of these advantages Bush lost the election, is the theme to be enquired in this study. The focus would be on the role of the media in portraying Bush on the foreign policy front.

With respect to the economy the media had done its part. The media was now decidedly influencing the elections. The stories being churned out by the press were increasingly repetitive and this very fact was now being discussed and used as a serious campaign fodder. These repetitions were self-fulfilling. The more the repetitions, the more it would be visible. Reporting would now increasingly be necessary in this area since one could not now be seen to be avoiding an election issue. As matters stood, the 'read-my-lips' issue was now serious enough and the elections would decidedly be fought on something that the media had brought up.

George Bush's emphasis on his foreign policy credentials no longer had the appeal it once had. He, along with other Republicans, tried to take credit for winning the Cold War. But with the demise of Soviet Union and thereby the disappearance of a formidable external enemy dictated that foreign policy would no longer command the same attention of the American people as it did earlier⁶⁶. Moreover, public exultation over the U.S. victory in the Gulf War faded as it

⁶⁶ Brody, A. Richard, *Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*. 1991, Stanford, Stanford University Press, pg.134.

became apparent that Saddam Hussein would remain in power and would continue to create problems. Public opinion polls in early 1992 showed that 63 % of the American people believed that Bush had stopped too soon by declaring a cease-fire before Hussein was ousted or killed. An NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* report on January 11th showed that 60 % of the Americans believed that the Gulf War had been worth fighting.⁶⁷

The charge, as laid out by Ted Koppel on ABC News Nightline, was that "It is becoming increasingly clear that George Bush, operating largely behind the scenes throughout the 1980s, initiated and supported much of the financing, intelligence and military help that built Saddam's Iraq into an aggressive power that the United States ultimately had to destroy."⁶⁸ A U.S. News & World Report said, "After a well-reasoned policy of quietly assisting Iraq during its eight-year war with Iran, George Bush continued to provide billions of dollars in loans to Saddam Hussein after the war with Iran ended in 1988. Despite evidence that Iraqi agents were stealing some of the American loan money and using it to buy and build biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons, the Bush administration increased the amount of the loans."⁶⁹

This article was a complement to their earlier cover piece, "Iraqgate: How the Bush Administration Helped Finance Saddam Hussein's War Machine with American Tax Dollars." The entire magazine ran seven articles with the word "Iraqgate" in the title.

⁶⁷ Hitchens, T.E. Facts on File, vol. 52, no. 2375, 1992, New York, Facts on File, pg. 23.

⁶⁸ Brody, A. Richard, *Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*. 1991, Stanford, Stanford University Press, pg.281.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* pg. 297.

The problem with all this exciting intrigue is it never happened. Repeated investigations have failed to turn up any Bush Administration wrongdoing. In a report published later, the Clinton Administration Justice Department found, to quote the New York Times, "no evidence to support allegations that aides to President George Bush had secretly armed Iraq and covered up their activities after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990."⁷⁰

Iraqgate was a big fat nothing, something readers of two brilliant exposes in *The American Lawyer* (Nov. 1994, by Stuart Taylor) and *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1994, by Kenneth Juster) already knew.⁷¹ It essentially began with a three-part series in the *Los Angeles Times*, headlining "Secret Effort by Bush Helped Hussein Build Military Might." One of the co-writers of the series, Murray Waas, also had a cover story in the Village Voice called "Gulfgate: How the U.S. Secretly Armed Iraq." From there it quickly spread to newspapers, newsmagazines and television news throughout the country.⁷² When the reporters held back, the editorial pages did not. Thus, while reportorial coverage at *The New York Times* was circumspect, the editorial page declared, "Crimes also were committed as the United States favored Iraq with loan guarantees to pay for food,"⁷³ adding, "The money was diverted to military purposes and government records were doctored to disguise the transactions."⁷⁴ The frenzy was such that *The Columbia Journalism Review* even ran a cover story blasting the media for not giving

⁷⁰ New York Times, January 23, 1993.

⁷¹ Artherton, F. Christopher. 'Campaign '92: Strategies and Tactics of the Candidates' in Gerald M. Pomper ed. 'The Election of 1992'. Chatham House, 1993, pg. 83.

⁷² Ibid. pg. 84.

⁷³ Ibid. pg. 84.

⁷⁴ Ibid. pg. 87.

enough coverage to the subject. "Just about every reporter following the story thinks [the] so-called Iraqgate scandal is far more significant than either Watergate or Iran-contra, both in its scope and its consequences,"⁷⁵ declared the writer. He later praised reporters at *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*, the latter of which he said got in late but headed the pack when they did.

How did the media get so misled? Surprisingly but much of the documentation came from Henry Gonzales, then Chairman of the House Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee. He later got famous for stonewalling the Whitewater investigation.

Two days before the presidential election, CBS's 60 Minutes began its program with Mike Wallace saying, "What I hear you saying, Mr. Chairman, is that Dick Thornburg, when he was the Attorney General, and William Barr, now that he is Attorney General, have been involved in obstruction of justice." His guest, Gonzales, had merely to reply, "Yes, sir." Thereupon Wallace could continue, "Obstruction of justice? What was the White House trying to hide?"

Is the word "misled" appropriate? Mr. Gonzales was merely demonstrating his twisted sense of loyalty to the Democratic Party. But to whom does the media owe its loyalty? Nonetheless, in a media known for a liberal bias, no one had greater impact than the conservative *New York Times* columnist William Safire. In a series of about 20 columns, Safire repeatedly attacked "the Bush

⁷⁵ Artherton, F. Christopher. 'Campaign '92: Strategies and Tactics of the Candidates' in Gerald M. Pomper ed. 'The Election of 1992'. Chatham House, 1993, pg. 87.

administration's fraudulent use of public funds, its sustained deception of Congress, and its obstruction of justice." Safire's gullibility in snapping up Gonzales's fake paper trail is proof that lack of liberal bias does not equal non-bias or accurate reporting.

How important the Iraqi scandal was in Bush's narrow election loss is hard to say. Certainly the Clinton ticket considered it valuable. "George Bush wants the American people to see him as the hero who put out a raging fire,"⁷⁶ said Al Gore in a late September 1992 speech. "But new evidence now shows that he is the one who set the fire." On October 25 he asserted, "This is a bigger cover-up than Watergate ever was," in "hiding the decision by George Bush to arm Saddam Hussein."

Now that the election is over and America is enjoying the fruits of the Clinton-Gore administration, there's no harm in the media saying, "We blew it, we're going to set this right" as was later accepted by a columnist in the Time magazine.⁷⁷

Repeatedly front page news as a scandal, as a non-scandal Iraqgate is fit only for sweeping under the rug. The Los Angeles Times gave it but 606 words on page A12. USA Today put it on A4-- then buried it in a series of short items. Still, nobody indexed on the Nexis computer database gave it closer to front-page coverage than that. The Wall Street Journal at least put the article on the back of the first section, but the Washington Post tucked it into A12. And

⁷⁶ This quote is taken from the Time magazine article: It's Not Quite Over by Laurence Barrett, Time, November 2, 1992, pg. 29.

⁷⁷ Laurence Barrett: 'It's Not Quite Over', Time, November 2, 1992, pg. 29.

what of U.S. News & World Report? No, not a word about the Justice Department ruling.

The media don't apologize for mistakes and falsehoods, just little errors like misspelling names. When they tamper with presidential elections and people's reputations there's no one to make them accountable and words one said is said seems to be their policy.

MEDIA AND CLINTON CAMPAIGN

By the time of the primaries the two names were the perceived frontrunners among the Democrat's candidate for the President. The New Hampshire primary was the first primary and this was a major setback for Bill Clinton as he finished second only to Paul Tsongas. Tsongas beat Clinton with 33 percent to mere 25 percent. The credit for the result goes not to Tsongas but the challenges faced by Clinton in the weeks before the New Hampshire Primary and the credit for coming back to race definitely goes to Clinton, observing this disastrous defeat and his comeback in the race.

On 16 January, a month before the New Hampshire primary, Star, a supermarket tabloid came up with a story that Clinton had a twelve year affair with a woman named Gennifer Flowers.⁷⁸ This accusation raised serious questions among the electorate about his character and trustworthiness. After February 25 South Dakota primary, 32 percent of the voters said they were concerned about Clinton's character.⁷⁹ Exit polls from the South Dakota primaries showed him falling 20 points after the allegation.⁸⁰ Although he won the primary defeating the nearest rival Paul

⁷⁸ Hitchens, T.E. Facts on File, vol. 52, no. 2675, 1992, New York, Facts on File, p. 124.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 124

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 423.

Tsongas by a vote margin of 19 percent to 9.6 percent,⁸¹ the allegations were serious. Much depended on the strategy by Clinton to counter the hype expected to be created by media.

Reporters claimed in 1992 that the important point of the Jennifer Flowers story wasn't whether Clinton had sex with Flowers, but whether he told the truth about it. But they didn't really mean it. In a remarkable March 1992 revelation in *The New Republic*, Hendrik Hertzberg polled "several dozen political journalists of my acquaintance" who unanimously told him they'd vote for Clinton if they were a New Hampshire voter. He added: "None at all is due to belief in Clinton's denials in the Flowers business, because no one believes these denials."

When the Flowers story broke in January 1992, the networks aired only 14 evening news reports in six days, and then stopped. Only CBS aired the suddenly relevant Flowers tapes, in which Clinton told Flowers to lie about their relationship and about the state job he awarded her. Bryan Denham and M. Mark observes in their analysis of the media coverage for Clinton:

"Our analysis of image issues showed what we consider a positive trend, as the use of terms that titillate and create political controversy declined in 1992. Thus, despite the ongoing effort of campaign strategists to exploit Bill Clinton's alleged marital improprieties, newspaper poll articles did not report the matter as much as they might have. We observed appropriate coverage of candidate character, but did not see consistent reference to alleged sexual liaisons and other topics that offer nothing substantive about the election or how the candidate might address a specific issue if elected. Unfortunately, the decline in "soft" issue

⁸¹ Ross k. Baker, *Sorting out and Suiting up: the Presidential Nominations*, in Gerald M. Pomper ed. 'The Election of 1992'. Chatham House, 1993, p. 49.

reporting appears to have facilitated more coverage of the horserace; substantive political issues were not addressed consistently during the 1992 election year, despite the decline of image-baiting terms."⁸²

The Freedom Forum studied the relationship between the Washington news media and Congress, the press foundation tossed in what it considered a throwaway question to the reporters: How had they voted in 1992? It was revealed in the study that was confidential that Washington press corps were liberal in accepting Clinton as of the 130 respondents, 89 percent said they had voted for Bill Clinton. Only seven percent had supported George Bush.⁸³ Washington Times jumped on the response as proof of a liberal bias in the news media. Right-wing press critic Brent Bozell did the same and soon the 89-percent figure was echoing through conservative radio talk shows. The Washington Post's media critic Howard Kurtz took it as conclusive proof of a liberal media bias, too.

But the Freedom Forum survey itself escaped any critical analysis, despite the shocking size of the supposed Clinton preference. Though it's true that many centrists favored Clinton as one of their own and liberals might have accepted him as the lesser evil, a significant percentage of high-profile journalists from Bob Novak to George Will had expressed clear preferences for Bush.

The magic word in Clinton's campaign had been "Change," a reorientation of policy toward the needs of the great majority of the population who had suffered from Reagan-Bush "trickle down" economics

⁸² Bryan Denham and M. Mark, *Public Opinion Polls During the 1988 and 1992 Presidential Election Campaigns: An Analysis of Horserace or Issue Coverage in Prestige News Papers*, Miller School of Journalism, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, p. 34.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 52.

-- in practice, an upward flood -- and had swept Clinton into office on the promise of an end to the party for the rich.

In the 1992 electoral campaign, the Democrats showed more awareness of these issues, gaining support from sectors of the corporate world that recognized them to be more attuned to real world problems than Reaganite ideologues. Not that Reaganites were reluctant to use state power to protect the wealthy from market forces. The primary mechanisms were the usual military Keynesian ones. To mention one striking case, a 1985 OECD study found that the Pentagon and Japan's state planning ministry MITI were distributing R&D funds much the same way, making similar guesses about new technologies. A major Pentagon funnel was SDI ("Star Wars"), which was openly advertised as a state subsidy to the "private sector," and lauded by the business press for that reason. The Reagan-Bush decade ended in fall 1992 with a well-publicized improvement in the economy, attributed in the business press to a sharp rise in military spending much of it for computer purchases.

How important the Iraq scandal was in Bush's narrow election loss is hard to say. Certainly the Clinton ticket considered it valuable. "George Bush wants the American people to see him as the hero who put out a raging fire," said Al Gore in a late September 1992 speech. "But new evidence now shows that he is the one who set the fire." On October 25 he asserted, "this is a bigger cover-up than Watergate ever was," in "hiding the decision by George Bush to arm Saddam Hussein."

The following examples from the New York Times (September 16, 1992) and the Washington Post (September 11, 1992) illustrate how journalists can include issue terms as a means of elucidating the horserace.

"Riding a wave of economic discontent, the Democratic nominee (Clinton) now has the backing of 49 percent of the voters over all, compared with 37 percent who say they are supporting Mr. Bush, the poll shows."

"In the most recent Washington Post-ABC News Poll, the Arkansas governor led Bush 69 percent to 20 percent among voters who listed the economy as an important issue, and by 60 to 24 percent among those who said 'bringing needed change in government' is a central goal."

In these sentences, substantive issue terms were included to help elucidate the horserace for newspaper readers. "Economy"--the most common key term in both the 1988 and 1992 substantive issue investigations--was widely used during the two election years to "explain" why certain candidates were leading or trailing in a presidential race. Specific information about fiscal policy and its impact on individual voters often was discounted at the expense of simply mentioning the term in the context of a separate thought. As one might expect, issue terms are mentioned in horserace sentences after the candidates have been sorted out by media. Journalists are then able to attach the nation's "most important" issue to the race for office.

MEDIA AND PEROT CAMPAIGN

Ross Perot was the surprise of the election. A group of unfulfilled voters who screamed for change had formed their own party with Ross Perot as its candidate for President. Although, realistically, his chance to win was minute, the number of voters who did join his leadership staggered the other parties. This 'grass root' movement only existed because of the help of the media. Without

getting such great exposure, the movement never could have been accomplished.

As an independent he was a surprise to the other candidates as well as to voters. Since his popularity was widespread the media did not know how to represent him. He provided an alternative to the usual politicians. However he received his snubbing from the press when he dropped out of the election in the summer. The media had a field day covering the story. When he reentered the election, the media was eager to remind the people of the time he let them down.⁸⁴

Ross Perot's popularity was largely due to his ability to advertise. He was named by Advertising Age magazine as 'Adman of the Year'. The half hour television slots purchased by candidate Ross Perot also provided viewers with an idea of his political platform. With his charts and graphs he drummed up many supporters. Even though he did not win, or even come close, he nevertheless converted many Americans in a very short period of time.

H. Ross Perot's rise in the poll was phenomenal. In a survey taken at the end of April, 1992, he had moved to within five points of Clinton in terms of voter preference.⁸⁵ He immediately made it clear that he was independent of both parties, and only ran for the presidency because he felt that he could do a better job than either George Bush or Bill Clinton. In a time of great economic strife, Perot was a very attractive candidate to many Americans. His speeches

⁸⁴ Artherton, F. Christopher. 'Campaign '92: Strategies and Tactics of the Candidates' in Gerald M. Pomper ed. 'The Election of 1992'. Chatham House, 1993, pg. 57.

⁸⁵ New York Times, 26th April, 1992.

were filled with somber warnings about the state of the country. For example, "We are no longer the No. 1 Economic superpower in the world"; the United States had become "the most violent crime-ridden society in the industrialized world"; and "we have 5 percent of world's population and 50 percent of world's cocaine use" and these statements from him were given due media coverage.⁸⁶ He had practical experience backing him that he could apply to a national economic policy. However, Ross Perot left questions in the minds of many Americans concerning other matters. Issues such as health care, education, and international affairs were left seemingly unaddressed. Ross Perot may not have become the next president of the United States, but his campaign was far from weak. His effect on the 1992 election was substantial, because he knew how to 'play the media game'.

To be able to utilize the power of the media to its fullest extent, large sums of money are needed, and Ross Perot had the money. Ross Perot spent a record amount of \$3.25 per vote; his campaign spending exceeded \$70 million, all of which he used from his personal finances. He gained the support of millions of Americans through television. A lot of it was also because his image was not that of a politician. People saw it and felt it through the media. During his campaign he was aware of the American fascination with newsworthy events, he played on that fascination and achieved more political success than the nation had ever expected from him.

⁸⁶Alvarez, R. Michael, and Jonathan Nagler, Economic Issues and Perot Candidacy: Voter choice in 1992 Presidential elections, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No. 3, August 1995, Pg. 724.

Perot turned around and did something that no one ever did. He used television to carry his message to the Americans. Instead of public speeches, he purchased an hour of television time on NBC to sit down and "talk" with America. People watched his "info-mercial" and loved it. It marked the first time that a candidate had ever used the media to get their point across without the media being able to change it. The ratings were so high that he decided to do another one. In all, there were five "info-mercials." In fact, the night before the elections, Bill Clinton joined Perot and had his own "info-mercial." The "info-mercials" were a creative as well as an effective solution to this problem of media bias.

Buying television time gave Perot the chance to charm the audience with his charisma and quick business savvy and showed America that not every politician is out for money. Perot gave the campaign a new twist, which in the future, neither politicians nor the media will forget.

Perot got so much media coverage because, at the start of the race, he had the money to buy media time and make a name for himself. Once he built up his name, the media began covering him for free. Perot was also surrounded by some scandals, or controversial topics, a thing that sells newspapers.

H. Ross Perot, the independent candidate, financed his own bid for the White House and built his entire campaign almost exclusively on television. He sneaked his way into the race on CNN's Larry King Live show by saying that if the people placed him on the ballot in all 50 states, then he would run for the Presidency. "This move and his

other strategies. . . were plotted way in advance of their actual occurrence. He did not simply make an off-handed remark, but rather a calculated statement which would catapult him into the political and Presidential arena.”⁸⁷ However, when the media began turning up the heat on Mr. Perot, he bowed out of the race. He re-entered with about six weeks remaining so as to avoid the close scrutiny that the other two candidates (had) endured. Even during that period when he was not an official candidate, Perot still manipulated the press. “He kept his name in the news just often enough to prevent the public from forgetting him, while staying out of the news enough to avoid bad publicity.”⁸⁸

In the June 29, 1992 issue of *Time* magazine there was an article on Ross Perot titled '*The Doubts About Ross Perot*' by George J. Church. It states that on March 25, 1987 Ross Perot said, '*We must cut spending and raise taxes to pay our bills. We all know it. Let's make sure our leaders understand that this must be done.*'⁸⁹ The media compares this with a quote five years later on June 3, 1992 by Ross Perot that states, 'Putting more money in the government is a serious mistake. And I have said I will not raise taxes.' What might have been necessary in 1987 is not what is necessary in 1992 or what Ross Perot believed would solve the problem in 1987 does not apply to 1992.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Artherton, F. Christopher. 'Campaign '92: Strategies and Tactics of the Candidates' in Gerald M. Pomper (ed.) 'The Election of 1992'. Chatham House, 1993, pg. 59.

⁸⁸ Ibid. pg. 63.

⁸⁹ George, J. Church. 'The Doubts About Ross Perot', *Time* magazine, June 29, 1992, pg. 31.

⁹⁰ Ibid. pg. 31.

Although most of the articles on Ross Perot were supportive of him, they would never let the public forget that he was rich. The media didn't trust Perot, and if the media didn't trust Perot, then the people didn't either. The media harassed Perot, asking questions about why he entered the race, how much money he was spending on his campaign, and questions about his personal life. For example, two of the articles had caricatures of Perot, one of them portraying him as a hero on top of an ocean of money and the other as a classroom teacher with money being added on a blackboard behind him. U.S. News and World Report also showed Perot having an attraction to conspiracy. He had accused that the Bush campaign was out to ruin his daughter's wedding and that the Bush campaign had threatened to release compromising pictures of his daughter.

The news media as we have seen had a large role to play. This is expected. However there were interesting points to the campaign. The use of the media by the candidates was illustrative not only of the media's power in changing opinion but also, in Ross Perot's Case was illustrative of the fact that media was not to be depended upon exclusively to provide that bit of unbiased news. However in going to the extent of purchasing his slots on TV, Perot might just have given in to the prevalent opinion that he was after all a mildly cranky man with a lot of money to spare. In fact the media played up this aspect of him in its cartoons of him.

Ross Perot's act was almost defiance. The media would not have liked that. Perot bypassed the media of its usual method of filtering news. In fact it almost fitted in with the image of Perot, as a

rich crank. It was also probably a sad commentary on what was a known fact, that the media could not provide unbiased reporting.

The news media regularly fail to provide a range of information and commentary that might help citizens in a democracy develop their own critical perceptions. The job of the corporate media is to make the universe of discourse safe for corporate America telling us what to think about the world before we have a chance to think about it for ourselves. We understand that news selectivity is likely to favor those who have power, position and wealth.

Even for a person just skimming through the papers, the media impression that was cased was that Perot was unstable and extravagant, that Bush was easily persuaded, and Clinton as strong, forceful and dependable.

CHAPTER-4

1996 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN AND MEDIA

Every four years, the American media gears up for one of the nation's top stories, the Presidential election. Countless broadcast time and newspaper and magazine space are devoted to candidate speeches, campaign expenses and analysis of television advertising, style, issue differences and debates. The year 1996 was no exception as planes and buses loaded with reporters and camera crews followed the incumbent President, Democrat Bill Clinton, Republican nominee Bob Dole, and an independent candidate Ross Perot.

Even then the 1996 Presidential elections were different in the sense that there was to be no major issue that the media or any other agency could play up. In fact it was one of the most lacklustre elections that America had ever seen. There was a growing alienation of the campaign. Politics and politicians were being losing their media value. It coincided with the rapidly increasing avenues from which the American public got their news. They were not dependent on traditional media alone to make their choices. Increasingly the candidates could now bypass the traditional media as newer methods like the Internet were available now. The candidates themselves got onto the media bandwagon after they felt that the media is passing them by. The advent of the 'informational commercials' (info-mercial)⁹¹ was one of the many phenomena that were beginning to appear. The info-mercials had made its appearance

⁹¹ The term info-mercial is frequently used by the print media instead of information commercial.

for the first time in the '92 elections. This was a trendsetter in the sense that the media was being used differently. Rather than rely on the media to disseminate opinion, the info-mercials used the media to send out a straightforward message. This was the result of two things. i.) The advent of newer channels of communication, and ii.) The increasing power of the media in being able to set an agenda that the politicians did not necessarily like.

The use of the traditional media declined in 1996 as is evident in the comparative studies of media use.

MEDIA USE, 1992 AND 1996, A COMPARISON.⁹²

Media Use	1992 <i>N=504</i>	1996 <i>N=534</i>
Newspaper Exposure*	4.45	4.16
Newspaper Attention**	2.94	2.75
TV News Exposure	5.08	4.79
TV News Attention	3.09	2.93
Radio News Exposure	3.37	----
Radio News Attention	2.39	2.47
TV Ad Attention	2.53	2.26
TV Talk show Attention	1.78	2.09
Debate Exposure***	2.11	1.12

*Media exposure measure in both surveys use scales ranging from 1 to 7 days.

**Media attention measure in both surveys use scales ranging from 1 "no attention" to 4 "lot of attention".

***Out of three debates in the 1992 election and two debates in the 1996 elections.

⁹² Drew Dan and David Weaver, Voter Learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter, *Journal of Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 75, No. 2, summer 1998, p. 298.

The 1996 elections were beset by another problem, a lack of interesting issues that the media could play up on. The Whitewater scandal, the sex scandal and the arrival of the Green Party were the few things that the media could now look at. These did not have as much scope for grand theories as did the earlier election issues relating to economy, increasing American influence in world affairs and the Cold War.

There was also a growing alienation of the media from the White House. There was nothing much to play around with. Almost all the issues were centered on Clinton and his doings. This free publicity in a way came as an icing on Clinton's campaign cake and helped build up his image, even if by default. However, there was another thing that changed the results of the American elections, low voter turn out.

The 1996 presidential campaign resulted in the lowest national turnout since 1924 when less than half the registered voters came out to vote. The presence at the Republican Convention was down by 21 per cent from 1992 and that at the Democratic Convention was also down by 21 per cent⁹³. Likewise, the viewership of the first Clinton/Dole debate was down 26 per cent from Clinton/Bush debate in 1992. In fact, the final Clinton/Dole debate had the lowest rating of any televised presidential debate in history.⁹⁴

⁹³ Graber, D. A. and Weaver, D., *Presidential Performance Criteria: The Missing Element in Election Coverage*. (Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 1, 1996), pp.17.

⁹⁴ The Hotline. 10 (39), November 8. URL:<http://www.nationaljournal.com/hotlineweekly.htm>

**DEGREES OF CAMPAIGN INTEREST IN 1992 AND THE
1996 ELECTIONS.**⁹⁵

Camapaign Interest	1992 ^a	1996
Not very Interested	7.0%	43.1%
Somewhat interested	25.2%	36.7%
Very Interested	67.8%	20.2
Mean ^b	2.61	2.23
<i>N</i>	504	534

^a Source : David Weaver and Dan Drew, "Voter learning in the 1992 Presidential Election"

^bwith scales ranging from 1 'not very interested' to 3 'very interested'

Detecting the lack of public interest, media coverage of the campaign also declined from the 1992 contest. Campaign coverage on the networks' nightly news fell 40 per cent from 1992. And even on election night, networks ratings were the lowest ever recorded in an election year⁹⁶. Viewership of election night returns was down at just 39 per cent.⁹⁷

The polls reflect a shift in public opinion about the role of government and the general performance of the Presidency and the Congress. Early polls conducted in 1992 elections reflect positive swing for Clinton and this turned negative after mid-term elections in 1994. For example, according to Scott Keeter while only 54 per cent of the public thought government should do more to solve problems

⁹⁵ Drew Dan and David Weaver, Voter Learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter, *Journal of Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 75, No. 2, summer 1998, p. 298.

⁹⁶ Nielson: Nielson ratings is a web based ratings for the television and other channels for U.S. the URL for the site is: www.Nielson.com/home/index.html/

⁹⁷ *ibid.* 1

in 1992, only 42 per cent thought so in 1994 and the figure rose up slightly to 45 per cent in 1996.⁹⁸

A Times-Mirror poll showed Clinton trailing behind the Republican nominee for Presidency in 1996 by a margin of 40 to 33 per cent. In late 1994, Clinton's approval rating was just 41 per cent, down from 56 per cent less than a year back.⁹⁹

As early as October 1994, news organizations were reporting GOP preference polls for twelve candidates in New Hampshire. Those receiving the top billing from the voters nearly one and a half years from the primaries were Colin Powell (18 per cent), Bob Dole (17 per cent), Jack Kemp (16 per cent) and Dan Quayle (10 per cent).¹⁰⁰ By January 1995, Dole was beating Clinton in the polls and only 17 per cent indicated they would definitely vote for Clinton. At this stage, 65 per cent of the public believed that Clinton would not win in 1996.¹⁰¹ By mid-February 1995, Bob Dole emerged as the front-runner among the Republican candidates and led Clinton 51 per cent to 44 per cent.¹⁰²

Clinton's poor performance in public opinion polls yet successful fundraising led his advisors to prompt him to start an 'air-war' of advertisements targeted against Republicans in the summer of 1995. Some seventeen months before the election, Clinton's

⁹⁸ Scott, Keeter. 1997. "Public Opinion and the Election". In the 'Election of 1996' Gerald Pomper ed., pg. 107-133, NJ, Chatham House.

⁹⁹ The Hotline Weekly, December 12, 1994, pg. 13.

¹⁰⁰ The Hotline Weekly, October 24, 1994, pg. 3.

¹⁰¹ Robert E. Denton, Jr. 1998, 'The 1996 Presidential Campaign : A Communication Perspective', Praeger, Westport, pg. 20.

¹⁰² Ibid. pg. 21.

campaign aired spots to recast his public image. These Democratic spot campaigns portrayed Republicans as cold, mean-spirited and champions of the rich. The spots ran in twelve states in 20 markets costing \$2.4 million.¹⁰³ These ads were not countered by the Republicans and thus throughout 1995, Clinton's approval ratings began improving.

Despite these private strategies and planning, Clinton's public image was under attack during 1994 and 1995. Media became dominated by charges of sexual misdemeanor and financial irregularities. A liberal columnist, Jack Newfield of the *New York Post* even wrote an open letter to Democrats proclaiming, "Its time to dump Bill".¹⁰⁴

While the 1992 presidential election generated interest about new media, alternative media, civic journalism and the impact of a third party and prompted the highest voter turnout since 1968, 1996's expensive campaigns seemed to generate only yawns. Bob Dole wrapped up the nomination before the Republican Convention and President Clinton never faced a serious challenge. Numerous polls showed the President ahead from the very start. As a result, coverage was less extensive than in 1992, audience interest was down and in the end voter turnout reached its lowest level in more than 70 years.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Church, Geogre J., "Around the World For Votes", *Time*, April 29, 1996 p.34.

¹⁰⁴ Duffy, Michael, " No Miracles Yet" *Time*, Sept. 21, 1992 p.32.

¹⁰⁵ Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter? Dan Drew and David Weaver, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol.75, no. 2 summer 1998, p.292-301

There were some surprises in terms of media coverage. Robert Litcher, head of the Centre for Media and Public Affairs, reported that network coverage gave Bill Clinton better, more favourable coverage during the campaign than Bob Dole. He found that fifty per cent of the stories on Clinton were positive compared to just thirty three per cent for Dole. In addition, compared to 1992, the network coverage of the general campaign was only about half that of 1992.¹⁰⁶

With Dole, the press talked of his tactics and strategies. They focused on his organizational troubles, lack of ability to generate excitement and lack of a clear message. In contrast, Clinton granted almost no media availability to national reporters from Labour Day until the election. He ignored questions from reporters traveling with him during his campaign. However, Clinton would readily agree to brief interviews with local reporters, in person or by satellite. For example, when the election closed in in Virginia, the President was offered outlets in Roanoke, a media market. Local anchors competed with each other for the privilege of a ten-minute interview opportunity. The resulting interview was, while quite exciting for the anchor, was not very enlightening for the general public.¹⁰⁷

The national conventions of the two major political parties bear witness to the media's obsession with presidential politics. Of the 35,000 people who attended each of the conventions, the Republican Convention in San Diego and the Democrats' in Chicago, 15,000 at each were members of the media.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ "Washington Whispers". 1996, U.S. News A World Report, Nov. 18, 121 p.20-21

¹⁰⁷ Robert E. Denton Jr. The 1996 Presidential Campaign : A Communication Perspective, (ed.), Praeger, New York, 1998 p.45

¹⁰⁸ Kramer, Michael, "Eyes on the Prize", Time, Oct.12, 1992 pp.36

"While voters have some misgivings about media coverage of this year's [1996] presidential campaign, they're also relying heavily on journalists to get them the information they'll need to make up their minds in November,"¹⁰⁹ says Nancy J. Woodhull, Executive Director of the Freedom Forum Media Studies Centre. How far the media came true to these expectations is still a subject of some controversy in the United States.

"The American media cover elections skeptically, if not cynically," says Larry Sabato, Professor at the University of Virginia, who has written extensively on politics and the media. He further believes that the American media views its mission as that contrasting with the official view, the 'spin' of the political consultants and the candidates themselves. Thus he reflects the attitude of the media and specially the news media in handling the coverage during elections.

"Spin" has become a much-used term in political coverage. It is the practice by which political associates offer an instant analysis of events and statements in an effort to cast their candidate in a favorable light. The more the campaigns try to put their own "spin" on things, the more the media try to seek the other side.

The TV networks, for example, rebelled against what they considered to be overly scripted and managed political conventions in August by doing interviews or commentary instead of showing the planned program.

¹⁰⁹ Drew, Dan, & weaver, David, " Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter?", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No.2, Summer 1998, pp. 292-301

David Bartlett, President of the Radio-Television News Directors Association, believes that the function of the journalist or the fundamental purpose of a free press in a free society is to act as a watchdog. "You can't be too skeptical," he says. "You can't be too critical. If anything, our media suffer from a lack of toughness in political coverage, not being too tough, he adds."¹¹⁰

The Center for Media and Public Affairs, a non-partisan group in Washington which studied television news during the 1996 primaries, found traditional coverage too negative, too focused on who was winning or losing and too journalist-centred.¹¹¹ According to the study, television journalists got six times as much airtime as candidates in reports on the primaries. The average candidate "sound bite", the actual time a candidate is heard talking, declined from 42 seconds in 1968 to a pathetic 7.2 seconds in 1996.¹¹² The traditional networks such as NBC, ABC and CBS felt people were seeing the news before they had a chance to report it. As a result, they began replacing their evening news summaries with more analysis and commentary.

Coverage by newspaper reporters differs from that of television because newspapers are held to stricter standards in regard to providing sources for stories, and to keeping commentary out of news stories. They also have the opportunity to write stories in greater depth. The role of the press has come to be seen as a broker of

¹¹⁰ Drew, Dan, & weaver, David, "Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter?", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No.2, Summer 1998, p. 296.

¹¹¹ Bartels, Larry M., "Messages Received : The Political Impact of Media Exposure", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No.2, June 1993 p. 279.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 281

information rather than its non-partisan purveyor. "They're acting as the gatekeeper, bringing out certain things and not others, says an observer." ¹¹³

During the 1996 primaries, while the candidates mostly focused on positive messages, news reports were largely negative. In Dole's coverage, what stood out was a lot of questioning of his strength as a frontrunner, the forces allied against him and when was he going to crumble. Journalists justified this coverage arguing that there were few real issue differences between candidates for the Republican nomination, with the exception of the extremist Patrick Buchanan. David Bartlett of the Radio-Television News Directors defended shorter sound bites saying "The world moves faster today than in 1968. The number of choices from which people can get their news and information is enormously greater in 1996 than in 1968."¹¹⁴ The Americans didn't had CNN and C-Span in 1968. C-Span covers events such as political conventions, campaign speeches and sessions of Congress uninterrupted, without the filter of the journalist and has numerous viewer call-in opportunities. Indeed, media outlets have become so plentiful, scholars and journalists agree, that Americans have a diversity of news sources available to keep them well informed about their government, candidates and key political issues.

¹¹³ Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election :How American Choose their President*, (Praeger, New York, 1980).

¹¹⁴ Renshon, A. Stanley. (Ed.) *The Clinton Presidency : Campaigning , Governing & the Psychology of Leadership*. (Westview Press, Inc., Colorado, 1995, p. 48).

MEDIA BIAS

Questions have been raised about bias in the American media. Conservatives believe the media favor Democrats and have a pro-Clinton bias. At the Republican National Convention, messages emanating from the media, which said in 1992, "Annoy the Media, Re-elect President Bush," did not change in 1996, as it said "Annoy the Media, Elect Bob Dole." The conservative Media Research Center has launched a \$2.78 million campaign to spotlight an anticipated bias in political reporting in 1996. Republicans believe media bias against their party was demonstrated by a poll taken for the nonpartisan Freedom Forum that found almost nine of ten Washington reporters voted for President Clinton.¹¹⁵

Ken Walsh, senior White House correspondent for U.S. News and World Report and author of *Feeding the Beast: The White House Vs. the Press*, feels that the Washington press corps goes after whoever is in power, regardless of their individual voting habits. During the fall campaign, he says, "I think we can count on the press picking up the cues from the campaigns as they hammer each other, and the press being unrelentingly critical."¹¹⁶

Some Democrats attending their national convention believe the media has been harsh on President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton. But this is not all. "A lot of people have a big problem with the news media, but I don't," says Missouri delegate Mildred Conner.

¹¹⁵ Graber, D. A., McQuail, D., & Norris, P. (Eds). *The Politics of News: The News of politics* (Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington, DC, 1998, p.185.).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 213.

"We need the newspapers and the radio and the TV to get the information out. If the press and the parties do their job", Ohio delegate Joe Rugola says, "then our message will get back to the American people, and then it will be their job to decide which direction they want the country to go in."

The Election of 1996 was the first time that a democrat was elected for a second full term in office since Franklin Roosevelt. Despite lingering doubts about his ethics and character, Americans voted in favor of President Clinton as lesser of the two evils. He skillfully reclaimed the centre of political discourse and successfully labeled the Republicans as the party of extremists. Clinton was aided by the fact that his opponent, Senate majority leader Bob Dole, never seemed able to connect with the voter and failed extensively to communicate newer ideas.

CHARACTER ISSUE AND CAMPAIGN'96

Clintons and one of their friends from Arkansas had jointly invested in a property development scheme called 'Whitewater', a resort complex in the Ozark Mountains. The project was launched in 1978, few days before he was elected the Governor of Arkansas. According to the media reports, Clintons always insisted that since investment till entering the White House, the investment was a major loss for them. Controversy surfaced when the reports of certain huge payments being made to the Whitewater account by the Madison Guaranty, another company of the partner friend from Arkansas.

The whitewater scandal officially began in March 1992 with the publication of a *New York Times* article discussing the Clintons' involvement in the venture.¹¹⁷ While campaigning for the 1992 elections, Clinton explained to reporters that he did nothing improper when he and his wife entered the deal with savings and loans and that they lost some money from this investment.¹¹⁸ The news media highlighted the possibility of the scam and through editorials asked for a fuller explanation and enquiry of his involvement.

By early 1996, it became clear that the Republican Party was planning to try convincing the American public that Bill and Hillary lacked the character to be in the White House for another four years. To counter the expected attacks, the Clinton campaigns adopted a two-pronged strategy for maintaining control over the agenda and avoid drawing the President directly into a debate over character. President Clinton announced a series of initiatives that demonstrated the ability of government to deal with important issues without increasing the federal budget deficits

In lieu of this strategy President Clinton proposed several legislations. One of which was to amend the *Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993* to allow workers to take "as many as eighty hours of 'flexi time' in lieu of overtime pay". He proposed a *Victim's Rights Constitutional Amendment* to announce that the Department of Education shall spend \$ 10 million in discretionary funds to pay for

¹¹⁷ Jeff Gerth, "Clinton joined S&L Operator in Ozark Real Estate Venture" *New York Times*, march 8, 1992, pg A1.

¹¹⁸ Carlson, Margret, " While the Getting's Good", *Time*, Oct.26, 1992 pp.24.

'anti-truancy' pilot programmes in twenty-five school districts.¹¹⁹ Further, he announced a \$2 million pilot programme 'to help track down those who sell guns to young people and convened a White House Conference on television and there he announced that he wanted the broadcast industry to increase the amount of children's programming.

His strategy was not applauded by everyone and received severe criticism from the Opposition and the media. Columnist Maureen Dowd wrote, "instead of great society, Clinton now brings us the Itsy-Bitsy society. Instead of rendezvous with destiny, he has an appointment with detail. From grand epic-making schemes of social engineering, he has come around to suggestions that we cross a few 'T's' and dot a couple of 'I's'".¹²⁰ Despite criticism, Clinton succeeded in his objective of neutralizing the effect of the media and the Opposition as was indicated by the polls. The fact that Bill Clinton did not face any opposition from the democratic nomination meant that the Clinton campaign could devote all its energy in presenting an image of the President who understood the problems of the average American, but who also had no plans of returning to an era of big government and high taxes. A June 27, 1996, NBC-Wall Street Journal poll found that sixty-two per cent of those surveyed believed issues mattered more than character.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Kinsley, Michael, "Sitting Pretty : Why do Americans seem ready to re-elect this President despite the distrust and ambivalence he arouses in so many of them ? We offer some theories", Time , Sept. 2, 1996 pp. 16.

¹²⁰ Robert N. Roberts and Marion T. Doss, Jr. From Watergate to Whitewater :The Public Integrity War, (Praeger, Westport, 1997) p.166

¹²¹ "Poll Finds Voters Care Most About Issues, Not Character ," All Politics, June 27, 1996, URL :[http:// all politics.com/news/9606/27/poll/](http://allpolitics.com/news/9606/27/poll/).

Throughout 1996, Bob Dole and the Republican Party tried to ignite a character backlash against Bill Clinton. The Republican National Committee unleashed an attacking advertisement in late May that slammed Clinton “for trying to use the Soldiers and Sailors Relief Act of 1940 to defer Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit”.¹²²In a June 2, 1996, speech, Bob Dole told a luncheon of Republican Party leaders: “I want to be the President because I want to return integrity to our government, a mission that’s more important this week than even a week ago”.¹²³

But a June 21 1996 USA Today-CNN-Gallup Poll found that fifty-seven per cent of those questioned planned to vote for Bill Clinton and only thirty-eight per cent planned to vote for Republican Candidate Bob Dole. Sixty-two per cent of those polled said that Bob Dole had the personal characteristics of honesty and trustworthiness, while forty-five per cent believed that Bill Clinton has such characteristics. Yet sixty-four per cent believed Bill Clinton cared about people like them, while only forty-seven believed Bob Dole cared about them.¹²⁴

When Paula Jones charged Clinton with sexual harassment in February 1994, ABC filed a 16-second brief. The rest of the media ignored the issue for three months until Jones filed suit against Clinton. Even then the networks then did just 21 stories, preceding

¹²² “Campaign’96 Ads,Strives,” All Politics, Jan.17, 1996, URL : [http:// allpolitics.com/candidates/campaign.96/index4.html/](http://allpolitics.com/candidates/campaign.96/index4.html/)

¹²³ Roert N. Roberts and Marion T. Doss,Jr. : From Watergate to Whitewater : The Public Integrity War, (Prager, Westport, 1997), p.167

¹²⁴ Gibbs, Nancy & Duffy, Michael, “ Inside the Race”, Time, Feb. 26, 1996 pp.28.

the suit, in that month.¹²⁵ On CNBC's Tim Russert, Tom Brokaw defended this blackout by the media saying that, "It didn't seem to most people, entirely relevant to what was going on at the time. These are the kind of charges raised about the President before. They had been played out in the Gennifer Flowers episode."¹²⁶ ABC Good Morning America co-host Charles Gibson and Sam Donaldson also extended their defense saying that, "Why does anyone care about what this woman has to say?"¹²⁷

In December of 1993, *The American Spectator* broke the story of another abuse of power that sprung from Clinton's sexual recklessness: State troopers told of being used to secure sexual conquests. The networks aired only 22 stories in 12 days, even though network reporters like NBC's Jim Miklaszewski and ABC's Jim Wooten later admitted they believed the troopers. But the media still told the public not to care about sex-related abuses of power. National Public Radio reporter Nina Totenberg claimed, "When the American people hired Bill Clinton for this job, they knew he was no saint. He virtually told them he was a sinner." Newsweek's Joe Klein told readers, "I suspect that as long as the peccadilloes remain within reason, the American people will have great tolerance for a President who has not only seen the sunshine of Oxford but also the dusky Dunkin' Donuts of the soul."¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Drew, Dan, & weaver, David, "Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter?", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No.2, Summer 1998, p. 295.

¹²⁶ Drew, Dan, & weaver, David, "Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter?", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No.2, Summer 1998, pp. 293.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 297.

¹²⁸ Drew, Dan, & weaver, David, "Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter?", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No.2, Summer 1998, pp. 298.

Character was beginning to occupy a low position in the run up to the elections. Reporters claimed in 1992 that the important point of the Gennifer Flowers story wasn't whether Clinton had sex with Flowers, but whether he told the truth about it. But they didn't really mean it. In a remarkable March 1992 revelation in *The New Republic*, Hendrik Hertzberg polled "several dozen political journalists of my acquaintance" who unanimously told him they'd vote for Clinton if they were a New Hampshire voter. He added, "None at all is due to belief in Clinton's denials in the Flowers business, because no one believes these denials."

When the Flowers story broke in January 1992, the networks aired only 14 evening news reports in six days and then stopped. Only CBS aired the suddenly relevant Flowers tapes, in which Clinton told Flowers to lie about their relationship and about the state job he awarded her. Other abuses were dismissed.

National Public Radio legal reporter Nina Totenberg was the White House's favourite journalist of the week. She quoted an unnamed Justice Department official on Wednesday's *All Things Considered* saying it was "breathtaking" that independent counsel Kenneth Starr did not tell Janet Reno that he'd had six conversations with Paula Jones lawyer Gilbert Davis in 1994. Totenberg's source maintained this would have caused Attorney General Janet Reno to disallow his request to investigate the Monica Lewinsky affair. Totenberg appeared on *Good Morning America* (in her role as an ABC News "contributor") to repeat the anonymous revelations. This official clashed with Reno who told ABC's Aaron Brown on the same

show, "I can't comment because we're reviewing all the issues at this point."

Other than MSNBC (where Keith Olbermann asked if this would be enough to get Starr fired) and CNBC (where Geraldo Rivera put Totenberg's charges on the front burner), other media outlets yawned at this supposed scoop. (*The Washington Post* wrote "News organizations, including *The Washington Post*, reported those contacts in January.")¹²⁹ But Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee have added Totenberg's suggestive story to their quiver of arrows aimed at Starr when he testifies before their impeachment inquiry.

Once again, Totenberg, who broke Anita Hill's unproven sexual harassment allegations against Clarence Thomas in 1991 and compared her Hill leaks to Watergate and the Pentagon Papers, covers the Paula Jones case as a politically injurious "Clinton-bashing" enterprise. Despite their role in promoting the Hill story, NPR ignored Jones' sexual harassment charges against Clinton for three months until Jones filed a lawsuit. NPR hasn't had much more enthusiasm for the Lewinsky story. The Newseum's Web site carried this dismissal, "NPR has been behind on the story (of allegations against President Clinton), but we've been deliberately behind," National Public Radio's Jeffrey Dvorkin said at an Inside Media program on March 20. 'So much of this has been innuendo, has not

¹²⁹ Bucy, Erick P. & Newhagen, John E., "The Micro and Macro drama of Politics on Television: Effects of Media Format on Candidate Evaluations", *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 43(2), Spring 1999 pp.193

been sourced properly. We've tried [to focus on] how this affects the presidency."¹³⁰

Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) showed a similar lack of Lewinsky fervour. Just 13 days into the story in January, *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* ran a segment on the media's "rush to judgment." As the commercial networks all aired the President's videotaped perjury before the grand jury, PBS ran its kiddie shows. They also skipped live coverage of the impeachment debate in the House Judiciary Committee and the full House. PBS took the same hands-off approach with the Senate fundraising hearings last year. "During Affair, Clinton Fired Envoy for Sex Misconduct," announced a front page Washington Times headline on Friday, October 30. But none of the network morning or evening shows on Friday touched the subject.

THIRD PARTY COVERAGE

The coverage of the Perot campaign in 1996 differs from 1992. Four years ago, there was extensive coverage into Perot's background because he was largely unknown as a political figure. But in 1996, coverage related largely to formation of the Reform Party, under whose banner he contested. Since Perot's popularity in the polls declined, journalists paid less attention to him although he remained a factor in the general election campaign. Billionaire Ross Perot said on CNN's "Larry King Live" that he will make another run for the

¹³⁰ Bucy, Erick P. & Newhagen, John E., "The Micro and Macro drama of Politics on Television: Effects of Media Format on Candidate Evaluations", *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 43(2), Spring 1999 p.196.

White House if his Reform Party decides to nominate him. Perot, 66, has frequently used "Larry King Live" to announce his intentions. In 1992, he told King he would run for Presidency if people in all 50 states got his name on the ballot. Last year, he announced on the show his plans to build a third party. Perot built the Reform Party in the wake of his 1992 presidential run. The maverick businessman spent \$70 million in that attempt and came in third with 19 per cent of the vote. He repeatedly said that the party and its principles are more important than his political aspirations.¹³¹

White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry said when he told President Clinton what Perot said on the CNN show, Clinton responded, "That's interesting. Let me tell you about my golf game."¹³² McCurry said Clinton shot an 83, after finishing the last three holes in the dark. The press secretary said the administration would not take a stand on Perot's announcement, "We'll deal with it when whomever wins."¹³³

Republican rival Bob Dole said he hopes Perot won't run. "I would hope it would be a two-man race," Dole said on Don Imus' radio programme. If he does decide to run, Perot will have some competition within the party he founded.

Could Bill Clinton's re-election victory have come as a surprise to anyone? For the entire race, polls have shown the President with a

¹³¹ Bucy, Erick P. & Newhagen, John E., "The Micro and Macro drama of Politics on Television: Effects of Media Format on Candidate Evaluations", *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 43(2), Spring 1999 pp.194.

¹³² *ibid.* p. 194.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p. 196.

commanding lead over his Republican challenger Bob Dole and with little movement in those figures the pundits had no choice but to concur. Even so, the answer is yes. Clinton's first-term stumbles were often more memorable than his successes. His administration has been plagued with scandal and the public is still skeptical about Clinton's true political self. Is he a moderate "new Democrat" or a closet liberal? These inconsistencies never made the difference. The long-awaited narrowing in the polls never happened. Dole's ethical charges never stuck. So tonight's shaking heads and shrugging shoulders were left to ask, how did this happen?

It would be easy to blame Dole. Analysts point to a series of Republican misses including a disorganized campaign or the decision not to attack the President's character until the last month. Over the final days, the GOP candidate made a feverish run that appeared to make a dent, but it was too little, too late. After a year of campaigning, Dole aides could only say, "If we only had more time."¹³⁴

But much of the credit was due the "Comeback Kid" himself. The President was acknowledged to be a consummate campaigner and fund-raiser; many say, the best. The Democrats ran a shrewd campaign that played up the prestige of the incumbency and kept the President above the political fray. Clinton ran on his record, telling voters they didn't need to take him on faith this time. Exit poll data showed the President was helped particularly on the issues of the

¹³⁴ Barret, Lawrence, I, "As Bush Struggles to catch up to Clinton, Perot's threat to leap back into the fray from the sidelines complicates an already strange race as it rounds into the final stretch", Time, Nov. 5, 1992, p. 27.

economy and jobs. The majority of voters indicated that they felt the country was better off than it was four years ago under a Republican President. For the two years before the elections, the White House's strategy had been more about re-election than governance. After the Republican sweep of the 1994 elections, a huge defeat for the President, Clinton turned to re-inventing himself. He moved back toward the centre, positioning himself as the counter against the "extremism" of House Speaker Newt Gingrich and his freshman army. After earning a reputation for not taking stands, Clinton stood firm while the Republicans shut down the federal government, twice, in budget battles.

The presidency was also defined by its efforts at policy making. The Clinton administration had taken the easy way out and avoided the fire he would have got otherwise. During a presidency with no defining national crisis, Clinton's domestic policy became one of incremental change. The administration would take a successful programme and alter or expand it slightly. That the tactic worked is proven by questions asked by audience members during the second town-hall style presidential debate. Participants wanted to hear the candidates talk about the Family Leave Act and college tuition credits. The only sticky point in the whole race was that of Clinton's character. His administration has been hounded for four years by scandals like Whitewater, Filegate, Travelgate, marijuana use, staff dismissals and, most recently, campaign finance abuses. Both Bob Dole and Reform party candidate Ross Perot offered scathing critiques of what they saw as an arrogant White House.

For Clinton to win, people either discounted it or had satisfied themselves on the subject four years ago. The 1992 campaign and the mudslinging accompanying it inoculated the President on the charges. Clinton also helped himself by using the pulpit to help redefine his image. He took on the roles of consoler-in-chief after the Oklahoma City bombing and national cheerleader during the Olympics in Atlanta.

The Clinton campaign was confident that these efforts would be enough to get their candidate reelected. As the campaign neared its end, they turned their attention to the President's second term. The press was forced to pick up issues that the Clinton campaign had forced on it. Clinton was probably the first President to ably play down the press and its content. The press' tradition of an opposition to the government was very much watered down. A large section of the voting public had also associated themselves with the image that Clinton had created for himself. The image was one of an acceptance of imperfection. The repeated hounding by the press of sexual misconduct-based issues had probably given Clinton an advantage by making voters tired of it.

As a result, how Clinton would govern became the big question during the elections. He has said that this was his last campaign. Would he stay the course of the past two years, promoting change at a more moderate pace? Or would the prospects of never facing voters again allow him to return to what Dole called his "big government liberal roots"? These were the questions which were doing rounds at the peak of election campaigning. But in fact, Clinton's second term , as he approaches the end of his second term, has come to be

dominated with increased activism on the foreign front without compromising the salience of domestic issues despite the Republicans dominating the Congress. The Republican dominance has in no way constrained Clinton's ability to rule and with time, his sexual escapades have also receded into the background. The possibility of continuing investigations into Whitewater, Democratic finances and other affairs have not proved more than a lingering fear and have also paled into insignificance with the march of time. The Republicans despite their dominance in the Congress have not been able to do much damage to President Clinton who was finally exonerated in the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal due to good media handling and factionalism among the Republicans themselves.

Clinton despite his dogged defense of his character did not compromise his campaign themes of the environment, crime, education and of building a bridge to the future. "We're not going to be diverted by insults or personal attacks that come disguised as, 'I don't want to talk about it, but ...,'" Ann Lewis, Clinton-Gore deputy campaign manager, told CNN Saturday Morning.¹³⁵

In the 1996 elections the press had probably played a marginal role in being able to play around with campaigns, campaign policy, candidates and other such issues. This was disempowerment in a way. For a media, which had done so much in building and strengthening the institutions of American politics this was certainly the first time they were faced with indifference. The reasons for this are not hard to locate. The Media had probably overplayed its role as a presenter

¹³⁵ Drew, Dan. & weaver, David, "Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter?", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No.2, Summer 1998, pp. 294.

of issues. The sexual escapades of Clinton had failed to ignite the kind of response that a similar issue might have been able to generate earlier. This time a candidate had managed to set his own agenda despite intervention from the press. And as was expected this candidate won.

CONCLUSION

Political advertising is not the bogeyman that its critics have often portrayed it to be. As is shown in the previous chapters of this work, it is implicit that media actually fosters the democratic ideals of an informed and reasoning electorate. Campaign commercials, which are now the dominant means of political communication in the United States, instruct people about the candidate's abilities, personalities, and ideas and they strongly reinforce voter's partisan loyalties. Unfortunately, however, advertising is increasingly at odds and with another democratic value--an active and efficacious citizenry. Negative campaigning transforms elections into an entertaining spectator sport.

The legitimacy of particular policies and of government generally depends on elections being an expression of the popular will. If people feel distant from the electoral process, they can take no pride in successes of the government, and they can avoid responsibility for the problems facing the nation. Similarly, high levels of electoral participation are essential for guaranteeing that government represents the public as a whole. If those dissatisfied with political process chose to stay home, then elections will not register their dissent, and politicians have every incentive to stay the course. The most effective way that people can vent dissatisfaction is through the vote.

More and more Americans don't vote. Only half the eligible electorate turns out for presidential elections, only a third show up for mid-term Congressional elections. Those who do not vote

represent increasingly extreme partisan groups within the electorate. Campaign advertising has contributed significantly to the disappearance of the nonpartisan votes and the polarization of elections.

Like party loyalty, political participation is a consequence of the electoral process. Political campaign can instill the sense that voting is a duty, that an individual's vote matters, and that elected officials are responsive to the wishes of the electorate. Or, campaigns can breed cynicism and alienation.

Time after time, presidential candidates have managed to mislead the American people, and get away with it. These days the press is often accused of being overly negative and too aggressive, of damaging if not destroying the public's faith in government with its cynical, confrontational approach.

But when it comes to presidential campaigns, history suggests that is not the problem. It suggests instead that the press often does not probe hard enough, does not dig deep enough. It suggests that the press tends to accept all too readily the spoken word and the patently self-serving political declaration without critical examination. That principle has been illustrated many times in the past.

Political parties still play a vital role in American elections, but campaigns are now run by and for individual candidates, who rely heavily on the techniques of mass marketing. In the case of the Ross Perot campaign, it looks more like a businessman trying to buy the Presidency direct rather than through one or other of the party franchises. Anyone

looking for a good argument in favour of a ban on paid political advertising on TV need look no further than Willie Horton and Ross Perot.

While wealthy candidates can buy airtime, this is not the same thing as buying votes. Viewers can be very cynical about political advertising. One of the most striking features of the 1992 campaign was the extent to which the candidates used the 'free' media airtime of chat shows and news shows. The campaign teams put a lot of effort into getting the candidate seen on shows that have some credibility with the viewer, in an attempt to get around the low impact that commercials increasingly have. The news and current affairs shows have of course always featured interviews with the candidates. What was new about the 1992 election season was extent to which campaign issues were raised on shows that aren't usually about current affairs. Chat shows which usually focus on everyday life, celebrities and moral issues embraced the candidates. Even MTV ran election talk shows.

Increasingly, the division between the public sphere and the private sphere is being eroded by the media. This means that politics is no longer about candidates who look good on a horse, passing down main street in a parade. It is about candidates who can behave like a guest in people's homes, as seen on TV. In the early days of television, the division between public and private space was reconfigured as a division between public and private television time. Public events were for the news and current affairs shows. The rest of the programming time was about the joys and tribulations of private life.

This division was never perfect or simple. Even TV sitcoms dealt with political and public matters at times. "Richard Nixon displayed a brilliant mastery of the public private divide by answering a serious allegation about accepting gifts into a monologue about his private life, culminating in the famous claim that all he ever received as a gift was a dog named Checkers and how could he give back a dog that his children loved so much?"¹³⁶

While the personal life of the candidates has always been a matter of public scrutiny, it is only with the coming of television that personal qualities have become major campaign issues. The Bush campaign learned the hard way that the rules of this game are changing. They thought that by exposing the weaknesses of Clinton, voters would reject him. What they did was paint a picture of a fallible man who shared very similar faults of many of the people who might consider voting for him. What did we know about Clinton? That he likes jazz, has smoked dope, didn't agree with the Vietnam war, has cheated his wife, who is a professional woman with a life and career of her own. In all, a thoroughly contemporary white middle class American male. In seeking to establish that Clinton was flawed and thus unfit to hold office, the Republican camp merely established that he was by contemporary standards a pretty regular kind of guy. The same thing worked for Ronald Reagan. Reagan and Clinton survived the exposure of their failings because they accepted them with good grace.

¹³⁶ Barnhurst, K. G. and Steele, C. A.). Image-Bite News: The Visual Coverage of Elections on U.S. Television, 1968-1992. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 2, 1997, pp. 47.

On the other hand, Clinton campaign succeeded in portraying Bush as another Reaganite who ignored the middle class and whose policies were tuned to help the wealthier classes. Pre-election recession, and overtly negative reporting of the economy by the media helped Clinton to prove this that Bush ignored the economy and that just ignorance wasn't his fault, also that it was the republican character of working against the middle and lower classes that had brought the nation on the verge of economic collapse.

While the 1992 presidential election generated interest about new media, alternative media, civic journalism and the impact of a third party and prompted the highest voter turnout since 1968, 1996's expensive campaigns seemed to generate only yawns. Bob Dole wrapped up the nomination before the Republican Convention and President Clinton never faced a serious challenge. Numerous polls showed the President ahead from the very start. As a result, coverage was less extensive than in 1992, audience interest was down and in the end voter turnout reached its lowest level in more than 70 years.

Clinton had come up with a new way of using bandwidth, and airtime. The way he did this was to avoid the very judgemental large television networks with its large audiences and one shot coverage of huge swathes of American audiences. He used the smaller networks and the segmented channels like CNN and MTV.

The 1996 elections were a landmark in the history of the American media. It had undergone a structural revolution of sorts. Traditionally based around big league newspapers, that were more or less local in their character and coverage the industry had developed

a national media beyond the now familiar format of a national weekly news magazine like *Time* and *Newsweek* and the national news programmes of the big three TV networks. Access to large audiences, which was the privilege of these media, was now accessible to most traditional networks too. With the advent of satellite-based communication from the dissemination of news, access to these audiences, was now within reach of a small network or paper too.

The electronic media was now fast enough to react. Initially having morning and evening news, they started broadcasting news in cycles through out the day. This new order was used by media savvy candidates like Clinton. Martin Walker the then US bureau chief for Britain's *Guardian*, writes in his critical biography of Bill Clinton:

“Clinton had swiftly learnt on the campaign trail to court the new segmented media of cable TV, from the Larry King show on CNN to the MTV music channel to playing his saxophone on the late night talk show of Arsenio Hall. During the campaign Clinton routinely used the new ploy of giving live Interviews to the local TV stations across the country by satellite. Properly organized, he could hit a dozen media markets within a single hour, all from one studio equipped with a satellite uplink.”¹³⁷

In the 1996 elections the press had probably played a marginal role in being able to play around with campaigns, campaign policy, candidates and other such issues. This was disempowerment in a way. For a media,

¹³⁷ Walker, Martin, *The President We Deserve: Bill Clinton: His Rise, Falls, and Comebacks*, (Random House Inc., New York, 1996, p. 195.

which had done so much in building and strengthening the institutions of American politics this was certainly the first time they were faced with indifference. The reasons for this are not hard to locate. The Media had probably overplayed its role as a presenter of issues. The sexual escapades of Clinton had failed to ignite the kind of response that a similar issue might have been able to generate earlier. This time a candidate had managed to set his own agenda despite intervention from the press. And as was expected this candidate won.

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