

# Emotional Responses of African American Voters to Ad Messages<sup>1</sup>

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The final results of the 1996 presidential election came as no surprise to most voters who followed the media's coverage of public opinion polls. "It was a race that never really changed: Bill Clinton started ahead and stayed there" ("The Numbers," 1996, p. 13). The 1996 presidential campaign has been referred to as a maintaining or status quo election. In making political comparisons, voters returned an incumbent president to office in economic good times just as they had done in 1984 with Ronald Reagan. However, Clinton was the first Democrat to be reelected for a second term since Franklin Roosevelt.

A more dubious comparison of the 1996 campaign was made to the 1956 rematch of incumbent president Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson. The 1996 campaign drew the lowest voter turnout since 1956, an election that also had an early-predicted outcome. However, one group of voters who were extremely concerned about the results of the 1996 campaign was African Americans.

Ten percent of the total votes cast in the 1996 presidential campaign were cast by African Americans, compared to 5% cast by Hispanics and Latinos and 1% by Asian American voters. In 1996, the African American vote broke out 84% for Clinton, 12% for Dole, and 4% for Perot. Similar results were seen in 1992 when Clinton garnered 83%, Bush 10%, and Perot 7%. Pomper (1997) wrote, "The gender gap, differences in preferences between women and men, now emulates established divisions of class, race, and region" (p. xi).

The Black political experience in the United States is peppered with unforgettable and emotional images of protest marches, water hoses, National Guard soldiers, raised fists, bombs, and riots. In contrast, the 1996 Democratic and Republican National Conventions offering the positive images of Jesse Jackson and Colin Powell addressing these bodies provided a sense of pride in the African American community. Historically absent from the majority of campaign advertisements have been prominent images or spoken roles of most underrepresented voters (Roberts, 1994).

The main focus of most research on political advertising in recent years has been on negative political advertising's effect on both the targeted opponent and the sponsor and whether it creates a backlash or boomerang effect. Other researchers have focused on the comparisons of issue and image in ad content. Research also has focused on voter, source, and candidate gender differences. Some studies have focused on media selection, agenda setting, and the intermedia influence of political advertising. Rare has been the study that: closely examined African American voters and their response to political advertising (Surlin & Gordon, 1977), although Woods (1995) examined the changes in general product advertising of Fortune 500 companies targeted to African Americans.

Researchers are now learning that emotions guide and influence consumer behavior far more than seen in traditional, cognitive research. Only since the late 1980s have advertising researchers begun to examine rigorously emotional response to advertising messages. A well-known and favored theory of emotion is the Pleasure/Arousal/Dominance (PAD) theory that describes the full spectrum of human emotions in three independent bipolar dimensions. The current exploratory study utilizes AdSAM<sup>®</sup>, specifically developed computer software (Morris, 1995), to measure the emotional responses of African Americans to the 1996 presidential advertising messages.

This chapter begins by providing a historical overview and previous research on African American voter behavior. Next, we examine previous research on emotional response and, specifically, studies that have focused on the affective effects of political advertising. A new methodology, AdSAM<sup>®</sup>, used in this

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study to examine the emotional response of African Americans to the presidential campaign commercials, is introduced. A discussion of the results and implications for future research concludes the chapter.

## **AFRICAN AMERICAN VOTER BEHAVIOR**

### **Overview**

Much of the research conducted on African American voting behavior has focused on a comparison between the Black and White electorate. The factors that influence Black voters, the issues of concern to them, and the manner in which they respond to specific campaign influences have not been extensively investigated. The perception that African Americans are a monolithic group whose votes are cast en masse has created a political environment in which Black voter behavior is considered predictable and thus, is taken for granted or ignored.

The notion that African Americans are staunch supporters of the Democratic party has been reinforced by pictures of Black leaders surrounding Lyndon Johnson as he signed voting rights legislation in 1965, stretching out to touch the hand of Robert Kennedy in 1968, dancing in elegant gowns at the inauguration of Jimmy Carter in 1977, and rallying around the twice elected Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996. However, the impression that Blacks and the Democratic Party has been longtime comfortable bedfellows misleading. The relationship between Black voters and the U. S. political system is significantly more complicated than it might appear on the surface. The Democrats, scarred by a legacy of violence and supremacy in the South, have not always been the party of choice for African Americans. The first national political figure with which Blacks strongly associated was President Abraham Lincoln—a Republican.

The roots of African American support of the Democrats are relatively recent, dating back to 1936 when large numbers of Black Republicans shifted allegiance to Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Tate, 1993). During the Roosevelt years, the Democrats basically ignored the Black vote for fear they would lose support from their White base. By 1952, Republicans were receiving large numbers of Black votes, a trend that continued through the second Eisenhower election in 1956. By 1964, following the historic March on Washington and the assassination of John F. Kennedy, 80% of African American aligned themselves with the Democrats—a relationship characterized by Tate (1993) as born out of economic necessity and a choice between the "lesser of two evils" (p. 50).

It is a relationship that exists to the present day, although it has become more tenuous in recent elections. A new Black voter has emerged, according to Preston (1987), who asserted that, "newly registered Blacks now believe that their participation in politics can make a difference . . . and who will probably never return to the quiescent state in which they existed in the past" (p. 130).

With a voting-age population reported at nearly 22 million, Black voters now represent a significant and potent force within U.S. politics, capable influencing the outcome of a major election (US. Bureau of the Census, 1994). The effectiveness of campaign messages aimed at this audience depends on a clear understanding of the motives, views, sensitivities, and sophistication of the African American electorate.

### **African American Voter Psychology**

As early as 1960, political scientist Oscar Glantz posed questions about Black voting behavior. Glantz chose to analyze the Black vote in terms of strength rather than solidarity. He found that there was an increase in Black voters correlating with a migration of Blacks from Southern states, that they influenced Truman's election, and that Black voter support of Democrats peaked in 1952. In 1956 Democrat Adlai Stevenson lost Black votes because he became more moderate. Finally, Glantz (1960) found that Blacks can change the outcome in a closely contested race.

A number of theories have attempted to explain why Blacks tend to vote as they do. Compensation theory suggests that Blacks tend to compensate for racial discrimination they encounter in a White-dominated society by forming more relationships and organizations among themselves (Myrdal, Sterner, & Rose, 1944; Orum, 1966). According to the theory, these organizations help African Americans to protect themselves against the lack of power they perceive. This compensation results in higher levels of Black political participation than would otherwise occur.

The ethnic community theory (Olsen, 1970) suggests that Blacks are more active in social and political affairs because of social pressure from others within the group. This theory is limited in its generalizability, however, because it primarily applies to working-class and lower income Blacks (Williams, Babchuk, & Johnson, 1975). Williams et al. (1975) suggested that the higher the social and

economic levels of Blacks, the less likely they are to be influenced by the compensatory or ethnic community theories.

Other researchers have looked at how campaign techniques have influenced African American voter behavior. Carton (1984) studied the effects of personal contact on Black voter behavior in Detroit. He found party organizational activity can have dramatic impact on Black voter behavior. Research into the role of gender and age on Black voting behavior has uncovered interesting patterns and trends. The National Black Election Study found that Black women are more likely to identify with Democrats than Black men. The study also reported that Blacks between the ages of 18 and 29 were less likely to identify with Democrats. Black women account for the largest increase in voter registration among African Americans with an increase of 95% since 1976, compared to 58% for Black men (Tate, 1993).

### **Colin Powell and the New Black Voter**

The notion that retired General Colin Powell might seek the presidency of the United States in 1996 tantalized the media, frightened political fundamentalists, and intrigued voters. The respected commander had helped the United States to victory in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and went on to lead the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Republican and Democratic presidents. Throughout his long and illustrious military career, Powell had kept his political views private. Was he a Democrat, like 80% of Black voters? Was he a Black Republican or possibly, an independent?

Powell's 1996 announcement of allegiance to the Republican Party and an appearance at the 1996 Republican National Convention created dissonance among many Black voters; A Black man was viewed as a viable candidate for the presidency. However, if elected on the Republican ticket, would he promote the ideologies of Presidents Reagan and Bush, considered by many Blacks to be unfriendly to African Americans?

Because of his decision not to seek national office in 1996, Black voters did not have to choose between party loyalty and race, ethnicity and social status, or liberalism versus conservatism. Powell's non-candidacy was a precursor to a political phenomenon that the electorate may someday have to encounter.

As Powell represents a new Black politician, there is also a new Black voter. Preston (1987) reported that the gap between White and Black voter registration and turnout rates has diminished from 9.2% in 1968 to 2.2% in 1984. He categorized new Black voters as newly registered voters or previously registered voters who are more confident about the process. They are more likely to be young, poor, female, and elderly—once the groups least likely to register and vote.

The future of African American voter behavior can, at best, be described as unpredictable. The short but intense, history of Black voting demonstrates that a number of factors coalesce at any given time to influence the political choices made by African Americans. The state of the U. S. economy, race relations, class differences, and the personal traits of the candidates are some of the uncontrollable issues that arouse the interests of Blacks and sway them in a particular direction. However, there are actions within the control of candidates and their political parties. Primary among these are the messages the campaign wishes to deliver to voters.

### **EMOTIONAL RESPONSE AND ADVERTISING**

Researchers are now learning that emotions guide and influence consumer behavior far more than seen in traditional, cognitive research (Holbrook & Batra, 1988; Rossiter & Percy, 1991). Traditional research methods such as measures of recall, recognition, and brand attitude measure consumers' thoughts, but not their feelings or their total range of emotion. Humans think and feel, and both processes influence their behavior (Zajonc, 1980; Zajonc & Markus, 1982).

Human emotions are complex, and there must be responsible measures to gauge the full spectrum (Plummer & Leckenby, 1985). Although advertisers began more rigorous examination of the emotional response to advertising in the mid-1980s (Stout & Leckenby, 1988; Stout & Rust, 1986), there is still no universally accepted theory of emotion in advertising. Some psychologists have suggested a finite number of underlying basic emotions and have systematically classified the primary emotions. Plutchik's (1980) eight-variable theory of emotion is one of the more popular theories where emotions are at the center of life and guide behavior. Plutchik's theory of emotion deals with eight primary emotions:

anticipation, acceptance, surprise, joy, fear, anger, sadness, and disgust.

Another well-known and favored theory of emotion is the PAD theory that describes the full spectrum of human emotions in three independent, bipolar dimensions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). These three dimensions are pleasure—displeasure, arousal—non-arousal, and dominance—submissiveness. Pleasure—displeasure ranges from extreme happiness to extreme unhappiness. The arousal—non-arousal constitutes a continuum ranging from a physiological dimension connoting a level of physical activity, mental alertness, or frenzied excitement to inactivity, mental lethargy, or sleep. Dominance—submissiveness refers to a feeling of total power and control or influence versus the inability to influence a situation or feeling of lack of control. Individuals use the PAD scales to report how they feel or ideally would like to feel while using a product (Mehrabian & Wetter, 1987). Evidence shows that three independent, bipolar dimensions are reliably measured and alone are sufficient to define all emotional states (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

## **AFFECT AND POLITICAL ADVERTISING**

Examining the degree of emotionality and visual imagery used in political advertising content can provide insights into the ad's effectiveness (Roberts, 1995). Although positive political advertisements frequently use the emotional appeals of hope, pride, reassurance, and trust, primary attention has focused on the impact of the negative appeals of guilt, fear, anger, and uncertainty (Kern, 1989). Presenting the "wheel of emotions," developed by Agres of Lowe—Marschalk, Inc., Kern's (1989) extensive content analyses have demonstrated how ads organize emotions.

Previous research has shown that regardless of whether the public dislikes the use of negative appeals, when properly produced they can be highly effective in a campaign (Boydston & Kaid, 1983; Kaid & Boydston, 1987; Merritt, 1984; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Weigold & Sheer, 1993). Kaid and Sanders (1978) and Newhagen and Reeves (1991) reported a "sleeper effect," where memory for a specific message endured despite disliking an ad.

Any particular commercial can have both intended and unintended consequences. Negative messages may create a backlash effect by invoking a more negative emotional response for the sponsor of the attack than for the intended target (Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993; Hill, 1989). Researchers have suggested that backlash effects are more likely among partisans of the target candidate. According to the works of Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991) and Roddy and Garramone (1988), voter responses to an ad also are affected by whether a negative attack is issue oriented or personally based.

Lang (1991) and Shapiro and Rieger (1989) implied that emotional political ads are better recalled than non-emotional appeals. One of the goals of Newhagen and Reeves (1991) was to differentiate various forms of negative messages in relation to psychological evidence about emotions. In a pretest the researchers used three negative categories (fear, anger, disgust) and one positive category (hope). The emotions could not be empirically separated using subjective responses. The researchers wrote that, "All four of the emotions reduced to a single negative—positive continuum. However, a more differentiated line of study ought not be abandoned" (p. 216).

Finally, also in an experimental setting, Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy (1997) found a rich pattern of effects for global affective responses to political advertising. They suggested that a negative ad is "likely to generate negative beliefs," "the attitude toward the person attacked will be most negative, resulting in a net advantage for the sponsor," and the evaluations of the ad, the sponsor and the target of the ad are all likely to be negative after exposure to a negative political message" (p. 19).

## **METHOD**

The current exploratory study utilized a hybrid methodology of survey research, focus group, and AdSAM<sup>®</sup> to measure the emotional responses of African Americans to the 1996 presidential advertising messages. In this study AdSAM<sup>®</sup>, which includes the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM; Lang, 1980), was used to measure the responses and report the findings (Fig. 19.1). SAM is a graphic character that eliminates many of the biases associated with verbal measures and it is quick and simple to use (Lang, 1980; Morris & Waive, 1994). Correlations of .937 for pleasure, .938 for arousal, and .660 for dominance were found between ratings generated by AdSAM<sup>®</sup> and by the semantic differential scales used by Mehrabian and Russell (1974; Morris, Bradley, Lang, & Waive, 1992; Morris, Bradley, Sutherland, & Wei,

1993; Morris & Waine, 1994). SAM uses a continuous 9-point scale for each of the dimensions.

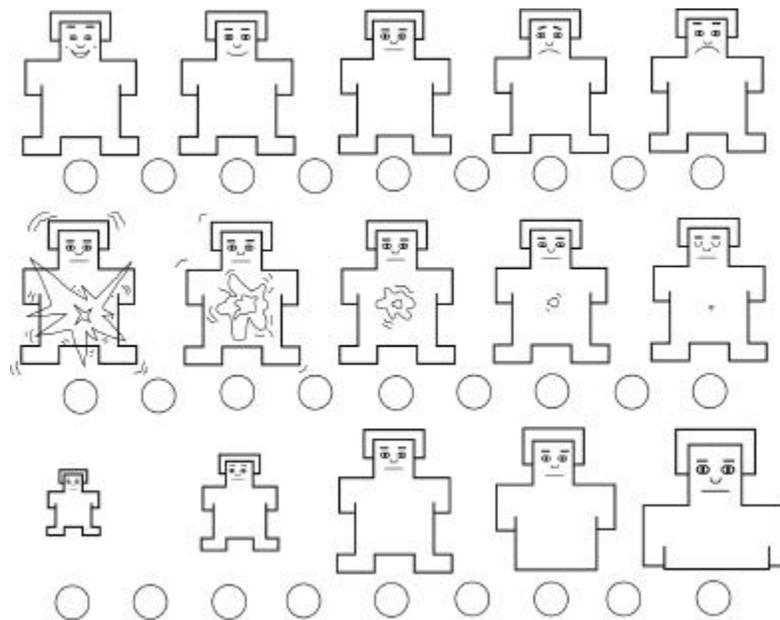


Figure 19.1. SAM The Self-Assessment Manikin.

SAM represents and measures the three affective, bipolar dimensions of Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) PAD and is a very useful tool as it is a graphic character that eliminates many of the biases associated with verbal and nonverbal measures (Morris & Waine, 1994). Another advantage to using SAM is that it is easier for participants to hold their attention to the task, as SAM's graphic character is easily identifiable and understood by adults and children (Lang, 1980). Also, SAM is quick and simple to use. It is more dynamic than single-dimensional measures such as interest—disinterest, like—dislike, or happy-sad. SAM also reduces respondent wear-out and is not limited by age, gender, culture, or different languages (Morris & Waine, 1994).

Two focus groups were scheduled during the final week of the campaign. One group contained older adult voters, whereas the other group contained younger, college-age voters. The study compared the differences in responses to eight commercials from the 1996 presidential campaign. All participants were recruited through various departments at the University of Florida.

The same African American facilitator conducted both sessions. When the participants arrived, they first filled out a questionnaire that contained questions about general feelings toward politics and politicians, a feeling thermometer measure for Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, issue concerns, level of advertising exposure, voter registration and partisanship status, and candidate choice. The questionnaire also included an open-ended question that asked what qualities an ideal president would possess.

The respondents were given the SAM score sheets, and the facilitator provided instructions for marking each 9-point dimension (see Fig. 19.1). Respondents could mark an "X" on or between the figures. Marks on the pictures are odd numbers 9, 7, 5, 3, and 1 and marks between the pictures are the even numbers 8, 6, 4, and 2. The pleasure dimension (top row) shows the happy extreme (left side) is scored a 9 and the sad extreme (right side) is scored a 1. On the arousal dimension (middle row), the excited extreme (left side) is scored a 9 and the calm extreme is scored a 1. For the dominance dimension (bottom row), the dominant extreme (right side—large character) is scored a 9 and the submissive extreme (left side—small character) is scored a 1.

The participants were exposed to four Clinton ads and four Dole ads. The SAM scores were collected while the focus group continued. The AdSAM<sup>®</sup> data were reported in the PAD format and consisted of a database of ratings of emotional adjectives. SAM scores were matched to adjective scores

to create a pleasure by arousal space that showed the relation of a particular political advertisement and the adjectives.

Two commercials were immediately Input into the AdSAM<sup>®</sup> software and results brought back to the focus group for further discussion and reaction. Later, the results of AdSAM<sup>®</sup> were merged in a data set with the questionnaire results for analysis. Focus group transcriptions were examined to provide further insight into the differences in emotional response to the Clinton and Dole advertisements.

## RESULTS

### Description of Focus Group Members

The younger focus group contained 5 men and 4 women who attended the University of Florida. Four reported being Democrats, whereas 5 indicated their party affiliation as Independent. No participants indicated that he or she was Republican. Seven of the 9 indicated that they were registered voters. Seven indicated their candidate choice as Clinton, whereas 2 were undecided. The most important issues mentioned in the survey by these participants were: education (9 mentions), the economy (6), health care (5), welfare reform (5), crime (4), and affirmative action (4). The issues of taxes, abortion, the environment, the budget deficit, and foreign policy received either one or two mentions among this group.

The adult focus group included 3 men and 7 women. All indicated that they were registered voters and all stated their partisanship as Democrats. Clinton was the candidate of choice of 9 members, whereas 1 adult member was undecided. Adults were more concerned about a larger number of issues than younger participants. The issue of welfare received seven mentions. Four issues received six mentions: education, taxes, foreign policy, and health care. The economy, social security, the budget, affirmative action, and crime received fewer mentions.

Means were calculated for the feeling thermometer measures for Clinton and Dole, where a rating between 50 and 100 indicated favorable feelings and 0 to 50 indicated unfavorable feelings. The adult group mean of 75.50 suggests a higher favorable feeling than the 69.88 for younger participants. Although the adult and younger means could generally be said to be close, four of the students' scores were lower than any of the scores reported by the adults. Two student scores were extremely high. This suggests that the feelings among the younger participants were not as uniformly positive toward Clinton as the mean score might suggest. However, the adult mean appears to more accurately reflect the overall high level of favorability toward Clinton by adult members.

Adults also appeared to rate Dole higher (28.90) than the student mean (10.94). Although no adult members indicated that they felt warmly toward Dole, four reported scores in the 45 to 50 range. Three adults rated their feelings toward Dole as extremely negative. Only two students gave Dole higher than a neutral score of 50.

When asked the level of exposure to ads and media coverage on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*a great deal*), the adult mean of 4.10 indicated "some" exposure. The student mean of 3.44 suggests a more neutral level of ad exposure.

### AdSAM<sup>®</sup> Results

Spot 1, "Midnight Basketball," was an anti-Clinton ad by Dole that began with the words, "the truth" about Clinton's record on spending (Fig. 19.2). The ad showed a picture of Clinton with dollar amounts that changed with each statement. An announcer said, "A massive health care bureaucracy. Thousands of wasteful projects like \$2.5 million for alpine slides in Puerto Rico. And \$76 million for programs like midnight basketball." The spot concluded, "the real Bill Clinton: A real tax and spend liberal." This ad appeared to engender similar feelings in the student voters as well as the adult voters.

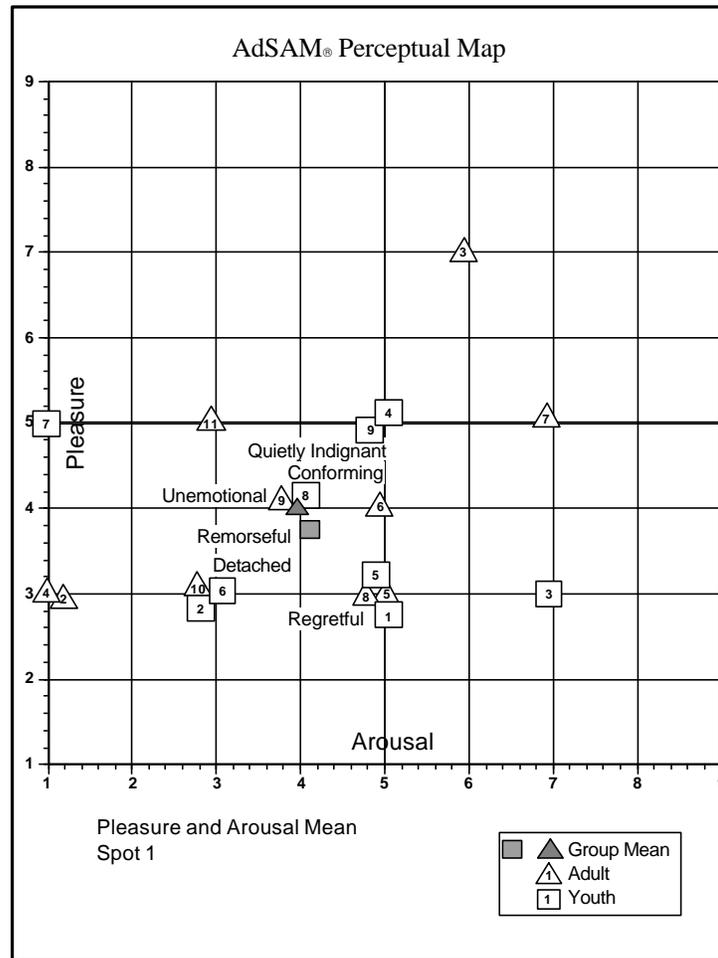


Figure 19.2. Pleasure and Arousal scores, Spot 1 “Midnight Basketball”.

There was a great deal of constancy within the groups as well as between the groups. Emotion adjectives indicated that most respondents felt unemotional and detached after viewing Spot 1. The mood, however, seemed to have been set by adjectives such as *quietly indignant*, *remorseful*, and *regretful*. The members of both groups wanted to distance themselves from the sponsor (Dole), because they felt affronted by the message. Most of the members were in agreement about their feelings. The means were equivalent and reflective of the majority of responses.

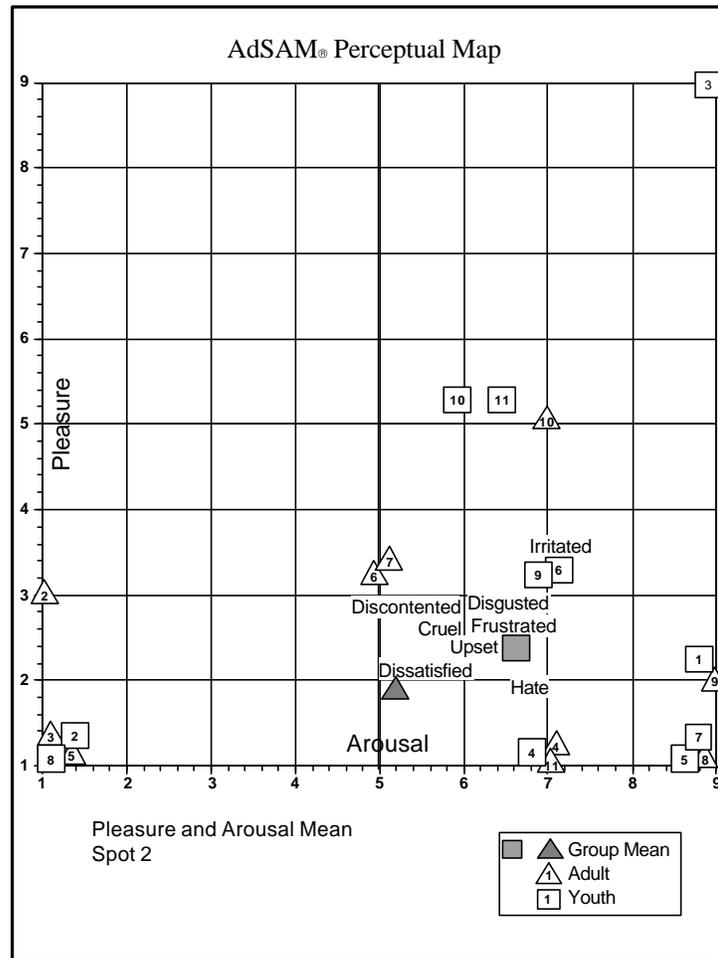


Figure 19.3. Pleasure and Arousal scores, Spot 2 “Wrong With the Past”.

Spot 2, “Wrong in the Past,” was an anti-Dole ad by Clinton that visually and verbally associated Dole with House Speaker Newt Gingrich. It contained contradictory stands on Medicare and education (Fig. 19.3). The spot concluded with the text, “The real Bob Dole, wrong in the past, wrong in the future.” The means for the adult and student groups again were fairly similar, although the groups seemed divided. The adjectives *discontented* and *dissatisfied* indicated that the adults seemed more unmoved by the ad, whereas the younger participants seemed more hostile with adjectives such as *irritated* and *hate*. Most of the respondents (all but four) were unhappy with the message, scoring under a 2 on the pleasure scale. However, some members were much more aroused than others. The arousal scores varied from 1 to 9, indicating that some respondents were more bothered by the message than others. These differences did not seem to be confined to the adult or the student group, but were evenly distributed between the groups.



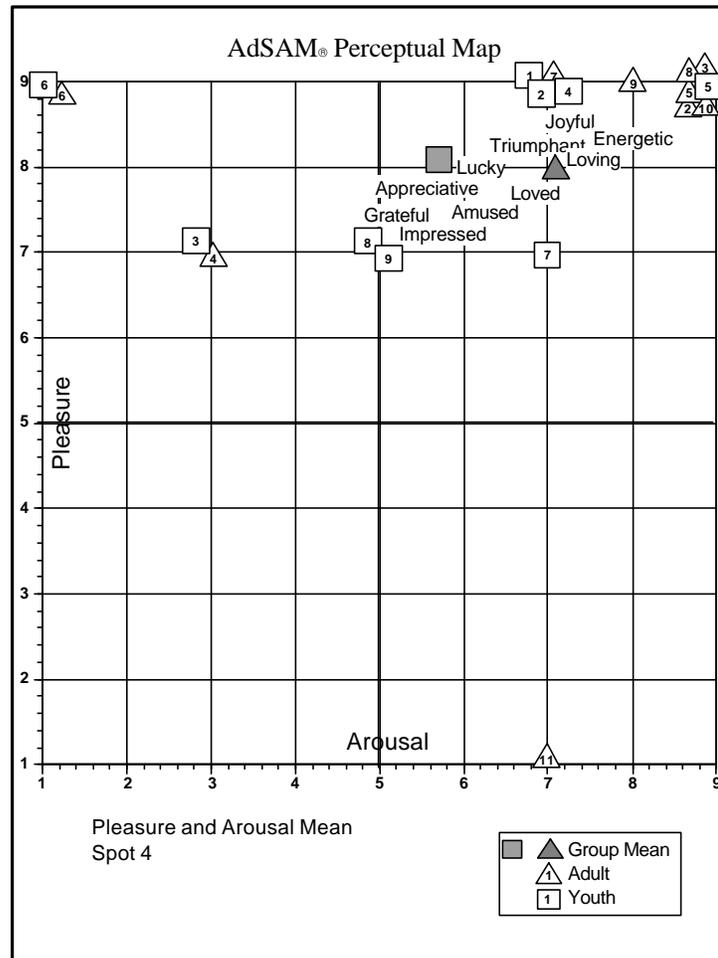


Figure 19.5. Pleasure and Arousal scores, Spot 4 “Brady Bill”.

Spot 4, “Brady Bill,” began with footage of the assassination attempt on President Reagan and then cuts of James Brady on camera talking about the Brady Bill (Fig. 19.5). Groups agreed that this was a powerful and motivating message that struck a very positive chord. The means for the adult and student groups were high in pleasure and arousal and close together. The adults were clearly more satisfied by the concept, seeing it as a victory for them. Adjectives such as *triumphant* and *joyful* suggested that these group members felt that this message had given people the power to over-come a major problem. The student group, although very similar in their positive reactions to the spot, were less excited. This was reflected by adjectives such as *lucky*, *appreciative*, and *grateful*. Both group means were quite reflective of the individual responses with all but two respondents, one in each group, very close to the mean. The adults were more unified in their feelings. This may be due to the fact that they felt more vulnerable given their age and life experiences.

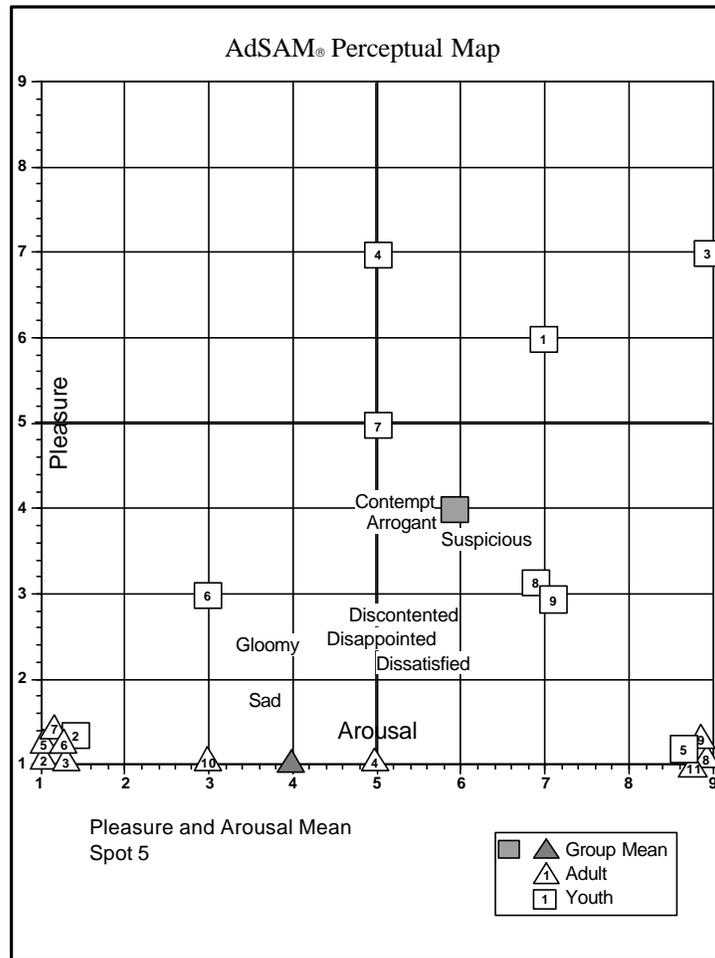


Figure 19.6. Pleasure and Arousal scores, Spot 5 “Dole in Congress”.

Spot 5, “Dole in Congress,” was an anti-Dole ad by the Clinton campaign in which Dole visually ages as his negative votes against important issues are listed (Fig. 196). This negative commercial divided the two groups and the feelings of the younger group in general. The adults were in the greatest agreement. They reported feeling absolutely no pleasure, but were greatly divided in their levels of arousal. All were displeased, but some adults were totally unmotivated some were signaling that they were somewhat bothered, and a few were very bothered by the commercial. *Sad* and *gloomy* seemed to describe one group of adults, but the others seemed to have been much more upset. The mean did not seem to be all that accurate in reflecting the feelings of this group. They simply did not agree on the level of negative feelings. The younger voters disagreed with their adult counterparts and with each other. Some were low in pleasure, varying in their level of arousal, and some were higher in pleasure and arousal. Although most of the responses from the student participants were in the two negative pleasure quadrants, they were clearly diverse in their feelings. The adjectives *suspicious* and *arrogant* described many of the feelings that were shared by these group members. Other responses were so divided that they were generally inexplicable.

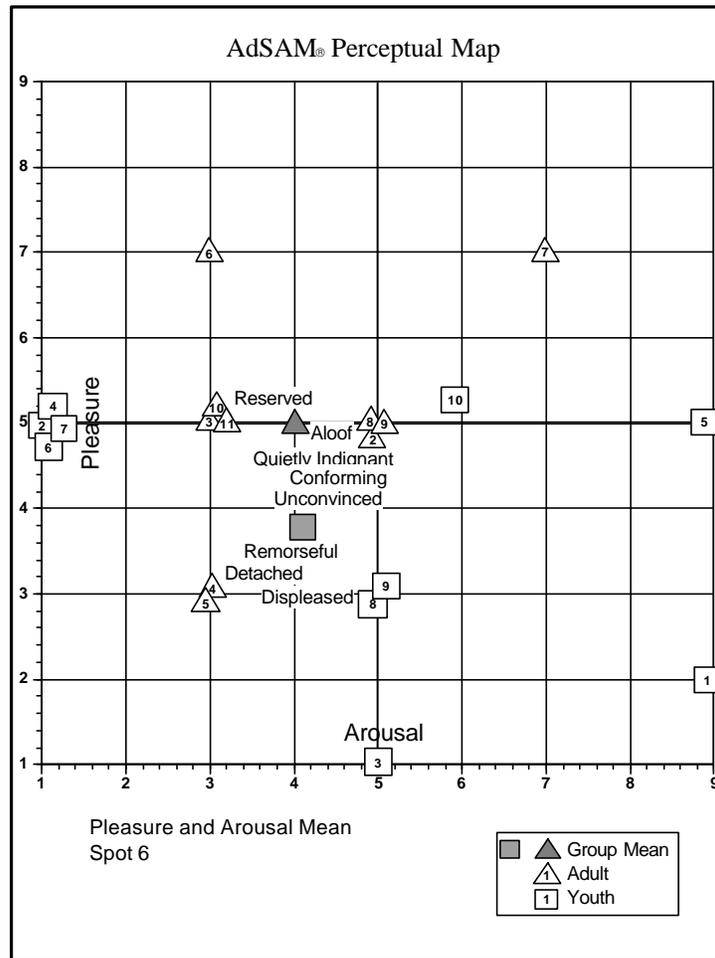


Figure 19.7. Pleasure and Arousal scores, Spot 6 “Does Truth Matter”.

Spot 6, “Does the Truth Matter” was an anti-Clinton ad by the Dole campaign (Fig. 19.7) that began with the infamous Clinton quote, “I will not raise taxes on the middle class.” The ad concluded with the announcer saying, “More investigation, more prosecution, more convictions, and the list goes on and on.” This negative commercial by Dole produced an unconvinced response from both the adult and student groups. The means as well as most of the responses were located in the low-pleasure, low-arousal quadrant. Those in the younger group who did respond in this manner were either very low on the pleasure scale, displeased, or very low on the arousal scale and very uninvolved. The younger respondents who were not clustered in this area were much more involved, but not pleased. The adults were almost all clustered around the mean and were feeling *quietly indignant*, *aloof* and like the students, *unconvinced*. This message seems to have failed to strike a believable cord with most members of either group. There were two members of the adult group who were pleased with the commercial and one who also was motivated by it. Generally, both adults and students agreed that the spot did little for them.

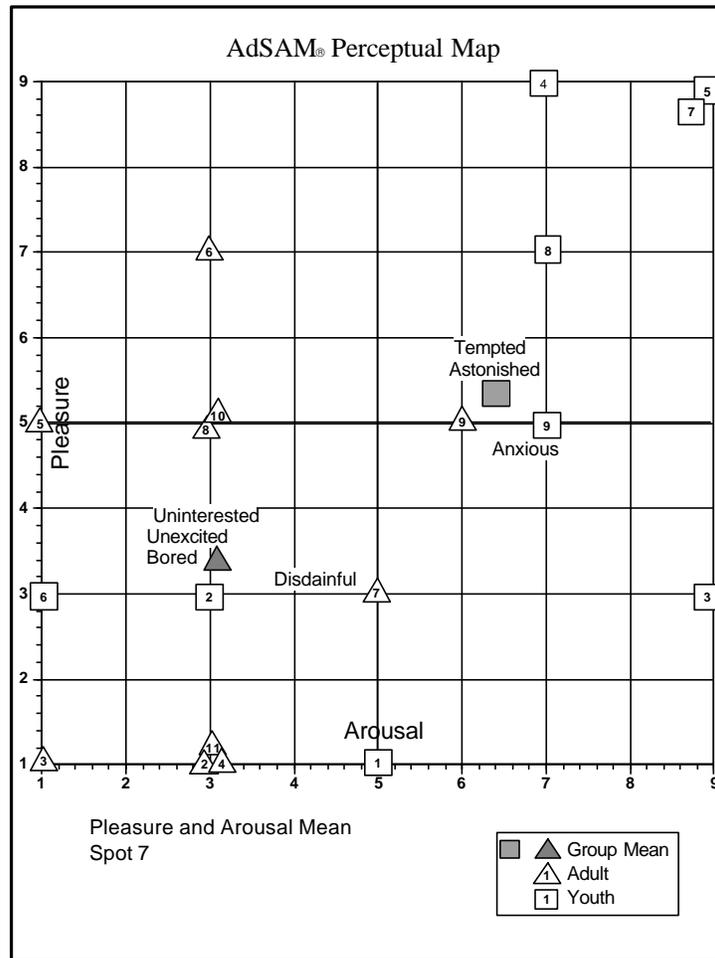


Figure 19.8. Pleasure and Arousal scores, Spot 7 "Nicole".

Spot 7, "Nicole," was an anti-Clinton ad by the Dole campaign on drugs that opened with a shot of a teenage girl's bedroom and later cut to the clip of Clinton being asked if he ever inhaled marijuana (Fig. 19.8). This commercial completely divided these two audiences. Even within the groups, there seemed to be little agreement about how these respondents felt. The adults, although mostly displeased, varied in their feelings from *uninterested* to *unhappy* and *disdainful*. Some seem to have reacted to the message as planned, but others seemed to feel that approaching the subject in this matter was inappropriate. Regardless, all adult participants were unmotivated and generally unaroused. The students, however, seem to have responded to the message as a challenge. Given the widespread level of responses the mean may not be all that descriptive. Many of the students were quite pleased with the message, and the adjective *tempted* may have struck an agreeable chord with them. It is clear that most of the students were highly excited, and the varying level of pleasure may have indicated their willingness to support Clinton in this endeavor. Is this ad a rallying cry? Clearly, the two groups disagreed greatly.

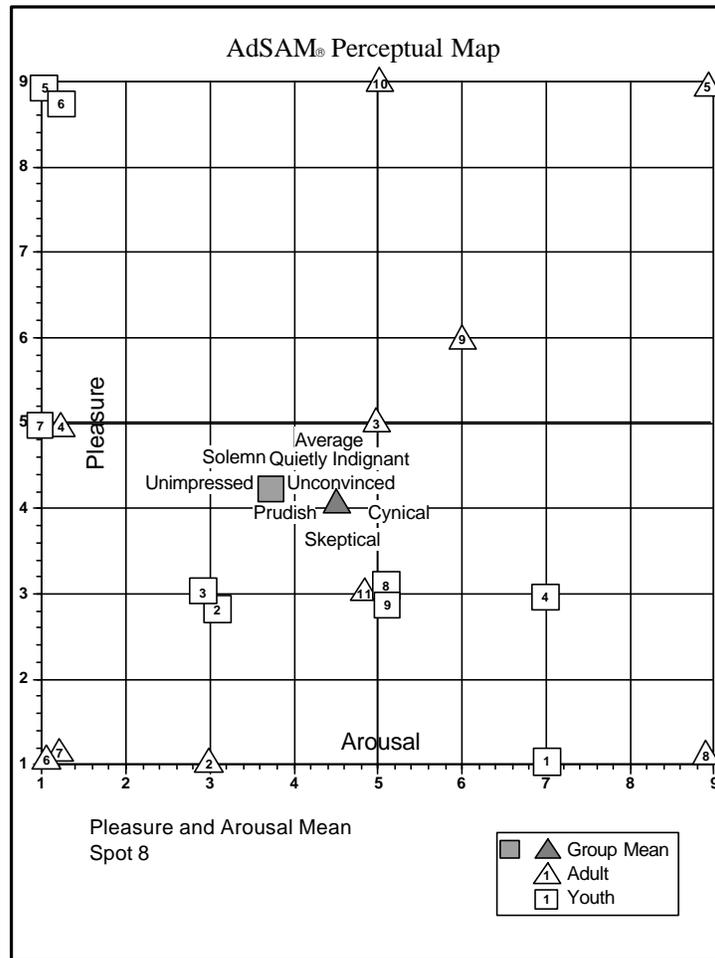


Figure 19.9. Pleasure and Arousal scores, Spot 8 “35 Years in Washington”.

Spot 8, “35 Years in Washington,” was a Clinton ad that rebutted Dole’s charges and then provided a counterattack on Dole’s record (Fig. 19.9). Once again, this ad unified the group means; however, only a few respondents agreed on their feelings. In this case, the similarity was created by highly varied responses. That is, there were responses that were located in every quadrant and at all four extremes. The message failed to produce a controlled response, and, given the widespread mixed feelings, the sponsor (Clinton) lost control of the message. Although the adjectives suggested that the audience feelings varied from *unimpressed* and *unconvinced* to *quietly indignant* and *skeptical*, many in both groups were either highly pleased or highly aroused by the message. This message was emotionally ineffective because it failed to direct the responses for either the adult group or the younger group.

## CONCLUSION

SAM is a unique tool for measuring voters’ affective responses to political advertising. The AdSAM® data reported in the PAD format and consisting of the ratings of emotional adjectives provide new insights into how voters may emotionally process political messages. SAM scores matched to adjective scores created a pleasure by arousal space that suggests the possible relation of a specific political ad and the adjectives. Figures 19.2 through 19.9 suggest that the SAM effectively functioned on both positive and negative message appeals. The sample of eight ads varied greatly according to the levels of pleasure and arousal across spots. The most effective positive ad in the sample was Spot 4 presented by James Brady and sponsored by the Clinton campaign. The adjectives associated with the ad were *joyful*, *triumphant*, *loved*, and *appreciative*. The spot produced both high pleasure and high arousal.

The responses to negative messages differed greatly as participants attempted to detach themselves from messages in spots that produced low levels of pleasure and arousal. Adjectives such as *unemotional*, *quietly indignant*, and *detached* often appeared in these instances.

Although the groups deemed no specific negative ads highly pleasurable generally, some executions were found to create greater levels of arousal than others. Negative ads considered to be more effective in controlling negative responses among the group members produced adjectives such as *irritated*, *frustrated*, and *dissatisfied*.

The study also provided insight for particular message strategies that could be considered off strategy due to age differences. Other messages may have produced highly mixed responses due to the consequences of backlash or boomerang effects at play. Not only was the goal of this study to apply SAM to political advertising messages for the first time, but also to examine these differences in emotional responses among voters who are highly similar in voting behavior.

African Americans are currently considered a monolithic group whose votes are cast en masse. However, recent trends in Black voter behavior are supported in this study. This study provides preliminary support for the notion of the emergence of a new younger Black voter who responds differently and more unpredictably.

There is a growing African American voter population exposed to a steady increase in media outlets and struggling to understand complex social and political issues. Common among them is race. Within the group are distinctions based on class, age, and gender. This particular combination of factors creates a need for carefully targeted, concise, and direct messages designed to reach African Americans with messages to which they feel compelled to respond.

Future research should include SAM measurements both cross-culturally among various segments of voters and within ethnic groups. As a result of this preliminary study, the researchers are encouraged that SAM can be a unique tool to reveal the subtle differences in emotional responses, which alluded to previous studies that attempted to differentiate various forms of negative messages. Future research using SAM also should be applied to different levels of local, state, and federal campaigns.

More tests are needed. The potential for measuring other media and forms of political communication needs to be examined. The role of SAM and AdSAM® in political advertising research has yet to be determined fully. If the current study is an indication, SAM may assist in sorting out the complexities and often-contradictory reactions to various forms of political advertising and voters' emotional responses to them.

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