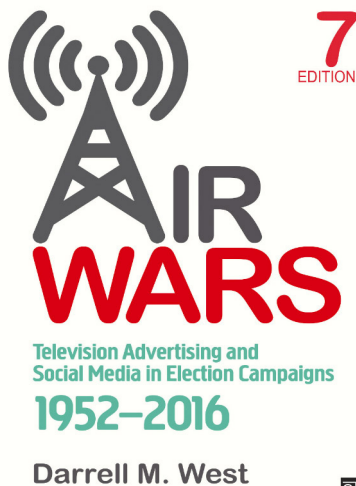


## Air Wars: Television Advertising and Social Media in Election Campaigns, 1952-2016

Darrell M. West (2018). *Air Wars: Television Advertising and Social Media in Election Campaigns, 1952-2016*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE & CP Press. 169 páginas, ISBN 978-1-5063-2983-3



Darrell M. West

The Center for Technology Innovation at the Brookings Institution is behind this interesting work of causal exemplification and theory synthesis. Professor Darrell M. West's book reflects the great efforts made to research on specific topic and line of inquiry: communication media, political agendas and public opinion. The objective is to shed light on the conflicts and interactions that arise in the context of election campaigns and peaks in political cycles.

The book's first edition (1993, Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly) is the result of a wide-reaching research project on the impact of audiovisual media on American election processes, in a period of transformation in the communicational landscape and in the area of political strategy. The first time period analyzed in the book runs from 1952 to 1992. During those years, cable broadcasting brought about great structural changes in the production of content related to political parties and leaders. Likewise, the 1992 presidential election was an outlier and contradicted many theoretical frameworks used in research. This first edition emphasized the constants and variables throughout the study period, paying special attention to data handling methods during upticks in voting issues.

This book is comprised of nine chapters, a preface and an appendix. Since the 1990s new editions have been published, not only in the event of being sold out, but also in response to new electoral events in the U.S. The seventh and current edition is not just another republication of the book; it is a review that also includes the election campaign that would take Trump to the White House and analyzes new trends in social media, advertising and political theory. The use of tables, images and infographics together enrich the publication.

The appendix compiles a wide selection of advertising spots and presidential candidate messages, dating from 1984 to 2016, the author considers key to understanding the historic evolution of political communication and election campaigns from the turn of the century.

The first chapter focuses on classifying concepts regarding communication strategies and media phenomena. It also attempts to synthesize, in a bold and organized fashion, a history of communication in the United States, from printed press and analogue television, to digital content and online platforms.

The second chapter, "Effective Ads and the rise of Social Media", covers issues like the main principles in advertising, and production techniques used in political messages and reception studies. A number of concrete case studies to illustrate the arguments after which the author concludes that many factors inherent to interpretation influence the political reading of how the media impacts on presidential campaigns.

The explanations and debate on multicausality are also present in the third chapter: "Buying Air Time and Using Social Media". The topics addressed in this chapter are linked to the economic strategy used to create more air time. The author discusses studies on profitability and dissemination and in particular, diversification and the selection process behind choosing objectives driving efforts to access corporations.

"Messages" and "Media Coverage" are the titles of the fourth and fifth chapters, respectively. The previous addresses topics such as the most popular, effective and memorable advertising campaigns. The latter discusses the different approaches to tracking media content. Both cases highlight the substantial increase in digital advertising and the uptick in resources and attention invested in advertisements, establishing to that end a comparative sequence of the

advertising during the 2008, 2012 and 2016 presidential campaigns.

The sixth chapter, "Learning about the Candidates", deals with issues revolving around awareness of political agendas and candidacy programs, candidateship support and the candidates themselves. Here, the author provides a deontological reflection on the power of corporations and new communication phenomena and their effect on election processes, especially considering that the type of message built within the context of a campaign does not function autonomously or independently. The complex topics deriving from agenda-setting are found in the seventh chapter, with a special emphasis on the influence of specialized advertising and the "programmed" chaos that often occurs in advertising campaigns.

The eighth chapter focuses on the overall trend in recent decades to build rhetoric based on negativity. The author states that campaigning on the basis of the candidates' positive attributes has declined in favor of focusing on the opposition's administrative background and program failures. This idea is backed by concrete cases and a diverse array of examples, stretching from the end of the 1980s to Donald Trump's groundbreaking campaign in 2016.

The last two chapters study the links between advertising, media discourse and political communication (parties and candidates). The author goes on to discuss electoral processes from a communication and advertising perspective, a montage of programmed and improvised performances such as the strategic need to deploy carefully studied

reasoning and to react to unexpected campaign events. Using various case studies, Professor West discusses empirical and intangible determinants, as well as inexplicable, ideological adherence. All these assumptions stem from the candidate's charismatic leadership, the risk of media manipulation, the need to establish priorities, the assimilation of historic precedence, establishing the main concerns of voters, gauging public opinion and the lack of scope on voter expectations.

Undoubtedly, the different sections of the book go about creating a structure (descriptive and interpretative) of case studies that, over time, has become a basic tool for tracking the various transformations in political communication theory in the United States. The work of Professor West, throughout the various reviewed and expanded editions, constitutes a veritable manual for US political communication researchers. For over a century, North America has become one of the main sources of theory in this area and, as a result, trends in theoretical-methodological models in the U.S. influence researchers all over the world. The media property structure throughout the Americas and the globalization of experimenting with format transform this study into an inevitable starting point for any young researcher in Latin America.

Production, edition and dissemination strategies (implemented since the 1950s) are presented in an original and engaging way. Considering all the issues that tend to arise in research of this nature, it can be said with great confidence that the book's study of the processes involved in informative coverage is one of its

strongest features, together with the fluid writing style of all the epigraphic introductions to each chapter, given that the author avoids, at all time, falling into a spiraling theoretical argument, something that often occurs in communication field research specializing in political electoral issues.

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