MINI-RALLIES AT SUPER WAL-MART: MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF JANET RENO'S "RED TRUCK TOUR" IN THE FLORIDA 2002 GUBERNATORIAL RACE

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Abstract

Using the design of a natural experiment, this study investigated the effects of the political spectacle of 2002 Florida Gubernatorial candidate Janet Reno's "Red Truck Tour," which lasted from February - March 2002. Voting intentions and support for women's issues were examined using the theoretical perspectives of political spectacle, direct effects, and gender effects. This study predicted a positive impact of candidate support and a shift in undecided voters as a result of the candidate hitting the campaign trail. Finally, the study examined concerns about women's issues and related policies as a direct effect to voter intention as related to gender. These factors, or hypotheses, were measured through the use of a statewide pre-test (n = 516) and post-test (n = 504) random-digit-dialing (RDD) telephone survey conducted throughout the months of February and March 2002. Results indicate that candidate support for Reno increased during this time and although there was a predicted shift in undecided voters, the results were dubious. Finally, male support for Reno increased while female support dropped slightly, a phenomenon requiring further investigation.

Introduction

Natural experiment has been used in previous studies to research the effectiveness of the political spectacle (Erickson, 1998) and debates. This research examines the political spectacle of Florida gubernatorial candidate Janet Reno's Red Truck Tour in relation to candidate support and women's issues through a natural experiment. Using the theoretical framework of direct effects (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), this study predicts the impact of candidate support as a result of the candidate hitting the campaign trail.

Despite the fact that communication researchers long ago adopted a more judicious view of the effects of media on political opinions, much of what occurs in modern political campaigning still proceeds from the assumption that the actions and communications of political candidates will have a direct and observable impact on voters. Thus, candidates routinely seek opportunities to convey their messages directly to voters through direct contact with the public and with the hope and intention that their communication messages will be carried by the media to even more voters, which would result in more of the intended effect for the candidate. In political campaigns, political spectacles continue to be prime examples of this type of communication activity, in which a candidate engages in a type of communication intended to result in a direct effect on the voters. In this context, the research presented here attempts to measure the effects of Janet Reno's "Red Truck Tour" as a political spectacle in the 2002 Florida gubernatorial election.

Theoretical Perspectives

Direct Effects and Political Spectacle

This research study will investigate the effectiveness of the "Red Truck Tour" and Reno's projection as an average Floridian as she cruises around the state's Super Wal-Marts in

search of supporters. The idea of the political spectacle, or a traveling road show for a politician or candidate, has long been researched (Hart, 1987; Erickson, 1998). The visual imagery provided by the mere presence (of a politician) can persuade and influence an audience (Farrell, 1989). Since Reagan's successful spectacles and speeches with neatly packaged sound bites, the popularity of the traveling spectacle has grown (Erickson, 1998).

The political spectacle itself can be newsworthy and attach a symbol or message to a campaign (Erickson, 1998; Gronbeck, 1994). For instance, Janet Reno's "Ret Truck Tour" aimed to showcase a "down-home Floridian" (Pressley, 2002) and someone who is in touch with the public. As she cruised from Super Wal-Mart to Super Wal-Mart across the state, she attempted to position herself as an ordinary person in her "little red truck." However, Erickson (1998) warns that it takes more than a suitcase full of sound bites to be successful. A political spectacle, if not properly planned or implemented, can backfire and result in less support of the candidate/politician than rendered prior to the event.

From a theoretical perspective, research that attempts to measure the impact of a specific communication event can be positioned in the "direct effects" perspective. While the original direct effects model was called into question, and an attempt was made to replace it with a belief in "minimal" or "limited" effects (Klapper, 1960), direct effects research remains viable in the study of political communication, especially as researchers have measured the effects of political advertising – via traditional and new media channels, debates and political rallies (Chrisman, 1976; Kraus & Davis, 1976; Kaid & Sanders, 1978; Sears & Chaffee, 1977; Sanders & Kaid, 1981; Kaid, 1981; Garramone, 1984; Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 1993; Kaid, 1991; Kaid, 1997; McKinnon & Kaid, 1999; Kaid, 2000; Kaid, 2001; Kaid, 2002). While, modern research realizes the oversimplification of the "hypodermic needle" or "bullet theory" perspective, it also

acknowledges the validity of the idea that while individuals might be influenced my multiple factors, there is a clear correlation between message and receiver.

In this study, direct effects are measured through support for the candidate. While some may argue that a content analysis would be a better means to measure the effects of the spectacle, we hold that this study is not reviewing the agenda setting function of the media. Rather, this study aims to investigate the public reaction to Reno after the tour, regardless of public exposure via the media or actual attendance to the rallies themselves.

Despite the fact that we position our study in the direct effects mode, we recognize that political communication scholars have identified many receiver characteristics that may qualify or modify the effects of any political message in particular circumstances. In this study, the most important of these may be the potential impact of gender.

Gender Effects

Numerous studies have indicated that voters use commonly held notions about sex roles when making decisions about candidates (McGlen & O'Connor, 1995; Fox 1997; Iyengar, Valentino, Ansolabehere, & Simon, 1997; Kahn, 1992) and candidates utilize basic theories about sex-role stereotyping when relating to the general public (Witt, Paget, & Matthews, 1994; Kahn, 1996; Kahn & Gordon, 1997; Iyengar et al., 1997). Bascow (1986) offers a concise and basic definition of stereotyping as the "[s]trongly held overgeneralizations about people in some designated social category" (p. 3).

Studies on media use of sex-role stereotyping of candidates indicate that women tend to be more vulnerable to attacks and misrepresentations by the media than their male counterparts with more attention paid to personal appearance, age, personality traits, or family status (Wadsworth, Patterson, Kaid, Cullers, Malcomb, & Lamirand, 1987; Dixon, 1992; Braden, 1996;

Carroll & Schreiber, 1997; Bystrom & Kaid, 2000; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2000; Devitt, 2002). The media tend to perpetuate the notion of women as emotional, weak, and indecisive, by focusing on image and personality traits and regularly asks questions of women not asked of men (Braden, 1996; Bystrom, McKinnon, & Chaney, 1999). Although improving (Smith, 1997; Bystrom, Robertson, Banwart 2001), media coverage of female candidates is less than for their male counterparts and these biases can affect campaign outcomes (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Kahn, 1992; Kahn, 1994a; Kahn, 1994b; Witt et al., 1994; Kahn 1996; Devitt, 1999; Bystrom et al., 2001).

Issues are also generally assigned stereotypically by gender, and the manner in which they are addressed may negatively impact a female candidate. In a study on campaign issue advertising, Iyengar et al. (1997) concluded that candidates who position their issue ads from the more traditional female-stereotyped angle (e.g., education, health care, etc.) are taken more seriously than those who adopt some of the more male-stereotyped issues (e.g., crime, economics, foreign policy, etc.). Further, it has been determined that candidates who fail to use communication techniques that conform to sex-role stereotype run the risk of having their messages rejected by the voters (Wadsworth et al., 1987; Kahn, 1996).

Janet Reno and the Red Truck Spectacle

This brings us to the Janet Reno "Red Truck Tour," a 15-day, 3,000-mile statewide Florida journey in a 1999 Ford Ranger accompanied by her brother (Pressley, 2002). Often compared to former governor, Lawton Chiles "Walking Lawton's" 91-day, 1,033-mile hike, Reno's plan was to give Floridians a taste of the "down-home" Janet, a softer, more relaxed and feminine image than that of the former Attorney General who had made forceful and controversial decisions (e.g., Waco, Elian Gonzales) during her tenure. This image balance

between the softer Reno and one who is able to govern decisively may be difficult to strike. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported that Reno's campaign has been crafted by "a well-organized, well-financed battalion of experienced fundraisers, pollsters, and media consultants" (Morgan, 2001). Focus groups were conducted to ask questions about her performance as Attorney General, her battle with Parkinson's disease, and to find out how she might be perceived around the state (Morgan, 2001). Fox (1997), citing Jamieson's (1995) *double-bind* theory purporting the necessity for women to portray both stereotypical "female" and "male" traits, found that women have difficulties finding balance without appearing unprofessional. However, female candidates have conformed to more masculine speech styles and strategies in recent years (Bystrom & Kaid, 2000) which might bode well for Reno. In comparing Reno's truck tour with Chiles' walk, media consultant Frank Greer indicated his belief that "Florida voters will respond well to a highly independent woman who 'shoots straight'" (Morgan, 2001). Whether or not the voters will buy into the image is still left to be seen and furthers the purpose of this study.

Reno, an unmarried "first woman Attorney General of the United States of America" (WIC, 2002) who was one of only 16 women at Harvard Law School in her 1960 class of over 500 students, and a woman who also drives a truck, is hardly the stereotypical female candidate. During her tour, "General Reno" as introduced on one of her stops, addressed the Triangle Jacksonville Caucus, a gay and lesbian group, as well as the more traditional seniors, service groups, and school stops, fielding a question about gay adoptions—an issue she supports—along with the usual questions about education and the environment (Pressley, 2002).

Although reluctant to use negative campaign tactics, Reno did not avoid the opportunity to criticize Florida's Governor Jeb Bush on his education policies, his recent handling of the Department of Children and Families (March, 2002) and other issues in various speeches around

the state. Studies have indicated that negativity in female-candidate campaigns can be problematic because voters tend to view attack tactics as "unfeminine" (Wadsworth et al., 1987; Trent & Friedenberg, 1995; Kahn, 1996). However, Bystrom and Kaid's (2000) content analysis study of videostyles in televised commercials used by female and male candidates in the U.S. Senate races of the 1990s indicated that women had begun to increase the use of negative appeals, adapting a more masculine approach to campaigning. It is uncertain whether or not Reno's "I call it like I see it" (a phrase Reno uses often) attitude has been viewed by voters as honest and straight forward—typically "feminine" traits—or as yet another negative campaign tactic, and how these perceptions affected the voters she was attempting to win on her tour.

This study used the natural (quasi) experimental approach. Using a pre-test, stimulus, post-test design, this experiment investigated the effect of the political spectacle (Erickson, 1998) of Janet Reno's "Red Truck Tour" across Florida as she campaigned across the state in the beginning days of the gubernatorial race in the state.[1] Based on this background and theoretical perspective of direct effects and gender modification, the following hypotheses were tested:

H1: Exposure to the political spectacle will result in an increase in candidate support.

H2: Specifically, exposure to the political spectacle will impact undecided voters and their candidate support.

H3: Concerns about women's issues and other related policies directly effect voter intention as related to gender.

Methodology

Natural Experiment

A natural experiment, or quasi experiment, occurs when the researcher does not have control over variables or the stimulus (Sommer & Sommer, 1997). Natural experiments occur naturally and the researcher must gauge the before and after status in order to see the effects of the stimulus. Because this experimental design occurs in the "real world," it is very high in external validity. However, because the researcher is not in control of all of the variables, the internal validity is limited. In a natural experiment, it is difficult for researchers to assign causality to one particular variable. Thus, researchers who conduct natural experiments must be careful and examine all of the variables that could cause the change. This research study assigns such care and attention to detail. To meet the strict criterion for direct effects, this research study examines a short time period before the Reno's "Red Truck Tour" and then takes the pulse of public opinion immediately after the tour ends. The results of this natural experiment are not to be interpreted such that the political spectacle solely effected change, but that all events occurring during this time frame directly resulted in any findings or change.

Pre-Test

This research team conducted a statewide random telephone survey from February 1 to February 28, 2002. The survey was conducted by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) at the University of Florida using random-digit dialing to select the sample of 516 Florida residents. The survey collected basic demographic information on each respondent, asked questions regarding past voting history, and gauged present candidate support. Additionally, the survey asked respondents about the importance of women's issues in relation to their voting choices.

Stimulus

The stimulus for the natural experiment was the widely-publicized Reno "Red Truck Tour." The 15-day tour of the state in a "red truck" began on February 26, 2002. On the tour, Reno's campaign reached every region of the state and held many rallies as Reno attempted to raise awareness to her candidacy and win voters. During the tour, the Reno campaign covered 21 counties, 33 cities, and put 3,071 miles on her red pickup truck.

Media coverage of the campaign and Reno's stance on issues throughout the tour is considered a part of the natural experiment and can contribute to change in voter support. Our research group monitored this coverage and concluded that there was a tremendous amount of news saturation with virtually all major news outlets covering the tour (WESH, 2002). Reno was also a guest of the "Jay Leno Show," gaining national attention for the statewide tour. Additionally, Reno's website offered news and photographs along the way charting her journey as she completed the political spectacle.[2]

Post-Test

After the "Red Truck Tour" began, a similar random telephone survey was conducted by BEBR from March 1 to March 30, 2002. The 504 respondents were called during the same times during the day as in the February pre-test survey. Again, researchers investigated where voter support and issue importance lie as well as which media sources were frequently used for political and campaign information.

Since Reno's tour of the state took place from February 26 to March 12, 2002, there is an obvious overlap between the pre-and post-test surveys as they relate to the tour. However, much of the media publicity and campaign build-up began prior to the start of the tour in an effort to draw attention it. The media "hype" surrounding this event was so powerful as to draw national

attention to a state election campaign tactic. Documented television and newspaper coverage in 21 major city news outlets throughout the state, coverage in three national outlets, and untold radio news broadcasts of the event contributed to a statewide saturation. Combine the media news saturation with the national attention that the Reno name garners, and it becomes virtually impossible not to be aware of the tour.

When examining the direct effect of a natural experiment, consideration must be given to how the target receives information. Overall, sixty-one percent of the February 2002 survey respondents indicated that television serves as their primary source of political news and information followed by newspapers (23%). Yet another 5% prefer radio. These figures hold fairly constant for the undecided respondents and for the March survey as well throughout the balance of the tour. It is reasonable to assume that the organizers of the campaign tour hoped to gain the attention and subsequent support of the undecided voters through the use of the free media coverage provided. Herr (2002) concluded in a study of the 1996 presidential campaign, that campaign appearances do matter, producing tremendous local media coverage, and intruding "into the consciousness of otherwise tuned-out voters" (p. 911).

Therefore, we contend that citizen reaction to the tour event is not a product of whether or not individuals actually attended the statewide campaign stumping event, but rather it is the citizens' reaction to the candidate via the media's exposure of the event that will effect a change in attitude. This natural experiment does not presume to attempt to measure each individual's exposure to the tour itself in a controlled environment, but rather presents itself as a reasonable test of the effect of the media event and accompanying publicity that turns the event into a political spectacle.

Results

Demographics and Politics

Basic demographic data comparisons indicate that most of the respondents in both surveys were between the ages of 25 and 44, female, white and non-Hispanic, married, employed outside the home with incomes in the $20,000 to $29,999 range, living in suburban areas. On average, the highest school grade completed was at least one year of college.

An examination of the state by region indicates that the larger portion of the survey respondents lived in the southwest portion of the state during both months—27% and 29% respectively, followed closely by both the southeast and central regions. Region location appeared to have a significant bearing on voting intentions during the pre-test period, $?^2$ (20, N = 516) = 37.828, $p < .01$, but not during the post-test period. More people reported living in a rural area during the pre-test (21%) than during the post-test period (17%), however, half of the respondents in both the pre- and post-tests reported living in a suburban area.

Politically, most respondents were Republican with intentions to vote for Bush in the upcoming 2002 gubernatorial election, and agreed somewhat with the statement "I vote for candidates who support women's issues." Little difference was found in the attitudes of males and females in response to the women's issue statement, although females agreed slightly more than males in both the pre- and post-tests. Seventy-six percent of the pre-test respondents said they were currently registered to vote and nearly 70% reported voting in the 2000 presidential election. Analysis of gubernatorial voting intentions (Bush, Reno, or undecided) by age group yielded significance in the post-test, $?^2$ (8, N = 516) = 15.745, $p < .05$, but not in the pre-test period. A similar cross-tabulation of race and voting intentions yielded significance in both the pre-test, $?^2$ (4, N = 516) = 31.840, p = .000, and post-test periods $?^2$ (4, N = 504) = 22.210, p =

.000. A regional analysis yielded significant findings in the post-test, $?^2$ (8, N = 504) = 19.409, p < .05.

The results from this natural experiment study indicate there are differences in voter intention after exposure to the political spectacle. These differences are analyzed according the hypotheses.

H1: Effects on Candidate Support

The first hypothesis (H1) suggested that exposure to the political spectacle would result in an increase in candidate support. An analysis of 2002 voting intentions indicates nearly a 10% increase in support for Reno from February to March 2002. The first hypothesis is supported by the data.

H2: Effects on Undecided Voters' Candidate Support

"Undecided" voters' intentions declined by just over 10% overall during the pre- to post-test period (Table 1). As previously mentioned, support for Reno increased (10%) while Bush

Table 1.

Overall Change in 2002 Gubernatorial Voting Intentions

Description	February (number)	March (number)	Percent change 2/02 to 3/02
VOTE INTENTION	435	420	N/A
Bush	207	201	-2.9%
Reno	74	81	9.5%
Undecided	154	138	-10.4%

Note: Excludes non-responses and respondents who intended to vote for another candidate and those who did not intend to vote for governor or to vote at all.

support fell minimally (-3%). The decline in undecided voters' intention combined with shifts in support for the candidates indicate an effect on undecided voters and support for Hypothesis 2.

Additional analysis revealed that intentions to vote for a candidate other than Reno or Bush grew by nearly 6%. Interestingly, the change in the percentage of respondents who stated they did not intend to vote for governor in 2002 grew by 29% between the pre- and post- test period, and those intending not to vote at all grew by 14%. Regardless of the sometimes dubious nature of the change, it is clear that at least for now, undecided voters came to some type of voting-intention decision during the course of Reno's political spectacle.

H3: Effects on Voter Intention as Related to Gender

Although gender failed to be significantly linked to voting intentions during the post-test, it was a significant variable prior to the tour, $?^2$ (2, N = 435) = 14.791, p = .001. When the pre- and post-test changes in responses of those intending to vote for Bush or Reno are compared along with undecided responses by gender (Table 2), it is revealed that the percentage of male respondents intending to vote for Bush in February 2002 declined by 11% in March while the percentage of male respondents intending to vote for Reno rose by 39%.

Table 2.

Change in 2002 Gubernatorial Voting Intentions by Gender

	Male			Female		
Description	2/02	3/02	% Change	2/02	3/02	% Change
VOTE INTENTION	200	199	N/A	235	221	N/A
Bush	115	102	(11.3)	92	99	7.6
Reno	26	36	38.5	48	45	(6.3)
Undecided	59	61	3.4	95	77	(18.9)

N/A Not applicable.
Note: Excludes non-responses and respondents who intended to vote for another candidate and those who did not intend to vote for governor or to vote at all.

The percentage of male respondents who were undecided rose slightly (3%). Women seemed to begin to make up their minds during the test period as the change in undecided females decreased by 19%. Somewhat surprising is that support for Bush among women rose nearly 8% during the course of the natural experiment and declined by 6% for Reno.

When examining respondents who indicated intentions to vote for Reno in 2002, overall agreement with the statement "I vote for candidates who want to support women's issues" grew during the test period by 29% with a 61% increase in those voting for Reno who indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement. In contrast, respondents who indicated that they vote for candidates who support women's issues declined among those intending to vote for Bush by 4%. Analysis of support of women's issues by candidate yielded significant post-test results, $?^2$ (8, N = 504) = 35.888, p = .000, with 83% of Reno supporters indicating during the post-test that they vote for candidates who support women's issues compared to 57% of Bush supporters.

Male and female respondents alike appeared to exhibit concern for issues affecting women, indicating that they are prepared to back their concern with their vote. Although overall support was higher among women than men, most of the respondents in both the pre-test (55% male, 65% female; $?^2$ [4, N = 516] = 14.902, p = .005) and post-test (58% male, 63% female) surveys indicated that they vote for candidates who support women's issues.

The positive results of the effects of the political spectacle on voter intentions as analyzed by gender and the backing of candidates who support women's issues indicate that Hypothesis 3 is supported by the data.

Limitations

As with most studies, there are several limitations in this study. First, the methodology of a natural experiment creates limitations in that these researchers cannot assert a causal relationship between the political spectacle and the increase in support for the candidate. However, very little social science research can, without a doubt, conclude such solid cause and effect relationships. In this study, the researchers used the methodology to show the result of real-life extraneous variables at play.

A second limitation in the design relates to the straight-forward nature of it: either it worked or it did not work. Here, Reno found limited success in the political spectacle. Previous research shows that people who attend political rallies, or events such as this political spectacle, are already supporters of the candidate. Such research shows that attendees are typically seeking to reinforce their feelings and ideas about the candidate. With this in mind, it is difficult to accept that such a political spectacle can reach out to new supporters or reach out to apathetic voters. Future research to address this issue could include surveys and interviews of attendees of such political spectacle events.

A third limitation of this research concerns the knowledge Floridians had about the political spectacle. While it was heavily covered in the media and Reno was able to bring in Hollywood star power as support (Associated Press, 2002a; Associated Press, 2002b; Associated Press, 2002c), researchers cannot be certain that those surveyed were aware of the political spectacle. This limitation can also double as a valid point, in that this natural experiemtn did simulate real-world experiences where not everyone is notified of the event in an artificial manner.

Discussion

Natural experiment methodology is rarely used and frequently misunderstood among communication scholars. This body of research aims to bring the advantages of natural experiments to light and differentiate it from other communication research methodology. This research study did not conduct a content analysis of area newspapers or gauge actual media coverage of the Red Truck Tour. While some agenda setting theorists may object to this, this body of research asserts that while such scholarship would be an interesting addition to this study, it would no more prove the sample were exposed to the Red Truck Tour. Even if this

research examined specific media outlets during the Red Truck Tour's journey across the state, there is no way to prove the survey respondents were exposed to the media coverage of the event.

This body of research did not set out to conduct an agenda setting analysis to test whether or not Janet Reno's political spectacle was successful in garnering media coverage and setting the agenda for the day. Instead, this study seized the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of a political spectacle. To be effective, the spectacle would have had to increase overall candidate support, decrease opposition support, and possible decrease the number of undecided voters. In this respect, Janet Reno's political spectacle was successful on several points.

The natural experiment was the most sensible methodology for this particular study because not all voters read the newspaper and follow the media agenda. Instead, previous research shows that the voting public comes at its views from a variety of different sources—this study was not meant to examine the sources, but the outcome of that viewpoint. Thus, a content analysis in this particular study would have only proven that the media covered the event. It would not have been a solid tool of analysis for evaluating the political spectacle. Regardless of direct exposure to the political spectacle, the central question remains: Did support for the candidate increase after the post-spectacle? Simply answered, yes, the candidate did receive more support from voters. However, these results were compounded with more complex and dubious findings.

According to the data analyzed in this study, the Red Truck Tour was effective on most accounts. As mentioned, Reno was able to garner more supporters, however not able to surpass Bush's lead. Additionally, during the Red Truck Tour, support for Independent or "other" candidates rose. There is no question that the purpose of the tour, to increase awareness and

support of Reno, was a success. However, where the tour succeeded with some audiences, it failed with others.

There are many possible reasons for the increase in support of Reno after the political spectacle of the tour. For instance, the post-test results shows more people living in suburban areas. These areas were more likely to have been a stop on the tour or have increased media coverage on the tour as it neared their cities.

The change in support of Reno varies across gender. If Reno's most difficult audience was male, perhaps the images of her driving around the state in a pick-up truck were exactly what were needed to reach the male audience. However, the increase of female support of Reno was stunted when compared to the increase of support Bush garnered in the post-test of the natural experiment. Regardless of the elements that attracted male supporters, those same elements appear to have had the opposite effect on female voters. Future campaign events and advertising will have to more effectively hit each target audience with separate images and messages to even the level of support across gender.

During the tour, celebrity supporters from outside of the state of Florida often flanked Reno. For instance, Martin Sheen, an actor well-known for his politics and the star of "The West Wing," where he plays the country's president, joined Reno for several stops on the tour (Associated Press, 2002b; Associated Press, 2002c). Other Hollywood actors and singers also joined in to support the candidate, even though they do not live in Florida nor vote in the state (Associated Press, 2002a). This study did not investigate the impact of these famous "out-of-towners" involvement with the political spectacle, but these factors are considered in the analysis.

It is noteworthy that this study found an increase in support in several groups of voters based on age. Reno's support rose considerably with 25-44 year olds and 55-64 year olds. The younger population, 18-24 year olds, left the Reno camp and self-selected "no intention to vote" or "undecided" after the exposure period. Based on these data, candidates who are weak in obtaining the 18-24 year old vote and require it to win would have to employ a different strategy to garner support.

Future Research

The next step in this vein of research lies in taking the political spectacle outside of the natural experiment. Future studies concerning the political spectacle could turn to the traditional agenda setting approach. In such a study, a content analysis of newspaper coverage would reveal the messages sent to the masses through the media. It would then be interesting to look at the media messages in relation to media consumption and candidate support. For instance, if newspapers favorably report on the candidate, then is there an increase in support for that candidate among newspaper readers? Conversely, if talk radio discusses the candidate and her agenda poorly, how do talk radio listeners rate the candidate?

In this study, the researchers just scratched the surface of the effects of a political spectacle like the Red Truck Tour, future research should further probe to identify what types of constituents were swayed by the tour, what issues they rank as most important to the state, what their voting intentions were prior to Red Truck Tour exposure, and a multitude of more in-depth questions.

Conversely, researchers should investigate the possible ramifications of the tour. While it was successful early in the election to garner support for Reno, how long will that support last? Would this type of political spectacle be more effective or less effective at a different time in the

election cycle? Did the mere image of Reno traveling around Super Wal-Marts talking to seniors turn off some voters? In this vein, it would be interesting to see if after the political spectacle of the Red Truck Tour, Reno supporters were turned off to the candidate and moved support elsewhere or if this strengthened their loyalty to her.

It is apparent from the overwhelming agreement to the statement, "I vote for candidates who support women's issues," that voters are concerned about women's issues and related policies. That concern may very well translate to a greater turnout in support of the candidate who expresses similar concerns and solutions. Future studies should incorporate questions regarding issue agenda setting into studies on the political spectacle.

Through this study, researchers have insight into the effectiveness of the political spectacle through a natural experiment. While there are still questions that beg to be answered by more research, it is evident that the spectacle used by Reno was able to successfully close the gap between her and her opponent in the run to win votes.

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Footnotes

[1] Note that primary winner Bill McBride had not yet become a serious Democratic Party gubernatorial candidate.

[2] Janet Reno's website at www.renoforflorida.com/tour.html included an itinerary and links to news articles pertaining to the Red Truck Tour from the following news outlets: CNN.com; Associated Press; Click10.com; WPBF, West Palm Beach; WTSP-TV, St. Petersburg/Tampa; Capitol News Service, Tallahassee; Miami Herald; Pensacola News Journal; News Herald, Panama City; Orlando Sentinel; Dade City Zephyr; Independent Florida Alligator, Gainesville; Gainesville Sun; Walton Sun; Star Banner, Ocala; WESH TV, Orlando; Ledger, Lakeland; WJXT, Jacksonville; Tampa Tribune; Daytona Beach News-Journal; WFLA, News Channel 8, Tampa; Bonita Daily News; News-Press, Ft. Myers; Bradenton Herald; Herald Tribune, Sarasota; South Florida Sun Sentinel; St. Petersburg Times; and the Palm Beach Post