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# Selecting a Winning Campaign Slogan

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*ABSTRACT: This study examines how Q technique and its methodology can be used to select a slogan for a campaign, in this case a tax levy campaign for a community college. The campaign began in a traditional (R methodology) manner. A large-sample public opinion survey of voters was conducted to develop strategy, and an advertising agency was then retained to develop the slogan and collateral material. After the failure of an advertising agency to develop a slogan that needed to appeal to two seemingly divergent groups of voters, Q methodology was introduced and identified a winning slogan that appealed to those target voters.*

A slogan can be a powerful symbol in a political campaign. A good slogan embodies the campaign theme, evokes positive images and gives the campaign workers a battle cry around which to rally. A good slogan is also memorable: Who can forget "Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too," or "I Like Ike"? When the voters hear or see a slogan, they should be reminded about a particular candidate or issue, and vice versa.

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There are dozens of possible slogans that might be appropriate for any campaign, but which one is best? Which one will evoke those positive images, and which one will best embody the intended message? In other words, which one will "work" with the voters? Typically, the selection of campaign slogans has been guided by "intuition" or "what sounds good," although more systematic approaches have recently been recommended (Fishel, 1985a, 1985b). This article examines the use of Q methodology as a scientific method of selecting a slogan which will evoke positive images and best embody the campaign theme.

### *Q Methodology in Political Campaigns*

Q methodology provides a scientific method for identifying attitude structures that exist within certain individuals or groups. Basically, Q methodology involves a rank-ordering procedure in which respondents rank order stimulus items (Q sample) according to some condition of instruction, e.g., "most agree" to "most disagree." Usually the stimulus items are statements of opinion; however, propaganda posters (Brown, 1979), automobile names (Stephenson, 1979), political cartoons (Bormann et al., 1981; Kinsey & Taylor, 1982) and other materials have also been used.

Once respondents have sorted the statements to reflect their own viewpoints, the Q sorts are correlated and factor analyzed. People who have sorted the statements in a similar fashion will cluster together on the same factor, which then represents a point of view or an attitude held by those individuals associated with that factor. For a detailed description of Q methodology, see Stephenson (1953), Brown (1980, 1986), and McKeown and Thomas (1988).

Campaign consultants are gradually becoming aware of Q methodology and its potential in political campaigns and it should eventually flourish in campaigns just as survey research has, because as Gopoian and Brown (1988, p. 114) suggest, "...campaign strategists must [also] employ methods which facilitate access to the voter's subjectivity." For now,

Q methodology's use in political campaigns is in its infancy. Rarick's (1981) review of the literature found only 18 studies involving Q in political campaigns.

Based on a series of candidate image studies, Nimmo and Savage (1976, p. 214) praised Q as being "particularly suited to the purpose of measuring candidate images." And generally, candidate image research has dominated the use of Q methodology in political campaigns since that time. Candidate image research has easily expanded and usually includes candidate issue positions as well (Wattier, 1986; Mansfield & Hale, 1986; Kinsey & Kelly, 1989).

Wattier (1982) has described various uses for Q methodology in political campaigns beyond candidate image and issue research. Q methodology has been used to pretest campaign messages, to suggest information to gather in public opinion polls, for developing campaign speeches, as well as helping campaign consultants reach a consensus on strategy.

One specific area of political campaigns that has been heretofore left unexplored is the use of Q methodology for selecting a slogan. This paper not only illustrates this new use for Q methodology in political campaigns, but takes it into the somewhat ignored area of non-candidate campaigns.

Most of the political campaign research conducted by Q methodologists has been concerned with campaigns involving candidates. With a few exceptions (Cohen & Taylor, 1971), little has been written about Q's use in issue campaigns, that is, campaigns in which no candidate is involved, campaigns in which only an issue is placed before the voters. Contests involving candidates are only a portion of the electoral process. Ballot issues, tax levies and other referenda have generally been ignored by Q methodologists.

### ***An Illustration: CC Levy Campaign***

In 1982, a large Midwest community college (which will be referred to as CC) was faced with an election. As is true for many community colleges, a portion of CC's financial support comes from local tax levies. This year, CC was not only ask-

ing the voters of the community to renew an existing levy of 1 mill, but also to vote for an additional 0.6 mill for the benefit of the CC District. The purpose of this tax levy was to provide educational services, including operating costs and support services, for 10 years.

A campaign committee, formed to pass this levy, hired a survey research firm to conduct a poll of the voters and develop the campaign strategy. The research firm conducted a public opinion survey of 600 likely voters. One of the main questions to be resolved was how to portray the college. CC provides both education in the classical sense (i.e., high school graduates going on to college) and training (preparing workers for new jobs in our changing society).

Respondents to the survey were asked to choose between education and training and to say which was more important for CC to provide. About one-third of the respondents chose education and about one third chose training. More than a fourth refused to choose, indicating that in their view CC should provide both. The pollsters concluded that although the levy was ahead (winning) in the poll, any campaign which did not portray CC as providing both education and training would be seriously flawed, and that each should be given relatively equal weight during the campaign.

Using the research results, the campaign's advertising agency developed a slogan for the campaign. The slogan, "Take Care of # 1," received mixed reviews. A debate arose as to the merits of the recommended slogan: Would it appeal to both types of voters, did it truly reflect the research? It soon became obvious that no consensus would easily be reached among committee members.

The polling firm recommended using Q methodology with voters to help select a slogan. The idea was to assemble numerous potential slogans into a Q sample and then arrange for a group of voters to sort the slogans from those that they found

"most appealing" to those that they found "most unappealing."<sup>1</sup>

### *Slogans for the Q Sample*

The first task was to develop a large number of slogans for the voters to sort. The advertising agency came up with an additional 15 slogans and the campaign committee members made up a few, as did the research firm. One of the best sources for slogans was old campaign literature, recruitment literature, and basic information published about CC. CC had been operating for nearly 20 years and the many slogans and themes that had been used over the years became part of the Q sample.

A Q sample of N = 33 slogans (see Table 1) was eventually agreed upon and administered to a small cross-section of n = 11 likely voters.

### *The P Set*

Participants for the Q study (the P set) were recruited from those respondents interviewed in the public opinion poll who said they were voting for the levy. Since the levy was ahead in the poll, the strategy became one of holding on to the lead. If CC could hold their current supporters, the levy would pass. Therefore we wanted to select a slogan that would appeal to those who were already voting for the levy.

A cross-section of these supportive likely voters representing different demographic characteristics (age, sex, race, area of the county) were asked to come to a focus group facility to participate in a discussion of several public issues. At the focus group facility, participants were instructed to rank the

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<sup>1</sup> The idea for using Q methodology for this purpose came from a study conducted by William Stephenson (1979, pp. 643-644) in which he used Q methodology with copywriters and ordinary car owners to select the name Lark for the Studebaker compact.

slogans in terms of the degree to which the slogans appealed to them.

## Results

The Q sorts were correlated and factor analyzed, revealing two factors. Interestingly, the two factors that emerged represented the two roles of CC: One (factor A) was a "training" factor while the other (B) was an "education" factor.

The training factor found most appealing slogans such as "CC: Training For Today," "CC: A Real Education For the Real World," and "Help Yourself." The education factor differentiated itself from the training factor by giving high scores to slogans such as "CC: on Course for the Future," "CC: The Community's College," and "CC: Learning More For Less." Factor scores for each of the 33 slogans in both factors are shown in Table 1.

The most valuable results from a Q study for the purpose of selecting a slogan are the consensus items, i.e., those slogans that voters scored essentially the same. As Mauldin (1980, p. 88) has pointed out, for communication purposes consensus items are most important because they "represent what all respondents have in common, which is the basis of communication among them and with them." For selecting a winning slogan, the positively scored consensus items are the most important, for they hold the key to a powerful symbol.

There were three positively scored consensus slogans that both factors found appealing: "CC: Training for the Real World," "CC: Learn Tomorrow's Jobs Today," and "CC: Where Futures Begin." The campaign used the latter,<sup>2</sup> and it can be easily seen how this slogan would appeal to both factors. For example, an unemployed auto worker could go to

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<sup>2</sup>Cognizant of the poll findings, that the campaign must portray CC as providing *both* education and training in equal measure, we chose not to use "CC: training for the real world," and "CC: learn tomorrow's jobs today." We felt these slogans slightly emphasized training over education, because they included the words "training" and "jobs," respectively.

**Table 1**  
**SLOGAN Q SAMPLE**

No.	A	B	Slogan
1	0	1	CC: Education for All
2	-1	-1	CC Works
3	1	0	CC: On Course for You
4	2	1	CC: Your Best Hope for the Future
5	4	0	CC: Training for Today
6	1	-1	CC: Continue a Good Thing
7	1	4	CC: On Course for the Future
8	-3	1	CC: # 1 in Education
9	1	-2	CC: Where Learning Works
10	-3	-2	CC Makes the Grade
11	0	-4	CC: Right for the Times
12	2	-4	Protect Your Investment
13	0	-3	You Can Save an American Dream
14	-4	2	CC Is # 1
15	-2	1	CC Makes Sense for Everyone
16	-2	2	CC: The Community's College
17	3	4	CC: Training for the Real World
18	-1	1	CC: Programmed for You
19	-1	-3	CC: Your Grade-A Community College
20	2	0	CC: A Real Education for the Real World
21	2	2	CC: Training for Tomorrow
22	-3	3	CC: Learning More for Less
23	3	3	CC: Learn Tomorrow's Jobs Today
24	0	-1	CC: College for the Real World
25	-1	3	The Future Is Here
26	-4	-1	CC Is A-OK
27	-1	-2	CC Works for You
28	4	2	CC: Where Futures Begin
29	3	-3	Help Yourself
30	0	-1	CC: Our Best Hope for the Future
31	-2	0	The Right Course is CC
32	1	0	CC: Where Education Works
33	-2	-2	CC: # 1 in Learning

CC and be re-trained in some other field: "That's where my future is going to begin," he might say to himself. Or a student just out of high school might ask herself, "Now what? I

can continue my education at CC, and that's where my future is going to begin."

Fishel (1985b, p. 14) correctly states that an effective political slogan "must be both believable and offer a benefit to the voters." In other words, a slogan must appeal to the voters. The slogan, "CC: Where Futures Begin," conveys benefits to the voters no matter in which role they viewed CC. This slogan could evoke positive images whether one believed CC's role to be one of training or education.

Edelman (1964, p. 6) has said that "every symbol stands for something other than itself, and it also evokes an attitude, a set of impressions, or a pattern of events associated through time, through space, through logic, or through imagination with the symbol." To those who viewed CC as a training facility, the slogan could have stood for retraining and a new start in life. For those who viewed CC as an educational institution, the slogan could have stood for starting college and starting the future.

"Where Futures Begin" became the slogan for the campaign.<sup>3</sup> It was prominently displayed on all campaign literature, in television spots, and as the tag line in radio spots. The levy passed by a larger margin than originally shown in the public opinion poll, and CC was funded for another 10 years.<sup>4</sup> Because the slogan was judged to be so powerful and

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<sup>3</sup> Discerning readers will have noticed that the slogan originally proposed by the advertising agency -- "Take Care of #1" -- was not included in the Q sample. The reason is political rather than methodological: The ad agency did not approve of the Q study and endeavored to block it by lobbying the campaign committee. When the campaign director learned of this, he removed the agency's proposed slogan from further consideration, an unfortunate consequence which precluded a direct test of how effective or ineffective the slogan would have been compared to the others.

<sup>4</sup> Although those individuals intimately familiar with the campaign generally shared the belief that the selected slogan played a significant role in the campaign's success, respect for experimental inference demands acknowledgement of the obvious -- that this was a field study, and that an unambiguous causal link has not therefore been demonstrated.

effective, it continued to be used long after the levy campaign ended. For the next five years, the College used the slogan on recruitment literature as well as in television and radio advertising.

### **Concluding Remarks**

There are probably a dozen slogans that could be used in any campaign, slogans that the campaign could "sell" to the voters. The point, however, is why select a slogan that has to be sold to the voters at all? Why not select a slogan that, from the beginning, is a powerful symbol in the campaign, a slogan that evokes positive images and embodies the campaign theme?

Edelman's (1988, p. 8) admonition -- that "Symbols ... that have no relevance to everyday lives, frustrations, and successes are meaningless and impotent" -- is of particular importance for political campaigns. In political campaigns, attitudes must be changed into behavior (voting for) in a relatively short time span (length of the campaign). An impotent slogan may do more damage than good. A political campaign cannot afford voter indifference resulting from an impotent slogan. Q methodology can provide campaigns with the slogans that have relevance to voters' everyday lives, frustrations, and successes.

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