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Attacking Ethos: The Rhetorical Use of Uncertainty in the 2004 Election

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ATTACKING ETHOS:
THE RHETORICAL USE OF UNCERTAINTY IN THE 2004 ELECTION

by

Theron Allen Verdon

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:

May 2008
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ABSTRACT

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May 2008

The rhetorical use of uncertainty in political communication (and other areas) has many implications. Uncertainty plays a major role in everyday life. Therefore, it likely plays a major role in political decision-making. Research has shown that uncertainty about a candidate affects a voter’s voting preference. Uncertainty usually affects voter decisions. Uncertainty was a factor in the 2004 presidential election. The Bush-Cheney Campaign used uncertainty to corrupt the ethos of the Democratic nominee, Senator John Kerry. The Bush-Cheney campaign rhetorically manipulated information about Senator Kerry to create a perception of a leader whose actions revealed an unpredictable flip-flopper. A lack of clear prediction caused one major effect. People lacked a desired sense of certainty and consistency in a leader during uncertain times, and an increase in uncertainty caused a decrease in identification. In the 2004 presidential election the Bush-Cheney campaign used strategic uncertainty to attack Senator Kerry’s ethos.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Humankind formed communities to assume control in an uncertain world. Maslow (1943) suggested that humans seek a safe and predictable environment, an environment that avoids uncertainty. As civilization advanced, a sensed need for the governance of societal uncertainties emerged. Along with forms of governance, from tribal to early democracies, political rhetoric developed. Political rhetoric has been studied at least since Aristotle (Aristotle, 1953; Hahn, 1998; Tulis, 1987). Like all forms of rhetorical expression, political rhetoric attempts to affect future outcomes. Future outcomes range from policy decisions to electioneering. The savvy politician will construct sound rhetorical appeals adapted to the psychology of audiences and will also be aware of the rhetorical situation. "Political actors must carefully assess the situation, calculate the appropriate action, and identify the proper roles to assume" (Denton & Woodward, 1985, p. 29).

Uncertainty is a major component in human interaction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Bradac, 2001; Katona, 1975, Weary & Edwards, 1996). Communication scholars view uncertainty as a variable in interpersonal interactions that people seek to overcome. There appears to be little or no research, however, that determines the rhetorical worth of uncertainty as a persuasive device, a strategic means of influencing political ethos or gaining a desired outcome. Thus, planned uncertainty or strategic uncertainty (SU) is insufficiently explored as an area of research. Since uncertainty is an important construct of human communication (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Bradac, 2001), one may be able to strategically manipulate it in order to gain a desired audience response. Potthoff and
Munger (2005) suggested “Uncertainty can be harmful to candidates” (p. 450), asserting that candidates who appear consistent and reliable are more likely to be elected than candidates depicted as uncertain. Arguably, political candidates could strategically use uncertainty to cast their opponents as unreliable and unpredictable. Voters may be led to believe that they cannot predict how a candidate will represent their interests (Hajnal, 2003).

Miller (2005) and Seeyle (2004) reported that the 2004 election was about values, the war on terrorism, conflict in Iraq, and the economy. Each issue dealt with uncertainty. A major contributor to the creation of political uncertainty was President George W. Bush’s presidential campaign, which depicted Senator John Kerry as riddled with uncertainty, a “flip-flopper” who could not make up his mind. For example, Bush-Cheney campaign volunteers dressed up like Flipper the flip-flopping dolphin. They relentlessly portrayed Kerry as elitist, untrustworthy, liberal and unpredictable regarding major issues (Milbank & VandeHei, 2004, p. A1). The Bush campaign successfully convinced voters that Senator Kerry was an uncertain leader in an uncertain world. By making John Kerry appear uncertain, the Bush campaign was able to use the voters’ risk averse inclinations. As an antithesis to Kerry’s uncertainty depiction, Bush was portrayed as a straightforward, certain individual.

The purpose of this dissertation is to review and critique research on political rhetoric and uncertainty theory with the goal of generating research questions. This dissertation is divided into the following sections: (a) Literature Review, (b) Critique, (c) Rational and Research Questions, (d) Situation, (e) Method, (f) Analysis, (g) Discussion, (h) Conclusion, and (i) References.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rhetoric

People communicate to create and sustain consensus. "Indeed, through public speaking by our national, state, and local officials, our values and goals are defined, refined, and articulated" (Denton & Hahn, 1986, p. 4). Aristotle identified three categories of public address; forensic oratory dealt with legal purposes, epideictic oratory concerned celebratory events, and deliberative oratory influenced politics. Ancient rhetoric dealt with oral persuasion. However, the use of rhetoric has changed over time. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the "art of finding the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle, 1991, p. 36).

Ehninger (1968), by contrast, considered modern rhetoric to be "an instrument for understanding and improving human relations" (p. 21). Denton & Hahn (1986) argued that through rhetoric we experience emotions that lead us to specific behavior. In addition, it can alter perceptions and assist in the formulation of beliefs. Ehninger (1968) argues that rhetoric is the way by which people influence each other's thinking through strategic use of symbols. Political rhetoric is, at its base, the strategic use of symbols to influence others. "Political consciousness, therefore, results from a largely symbolic interpretation of sociopolitical experience. To control, manipulate, or structure the interpretation of meaning is a primary goal of politics in general" (Denton & Hahn, 1986, p. 5). In a democracy voters are the politician's audience. The populace accepts or rejects rhetorically manipulated symbols. Voters remember symbols when recalling or processing political discourse. "Publics respond to currently conspicuous political
symbols: not ‘facts’...but to gestures and speeches that make up the drama of the state” (Edelman, 1985, p. 172). Through the manipulation of symbols, we construct social reality. In the 2004 election, the Bush campaign’s strategic use of symbols created a “reality” about Senator Kerry that many voters accepted as true that he was indecisive and unpredictable.

Ethos. Credibility is a major factor of persuasion as it influences an audience’s perception of a speaker (Aristotle, 1991; Cicero, 1913; Quintilian, 1891). “Most people agree that a speaker’s success in a given situation depends significantly upon the opinion of his character” (Brandenburg, 1948, p. 23). A speaker’s perceived credibility, therefore, is important as it affects the decisions of an audience.

Aristotle segmented ethos into three categories. “There are three reasons why speakers themselves are persuasive, for there are three things we must trust other than logical demonstrations. These are practical wisdom [phronesis] and virtue [arête] and good will [eunoia] (Aristotle, 1991, pp. 120-121). For a speaker to gain confidence from his audience he must create the perception of competence (practical wisdom), moral character (virtue), and trustworthiness (good will). Aristotle (1991) argued that failure to exhibit one or all of those divisions of ethos creates a negative impression.

Cicero (1913) argued that the character of the speaker moves people. However, character was supported mainly by knowledge. Cicero contended a speaker must be knowledgeable, well educated, and skilled in the liberal arts. Cicero added the idea of gravitas to the character of a speaker. “Possessing the quality would require a history of doing good deeds, giving good advice, or making good decisions” (Smith, 2003, p. 130). For Cicero a man must be good in his actions to be a good man and a good speaker.
Quintilian followed Aristotle and Cicero as he stressed the importance of being a good man to be a good rhetor. "Let the orator, then, whom I propose to form, be such a good one as is characterized by the definition of Marcus Cato, a good man skilled in speaking...I not only say that he who would answer my idea of an orator must be a good man, but that no man, unless he be good, can ever be an orator" (Quintilian, 1891, pp. 391-392). Like previous rhetoricians, Quintilian suggested that persuasiveness is highly depended on a speaker’s character. Quintilian’s assertion that only a good man can be a good speaker exceeds the perception of character. Like Cicero, Quintilian argued that a speaker must do good works.

Bradenburg (1948) stated, “The practice of rhetoricians through the years, then, would seem to support the belief that the task of the rhetorical critic most certainly does include the estimate of the moral character of the speaker” (p. 25). Character is especially important in a presidential election. Presidential candidates project a positive image of themselves to bolster their credibility. Nimmo and Mansfield (1986) proposed that the images candidates project are meant to convey leadership characteristics, including such qualities as competency, experience, and trustworthiness. Despite thousands of years, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian’s concepts of credibility are still important in modern American politics.

**Political Reality**

Holtgraves (2002) stated that language creates worldviews. Similarly, Blair (1990) said, “One of the most distinguished privileges which Providence has conferred upon mankind is the power of communicating their thoughts to one another. Destitute of this power, reason would be solitary, and, in some measure, an unavailable principle” (p.
Politics is about competing definitions of social reality. Those competing definitions of reality become the common consensus of social reality.

Our everyday, traditional ideas of reality are delusions which we spend substantial parts of our daily lives shoring up, even at the considerable risk of trying to force facts to fit our definition of reality instead of vice versa. And the most dangerous delusion of all is that there is only one reality. What there are, in fact, are so many different versions of reality; some of which are contradictory, but all of which are the results of communication and not reflections of eternal, objective truths (Watzlawick, 1976).

People communicate social reality through the use of symbols. “A symbol, then, is a human invention and arises from the attributing of meaning to an object” (Elder & Cobb, 1983, p. 29). The symbols humans create help communicate people’s shared perceptions of social reality. Holzner (1968) stated that communication is integral to the social construction of reality. Symbols make up part of our social reality, they order and facilitate it. “Man does not live by symbols alone, but man orders and interprets his reality by his symbols, and even reconstructs it” (Firth, 1973, p. 20). Social reality is a fabrication of humankinds’ ability to give meaning to objects and to communicate that reality to others. Political reality is part of social reality. Political reality is entered into the national dialogue rhetorically (Nimmo & Combs, 1983), relying upon the acceptance of and communication between individuals. The populace either adopts that dialogue or seeks another. Communication therefore facilitates the spread of social reality through the messages of the populace (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Holzner, 1968; Potter, 1996).
A particular population communicates that acceptance or rejection through the community. “Group members frequently talk to one another, thus socially validating their shared view of things” (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 218). For instance, prior to the 2004 election, particular groups accepted and rejected a reality about the war in Iraq. “Despite the report of the 9/11 Commission saying there is no evidence Iraq was providing significant support to al Qaeda, 75% of Bush supporters believe Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda (30% of Kerry supporters), with 20% believing Iraq was directly involved in 9/11. Sixty-three percent of Bush supporters even believe that evidence of this support has been found, while 85% of Kerry supporters believe the opposite” (Kull, Ramsay, Subias, Weber, & Lewis, 2004, p. 4). Social reality had been split into two competing political realities, a Bush supported and a Kerry supported one. Each defined the campaign to conform to their reality.

Political realities are communicated through various means. Political realities can be articulated by a politician, by their campaign staffs, and subsequently through mass media to the public. A campaign is designed to communicate specific messages to the public. Political reality is communicated to voters through rhetoric. “Language should be viewed as the medium for the generation and perpetuation of politically significant symbols” (Denton & Woodward, 1985, p. 31). We have our world views shaped and created by rhetoric. Rhetoric also helps shape our perceptions of individuals.

Visual Rhetoric

The study of rhetoric has often been limited to the analysis of verbal arguments. “Rhetoric and arguments have been associated since antiquity, and in that connection arguments have traditionally been thought of as verbal phenomena” (Blair, 2004, p. 41).
However, visual rhetoric may be said to function as an argument as well (Birdsell & Groarke, 1996; Blair, 2004; Blair, 1996). Surprisingly, visual rhetoric has been relegated to a subordinate status in the hierarchy of research. A strong case can be made for the study of visual arguments. Blair (1996), for example, argued that images can be influential in affecting attitudes and beliefs. Foss (2004) cited "three exigencies" to support the study of visual images: "One is the persuasiveness of the visual symbol and its impact on contemporary culture. Visual artifacts constitute a major part of the rhetorical environment, and to ignore them to focus on verbal discourse means we understand only a minuscule portion of the symbols that affect us daily" (p. 303). A grammar of visuals in political rhetoric has evolved over time (Jamieson, 1992). Indeed, Erickson (2000) argued that politics has made a visual turn. Visual rhetoric is important to modern political rhetoric because it relies on television (Kaid, 2005). Because visual symbols create social reality, they are an important part of political communication.

**Political Communication**

Political rhetoric communicates particular realities to voters. By doing so, political communication helps foster democracy. People communicate shared ideals and build consensus in a democracy. Rhetoric is vital, therefore, for transmitting the norms of a democratic culture, and for vitalizing political engagement among citizens. For a political reality to be accepted, voters must recognize the symbols and myths associated with that reality. "The democratic citizen is expected to be well-informed about political affairs. He is supposed to know what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, what the likely consequences are" (Berelson, Lazarfeld, & McPhee, 1954, p. 308). Each party
constructs a reality around important issues. Each political actor and group attempts to incorporate their narrative into the broader societal narrative.

**Political Campaigns**

It is hard for presidential campaigns to appeal to a broad audience. Thus, campaigns target specific audiences in order to establish political realities. "One of the most important and difficult communication tasks is to reach the right audience with the right message" (Johnson, 2001, p. 149). Holbrook (1996) said that campaigns are large-scale efforts to reach voters, to structure a desired outcome (see Alvarez, 1997; Gelman & King, 1993; Holbrook, 1996; Joslyn, 1990; Popkin, 1991). Considerable research helps explain why citizens are swayed by political campaigns (Berleson, Lazarfeld & McPhee, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979).

Most campaigns are designed to persuade voters to accept a particular political reality. "Elections depend upon voters...a primary function of campaigning is that of stirring previous voters, cross-over voters, and non-voters on the Tuesday of an election" (Gronbeck, 1978, p. 269). When individuals enter the voting booth, the desired outcome is to have them express a given political reality in the form of a vote. By accepting a specific reality as the "correct reality," a citizen will vote for the candidates that represents that "correct reality." "The assumption that the purpose of election campaigns is to win votes principally by altering attitudes lies at the base of much of the research about campaign effects" (Nimmo, 1970, p. 165). Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau (1995) found citizens respond to campaign information. A response is the product of steps conducted by a campaign. Lazarfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) listed how campaigns work: (1), propaganda gets the interest; (2), increased interest increases exposure to
information; (3), the attention becomes selective; and (4) support for the candidate. Gronbeck (1978) stated that campaigning is not only about getting voters to vote but to create “second-level or meta-political images, personae, myths, association” (p. 271). Campaigns create an image for a candidate that is designed to inform citizens about various aspects of the candidate’s values, beliefs, and attitudes. Nimmo (1970) indicated that a politician’s image is an aggregate of a variety of qualities: “Image consists of the qualities, traits, attributes, and views displayed for the voters” (p. 34). A campaign communicates an image of the candidate to create a strong perception of credibility. They also tear down an opponent’s credibility.

Political campaigns have a limited period. That period is broken up into specific campaign stages. Each stage disseminates specific information that may be accepted or rejected by the populace.

Stages of a presidential campaign. Electoral campaigns are conducted in a specific time frame. Kessel (1988) stated there are strict time limits on electoral political campaigns. Trent and Friedenberg (2004) identified four stages of the presidential campaign process: (1) Surfacing, interest is shown and images are beginning to be built; (2) primaries, party members select who will be the candidate; (3) nominating conventions, parties make official presidential and vice presidential nominations; (4) the general election, once nominated candidates resume campaigning (pp. 21-63). The first stage Trent and Friedberg (2004) identify is surfacing. “Surfacing begins with the candidates’ initial efforts to create presidential interest and image themselves in the public imagination (Trent, 1978, p. 282). During the surfacing period, the party nomination is open to anyone.
Trent and Friedenberg (2004) stated there are five functions to the primary’s stage. The first function is the “source of feedback for candidates” (p. 39), providing “a chance for repositioning in terms of stands on issues, themes, images, and over all campaign strategies” (p. 39). The second function is that primaries act as a source of information for voters. “The information they receive aids in determining or readjusting their opinions (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004, p. 43). The second function allows the campaign to disseminate political reality to the public. “The third function of the primary period is that it involves many citizens in the democratic process” (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004, p. 44). The actions citizens take define the process, from holding signs on street corners to the placement of bumper stickers. It identifies who has accepted the campaign’s definition of reality and subsequently communicates it to others. The fourth function identified by Trent and Friedenberg (2004) is the promises function. It provides an outlet for candidates to “make promises about what they will do if elected” (p. 47). Promises shore up voters’ acceptance of a candidate’s political reality. During these stages, there are competing definitions of reality as defined by other candidates; the final function reveals whose reality is acceptable to the majority of citizens. The final function of the primary stage is to identify frontrunners. “The voters have a chance to determine the ‘real’ front-runners or leading contenders for the nomination” (p. 47). As the lead candidate is revealed to the voting population, so too is the candidate revealed to the incumbent. Subsequently, the incumbent has time to circulate a counter-reality. After the front runner selection, the process moves on to the nominating convention. Usually by that time the candidate is officially selected, incumbents have manipulated symbols and constructed myths to create a specific reality around themselves and their opponents.
Televised political advertisements. In almost every election, campaigns run televised advertisements. "Many campaigns are waged essentially through advertising, primarily over radio and television" (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004, p. 339). The political ad has become a ritual for the election process. "A ritual is simply a series of acts that for the most part are regularly and faithfully performed time and time again" (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 49). Televised political advertisements have been a major part of presidential elections for five decades. They enable candidates to bring themselves to the attention of the people and to define political reality. Political advertisements communicate a candidate’s perception of political reality while myths ally the candidate with values and norms that hold society together. Denton and Woodward (1985) refered to such myths as the "us versus them" myth and the "pseudo-myths." "Us versus them" myths “focus on social structure or collectivities” (p. 39). The “pseudo myth,” according to Denton and Woodward (1985), are myths that create the “hero” and “common man” image. These two myths are designed to attach the candidate to communal norms and values. By identifying the candidate with communal norms and values, citizens believe they can predict a candidate’s values, attitudes, and actions. Political advertisements in an election are designed to broadcast to a mass audience a candidate’s values and norms with calculated effect. “The rituals of political activity are not spontaneous. They are usually planned for particular effect. Press conferences, speeches, bill-signings, proclamations, heated exchanges in debates, are rhetorical constructions designed to secure the attention and support of an audience” (Denton & Woodward, 1985, p. 151). Political advertisements inform the population about a candidate’s attitudes, beliefs, and actions.
Rhetoric and Uncertainty

The history of rhetoric is man’s attempt to practice uncertainty reduction. The early sophists believed certainty or absolute truth was unobtainable by humans. Sophists created uncertainty by asserting that “truth” did not exist. Sophists likewise generated uncertainty regarding the hierarchy of Greek society. Athenian citizens deferred to the wisdom of elders and those considered socially superior. The sophists taught anyone who wished to learn the art of public speaking. “Hence the traditional privileges of the aristocracy were undermined” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 22). This created uncertainty for the powerful and privileged. Learning the art of rhetoric gave citizens the power to persuade. With the ability to persuade the population could question the privileged class’ right to power. Indeed, uncertainty is situated in much of human history.

Some argue that uncertainty has been a major part of 20th century history. Fiddle (1980) concluded that:

The twentieth century has been colored by the principle of uncertainty, taken both in its original Heisenberg meaning of 1927, to refer to a fundamental incommensurable, and in its broadest sense, as a general characteristic of the life of a modern man since Einstein’s miracle year of 1905 and the killing of the archduke in 1914. Along with relativity, uncertainty is a sort of charismatic concept, exciting those who filter conventional concepts and data through its perspective (p. 3).
There is a link in history between uncertainty and rhetoric. There is a link between uncertainty and much of human decision-making.

Importance of uncertainty

Uncertainty plays a major role in everyday life (Berlyne, 1962; Festinger, 1954; Kagan, 1972; Sorrentino & Roney, 2000; Weary & Edwards, 1996). Therefore, it likely plays a major role in political decision-making. Research has shown that uncertainty about a candidate affects a voter’s voting preference (Bartels, 1986, 1988; Potthoff & Munger, 2005; Vavreck, 2001).

Uncertainty conceptualization. Conceptualizing uncertainty aids an understanding of its rhetorical implications. Uncertainty is when a person lacks the knowledge to predict a person’s, attitudes, beliefs, and actions (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Uncertainty is influenced by the perception of quality and quantity of information. A receiver may perceive that they lack sufficient information to predict a person’s attitudes, beliefs, or actions. Voting for a candidate often revolves around determining whether a candidate matches a voter’s attitudes and beliefs. Specifically, will a candidate constitute a good representation of a voter’s attitudes and beliefs? Uncertainty is found in the perception of the voter. Rhetoric manipulates those perceptions. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that rhetoric can manipulate the perception of uncertainty.

Uncertainty is a construct that people generally avoid (Katona, 1975). Therefore, uncertainty about a particular person or political candidate can create a negative perception. If a voter is uncertain about a candidate and cannot get information to alleviate that uncertainty, the voter might avoid supporting a candidate. As Berger and
Calabrese (1975) noted in their initial study of uncertainty, people want and need confirmable, accurate information to formulate relationships. Gudykunst (2005) stated that uncertainty affects the way we think about people. If a person is uncertain about a candidate, it is safe to assume that this will affect their vote.

*Uncertainty.* Uncertainty is a powerful factor in human perceptions and actions. “Uncertainty is one of the fundamentals in life” (Knight, 1921, p. 347). That is why it is important to study uncertainty. Berger and Calabrese (1975) developed uncertainty reduction theory to examine initial interaction and attraction between strangers.

Numerous disciplines have studied the effects of uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berlyne, 1962; Burden, 2003; Cioffi-Revilla, 1998; Fiddle, 1980; Hoagland & Shepard, 1980; Katona, 1975; Knight, 1921). Uncertainty research has generated considerable attention. “Interest has expanded far beyond these boundary conditions to include examination of uncertainty in ongoing personal relationships, organizational settings, health care interactions, and interactions among individuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds” (Goldsmith, 2001, p. 514). Despite the expanding boundary of uncertainty, the basic concepts remain. Bradac (2001) stated that uncertainty refers to an interactant’s sense of a number of predictions about a person’s actions. Berger and Bradac (1982) defined uncertainty as the number of alternatives that occur in a situation and the relative likelihood of their occurrences. Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) information theory also held that the possible number of alternatives determines uncertainty. Berlyne (1962) noted that knowledge is the only way to ease uncertainty. Fundamentally, uncertainty constitutes a lack of knowledge. Perceiving a lack of knowledge could be related to a person’s specific situation. That lack of knowledge leads to tension, reduced only by the
gathering and evaluation of information. Uncertainty has a lot of influence over people and their decisions. There are different forms of uncertainty that affect decisions.

Political uncertainty. “Political decisions have the potential to affect a wide group of people and institutions” (Burden, 2003, p. 7). The political decisions made in a democracy are very uncertain. “Politics, at least for those invested in it, have even greater (negative) consequences, including policy decisions that could lead to such unpleasant consequences as an increase in crime...economic recession or even depression, or heightened racial tensions” (Burden, 2003, p. 13). Research regarding political uncertainty focuses on a variety of issues. Dickinson (2003) looked at how the growth of the White House Staff curbs uncertainty. “What explains variations in White House staff size since 1940? One explanation is rooted in changing contextual circumstances that have collectively increased the political uncertainty associated with presidential bargaining” (Dickinson, 2003, p. 44). A president’s staff is designed to provide information to reduce uncertainty. O’Toole and Meier (2003) suggested that governmental bureaucracies are designed to deal with uncertainty in the interest of stable, equitable, and predictable public action. Vanden Bergh and de Figueiredo, Jr (2003) argued, “Uncertainty leads to the insulation of government agencies through structure” (p. 67). Information sources are created to alleviate uncertainty in the citizenry. Even as government is designed to lessen uncertainty, Geer and Goorha (2003) proposed that uncertainty is dynamic. We may be “uncertain” about the political landscape, but probably less uncertain than in the past. Like communication, uncertainty is dynamic and situational. “Uncertainty... is especially acute in the political realm. This is because politics is largely about making decisions, and decisions are seldom certain” (Burden,
Largely because uncertainty is so powerful it becomes advantageous for political campaigns. Generating uncertainty about an opposition candidate could potentially influence voters. A candidate who is relatively unknown, for example, generates considerable uncertainty among voters.

**Environmental uncertainty.** The majority of environmental uncertainty research involves how organizations deal with external uncertainty (Spekman & Stern, 1979; Thompson, 1967). According to Weary and Edwards (1996), uncertainty research has dealt with an organism’s relationship with its environment. Environmental uncertainty creates many possibilities in politics. Scarcity of resources has a dramatic effect on political decision-making. “Politics of scarcity almost always involves a zero-sum gain in which one person’s group or group’s gain requires the equivalent loss” (Zald, 1970, p. 227). The scarcity of resources creates an uncertain future where decisions made in the present must alleviate uncertainty generated in the future. Distribution of resources is a focal point in racial politics (Feagin & Feagin, 1994; Hajnal, 2003).

**Societal uncertainty.** Considerable research regarding societal uncertainty has dealt with intercultural communication. Kagan (1972) stated that the reduction of uncertainty was a constant concern, and research has investigated intercultural uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1985; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984), showing that uncertainty plays a large role in intercultural relations. In a multicultural democratic society, politicians must reach a diverse group of stakeholders. Communicating with diverse cultures involves misunderstandings. As Hall (1959, 1966) pointed out, we encounter considerable difficulty in trying to interact with persons from different cultures. We often fail to
recognize that other people employ a different set of communication conventions and norms. Gudykunst and Hammer (1988) developed the anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory of intercultural adjustment to account for the inherent uncertainty of dealing with other cultures. Gudykunst (2005) suggested that the AUM theory can be applied in several ways to improve communication between cultures. Alleviating uncertainty, they claim, may lead to better communication.

*Economic uncertainty.* In a free market society individuals are afforded choices. With more choices there come more possibilities, and with more possibilities uncertainty is generated. “Uncertainty is determined by the number of alternatives that occur in a given situation, and the relative likelihood of their occurrence” (Berger & Bradac, 1982, p. 6). In an economy that provides a multitude of alternatives, uncertainty becomes a major factor in economic decisions. Milton Friedman (1977) in his Nobel lecture discussed how important uncertainty is to the economy, and how it can stall economic activity. This becomes important because the economy affects politics, and politics affects the economy. “There is an intimate connection between economies and politics that on certain combinations of political and economic arrangements are possible…” (Friedman, 1967, p. 8). In a market economy economic uncertainty can have an effect on societal uncertainty. Consider one of the major planks in the Democratic platform opposing outsourcing of jobs. To affect cost and profit many organizations moved jobs overseas. Outsourcing alleviated market uncertainty but it increased job insecurity in the United States.
**Uncertainty and communication.** Communication is a common denominator among political, environmental, societal, and economic uncertainty. Three theories of uncertainty elaborate its communication consequences. Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) holds that there is a human drive to reduce uncertainty about our own and others’ beliefs and attitudes. “Uncertainty refers to an interactant’s subjective sense of the number of alternative predictions available when thinking about a partner’s future behavior…” (Bradac, 2001, p. 458). Berger and Calabrese (1975) focused their research on the initial interactions among strangers.

Another theory of uncertainty is uncertainty management. Brashers (2001) described uncertainty management as occurring “when making decisions, planning events, and interaction with others, people experience uncertainty” (p. 477). Decisions are contingent upon how much information one has regarding a situation. The need to alleviate uncertainty becomes the stimulus for communication. To make a decision one must gather an appropriate amount of confirming or disconfirming information.

A third theory of uncertainty is problematic integration theory. Bradac (2001) described this theory as encapsulating the standard reasoning such that one would think about another: “He is probably dishonest’ (because I caught him lying twice). They also evaluate the more or less probable possibility: ‘A tendency to lie is a negative attribute’” (p. 460). People will assess the uncertainty of a person and gather additional information to alleviate that uncertainty. In Bradac’s description, one evaluates the ethos of an individual.

Uncertainty is a perception that one lacks sufficient information to make a proper prediction. Various situations lead to specific perceptions of uncertainty.
Critique

This section critiques uncertainty research as well as the rhetorical uses of uncertainty. Uncertainty research has commonalities: (1) its importance to communication, (2) how people alleviate uncertainty, and (3) the quantification of uncertainty. The last two commonalities create research questions. Insofar as uncertainty is an important aspect of human interaction and affects human decision making (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Cioffi-Revilla, 1998; Fiddle, 1980; Potthoff & Munger, 2005; Sorrentino & Roney, 2000), perhaps it is rhetorically beneficial in situations. Geer and Goorha (2003) proposed that much of the research addresses how uncertainty poses a stumbling block for good, or efficient, decision making. The majority of uncertainty research analyzes how people lower their perception of uncertainty. What if in certain situations it would benefit a rhetor to generate uncertainty? If rhetoric can generate uncertainty perhaps it constitutes an effective rhetorical strategy.

Bartels (1988) argued uncertainty has three effects: (1) voters do not support a candidate if they do not know anything about him; (2) voters prefer known quantities over unknown quantities; and (3) levels of information available to the public influence the voter’s evaluation. If uncertainty is something people avoid it would seem they would migrate to that which is certain. Avery and Zemsky (1998) found that uncertainty correlates with short-term herd behavior. Pfaffenberger (2000), for example, suggested that uncertainty is used as a tactic in the technology market. It seems reasonable that the rhetorical use of uncertainty creates a specific response by an audience. If a campaign could make an opponent appear unpredictable and their candidate predictable voters might align with certainty.
Analysis of uncertainty in communication and politics is not new. Research investigating political uncertainty examines how voters alleviate uncertainty. Much of that scholarship uses quantitative methods. Expanding the scholarship of uncertainty would expand our knowledge base. A rhetorical perspective, I argue, is called for.

In summary, much of U.S. politics is about voter decision-making. Uncertainty plays a role in voter decisions. The less a voter perceives they know about a candidate the less likely they will vote for that candidate (Vavreck, 2001). Uncertainty is lowered as one learns about a candidate’s values, beliefs, and actions. If a voter perceives he can make a positive prediction of a politician’s attitudes, beliefs, and actions he feels greater confidence in his voting decision. Therefore, it would benefit a campaign to generate uncertainty about an opposing candidate.

Rationale and Research Questions

Rhetorical use of Uncertainty

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 imbued Americans with fears, emotions, and various symbolic meanings. Terrorists violently established their political reality; it became a part of American consciousness and national discourse. Many symbols created a rallying cry to fight terrorism, a “Remember the Alamo!” for the twenty-first century. For example, images of Osama bin Laden or the ruins of the World Trade Center were symbols used quite often. The symbols of “9/11” could also mean an uncertain future. “The unprecedented terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001 caused massive casualties and damage and ushered in an era of great uncertainty” (Karolyi & Martell, 2005, p. 1). The average American citizen could not conceive of such an attack. After the attacks, “9/11” reminded the population of world instability. “Most
people saw the 9/11 tragedy as a horrible terrorist attack, and while economists saw it as that too, they also saw it as an economic shock” (Liesman, 2005, p. 77). The attacks affected politics as well. “The Bush Administration pledged war not only against al Qaeda, but also against global terrorism writ large and any state that dare support it” (Kitfield, 2005, p. 68).

The attacks reminded the U.S. of its dependency on a scarce resource-oil. “Today America is importing 60 percent of its oil—roughly one-fourth of this coming from the Persian Gulf, with Saudi Arabia providing 14.5 percent and Iraq about 8 percent. We were importing only 33 percent of our daily oil needs in 1973 when the Arab embargo sent our economy into a tailspin” (Mann, 2001, p. 55). Uncertainty generated by these symbols is powerful and persuasive. As stated, political reality is constructed through the use of symbols. Symbols were used to generate uncertainty in order to affect decision-making. Sorrentino and Roney (2000) argued that uncertainty is a major factor in decision-making. The uncertainty generated was used to manipulate voter decision making in a presidential election. Uncertainty is also found in financial markets and affects consumer decisions.

The effects of uncertainty can be seen in the U.S. financial markets and marketing strategies. Avery and Zemsky (1998) found a correlation between uncertainty and a short-term behavior referred to as “herd behavior” in financial markets. “Herding behavior is often said to occur when many people take the same action” (Graham, 1999, p. 237). Herding behavior has been linked to earning forecasts (Trueman, 1994), fads and customs (Bikhchandani, Hirschleifer, & Welch, 1992), and investment recommendations (Scharfstein & Stein, 1990). Avery and Zemsky (1998) found that with an atmosphere of
exaggerated uncertainty market investors tend to herd towards a specific investment due to perceived certainty. In the political market that herding behavior could be designed to steer the population to a specific candidate. Marketing tactics also use uncertainty to create specific results. Fear Uncertainty and Doubt (FUD) is a marketing strategy IBM and Microsoft use when faced with competition (Pfaffenberger, 2000). The FUD marketing strategy generates fear, uncertainty, and doubt in market segments to keep people from purchasing a competitor’s product or service. Pfaffenberge’s (2000) article, “The rhetoric of dread: Fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD) in information technology marketing,” explained:

FUD is a marketing technique that a…firm employs to blunt a competitor’s first-to-market advantage. Typically, a FUD campaign employs a variety of techniques, including warning to customers concerning the risks of moving to an unproven new product, a barrage of press releases designed to confuse customers concerning the merits of the new product… (p. 79).

Those forms of uncertainty are found in financial markets. In politics also, people make decisions that affect their lives. Uncertainty is likely as powerful in politics as it is in the financial markets. Uncertainty, therefore, may be a powerful rhetorical device.

Perhaps one of the most notorious uses of strategic uncertainty was the 1964 Lyndon Johnson political attack ad. The ad produced for the Johnson campaign “juxtaposed a child plucking the petals from a daisy with the explosion of a bomb as Lyndon Johnson extolled the value of loving one another” (Jamieson, 1992, pp. 54-55).
As the nuclear bomb exploded, Johnson's voiceover stated: "These are the stakes. To make the world in which all of God's children can live. Or go into the darkness. We must either love each other. Or we must die." The commercial ends with "Vote for President Johnson on November 3. The stakes are too high for you to stay home." (Jamieson, 1992, pp. 54-55). During the Cold War people were uncertain whether a war with the Soviet Union was likely. The Johnson campaign was able to use societal uncertainty for political purposes.

In the 1972 presidential campaign, President Richard Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew campaigned against Senators George McGovern and Thomas Eagleton. In that campaign, Thomas Eagleton created uncertainty that led to his withdrawal from the race. A news conference was held to discuss Eagleton's mental health issues (Eagleton had sought treatment for nervous exhaustion.) Senator Eagleton's mental health issues had created uncertainty amongst the population. After the revelation, news sources called for Eagleton's withdrawal from the campaign. The Eagleton Affair evolved to the point where the Democratic national chairperson wanted Eagleton to withdraw. The people of the U.S. and the Democratic Party had become uncertain about the mental health of Senator Eagleton. They could no longer "predict" his beliefs, attitudes, and actions. A decision was made to ease the uncertainty in the public's mind. Eagleton withdrew from the race. The uncertainty about Eagleton's mental health adversely affected Senator McGovern. "Portrayed first as stoutly supportive of Eagleton, the hero of New Politics, McGovern was soon labeled indecisive, wishy-washy" (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 53). The Eagleton Affair was a case of societal uncertainty evolving into political uncertainty. Initially, people were uncertain about Eagleton's mental health. The uncertainty about
mental health created uncertainty about his ability to represent the people. Societal uncertainty caused Eagleton to withdraw, which in turn developed uncertainty regarding McGovern. The Nixon campaign did not intentionally generate uncertainty regarding Eagleton, but it did benefit from it.

In the 1988 presidential election, vice President George Bush’s campaign used strategic uncertainty. The Bush campaign was able to link Dukakis’s stance on crime to a rape and murder. Uncertainty about and the fear of crime affects voter decisions (Jamieson, 1992). Candidates announce they are tough on crime to alleviate the uncertainty of crime. In one political advertisement the Bush campaign raised doubts about Dukakis being tough on crime. “The ad tied Michael Dukakis to a convicted murderer who had jumped furlough and gone on to rape a Maryland woman” (Jamieson, 1992, p. 17). The fear of crime was used to generate uncertainty about Governor Dukakis’s attitudes and actions about handling crime.

Strategic uncertainty has played a role in modern presidential elections. That role is no more apparent than in the 2004 Presidential election. The months preceding the 2004 election was a period of “dynamic uncertainty” (Geer & Goorha, 2003). Corporate scandals, the economic recession, and job loss were on the minds of the U.S. population (Newport, Saad, & Carroll, 2004). The war on terrorism, the war in Iraq, and the plethora of terrorist alerts created an atmosphere of uncertainty. No one knew what would happen next. No one possessed the information necessary to make an educated prediction. Because of those events, the Bush campaign was able to label the Democratic opponent, Senator John Kerry, as unpredictable. The Bush campaign generated enough uncertainty to make the citizens of the United States uncertain about Kerry. “Cheryl Utley, 43, of
Lowell, Mich., seems to be exactly the kind of voter Kerry is targeting this week. 'I have more of a sense of where he stands on things than Kerry,' she said” (Morin & Deane, 2004, p. A01). People believed they knew what Bush stood, for even if they did not agree with it. “In supposed contrast to Kerry, Bush presents himself as the immutable politician, a man of fixed, firm beliefs who sticks to them not because they are popular but because they are right” (Cohen, 2004, p. A19). Strategic uncertainty about Senator Kerry had influenced voter decisions to vote for Bush.

Uncertainty plays a role in voters' decisions. Low uncertainty about a candidate may influence a voter's favorable disposition. Uncertainty regarding a candidate affects voter choices (Vavreck, 2001); usually uncertainty about a candidate negatively affects voter decisions (Potthoff & Munger, 2005). Therefore, one would avoid voting for that individual. Because of uncertainty’s importance to politics, it generates a research question in light of the most recent presidential election:

RQ1: What rhetorical functions does strategic uncertainty serve in a presidential election?

Situation

A cliché about presidential campaigning suggests that the next campaign begins the day after one's inauguration. The 2004 election did not stray from this observation. “Within minutes after the inauguration of George W. Bush in 2001, the passion for taking his job as a result of running and winning the 2004 election beat wildly in the hearts of many Democrats” (Trent, 2005, p. 4). The Bush campaign strategy was established following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. “The Bush presidency changed, of
course, on September 11, 2001, in ways that defined the incumbent’s campaign for reelection” (Smith, 2005, p. 136). The terrorist attacks’ effects permeated every aspect of American society. The U.S. embarked on an invasion of Afghanistan, a worldwide war on terror, and eventually attacked Iraq. The American free market was jumpy and uncertain long after “9/11.” “The U.S. economy has been hit hard in the past few years by a number of unexpected developments, including the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, the corporate governance and accounting scandals of 2002” (United States Congress, 2004, p. 37). The citizens of the United States were told to resume everyday life. However, normal life was difficult to resume given terror alerts and the build up to war. “War causes uncertainty” (Liesman, 2005, p. 77). Moreover, the corporate scandals “contributed to a climate of uncertainty” (United States Congress, 2004, p. 37).

Strategic uncertainty does not always work because uncertainty is dynamic (Geer and Goorha, 2003). George H. W. Bush was a known “commodity” during the 1992 election. Bill Clinton, as challenger, ran on a platform of change. Apparently, Bill Clinton and change did not seem to constitute a risk to the voting population. Strategic uncertainty could work best when there is a climate of uncertainty. A climate of uncertainty can make people risk averse. Edelman (1988) theorized that people in a crisis-ridden world seek reassurance. An incumbent leader can be perceived as giving such reassurances. When a population becomes risk averse they can more easily be led to a desired outcome (Avery and Zemsky, 1998). Avery and Zemsky (1998) noted that the perception of multiple forms of uncertainty creates an atmosphere for short-term “herding behavior.” The 2004 election had a multitude of phenomena that generated uncertainty in the population.
The War on Terrorism

The war on terror began in 2001. War rhetoric defines enemies, what Ivie (1980) referred to as the us vs. them. War rhetoric first appeared in Bush's 2002 State of the Union address. Bush's address identified the "Axis of Evil" as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. The "Axis of Evil" harkens to both World War II and the cold war. Axis reminds the populace of the Axis Powers of World War II. The Evil in the Axis of Evil evokes memories of the Cold War and President Reagan's reference to the Soviet Union as the Evil Empire. After "9/11," and given the State of the Union address definition of the enemy, President Bush declared war on terrorism. Bush's rhetoric quickly transformed the attacks into a war on evil in a way that asserted his personal mastery of the situation, exclusivity of sources of information, embodiment of expertise, and his "compact with the people" (Smith, 2005, p. 136). President Bush's "expert information," "expertise," and "compact with the people" projected an ethos of certainty. During war, certainty impacts election outcomes. The war on terrorism became the major issue for the 2004 election cycle. "Bush has made his post-9/11 leadership in the war on terror a center piece of his reelection bid" (Kitfield, 2005, p. 65).

The war on terrorism transcends boundaries of uncertainty because it is mercurial. It lies within political uncertainty because it affects the politics of America. The war on terrorism affects economics because it bolsters the economy. "The heightened focus on security at home, together with the determined efforts against terrorism around the world, have required some types of government spending" (United States Congress, 2004, p. 37). Spending went into the military and security industries. War may increase productivity in certain sectors of the economy but in others it generates uncertainty. "War
creates uncertainty – a condition dreaded by businesses” (Liesman, 2005, p. 77). The war on terrorism affects social uncertainty, as people are not sure if there will be another attack, or when and where it will take place. Because of such uncertainty consumer confidence fell sharply in early 2003 (United States Congress, 2003). The war on terrorism in part affects environmental uncertainty, which in turn affects the economy. “One source of this uncertainty was the potential effect of the conflict on the capacity for producing and transporting in the Persian Gulf, and thus the future supply and price of oil” (United States Congress, 2004, p. 37).

Ironically, despite being rife with uncertainty, the term “war” can lower perceptions of uncertainty. The “war on terrorism,” for example, creates a perception of certainty. In a war there is a perception of good guys and bad guys (Ivie, 1980), there are nations with clear borders fighting, and more importantly there is an end. Having an end to a war lowers probabilities and possible outcomes. War rhetoric is about certainty, about instigating action. Ivie (1980) argued that in American history the justifications for war are boiled down to an argument of force vs. freedom, irrationality vs. rationality, and aggression vs. defense. “The usual strategy is to construct the image indirectly through contrasting references to the adversary’s coercive, irrational, and aggressive attempt to subjugate a freedom loving, rational, and pacific nation” (Ivie, 1980, p. 284). There is a clear duality in the war, light against dark. President Bush’s rhetoric was no different than previous presidents. War rhetoric appeared in his campaign rhetoric, too. “President Bush’s focus on ‘evil doers’ created an enthymeme of evil in which Americans opposed those who pursued acts defined by the president as evil” (Smith, 2005, p. 13). Rhetorical focus on the war on terrorism worked well with campaign rhetoric. Smith (2005)
identified strategies incumbent presidents use in an election: “The second approach is to argue that despite the incumbent’s efforts the nation faces terrible problems that can not be entrusted to others. This approach requires the careful use of alarmist rhetoric to heighten voters’ sense of imminent danger and to underscore their need for their incumbent president in such troubled times” (p. 133). This strategy worked well since a majority of likely voters perceived President Bush as a decisive leader (Kenski & Kenski, 2005; Newport et al., 2004). Bush could use another strategy identified by Smith (2005). Incumbents can “polarize the nation around an issue in which the incumbent president has obvious support” (2005, p. 134). Bush asserted that he was the only candidate able to handle national issues (Smith, 2005). Bush rhetorically cast himself as steadfast in an atmosphere of uncertainty. The rhetoric of war creates a perception of certainty regarding leadership. However, the war on terror did not conform to the old concepts of war between nation states. The name, war on terror, reveals the ambiguities that lie within war. Terror is a tool used by people. Governments in the past attempted to manage terror, not wage war upon it.

In an attempt to manage terror, the government created the Terror Alert System. The terror alert system informs the population if a terrorist attack is imminent and what to expect from the government. This is very important because the population requires adequate information to alleviate uncertainty. By contrast, they cannot anticipate the actions of terrorists. Eventually a multi-colored, multi-leveled terror alert system was designed. Each color and each level denotes a threat level and specific information regarding government responses.
Green, or low condition, signifies the lowest risk of terrorist attack. Blue, or guarded condition, signifies a general risk of terrorist attack. Yellow, or elevated condition, indicates a significant risk of terrorist attack. Orange, or high condition, indicates a high risk of terrorist attack. Red, or severe condition, indicates the highest state of alert. (NewsMax.com, 2002, n.p.).

At specific levels of alert, U.S. citizens are provided with information. Terror alerts alleviate minor uncertainty. Reminders of the threat levels provides an alleviation of some uncertainty. Sorrentino and Roney (2000) suggested that ritual and routine help lessen uncertainty (p. vii). The ritual and routine of terror alerts help people to cope with the uncertainty of a terrorist attack. However, the alerts do not communicate what terrorists will do. Instead, alerts can create more uncertainty by failing to inform regarding the who, what, where, when, and how of terrorism. Designed to manage the uncertainty of terror attacks, the terror alert system does not sufficiently answer questions so as to lower uncertainty.

Terror alerts affect political certainty. The ritual and routine of the alerts create a perception of government protection. The ethos of the government helps foster a perception of protection. That, in part, played to the perception of President Bush as steadfast and caretaker. Fear makes people look to their leader, especially during wartime.
War in Iraq

Soon after the 2001 attacks, the United States invaded Afghanistan. In 2002, talk of invading Iraq began to circulate in the national discourse. "By August of 2002 the President’s job approval ratings and popularity were still sky-high, and the debate over whether or not to invade Iraq was in full swing" (Cameron, 2005, p. 60). There was a fear of terrorism financed and armed by Saddam Hussein. "On September 2002 Bush cited a report by the international Atomic Energy Agency that, he said, proved that the Iraqis were on the brink of developing nuclear weapons" (Rampton & Stauber, 2003, p. 86). Saddam’s army of unmanned aircraft would deliver the attack. Bush communicated messages designed for specific segments of the American population. Rhetoric was designed to appeal to people who experienced the Cold War. The Cold War created an atmosphere of uncertainty over whether or not there would be a nuclear war.

The Bush Administration referred to the Cold War when Condoleezza Rice stated, on CNN, that the Bush administration did not "want the smoking gun to be in the form of a mushroom cloud" (CNN, 2002, September 8). The fear of a mushroom cloud called up memories of the Cold War. No one was certain if terrorists had access to weapons of mass destruction. "Of all the Bush administration’s arguments in support of war with Iraq, the strongest was its claim that Iraq possessed or might acquire weapons of mass destruction" (Rampton & Stauber, 2003, p. 80). Due to fears of Saddam Hussein and/or terrorists possessing weapons of mass destruction, President Bush sought and gained special authority. The Congress gave President Bush authorization to use the U.S. military. Assured that American troops would be greeted as liberators, war was declared
on Iraq March 19, 2003. It did not take long for Baghdad and all of Iraq to fall to coalition forces.

On May 1, 2003, President Bush landed a Navy jet on the aircraft carrier the *USS Abraham Lincoln*. He delivered a speech in front of a banner that announced “Mission Accomplished.” Shortly thereafter, the situation in Iraq began to unravel. “This is the mess we find ourselves in 6 months after the president pranced about in a flight suit on the deck of the *USS Abraham Lincoln*. American-led coalition forces sustained 122 combat deaths before May 1 – the day Bush declared major combat operations over – but over 3000 deaths since then” (Tucker, 2003, p. A13). The perception of the U.S. and coalition forces was not one of liberators. “A leaked CIA report contend[ed] that the majority of the Iraqis now view U.S. soldiers as occupiers rather than liberators” (Tucker, 2003, p. A13). Outside forces augmented the Iraqi insurgency. Jihadists from Muslim countries flowed into the Iraqi war zone. “Rumsfeld also said money and people channeled from Iran were fuelling the insurgency in Iraq” (Coorey, 2004, p. 23). The Iraqi insurgency was no longer made up of Iraqi citizens; it became an international insurgency. The U.S. government and citizenry could no longer properly predict who was responsible for the mayhem in Iraq.

The war in Iraq had a dramatic effect on the economy. “Uncertainty increased during the period leading up to the war in Iraq” (United States Congress, 2004. p. 37). The future prospects of oil production and transportation became uncertain (United States Congress, 2004, p. 37). Consumers reacted to uncertainty, which affected the consumer confidence. “Consumer confidence fell sharply in early 2003, raising concerns that the consumer demand that has supported the economy over the previous could of years

Americans and business feared Iraq had weapons of mass destruction...that it would use to retaliate against America for invading the country. The fear of another terrorist attack in the United States affected citizens. Faced with all these uncertainties, many businesses decided to determine the impact of the shock before hiring workers, building factories, or starting new business ventures. Without these types of economic decisions, the economy simply does not grow, or grows slowly (Liesman, 2005, p. 77).

The war in Iraq had not only affected economic uncertainty but social uncertainty as well. The United States Institute of Peace (2003) generated a report on global terrorism after the Iraq war. It reported that "The U.S.-led coalition's defeat of Saddam Hussein rid the Middle East of a brutal regime and eliminated a potential source of state-sponsored terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, but continuing instability in Iraq may make the country a breeding ground for anti-U.S. terrorism" (p.1). The fact that the war in Iraq was not stabilizing fed an atmosphere of uncertainty. The fear of a terrorist attack added to the sense of uncertainty. Uncertainty is a weapon in the hands of terrorists because it is that uncertainty of who, what, where, when, and how that breeds much of the fear. Daniel Benjamin (2003) in the report went on to state, "The greatest windfall for Bin Laden's forces comes in the realm of propaganda, not a small issue for a movement that views establishing itself as the undisputed champion of Islam as a primary goal. By occupying
Iraq, the United States has given al Qaeda a major opportunity to drive home its argument that the ‘leader of world infidelity’ seeks to destroy Islam and subjugate its believers” (p. 4).

President Bush was able to project himself as the antidote to the climate of uncertainty. "According to Bush, under his leadership the nation was safer from the external threats posed by terrorists and safer from the internal threats to the economy and the social order posed by Democrats" (Stuckey, 2005, p. 156).

The Spread of Global Uncertainty

By February 2004 it became clear that Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the “father of the Pakistan nuclear bomb” was involved with a nuclear black market. He admitted to transferring “sensitive nuclear technology to Libya, Iran, and North Korea” (Albright & Hinderstein, 2004). Nuclear secrets were sold to countries with a history of anti-Americanism. Those anti-American countries were getting nuclear secrets from a supposed “ally” of the United States in the war on terror. With Pakistan as an ally, it further complicated international matters. “Nearly a year after Dr. Khan's arrest, secrets of his nuclear black market continue to uncoil, revealing a vast global enterprise. But the inquiry has been hampered by discord between the Bush administration and the nuclear watchdog, and by Washington's concern that if it pushes too hard for access to Dr. Khan, a national hero in Pakistan, it could destabilize an ally” (Broad & Sanger, 2004, n.p.). The pursuit of Dr. Kahn would create even more uncertainty. Despite trying to fight a war on terrorism to stabilize the world it appeared that the world was becoming increasingly unstable. World instability added to atmosphere of the 2004 Presidential election.
The United States Economy

According to Trent (2005), in 2004 "the country was trying to recover from the surprise and devastation of 9/11, and the issues on peoples’ minds were global issues – Iraq, al Qaeda, homeland security, the doctrine of preemptive war, questions about WMD and the future of America’s allies" (p. 23). Though national security was a major issue in the 2004 election, the economy was an important issue too. Newport et al. (2004) reported that Gallup found the economy was a very important issue in battleground states. After the events of September 11, 2001 and corporate scandals, the American economy went through an adjustment. "The U.S. economy made notable progress in 2003. The recovery was still tenuous, as continued fallout from powerful contractionary forces- the capital overhang, corporate scandals, and uncertainty about the future economic and geopolitical conditions...still weighed against the stimulus from expansionary monetary policy and the Administration’s 2001 tax cut and 2002 fiscal package" (United States Congress, 2004, p. 88). The economy was adjusting to the ever-expanding scope of globalization. Trent (2005) stated that not only was the American populace thinking globally but considered "as well as economic issues- the jobless recovery, federal budget deficits, tax policy and the loss of employment to overseas competitors" (p. 23). There was a sense of uncertainty about national and economic security.

Prior to the 2004 election season corporate scandals, like Enron and WorldCom, affected the market negatively. Liesman (2005) argued that scandal can cause significant damage to the American economy as Americans become reluctant to invest in the stock market. The government attempted to alleviate investor uncertainty by making CEOs sign forms attesting to the reliability of their reports. September 11, 2001, however, affected
society and the economy like nothing else before. “Most people saw the 9/11 tragedy as a horrible terrorist attack, and while economists saw it as that too, they also saw it as an economic shock” (Liesman, 2005, p. 77). Another area of importance to the 2004 election was job loss due to outsourcing.

Globalization is an umbrella term for economic interaction between nation states. Though globalization was not a main issue in the 2004 election, some of the effects of globalization were outsourcing and joblessness. “Outsourcing is when a company relocates a whole process, a piece of a process, a function, or a discrete piece of work outside of its own corporate boundaries” (ManufacturingNews.com, 2004).

The loss of jobs to cheaper markets has been an ongoing issue for the American public. In 2004 it was a plank on both President Bush’s and Senator Kerry’s party platform. President Bush needed to run on a record of job creation while Kerry needed to run on the jobless economic recovery. “Central to the 2004 presidential campaign will be the issue of job creation – or lack thereof over the last four years” (Liesman, 2005, p. 74). The outsourcing of jobs had created an atmosphere of economic uncertainty with “2 million jobs…lost” (Liesman, 2005, p. 74). While job loss was an issue in the economy so too was the economics of scarcity.

Environmental Uncertainty

Resource scarcity generates uncertainty (Boyd & Caporale, 1998). Its scarcity drives up prices, which affects consumers, which affects politics. Scarcity of resources, like oil, tends to create material inequalities and intensify internal and international conflict (Gurr, 1985). Under the guise of energy independence, uncertainty about oil futures became an issue in the 2004 election. Though both candidates espoused a need for
energy independence (VandeHei, 2004, p. A01) they approached that need in different ways. Kerry attacked the Bush administration saying Bush’s plan would benefit the wealthy. He also promised America that they would be independent of foreign oil in ten years, but did not provide a plan. The Bush-Cheney campaign launched a counter-offensive with a commercial that suggested Kerry voted to increase the gas tax by fifty cents. After the counter attack Kerry began to backpedal on his statements (Collier, 2004, p. A1). Kerry’s backpedaling added to uncertainty. Despite attacking the Bush administration Kerry did not provide a plan for energy independence. Consequently, people could not predict Kerry’s actions as a president dealing with oil scarcity. Kerry’s backpedaling created uncertainty about his values and beliefs. He did not hold strong on his values or beliefs in the perception of the voters.

Social Uncertainty

One of the major social issues in the 2004 election was same sex marriage. The Bush-Cheney campaign used the same sex marriage issue as a cultural weapon to divide people (Kennedy, 2004, p. B5). By making same sex marriage an issue the Bush-Cheney campaign made each candidate take a stand. The issue worked well in establishing certainty with respect to Bush and Cheney, and uncertainty regarding Kerry. Bush proclaimed a need for an amendment to the Constitution to ban same sex marriage. President Bush took a clear stand on the subject, thus appealing to his conservative base and two thirds of the population (Roth & Reinert, 2004, p. 1). As the opponent, Kerry was thrust into an awkward rhetorical dilemma. With a portion of his base either pro-same sex marriage (or at least tolerant of it) he had to appeal to that audience while simultaneously appealing to those two thirds of the population who did not. That division
in the Kerry audience created a problem for the Senator. Kerry had to strike a balance between his base and the larger population.

This created a situation where Kerry had to nuance the subject without suppressing his base vote or alienating the larger vote. “Kerry's stance on gay marriage is not a secret; he has said he opposes it, but also opposes a constitutional ban” (Milligan, 2004, p. A1). With the atmosphere of uncertainty and Kerry’s perceived “flip-flops” his nuanced approach created uncertainty. “Independent pollster John Zogby point[ed] to a recent focus group in St. Paul, Minn., in which two black men mentioned gay marriage over and over as their reason for hesitating to support Kerry. It's not even that they believed Kerry supports gay marriage, which he does not. Kerry’s problem, said Mr. Zogby, is that he's from Massachusetts, famous for having legalized gay marriage last year, and that his opposition to gay marriage is less than absolute” (Feldmann, 2004, October, p. 02). By contrast, President Bush’s stance became clearer and more certain. “At every opportunity, Bush restate[d] his opposition to gay marriage, a position strongly supported in the polls” (Feldmann, 2004, October, p. 02). With voters questioning Kerry’s position, uncertainty developed. Voters opposing same sex marriage could not predict Kerry’s values and his actions. On the other side, Bush was clear with respect to his beliefs.

Social issues like abortion and gun rights were factors in the 2004 election. “They are the hot-button topics that many Americans avoid in polite company - stem-cell research, gay marriage, abortion, and gun rights. And they are lurking on the edge of the 2004 presidential campaign, their small but vocal constituencies poised to make the difference in a down-to-the-wire election” (Feldmann, 2004, October, p. 02). However,
these were issues in prior elections. Those issues tend to fall in line with party consensus, which becomes a certainty. A Republican candidate affirms belief in pro-life, pro-gun, anti-stem cell research issues. A Democratic candidate affirms belief in pro-choice, pro-gun control, and pro-stem cell research. These issues become less of a questionable factor because of the public’s perception of certainty.

Political Uncertainty

The 2004 election was not just a referendum on President Bush, which re-elections often are. It was also about the Democratic Party rebuilding its ethos. The Democratic Party had to create a perception there was certainty in a Democratic president. In order to bolster party ethos Senator John Kerry was selected as their presidential candidate. The defining issue, as defined by the Bush administration and Bush-Cheney campaign, was war -- terrorism, and Iraq, and to a lesser degree Afghanistan. By selecting a “war hero” as its nominee, Democrats believed they had a viable candidate (Holloway, 2005, p. 49). As pointed out by speeches during the national party convention, Senator Kerry chose to serve in Vietnam. His service positioned him as a perfect candidate “to unseat a war president.” Since “9/11,” the Republican Party and Bush administration had been creating the perception of President Bush as a war president. This was important to the campaign because a President’s ethos is tied to the nation’s welfare.

The Bush administration, with the help of the Republican-controlled congress was able to create the perception that President Bush had more power than he actually wielded. A climate of uncertainty permeated the United States. Political reality seemed uncertain. Except for President Bush, people felt like they knew where he stood on the
issues (McKinnon, 2006). Early on in the war on terrorism, President Bush made his worldview apparent when he uttered, “You are either with us or against us.” Suggesting there were but two worldviews reduced alternate realities. A single worldview was formed. That worldview meshed well with war rhetoric’s use of us vs. them, good vs. bad. Suggesting that the war on terror was more complex would raise probabilities, and raising probabilities raises uncertainty.

A sense of certainty in an uncertain world became a major factor in the 2004 presidential election. The Bush-Cheney Campaign had a plan to use uncertainty to corrupt the ethos of the Democratic nominee, Senator John Kerry. Matthew Dowd (2006) chief campaign strategist for the Bush-Cheney 2004 campaign, in the book *Electing the President 2004: The insider’s view*, stated “We wanted to put John Kerry in the position where if he said something about us, people would question it. People would say ‘Wait a second, I don’t know if I can believe that, I don’t know if that’s true. This is a guy who has a tendency to flip-flop’” (p. 25). Importantly, is that the strategy was not to make people say, “I don’t believe a word he says.” Instead, it was to make them “uncertain” about whether or not they could believe Senator Kerry.

*The 2004 Presidential Election*

Trent and Friedenberg (2004) identified four stages of the political campaign process: (1) Surfacing, interest is shown and images are established; (2) primaries - party members select who will be the candidate; (3) nominating conventions - parties make official presidential and vice presidential nominations; (4) the general election - candidates resume campaigning (pp. 21-63).

An incumbent president does not participate in the first two stages, surfacing and primaries. However, during that time an incumbent president defines his campaign. Smith (2005) argued that the incumbent has two choices: should voters support the incumbent because conditions are good, or because conditions are bad? (p. 133). One of those suggests, “The nation is doing so well that we cannot afford to change leaders” (Smith, 2005, p. 133). The other “is to argue that despite the incumbent’s efforts, the nation faces terrible problems that cannot be entrusted to others. This approach requires the careful use of alarmist rhetoric to heighten voters’ sense of imminent danger and to underscore their need for their incumbent president in such troubled times” (Smith, 2005, p. 133). Clearly, because of the war on terror uncertainties were more prevalent, making it easier for President Bush to argue, “the nation faces terrible problems that cannot be entrusted to others” (Smith, 2005). The Bush campaign strategy was set early on. “The Bush presidency changed, of course, on September 11, 2001, in ways that defined the incumbent’s campaign for reelection” (Smith, 2005, pp. 135 – 136). While the incumbent worked on his strategy, there was the race for the Democratic nomination.

*Surfacing.* An incumbent president, of course, does not need participate in name recognition rhetoric. “During the surfacing stage the president has little need to establish name recognition…whereas the challengers must start from scratch” (Smith, 2005, p.
Trent (2005) identified the first stage, surfacing, as the “rhetorical transactions of surfacing – organizing in early primary states, building their campaign staff, and fund raising (Trent, 2005, p. 11). Examining the surfacing stage for the challengers allows an understanding of the political climate.

Not long after the election of George W. Bush the campaign for the next election began. Due to the attacks on “9/11” politicians rallied around the president. Around February or March of 2002, contenders began to resurface: “Thus after a five-to-six-month hiatus the 2004 surfacing stage was once again in full swing” (Trent, 2005, p.7).

Each contender for the Democratic nomination created an exploratory committee. Surfacing relies on a candidate’s rhetorical skills to build support. Candidates’ messages are communicated, responded to, and refined. Smith (2005) stated that the surfacing stage along with the primary stage “attracts and alienates supporters and refines arguments, themes, and personalities” (p. 135). Surfacing not only attracts, alienates, and refines, but winnows candidates. First, to drop out was Senator Graham: “Long before any votes would be cast the senator apparently decided that the presidential waters needed no more testing and officially dropped out of the race” (Trent, 2005, p. 10). The other contender to leave the race was Senator Braun. Senator Braun entered with the announcement of the formation of an exploratory team in February 2003 and dropped out of the race January 2044. Because of the emergence of Senator Kerry as the front runner this dissertation will focus on the primary stage.

Primaries. Primaries are designed to reduce uncertainty regarding contenders. On January 19, 2004, the Iowa Caucus began. The caucus signaled the end of surfacing and the beginning of the primaries. Only voter-designated nominees head to convention.
Primaries set the agenda for the party in the nominating convention stage. “Primaries define issues, identify groups, and test the fabric of the individual candidates” (Denton & Woodward, 1985, p. 77). Officially, the primaries run from January until June. Usually by then, a nominee has been determined. Going into the 2004 primaries Vermont Governor Howard Dean led the Democratic hopefuls. The Dean campaign had raised $14.8 million in campaign funds. Along with a large war chest, the Dean campaign received considerable media attention. While Lieberman and Kerry were using centrist rhetoric, Dean appealed to the liberal base of the Democratic Party. “Vermont governor Howard Dean and advisor Joe Trippi took a different tack. Their strategy was to energize and activate the politically alienated and disaffected to take the Democratic Party back toward its liberal base” (Smith, 2005, p. 138). The Dean campaign also “energized” the base. Using the internet the Dean Campaign was able to work from the ground up. “Soon we had people volunteering to work on the ground in their own communities, and by spring, a campaign that had no national structure had volunteers stepping up in all fifty states – more of them attracted not by television, the old flaccid warhorse of political campaigns – but via the sleep hungry Internet” (Trippi, 2004, p. 88). Early on, Dean’s campaign faltered and lost momentum. Senator Kerry won the majority of the primaries. The Bush-Cheney campaign identified Kerry as the frontrunner and began to generate uncertainty about him.

*The flip-flop.* Elder and Cobb (1983) gave three reasons why a symbol is created. First, there is a human need for psychic economy; second, the need for efficient communication; and finally, to distinguish candidates and establish social identities (pp. 31-32). Flip-flop became a symbol of uncertainty about Kerry. Elder and Cobb (1983)
suggested the first factor of a symbol is psychic economy. Humans need to summarize, capsulize, and index knowledge and experiences. The term flip-flopper, describing one who flip-flops, summarized Kerry's stand on the issues and encapsulated his twenty years in the Senate. It indexed "knowledge" and "experiences" about Kerry. The flip-flop label worked well in a presidential race between an incumbent and the challenger. As the challenger, Kerry was an unknown. "Some Democratic strategists worr[ied] that Mr. Kerry is still an unfamiliar figure to many voters, and that the early attacks show[ed] just how vulnerable he is to being defined by the Republicans as indecisive or politically expedient" (Halbfinger, 2004, p. 1). To get a head-start the Bush administration needed to define Senator Kerry. By rhetorically defining him with the flip-flop symbol, the Bush-Cheney campaign created an accessible perception of the unfamiliar Kerry. "New symbols are therefore likely to be created when people find themselves in novel situations or confronted with unfamiliar circumstance" (Elder & Cobb, 1983, p. 31).

Kerry was an unknown quantity in an uncertain situation. By labeling Kerry a "flip-flopper" the Bush-Cheney campaign were able to affect the perception of voters. People knew he changed his opinion often. The label also attaches uncertainty to Kerry. "Bush mocked Kerry - and at the same time tried to paint the Democrat as an uncertain leader who's wrong for the post-9/11 era" (Blomquist, 2004, p. 8). Flip-flopper characterizes Kerry's traits as an uncertain individual who changes his values at will and who may not have the publics' best intentions. The symbol flip-flop became shorthand a means by which people evaluated Kerry's character.

The second impetus for symbol creation as identified by Elder and Cobb (1983) is efficient communication. Flip-flop provided a common reference point for voters. Flip-
flopper summarized and condensed Kerry’s twenty years of service in the Senate, and was able to summarize strategic uncertainty into one symbol. Republicans had only to call him a flip-flopper. Rhetorical arguments were unnecessary. The flip-flop symbol was adopted by the media and used to summarize Kerry’s experiences.

Elder and Cobb (1983) stated that a symbol is created to distinguish between people by establishing or affirming social identities. Flip-flop indicated differences between President Bush and Senator Kerry. The term flip-flop helped foster social identities with Bush supporters. “As Kerry made his case to voters that he is better suited than George W. Bush to lead the nation, he was bedeviled by accusations that he lacks a clear vision, that he drowns his positions in nuance, and that he frequently contradicts himself. On the campaign trail, protesters chide[d] him by applauding with flip-flop sandals” (Boston Globe, 2004, p. A1). In the Republican convention people sang chants of flip-flop when someone mentioned Kerry’s name. The use of the sandals or the term flip-flop signaled to the outside world one’s support for President Bush.

The concept of “flip-flop” as a rhetorical symbol had weight in the 2004 primaries. Therefore, it is important to identify its use throughout the election.

January to March, 2004

After Howard Dean lost his lead, it had become apparent to the Bush-Cheney campaign that Kerry was going to win the primaries. “Sen. John Kerry won only a fraction of the 2,162 delegates he need[ed] to take the Democratic presidential nomination, but Republicans had placed him in their sights as the party's most likely opponent in November” (Feldmann. January, 30, p. 01). Entering the election as a relatively unknown challenger enabled the Bush-Cheney campaign to redefine Kerry.
They were intent on defining him as a liberal. "On a basic level, just about any of the Democratic contenders would face the same story line from the Republicans: that the nominee was a liberal, out of touch with the American mainstream" (Feldmann. January, 30, p. 01). Instead of defining Kerry as a liberal early on, Republican Strategist Arnold Steinberg suggested that the GOP label Kerry a man of inconsistency. ""Probably the best [Republican] argument against Kerry would seek to depict him as a man of contradiction and flip flops, who is all things to all people, who is really mixed up on foreign policy and defense, [and] appears to be a grand statesman and strategist, when in fact his views go whichever way the wind blows"" (Feldmann. January, 30, p. 01). Clearly, this was not a new idea for the Bush-Cheney campaign.

Preparations for that moment had been underway for many months, part of a carefully designed Republican effort coming out of the Democratic primaries to pounce on contradictions in Senator John F. Kerry's message. And the strategy dates back nearly a decade to the 1996 Senate race against former Massachusetts Governor William Weld, when strategists now advising Bush first began studying Kerry's weaknesses and honed in on fickleness as a potentially devastating line of attack (Kornblut, 2004, September, p. A1).

Though it may have been old, it was revived because it worked well with the overall strategy of generating uncertainty. It was a term that was easily adopted and reminded voters that Kerry was uncertain as a candidate and leader, an individual who changed his
values for political gain. The media and public eventually embraced the term. By
convention time “flip-flopping” had become Kerry’s defining character fault.

The term flip-flop began as a Republican strategy to interject a specific political
impression about Senator Kerry. “Campaign propaganda aims at mediating two closely
related overlapping fantasies. First propaganda constructs fantasies about the candidate,
his qualities, qualifications, program, and destiny. Second, propaganda mediates realities
about the nature of the world, the array of forces, dangers, threats and enemies that must
be confronted and vanquished. Linking the two fantasies is essential for the “destiny of
the candidate becomes the destiny of the political world” (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p.
63). The Bush-Cheney reality relied on President Bush maintaining consistency. “Steady
meant steady convictions or principles, which we knew people believed about the
president. We wanted to articulate the idea that, even if you didn’t like the guy you knew
where he stood, you knew what he believed, you knew where he was headed”
(McKinnon, 2006, p. 40). In other words you could predict his values, his beliefs, and his
actions. The Bush-Cheney campaign needed to reinforce Bush’s ethos. The Bush-Cheney
campaign also needed to reinforce the publics’ perception of an uncertain world
populated with terrorists. Terrorists, Bush argued, needed to be brought to justice.
Republicans maintained that in an uncertain world change was risky. In particular,
Senator Kerry was a great risk because he was unpredictable. The “flip-flop” symbol
communicated that uncertainty. A voter cannot predict a person who changes values,
beliefs, and actions mid-stream.

Strategic uncertainty thrives in the media. Nimmo and Combs (1983) argued that
the news media builds a black and white narrative. Reporters look for ways to simplify a
story and to give an audience short-hand access to information. Symbols simplify complex situations. “They are rather, the only means by which groups not in a position to analyze a complex situation rationally may adjust themselves to it, through stereotypization, over simplification, and reassurance” (Edelman, 1967, p. 40). “Flip-flop” simplified a complex Senate career. Reassurance was found in the symbol of a steadfast, resolute, certain leader juxtaposed to a “flip-flopper.” Edelman (1988) argued that in times of crisis and complexity people look to a leader. In February of 2004 the Republican Party began to argue that Kerry “flip-flops.” “We can begin to focus on the Kerry record,” said Wisconsin Republican Party Chairman Rick Graber, who accused the Massachusetts senator of “flip-flop hypocrisy” on Iraq, national security and improving public schools” (Walters, 2004, p. 01A). Republicans began to use Kerry’s record to legitimate the symbol “flip-flop.”

U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Janesville) listed what he said was another example of a Kerry flip-flop. Ryan said the Democrat was one of 14 senators to vote against a Senate bill to give states authority to legalize or prohibit gay marriages. By saying he supports civil unions but believes marriage should be between a man and a woman, Kerry is “trying to have it both ways on that issue,” Ryan said.

(Walters, 2004, p. 01A)

Later in February, President Bush generated uncertainty about Senator Kerry, but did not use the term flip-flop. Instead the term was used by reporters to describe the president’s attack on Kerry’s inconsistencies. “President Bush lampooned Sen. John Kerry for policy
flip-flops and said if America elects a hesitant leader in the terror war, ‘the world will drift toward tragedy’” (Blomquist, 2004, p. 8). Blomquist referred to the president’s accusations of “flip-flopping” towards Senator Kerry. “The other party’s nomination battle is still playing out. The candidates are an interesting group with diverse opinions - for tax cuts and against them, for NAFTA and against NAFTA, for the Patriot Act and against the Patriot Act, in favor of the liberation of Iraq and opposed to it. ‘And that's just one senator from Massachusetts,’ Bush said, getting a roaring response from the Republican crowd” (Blomquist, 2004, p. 8). The term flip-flop was supported with examples. Blomquist used it to refer to Bush’s joke about Kerry’s change of stance on issues. In the speech, Bush used strategic uncertainty by casting himself as steady and Kerry as uncertain. “‘So far all we hear is a lot of old bitterness and partisan anger’ from them. Bush mocked Kerry - and at the same time tried to paint the Democrat as an uncertain leader who's wrong for the post-9/11 era” (Blomquist, 2004, p. 8). The label flip-flop was gaining recognition as a symbol that characterized Senator Kerry.

The term flip-flop signaled Kerry’s change on issues. Those “flip-flops” had become news. No longer was it just Republicans who used flip-flop. Reporters, too, reported Kerry’s inconsistencies. “When Senator John Kerry was speaking to Jewish leaders a few days ago, he said Israel's construction of a barrier between it and Palestinian territories was a legitimate act of self-defense. But in October, he told an Arab-American group that it was ‘provocative and counterproductive’ and a ‘barrier to peace’” (Halbfinger, 2004, March, p. 1). Reports of flip-flops on social issues also emerged. “On Feb. 27, Kerry quietly told a group of unhappy gay donors that he would work to confer full federal benefits, including Social Security survivor benefits, the right to file taxes
jointly, and more than a thousand others, on gay couples joined by any state-sanctioned union -- which would of course include marriage. So while wishing to forbid gay marriage in his own state, he is promising to reward it in others” (Williams, 2004, p. B07). The Republican Party no longer had to load the symbol flip-flop with examples. Reporters were doing the work for them. “Wearing sandals would hardly do John Kerry's presidential campaign much good, and, at 60, he is long past the days when a backward handspring is something he could sensibly contemplate. He is, however, proving to be a master of the ‘complete change of opinion’. The Republicans are noting his flip-flopping with glee” (McElroy, 2004, p. 21).

The symbol flip-flop caught fire when reporters started to report them. It then chained out (Bormann, 1972) to opinion pieces. “And I've labored to turn my eyes from his career-long opportunism, the knowledge that Bay State political junkies trade their favorite Kerry flip-flops like baseball cards” (Williams, 2004, p. B07). The knowledge of his flip-flops had suddenly become an issue with conservative journalists. “I've tried, really I have. As a charter member of the ABB Society -- Anybody But Bush --...It was especially difficult, but I worked to achieve a kind of amnesia about Kerry's incoherent and changing explanation of his position -- no, his positions -- concerning the crucial issue of Bush's war in Iraq” (Williams, 2004, p. B07). Not only did Kerry flip-flop but also those flip-flops made him unelectable in the eyes of someone who did not want to reelect Bush.

The flip-flop term became a part of the 2004 political lexicon. As a rhetorical device, it was used to target specific audiences. “A search of the Bush campaign website turns up no references to a ‘Massachusetts liberal’ at all, yet its top headlines yesterday
included a statement by Senator Norm Coleman, Republican of Minnesota, accusing Kerry of ‘Flip-flops on Israel’” (Kornblut, 2004, March, p. A1). Kerry’s flip-flops could affect a specific audience’s area of interest. Iraq was a strong issue with the Bush-Cheney, campaign making it important to cast Kerry as uncertain with respect to it. “Vice President Dick Cheney ripped into Democratic nominee John Kerry as a weak waffler with poor judgment who'd have left Saddam Hussein in power, and insulted Great Britain… Cheney contended that ‘the senator from Massachusetts has given us ample doubts about his judgment and the attitude he brings to bear on vital issues of national security’” (Orin, 2004, p. 7).

The label flip-flop had been given life by the Republican campaign then used for efficient communication to distinguish the candidates by the press and citizenry. Flip-flop was evolving as a symbol of strategic uncertainty; it was also used to establish social identities.

April to May, 2004

The primaries ran from January to May. By late March and early April it had become clear that John Kerry was going to receive the Democratic nomination. The term flip-flop had been successfully interjected into the national dialogue. Strategic uncertainty soon surfaced in Republican attack ads. “In a blitz of ads and speeches, the Bush campaign claims that John Kerry has flip-flopped on several issues” (Shepard, 2004, April, p. A4). Republican attack ads affected likely voters’ perception of Kerry. “A month-long blitz of Republican campaign ads defining his Democratic challenger as someone who flip-flops on issues and increases taxes appears to have had a greater political effect. A Gallup poll this week shows that Senator John Kerry has lost a 52-44
lead he had three weeks ago, just after he secured the Democratic nomination, and now trails Mr. Bush 51-47 among likely voters” (O'Clery, 2004, April, p. 15). Flip-flop had become a potent symbol of strategic uncertainty. It was soon to receive a powerful boost.

March 16, 2004, Kerry visited West Virginia to speak to a veterans group. Kerry, when questioned about a vote on an $87 billion supplemental bill, remarked: "I voted for the $87 billion before I voted against it" (Gibbs, 2004, p 2). That statement helped cement the legitimacy of the flip-flop label.

Whereas the flip-flop charge originally attacked Kerry's consistency on political policies, the term now attacked Kerry's good will and character. "In the heat of a campaign, the flip-flop charge can be devastating as part of a larger theme: that a candidate is changing positions for political expediency and therefore cannot be trusted. That is the message Bush sent to voters, beginning with a speech in which he offered a wry critique of the Democratic presidential field as Kerry emerged the favorite” (Shepard, 2004, April, p. A4). Flip-flop had additional rhetorical implications. It now suggested that Kerry lacked steady values.

The whole concept of 'character' is an important one to American voters,” said John Zogby, an independent pollster. “They want to know that their president is principled, grounded and has leadership skills.” He added: “It is one thing for a candidate to have grown or changed his or her mind earlier in a career...But for a candidate to change on issues in the heat of a campaign denotes the

Strategic uncertainty had affected Kerry; he contradicted himself. It even generated questions about his personal life. “The latest headline maker: John Kerry flip-flops on whether he owns an SUV. He says he doesn't own one, but then has to admit that his wife has a Chevrolet Suburban” (Sciacca, 2004, p. 012). When Kerry was accused of flip-flopping regarding his car, the symbol had saturated the political landscape. Details affect a candidate’s ethos. If he is taking a pro-environmentalist stance and misrepresents ownership of an SUV, his good will and character will likely be questioned. Reporters “pointed to his response two weeks ago when reporters asked him if he owns an SUV, while also advocating higher automobile fuel economy standards. He said his ‘family has it. I don't have it,’ a reference to the Chevrolet Suburban his wife drives at their home in Ketchum, Idaho” (Xiong et al., 2004, p. 12A). Strategic uncertainty, and a symbol of it, had generated uncertainty about Kerry.

Flip-flopping helped Bush supporters form a uniform argument against Kerry. Flip-flopping was given animate expression. “Flipper the Dolphin was dragged into the political fray Monday as demonstrators waved inflatable dolphins and chanted anti-John Kerry slogans outside the Minneapolis Convention Center, where the Democrat was scheduled to speak. About 50 supporters of President Bush had one thing to say: Kerry is a flipper - he flip-flops” (Xiong, McKinney, Smith, & Schmickle, 2004, p. 12A). By April and May the flip-flop symbol was reproduced in a variety of ways. “John Kerry stands on both sides of the issues,” said Jake Grassel, state chairman for College Republicans, as he gripped one of several…sticks festooned with a…yellow flip-flop
Nobody really knows where he's going to stand” (Xiong et al., 2004, p. 12A). Flip-flop sandals were used to argue Kerry was a flip-flopper.

Going into June and July, the month of the convention, the Bush-Cheney campaign continued to attack Kerry’s ethos using strategic uncertainty including the flip-flop symbol.

*June to July, 2004*

By June, the Bush-Cheney campaign had defined Kerry. He was known primarily as a flip-flopper. “Whenever he appears in the media he's being harassed by two little words: ‘flip’ and ‘flop’” (Nevius, 2004, p. B1). Despite being relatively unknown, there was a perception that Kerry flip-flopped on policy and values. Once a symbol has integrated into the popular culture and has been adopted by a large portion of public it can be rhetorically manipulated. One of the more powerful ways this done through humor.

The term “flip-flop” emerged in popular culture, including comedy. Jay Leno, for example joked that Kerry “would be a perfect president because he could ‘deliver both the State of the Union and the rebuttal.’ ‘When they start making jokes about you, it's a problem,’ Payack said. ‘You knew when Johnny Carson started joking about Watergate that Nixon was doomed” (Nevius, 2004, p. B1). The perception of Kerry as someone who flip-flops had become “common knowledge,” as people comprehended the humor (Morreall, 1983). When a political symbol becomes humorous it can have a dramatic effect on the person attached to the symbol. “Aristotle points out its heavenly source; his contemporaries characterize its joyfully liberating nature...Homer seems to say that philosophical talk about laughter is fine, but look what happens to laughter in practice,
look at the enormous power in that flamethrower called laughter” (Sanders, 1995, p. 83). Humor has a subversive affect; it can undermine a person’s ethos. The act of using flip-flop sandals and inflatable dolphins requires a leap of faith that people have the appropriate knowledge to appreciate the inference.

The symbol flip-flop had become such a success because the Republican Party had carefully monitored Kerry for more attachment opportunities. “Every comment and gesture Kerry made was monitored on a bank of televisions in the Republican war room in Arlington, Virginia. Bush campaign aides watched particularly for equivocation or flip-flops” (O'Clery, 2004, July, p. 10). The use of strategic uncertainty, found in the term flip-flop, had done damage to Kerry’s ethos. Kerry thus had to reinforce his ethos by lowering uncertainty about his values. “In every speech he used the word "values" so many times it makes listeners cringe” (O’Clery, 2004, July, p. 10). The use of strategic uncertainty and flip-flop was even used when Kerry selected Senator John Edwards as his vice-president running mate. “Less than an hour after Senator John F. Kerry made his final phone call about the decision, Republicans declared it a flip flop pointing out that Kerry had questioned his new running mate's experience during the primaries” (Kornblut, 2004, July, p. A10).

In an effort to keep control of the flip-flop symbol, the Republican Party continually reminded voters about how Kerry had “voted for the $87 billion before I voted against it.” In many instances, Republican Party members would remind audiences of the statement even when it had nothing to do with the subject. “‘John Kerry was against John Edwards before he was for him," read a statement by the Republican National Committee, mocking Kerry's past statement” (Kornblut, 2004, July, p. A10).
During the 2004 Democratic convention, former Mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani spoke to an audience and reminded them of Kerry’s famous flip-flop (Rennie, 2004, p. A6).

The challenger’s convention is designed to introduce the candidate to the American population, and, as it does, reduce uncertainty about the challenger. This is accomplished by establishing his practical wisdom, virtue, and good will.

_Nomining conventions._ According to Denton and Woodward (1985), “Political conventions really serve three functions. They, of course, officially nominate the party’s candidate. Conventions also unify the party for both local and national candidates. And perhaps most importantly, conventions provide a free forum to present the candidate’s issues and image to those watching the proceedings on television” (p. 80). Trent and Friendenberg (2004) suggested the nominating conventions were no longer about pragmatic communicative functions, but about symbolic or ritualistic functions (p. 49). Though nominating conventions are heavily symbolic and ritualistic, they are also a forum to reduce uncertainty and to establish the party and nominee’s ethos. The show of unity signals to the broader population party competence and trustworthiness. The issues and image of the nominee establish competence and trustworthiness. Campaign convention communications are designed to reduce uncertainty and increase ethos.

Nominating conventions were given less time on television. “As conventions became more controlled, predictable and thus less newsworthy television news executives reduced network coverage of what they considered elaborate infomercials for each party” (Holloway, 2005, p. 31). This negative view of the conventions caused the major networks to announce that “they would air only three hours of each convention,
one hour each of the three nights” (Holloway, 2005, p. 30). Each speech, therefore, had to be on message. Speeches went through a screening process to make sure they matched Kerry’s points (Halbfinger, 2004, July, p. 3).

For years, the Republican Party whittled away at the public’s perception of the Democrats’ credibility. Wishing to rebuild their ethos, the Democratic convention was held in a place tied to American history. “Boston offered some symbolic opportunities to tie the Democratic Party to the founders and to the values of the Revolution, to celebrate the democratic process, and to the glory in national process” (Holloway, 2005, pp. 31-32). Each day of the convention consisted of speeches from Democratic Party leaders. According to MSNBC’s website on Monday, July 26, the theme was “The Kerry-Edwards Plan for America’s Future.” Six different speakers educated the convention audience and the American audience on Kerry and Edwards’s domestic plan for America. Though the theme was “The Kerry-Edwards Plan for America’s Future” many speeches talked about the negative impact of the Bush administration (Holloway, 2005).

Introduced by his wife Hillary Rodham Clinton, Bill Clinton was a major part of the convention. Former President Bill Clinton delivered a speech of “carefully crafted dichotomies and contrasts, all couched in the theme of unity” (Holloway, 2005, p. 34). Clinton’s speech called for unity. He opened by stating how he was honored to have shared the stage with his wife, former President Jimmy Carter, and former Vice President Al Gore. He suggested he was but a foot soldier fighting for the future, tied into John Kerry’s evocation of his Vietnam experience. He called forth the names of former presidents from the New England area, John Adams and John Kennedy. Clinton followed a unity theme. “My friends, we are constantly being told that America is deeply divided.
But all Americans value freedom and faith and family. We all honor the service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the world” (Clinton, 2004, n.p.). To alter the perception of the party as being non-mainstream, Clinton pointed out other similarities between themselves and Americans. He created, therefore, a sense of trust in the Democratic Party. He followed with “carefully crafted dichotomies” “Therefore, we Democrats will bring to the American people this year a positive campaign, arguing not who is a good or a bad person, but what is the best way to build a safe and prosperous world our children deserve” (Clinton, 2004, n.p.). By contrast, one could only infer how Republicans define the qualities of a good person and who is a bad person. Clinton continued to reinforce the trustworthiness of the Democratic Party, while sabotaging the Republican’s ethos.

We Democrats want to build a world an America of shared responsibilities and shared benefits. We want a world with more global cooperation where we act alone only when we absolutely have to... And we think everybody should have that chance. On the other hand, the Republicans in Washington believe that America should be run by the right people – their people... leaving ordinary Americans to fend for themselves (Clinton, 2004, n.p.).

Clinton rhetorically pushed the Bush administration and Republican Congress out of the mainstream. He listed how the two “chose to” take the country far right, walk away from allies, and other issues that removed themselves from the international community (Clinton, 2004, n.p.). Steering the audience away from international affairs, Clinton
brought them back to domestic issues. Despite a theme of unity, Clinton’s speech divided
the population between the wealthy and the not wealthy. “Clinton’s approach created a
clear contrast, appealing directly to middle – and lower – class voters who had significant
concerns about the economy, jobs, and a range of domestic issues” (Holloway, 2005, p.
37). Using a common man appeal, Clinton signaled commonalities between all
Americans and the Democratic Party. He discussed his 1992 campaign: “For all the
strategic appeals to undecided and independent voters, the first night of the Democratic
convention offered loyal Democrats and delegates in the hall a reminder of better days”
(Holloway, 2005, p. 37). Invoking the wins of the Democratic Party not only reminded
loyal Democrats and delegate of “better days” it also reminded the population of the
competence of the Democratic Party.

Clinton continued to bolster the Democratic ethos. He explained how the
Democrats seek to protect Americans. The discussion of Democratic attempts to secure
national safety signals likewise competency in the party. “On homeland security,
Democrats tried to double the number of containers at ports and airports checked for
weapons of mass destruction. It cost $1 billion. It would have been paid for under our
[Homeland Security] bill by asking the 200,000 millionaires in America to cut their tax
cut by $5,000. Almost all 200,000 of us would like to have done that, to spend $5,000 to
make all 300 million Americans safer” (Clinton, 2004, n.p.).

Nominating conventions also endorse the Presidential nominee. In endorsing the
nominee, speakers affirm the ethos of the nominee. Bill Clinton did this addressing
Senator Kerry’s commitment to duty. Since the major issue of the 2004 presidential
campaign was the war on terror and war in Iraq, Senator Kerry’s past duty in Vietnam
seemed appropriate. Clinton highlighted not only Senator Kerry’s service but his sense of duty. Citing Kerry’s background of privilege, Clinton recounted how Kerry selected not to defer service, but to serve in Vietnam. “During the Vietnam War, many young men, including the current president, the vice president and me, could have gone to Vietnam and didn't. John Kerry came from a privileged background. He could have avoided going too, but instead, he said: Send me” (Clinton, 2004, n.p.). Clinton continued to describe how Senator Kerry served the United States during his presidency. “When I was president, John Kerry showed courage and conviction on crime, on welfare reform, on balancing the budget, at a time when those priorities were not exactly the way to win a popularity contest in our party” (Clinton, 2004, n.p.). Clinton also reifies Kerry’s trustworthiness by establishing his strength of conviction. Clinton’s endorsement speech accomplished two things; first, he was able to supplement the party ethos. The Democratic Party had fallen on hard times and required reaffirmation. By highlighting the positive actions of the Democratic Party, he affirmed the party’s ethos. By contrast, he created a negative perception of the Republican Party and President Bush.

Even though the former frontrunner Howard Dean delivered an upbeat speech, Barack Obama presented what was considered the highlight speech. “Obama rivaled Clinton in his ability to capture the convention hall” (Holloway, 2005, p. 38). Obama did not directly reinforce the Party ethos, but appealed to unity instead. His speech kept with the convention’s purpose of uncertainty reduction and ethos building. He began by establishing credibility. Obama recollected his diverse and humble family beginnings. Both parents came from hardworking people. Obama told his father’s story. “My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding
goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father -- my grandfather -- was a cook, a domestic servant to the British” (Obama, 2004, n.p.). By referencing his father, Obama told an immigrant’s story. “Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before” (Obama, 2004, n.p.). The story personalized the immigrants’ experience even as it calls attention to our heritage. After viewing the “magical place, America” through his father’s eyes, Barack took the audience to the heartland of America, Kansas. He told his mother’s story. “She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oilrigs and farms through most of the Depression. The day after Pearl Harbor my grandfather signed up for duty; joined Patton’s army, marched across Europe. Back home, my grandmother raised a baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line” (Obama, 2004, n.p.). With a patriotic grandfather, Obama emerged as a patriot as well. Throughout the speech Obama also scattered allusions to religious beliefs, thus communicating his values and beliefs.

After establishing his credibility, Barack Obama endorsed Senator Kerry, thereby reducing uncertainty. “John Kerry understands the ideals of community, faith, and service because they’ve defined his life. From his heroic service in Vietnam, to his years as a prosecutor and lieutenant governor, through two decades in the United States Senate, he’s devoted himself to this country. Again and again, we’ve seen him make tough choices when easier ones were available” (Obama, 2004, n.p.). By stating his ideals Obama seeks to establish a sense of trust in the audience. Obama further reduced uncertainty by bolstering Senator Kerry’s ethos.
His values and his record affirm what is best in us... John Kerry believes in the Constitutional freedoms that have made our country the envy of the world, and he will never sacrifice our basic liberties, nor use faith as a wedge to divide us. And John Kerry believes that in a dangerous world war must be an option sometimes, but it should never be the first option. (Obama, 2004, n.p).

Obama referred to Senator Kerry’s military record to reinforce Kerry’s competence as a potential Commander-in-Chief.

The keynote presentations establish the nominee’s ethos reducing uncertainty in the audience. Barack Obama highlighted Senator Kerry’s beliefs and values with regard to the election issues. Though Obama spent a good part of the speech establishing his own credibility, he helped reduce uncertainty regarding the Democratic nominee.

Vice-Presidential nominee John Edwards spoke to the convention attendees, delegates, and national audience on Wednesday. Edwards began his speech by relating values instilled in him by his parents. “You taught me the values that I carry in my heart: faith, family, responsibility, opportunity for everyone. You taught me that there's dignity and honor in a hard day's work. You taught me to always look out for our neighbors, to never look down on anybody, and treat everybody with respect” (Edwards, 2004, n.p.). He proceeded to attribute similar values to John Kerry. “Those are the values that John Kerry and I believe in” (Edwards, 2004, n.p.). By relating their values to the audience, Edwards not only lowered uncertainty but established trustworthiness. If people can predict a person’s values and feel they have values in common, they can perceive that
person as trustworthy. Edwards not only referred to his parents as the base of his values but his geographical culture. "You know, we hear a lot of talk about values. Where I come from, you don't judge somebody's values based upon how they use that word in a political ad. You judge their values based upon what they've spent their life doing" (Edwards, 2004, n.p.). The values and beliefs Edwards espoused are very broad and positive values that people could relate to, and thus they could more likely predict those values.

Edwards, too, mentioned Senator Kerry's military history to establish the nominee's competence. "When John Kerry graduated college, he volunteered for military service, volunteered to go to Vietnam, volunteered to captain a swiftboat, one of the most dangerous duties in Vietnam that you could have. As a result, he was wounded, honored for his valor" (Edwards, 2004, n.p.). Since Edwards was a part of the ticket he must also bolster his competency by discussing their social and economic plans, including a plan to provide health care to the American population. "We have a plan that will offer all Americans the same health care that your senator has. We can give you tax breaks to help you pay for your health care. And when we're in office, we will sign a real patients' bill of rights into law so that you can make your own health care decisions" (Edwards, 2004, n.p.).

By revealing a plan he signaled to the audience that they can predict the actions of a Kerry-Edwards administration. Edwards also reduced uncertainty about their competency in education reform: "Our plan will reform our schools and raise standards. We can give our schools the resources that they need. We can provide incentives to put our best teachers in the subjects and the places where we need them the most. And we
can ensure that three million children have a safe place to go when they leave school in the afternoon” (Edwards, 2004, n.p.). Since job security was an issue, Edwards presented a plan to assure job security, thus reducing uncertainty. “First, we can create good-paying jobs in this country again. We're going to get rid of tax cuts for companies who are outsourcing your jobs and, instead, we're going to give tax breaks to American companies that are keeping jobs right here in America. And we will invest in the jobs of the future and in the technologies and innovation to ensure that America stays ahead of the competition. And we're going to do this because John and I understand that a job is about more than a paycheck; it's about dignity and self-respect” (Edwards, 2004, n.p.). Each plan communicates to the audience an expectation of the Kerry-Edwards administration.

John Kerry’s acceptance speech was meant to conclude the convention. “He needed to establish himself as a strong, optimistic, and capable leader” (Holloway, 2005, p. 45). The convention had established his beliefs, values, and competency. After a series of introductions from family members, a biographical video was shown. Narrated by Morgan Freeman, the video followed Kerry from birth, to primary school, college, and his decision to volunteer for duty in Vietnam. A significant part of the video established his military ethos. The video concluded by covering his 1984 election to the United States Senate. After a brief “lull,” the hall fell silent and Senator Kerry entered the hall. When he got to the podium he announced “I’m John Kerry and I’m reporting to duty” (Kerry, 2004, n.p.).

Kerry’s speech revealed his beliefs, values, and competency. He proceeded to establish the foundations of his beliefs and values by telling his family history. He talked about his father (a military man) and mother. “She gave me her passion for the
environment. She taught me to see trees as the cathedrals of nature. And by the power of her example, she showed me that we can and must complete the march toward full equality for all women in the United States of America” (Kerry, 2004, n.p.). He explained to the audience that he learned a specific lesson from his father when he worked at the State Department. He related how he rode his bike in Soviet East Berlin, and of the lasting impression it left on him. “But what I learned has stayed with me for a lifetime. I saw how different life was on different sides of the same city. I saw the fear in the eyes of people who were not free. I saw the gratitude of people toward the United States for all that we had done (Kerry, 2004, n.p.). He stated that he learned what it meant to be an American, and that he found inspiration in his family to serve his country.

Senator Kerry explained his experiences and knowledge to create the perception of competency and to lower uncertainty about his ability to act. “I ask you, I ask you to judge me by my record. As a young prosecutor, I fought for victims' rights and made prosecuting violence against women a priority. When I came to the Senate, I broke with many in my own party to vote for a balanced budget, because I thought it was the right thing to do. I fought to put 100,000 police officers on the streets of America. And then I reached out across the aisle with John McCain to work to find the truth about our POWs and missing in action and to finally make peace in Vietnam” (Kerry, 2004, n.p.). Kerry establishes his ethos by telling of his fight for victim’s rights, as well as his ability to relate to Republicans. These qualities, be asserted, qualified him to be president.

To establish his competency with respect to Iraq he cited his military history. “I know what kids go through when they're carrying an M-16 in a dangerous place, and they can't tell friend from foe. I know what they go through when they're out on patrol at night
and they don't know what's coming around the next bend. I know what it's like to write letters home telling your family that everything's all right, when you're not sure that that's true” (Kerry, 2004, n.p.). Relating to present-day soldiers suggests his empathy as Commander-in-chief. Senator Kerry explained how, as president, his administration would fight the war on terror. “We will double our Special Forces to conduct terrorist operations, anti-terrorist operations, and we will provide our troops with the newest weapons and technology to save their lives and win the battle” (Kerry, 2004, n.p.). He also discussed homeland security. Like Senator Edwards, Senator Kerry laid out plans to deal with social and economic problems.

Near the end of the speech Senator Kerry revealed his values. He noted that: “I don't wear my religion on my sleeve, but faith has given me values and hope to live by, from Vietnam to this day, from Sunday to Sunday.” (Kerry, 2004, n.p.). He followed that with a call to faith, ending with a sense of optimism by using a rising sun metaphor. However, while the Democratic Party introduced Senators Kerry and Edwards, the Republican Party continued to use strategic uncertainty to attack Kerry’s ethos.

The Democratic nominating convention was designed to introduce Senator John Kerry and his running mate Senator John Edwards to the American people. The convention was designed to reduce uncertainty about the candidates even as it raised candidates’ ethos. That reduction was shown by a post convention bump in the polls. The voting public had learned about the party and its nominees, allowing them to predict their beliefs, values, and attitudes. By contrast, the Bush-Cheney campaign attempted to diminish Kerry’s ethos. “The most notable strategic move by President Bush during the
primary was to wait for the Democrats to settle on John Kerry as their nominee and then quickly launch an attack” (Smith, 2005, p. 143).

Having initiated an attack on Senator Kerry’s credibility early, the Bush Campaign tried different strategies to negatively “define” Kerry. By convention time, the Bush Campaign had branded Kerry as uncertain in a climate of uncertainty. As an antithesis to President Bush, Kerry was framed as an uncertain candidate. “The key tactic in the convention attacks was to brand Kerry as a ‘flip-flopper’ who changed positions in contrast to Bush’s clear, and simple, and familiar positions” (Smith, 2005, p. 147).

At the Republican national convention the first day’s theme was “A Nation of Courage” which translated into “Much of the evening would focus on the events of 9/11 and their meaning for the nation and Bush’s campaign” (Holloway, 2005, p. 50). This was apparent in Senator John McCain’s speech. A veteran of the Vietnam War, McCain’s ethos with respect to war lent credibility to the Bush-Cheney campaign. Senator McCain began his speech by claiming that millions of Americans supported President Bush and Vice President Cheney. He then reminded the audience of September 11, 2001. McCain described the war on terrorism as a hard struggle filled with sacrifice. He took the audience back to the day when President Bush stood on the rubble of the World Trade Center and how he promised the enemies they would hear from us. “He ordered American forces to Afghanistan and took the fight to our enemies, and away from our shores, seriously injuring al Qaeda and destroying the regime that gave them safe haven” (McCain, 2004, n.p.).

McCain discussed next the war in Iraq. “After years of failed diplomacy and limited military pressure to restrain Saddam Hussein, President Bush made the difficult
decision to liberate Iraq. Those who criticize that decision would have us believe that the choice was between a status quo that was well enough left alone and war. But there was no status quo to be left alone” (McCain, 2004, n.p.). By reminding the audiences of the two wars, McCain not only stayed with the Bush-Campaign strategy of running as a war president, but helped foster certainty. McCain discussed President Bush’s actions as evidence of direct action. The audience could conceptualize Bush as predictable. With Senator Kerry, one could only speculate.

The second night of the Republican convention was entitled “A Nation of Compassion.” The keynote speaker was Arnold Swartzenegger. An immigrant from Austria and action movie star, Swartzenegger had been elected governor of California in October of 2003. A naturalized citizen, he had special appeal for the Republican Party who sought to expand its party’s base. “Schwarzenegger is the one to watch….He will recast the American dream of immigrant makes good for the twenty-first century, even though as a foreign-born citizen he can never go all the way to the White House” (Rowat, 2004, p. 7).

Swartzenegger opened his speech with three jokes that referenced his movie career. The first was a self-deprecating joke, followed by one at the expense of the Democrats, and finally another self-deprecating joke. Swartzenegger bolstered his ethos while appealing to the sense of the American dream. “To think that a once scrawny boy from Austria could grow up to become Governor of the State of California and then stand here -- and stand here in Madison Square Garden and speak on behalf of the President of the United States. That is an immigrant's dream! It's the American dream” (Swartzenegger, 2004, n.p.). Governor Swartzenegger’s story relates how he looked to
America as the land of the free. “You know, I was born in Europe and I've traveled all over the world, and I can tell you that there is no place, no country, that is more compassionate, more generous, more accepting, and more welcoming than the United States of America” (Swartzenegger, 2004, n.p.). To give a sense of where he came from he contrasted the American dream to his life in a former Soviet occupied section of Austria. “When I was a boy, the Soviets occupied part of Austria. I saw their tanks in the streets. I saw communism with my own eyes. I remember the fear we had when we had to cross into the Soviet sector” (Swartzenegger, 2004, n.p.).

Swartzenegger also detailed the lack of material possessions of a typical family. “Now my family didn't have a car -- but one day we were in my uncle's car” (Swartzenegger, 2004, n.p.). His story about his family not having a car signaled to his audience his humble upbringing. It also signaled to the American audience the failure of Communism to provide transportation. The governor told his tale of coming to America. “I finally arrived here in 1968. What a special day it was. I remember I arrived here with empty pockets, but full of dreams, full of determination, full of desire. The presidential campaign was in full swing. I remember watching the Nixon and Humphrey presidential race on TV. A friend of mine who spoke German and English translated for me. I heard Humphrey saying things that sounded like socialism, which I had just left. But then I heard Nixon speak. He was talking about free enterprise, getting the government off your back, lowering the taxes and strengthening the military” (Swartzenegger, 2004, n.p.). This bit of history Swartzenegger established his values and created identification with other ethnic groups who otherwise might have not identified with the Republican Party.
For the 2004 election, the Republican Party wanted to create the perception of being inclusive. “Ethnic, gay-friendly and feminist. Say hello to the modern Republican Party as it will be presented to voters tonight” (Rowat, 2004, p. 7). Swartzenegger’s speech presented the Republican Party as an organization open to immigrants, as its members admired the hard work of immigrants. Swartzenegger explained that he learned first hand of the benefits of hard work. “If you believe that government should be accountable to the people, not the people to the government, then you are a Republican. If you believe that a person should be treated as an individual, not as a member of an interest group, then you are a Republican. If you believe that your family knows how to spend your money better than the government does, then you are a Republican. If you believe -- If you believe that our educational system should be held accountable for the progress of our children, then you are a Republican. If you believe -- If you believe that this country, not the United Nations, is best hope for democracy, then you are a Republican. And ladies and gentlemen -- And ladies and gentlemen, if you believe that we must be fierce and relentless and terminate terrorism, then you are a Republican” (Swartzenegger, 2004, n.p.). Swartzenegger created an atmosphere of acceptance for the party’s core beliefs.

Swartzenegger spent most of his time reinforcing his and the party’s ethos. He did, however, attempt to create the perception of President Bush as a steady leader who sticks to his convictions. “The President did not go into Iraq because the polls told him it was popular. As a matter of fact, the polls said just the opposite. But leadership isn't about polls. It's about making decisions you think are right and then standing behind those decisions. That's why America is safer with George W. Bush as President”
Swartzenegger suggested that President Bush is a man of certainty whose actions are predictable, thereby bolstering the president’s credibility.

The political climate had changed by the third day of the convention. The theme was “A Nation of Opportunity.” The two key note speakers, Zell Miller and Vice President Dick Cheney, used their time to attack the Kerry-Edwards campaign. The use of strategic uncertainty had taken hold. In his speech Democrat Zell Miller said, “For more than 20 years, on every one of the great issues of freedom and security, John Kerry has been more wrong and more wobbly than any other national figure” (Reinhard, 2004, p. C5). That “wobbly” nature belied an uncertainty that could not be predicted. Zell Miller continued to create uncertainty about Senator Kerry. “From John Kerry, (terrorists) get a ‘yes-no-maybe’ bowl of mush that can only encourage our enemies and confuse our friends” (Reinhard, 2004, p. C5). Miller suggested Kerry’s uncertain nature not only encourages terrorists but our allies may become uncertain themselves. The uncertainty issue did not stop with Zell Miller. Democratic Mayor Randy Kelly of Saint Paul, Minnesota, stated that “We need unequivocal leaders with resolve because it’s a very dangerous world out there. We cannot have a leader who can in any way be seen as equivocating when a tough decision is required,” (Reinhard, 2004, p. C05). Zell Miller led the attack on the Kerry campaign. Vice-President Cheney followed it with an attack of his own.

Though Vice-President Cheney’s speech was to be an acceptance speech, he used his time to attack the ethos of Senator Kerry even as he shored up President Bush. He began his speech by accepting his party’s nomination. He pledged to the people. “I will give this campaign all that I have, and together we will make George W. Bush president
for another four years” (Cheney, 2004, n.p.). He followed this pledge with a self-deprecating joke, and then reinforces his credibility through narratives, first relating his birth story. “My grandfather noted that the day I was born was also the birthday of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And so he told my parents they should send President Roosevelt an announcement of my birth. Now my grandfather didn't have a chance to go to high school. For many years he worked as a cook on the Union Pacific Railroad, and he and my grandmother lived in a railroad car. But the modesty of his circumstances didn't stop him from thinking that President Roosevelt should know about my arrival. My grandfather believed deeply in the promise of America, and had the highest hopes for his family. And I don't think it would surprise him much that a grandchild of his stands before you tonight as vice president of the United States” (Cheney, 2004, n.p.). By telling his history, Vice-President Cheney established his values. He concentrated next on Bush's credibility and Kerry's uncertainty character flaw.

Cheney also discussed the education system, followed by a discussion of the economy. “As President Bush and I were sworn into office, our nation was sliding into recession, and American workers were overburdened with federal taxes. Then came the events of Sept. 11th, which hit our economy very hard. So President Bush delivered the greatest tax reduction in a generation, and the results are clear to see. Businesses are creating jobs. People are returning to work. Mortgage rates are low, and home ownership in this country is at an all-time high. The Bush tax cuts are working” (Cheney, 2004, n.p.). By referencing economic actions, Cheney demonstrates the president's hands-on ability to resolve economic problems.
After discussing social issues, Cheney focused on the Bush-Cheney campaign, the war on terrorism, and Iraq. He pointed to actions taken by the President. “The fanatics who killed some 3,000 of our fellow Americans may have thought they could attack us with impunity because terrorists had done so previously. But if the killers of Sept. 11 thought we had lost the will to defend our freedom, they did not know America and they did not know George W. Bush. From the beginning, the president made clear that the terrorists would be dealt with and that anyone who supports, protects, or harbors them would be held to account. In a campaign that has reached around the world, we have captured or killed hundreds of al Qaeda. In Afghanistan, the camps where terrorists trained to kill Americans have been shut down, and the Taliban driven from power. In Iraq, we dealt with a gathering threat, and removed the regime of Saddam Hussein” (Cheney, 2004, n.p.). Cheney showed the audience clear and certain outcomes of the war on terror while linking the war in Iraq to the war on terror. “From the beginning, the president made clear that the terrorists would be dealt with and that anyone who supports, protects, or harbors them would be held to account… President Bush does not deal in empty threats and half measures, and his determination has sent a clear message… But as the President has made very clear, there is a difference between leading a coalition of many, and submitting to the objections of a few… Fellow citizens, our nation is reaching the hour of decision, and the choice is clear” (Cheney, 2004, n.p.). Cheney effectively compared and contrasted President Bush and Senator Kerry with respect to predictability.

Cheney compared and contrasted President Bush and Senator Kerry by talking about what they had done and said militarily.
Senator Kerry... takes a different view when it comes to supporting our military... he voted to authorize force against Saddam Hussein, he then decided he was opposed to the war ... The other candidate in this race is a man our nation has come to know... I have seen him face some of the hardest decisions that can come to the Oval Office and make those decisions with the wisdom... Americans expect in their president (Cheney, 2004, n.p.).

By describing Bush as a leader with knowable convictions, values, and beliefs, voters could assess his credibility. By contrast, Cheney’s interpretation of Kerry’s record creates uncertainty. Cheney concluded by stating. “When this convention concludes tomorrow night, we will go forth with confidence in our cause, and in the man who leads it. By leaving no doubt where we stand, and asking all Americans to join us, we will see our cause to victory” (Cheney, 2004, n.p.).

Today, biographical films play a major role in political campaigns. For the 2004 conventions, films were used to introduce the candidates. According to Strachan and Kendall (2004) the biographical film was designed to appeal to a larger, less attentive audience (p. 118). A brief film was aired the last night of the Republican convention. Bush’s film told the story of America led by Bush. The film focused mainly on “9/11.” “The campaign film itself focused entirely on Bush’s baptism by fire in the wake of 9/11” (Edwards, 2005, p. 85). The “9/11” tragedy was the focus of the film and President Bush’s acceptance speech.
President Bush began his speech by recalling "9/11" and the effects of the attack. He used that tragedy to emphasize the perseverance and heroism of the American people. "Since 2001, Americans have been given hills to climb, and found the strength to climb them. Now, because we have made the hard journey, we can see the valley below. Now, because we have faced challenges with resolve, we have historic goals within our reach, and greatness in our future. We will build a safer world and a more hopeful America and nothing will hold us back" (Bush, 2004, n.p.). Bush proceeded to invoke a sense of family values by discussing his fortuitous life with his wife, two daughters, brothers, sisters, and parents. Each, he claimed, had instilled values and experiences in him. Bush then listed his beliefs and the actions committed in the name of those beliefs.

I believe -- I believe... every school must teach, so we passed the most important federal education reform in history... I believe in the energy and innovative spirit of America's workers... so we unleashed that energy with the largest tax relief in a generation...I believe the most solemn duty of the American president is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty or weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. (Bush, 2004, n.p.)

Bush laid out plans for the following four years. "To create more jobs in America, America must be the best place in the world to do business. To create jobs, my plan will encourage investment and expansion by restraining federal spending, reducing regulation, and making the tax relief permanent. To create jobs, we will make our country less
dependent on foreign sources of energy. To create jobs, we will expand trade and level 
the playing field to sell American goods and services across the globe. And we must 
protect small business owners and workers from the explosion of frivolous lawsuits that 
threaten jobs across our country” (Bush, 2004, n.p.). A common thread through the Bush 
acceptance speech is life changing times.

The times in which we live and work are changing 
dramatically… In this time of change, government must 
take the side of working families…. In this world of 
change, some things do not change: the values we try to 
live by, the institutions that give our lives meaning and 
purpose. Our society rests on a foundation of responsibility 
and character and family commitment. (Bush, 2004, n.p.)

Bush reaffirmed that he was steadfast and resolute in uncertain times.

President Bush recounted for the audience the changes he had initiated to protect 
the country. In defense of his actions he generated uncertainty about Senator Kerry.

Again my opponent and I have different approaches. I 
proposed, and the Congress overwhelmingly passed, 87 
billion dollars in funding needed by our troops doing battle 
in Afghanistan and Iraq. My opponent and his running mate 
voted against this money for bullets, and fuel, and vehicles, 
and body armor. When asked to explain his vote, the 
Senator said, "I actually did vote for the 87 billion dollars 
before I voted against it." (Bush, 2004, n.p.)
People who accept a political reality show support by adopting its symbols. Symbols give definition to political cultures (Elder & Cobb, 1983). This was apparent in the Republican convention. Conventioneers adopted the use of various symbols to convey the message that Kerry was untrustworthy and uncertain. "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth," an anti-Kerry group, had accused Senator Kerry of lying to get his purple heart in Vietnam. “Delegates who were wearing Band-Aids, mocking the Kerry injuries that earned him his Purple Hearts” (Dauber, 2004) signaled to those in attendance and those viewing that they did not believe Senator Kerry. That uncertainty about his past was also conveyed in the term flip-flop. Flip-flop had become a symbol of uncertainty. Flip-flop’s symbolism was transferred to different symbols used by conventioneers. “Republican delegates cheered attacks on Kerry, waving flip-flop sandals and chanting ‘flip flop’” (Shepard, 2004, September, p. 1A). The term flip-flop was used in a variety of ways. “During Vice President Cheney’s speech on Wednesday night, an address devoted in large part to defining Mr. Kerry as a ‘flip-flopper’ who wants to have it both ways, hundreds of delegates held aloft pairs of flip-flops” (Reid, 2004, p. 18). “Although Kerry exceeded many analysts’ expectations, his ethos was narrowly defined at the convention and would be the source of doubts over the course of the campaign” (Holloway, 2005, p. 69). The conventions had set the tone for the general election, which Trent and Friendenberg (2004) described as the time when the nominees start campaigning.

The convention months, late July to early September, 2004. The convention for a presidential challenger introduces them to the broader American public. The conventions lower uncertainty about the challenger. During the convention his values are revealed, his beliefs are espoused and his past and future actions are discussed. The revelation of his
values, beliefs and actions establish his ethos. After conventions, candidates usually receive a bump in the polls. The Bush-Cheney campaign had to suppress that bump. Suppressing the bump affects perceptions. News reports of a lower than usual bump in the polls created a perception of a weak candidate. In this case, it helped the Bush-Cheney campaign to generate uncertainty about Kerry. Senator Saxby Chamblis held a news conference to generate uncertainty. “The Republican senator from Georgia was part of a Republican ‘truth squad’ that held a news conference across the street from the FleetCenter, where the Democrats are holding their convention, to counter their political message and screen a video detailing Sen. John Kerry's alleged ‘flip-flops’ on the Iraq issue, with the theme from the TV show "Flipper" in the soundtrack” (Baxter, 2004, p, 10A). Referring to themselves as the truth squad, they used pop cultural references to generate uncertainty.

Strategic uncertainty was used to attack Kerry’s competency. The Bush-Cheney campaign questioned Kerry’s twenty years in the Senate, especially his inconsistent voting record, and Kerry’s values as well. Both frames attacked Kerry’s position on the war in Iraq.

President Bush accused Sen. John Kerry on Tuesday of shifting positions on the war with Iraq… At a rally in Pensacola, Bush noted that his Democratic rival has criticized the war but said Monday that he still would have voted to give Bush the authority to go to war even if he had known that no weapons of mass destruction would be found (Keen, 2004, p. 8A).
The accusations rhetorically painted Kerry into a corner. He had to explain his position on the war in Iraq. Kerry was trapped. He equivocated, which subsequently generated uncertainty.

It took a direct challenge from President Bush, who asked if Kerry would still have voted to authorize the use of force against Saddam Hussein if he knew that no weapons of mass destruction would be found... Still, Kerry's answer likely will raise some eyebrows among people who believed the Democratic nominee when he agreed that he was one of the "anti-war candidates (Fettman, 2004, p. 31).

By forcing Kerry to equivocate, Bush generated uncertainty. One of the benefits of strategic uncertainty is the suppression of voters within the party. If party faithful perceive a candidate as uncertain, they will be less likely to vote. The Kerry-Edwards campaign had generated uncertainty with respect to their leadership credibility. One instance was when the Kerry campaign sent out two letters from the senator, one was targeted to anti-war constituents and the other emphasizing his support for President Bush's response to the crisis and the policy goals he established (Fettman, 2004, p. 31).

Strategic uncertainty had not only generated uncertainty in the American electorate but it was affecting Kerry's supporters. Kerry's uncertainty made him appear incompetent to fight the war on terror or war in Iraq. It also created an image of a political opportunist. Kerry's practical wisdom and good will were hurt by strategic uncertainty. Kerry did not get much of a bump following the convention. "Not only had Kerry failed to energize the electorate, the convention raised issues and vulnerabilities in
the Kerry-Edwards ticket without providing a clear attack on the Bush-Cheney record” (Holloway, 2005, p. 49). Strategic uncertainty had blunted Kerry’s uncertainty reduction and thus lowered his ethos. Kerry’s credibility was severely damaged.

*General election.* The general election period began immediately after the last day of the Republican convention. The general election period signals the lead up to election day. “However, once the final stage begins, the campaign communication is at once more intense, less interpersonal, but more direct and certainly more important” (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004, p. 61). Candidates attempt to frame the main issues for the election. “Democratic Kerry began the fall campaign on the defensive and faces the urgent necessity to make the race about the economy and other domestic concerns, after President Bush used his convention to say this election is all about keeping the country safe” (Broder & Balz, 2004, p. A01). It is also the stage where well-received campaign strategies are reinforced. Presidential debates are an important part of the general election. Jamieson and Birdsell (1988) argued “In politics, debating reveals problem-solving abilities, habits of mind, and electoral appeal” (p. 37).

Trent and Friedenberg (2004) suggested that every campaign tactic prior to the general election is a “dress rehearsal.” The campaign solidifies campaign rhetoric for the run up to the election. Gronbeck (1978) argued that presidential campaigns accomplish three things: reinforce the party faithful; activate new voters, and convert by attracting undecided voters and other party faithful. Voters reveal their reinforcement, activation, or conversion through the adoption of campaign symbols. It could be an “I like Ike” button or someone just saying “I like Ike.” Elder and Cobb (1983) argued that symbols are the
currency of political communication. Buttons, posters, words, and other forms of political reality symbols signal which political “currency” a voter should accept.

In the 2004 election Bush supporters adopted pairs of flip-flops sandals to symbolize John Kerry’s flip-flopping. Flip-flops communicated a code to people, that John Kerry changes his mind, that voters cannot predict his values, beliefs, or actions. The flip-flop sandal was a recognizable sign. Kerry’s inconsistency and uncertainty were associated with the sandals, they had become politically charged. President Bush, for example, did not have to mention them; just bringing up Kerry’s name would stir the audience to chant flip-flop. “At virtually every rally, Bush supporters interrupt[ed] the stump speech whenever Kerry was mentioned to chant in a mocking sing-song tone: "Flip-flop! Flip-flop!" Senior Bush advisers revel in the refrain, and have used it as the basis for at least three advertisements since the end of the primaries” (Kornblut, 2004, March, p. A1).

The term flip-flop had emerged from political think tanks. Flip-flop, referred to John Kerry’s past as well as his future. Going into the 2004 general election the idea of Kerry being “‘unsteady’ as in ‘not consistent, politically’” (McKinnon, 2006, p. 39) and “an uncertain leader who’s wrong for the post-9/11 era” (Blomquist, 2004, p. 8) chained out (Bormann, 1972) from Bush-Cheney campaign communication to media pundits. By contrast, the Bush-Cheney campaign worked to create the perceptions of trustworthiness, competence, and predictability. “One advantage I think we had from the president’s perspective is that voters might disagree on some policies but they always said, ‘at least I know where this guy comes from and at least I know where he stands on this.’”
(McKinnon, 2006, p. 26). Campaign communication, social interaction and the presidential debates bolstered Kerry’s uncertainty and Bush’s certainty.

*September.* Not long after the convention, Bush traveled to Wisconsin. The state was an important one. “As Bush spoke, his chief political aide, Karl Rove, emphasized in an interview how intense the Bush campaign in the state will be, saying, ‘He (Bush) is going to treat Wisconsin like he's running for governor.’” (Borsuk & Carlson, 2004, p. 01A). When President Bush mentioned Kerry’s name the crowd would chant flip-flop. The use of strategic uncertainty had become a common tactic by September. The chanting of “flip-flop” by Republican crowds became a ritual. The chant acted rhetorically as an enthymeme. Just the mention of the Kerry $87 million vote signaled Kerry’s inconsistency.

Two articles on the same day referred to Senator Kerry’s issues positions as flip-flops. In Deborah Orin’s article, “Rivals at war over John’s Flip-flop,” the journalist suggested Kerry flip-flopped regularly. The use of flip-flop was the result of statements President Bush had made. “Just a few weeks ago, Kerry said he'd have voted for the war in Iraq even if he knew then what he knows now - that Saddam Hussein apparently didn't have weapons of mass destruction. Bush shot back, ‘After voting for the war but against funding it, after saying he would have voted for the war even knowing everything we know today, my opponent woke up this morning with new campaign advisers and yet another position - suddenly, he's against it again.’” (Orin, 2004, September, p. 6). Having never mentioned the term flip-flop, Orin now used the term. In an article for the *Boston Globe* Sasha Talcott (2004) stated “Republicans who led chants of "Flip-flop!" at the GOP convention in New York last week say they have new ammunition against
presidential candidate John F. Kerry, who is on record as being both for and against a provision prohibiting Medicare from negotiating lower prices with drug companies” (p. F1). Talcott reinforced the term. Talcott agreed that the Republicans who chanted “flip-flop” held a correct perception of Kerry. Consequently, the term flip-flop gained rhetorical weight in the media.


The debates for the 2004 presidential election began at the end of September and ran through October. Debates are an important part of presidential elections. They are means of communicating values, beliefs, and competency. They also legitimate the democratic process. “Since 1976, debates have taken place in every presidential election… In order to lend some order and structure to the general election debates between presidential contenders, the Commission on Presidential Debates was created in 1987” (Hollihan, 2001, p. 165). Debates give candidates a chance to formally introduce their political positions to the electorate. It is also an opportunity to attack an opponent’s credibility. However, research suggests that debates only reinforce party and candidate
loyalty (Pfau & Kang, 1991; Zhu, Milavsky, & Biswas, 1994). However, the 2004 election was different; the campaigns targeted undecided voters. “Bush targeted a national audience of undecided voters, largely with a single message -- that he is a better bet to keep the country safe” (Broder & Balz, 2004, p. A01). Debates provide an opportunity to reach undecided voters. “Dowd said that unlike the partisans, the undecided voters pay attention largely to big events in the campaign, such as the conventions, and that the upcoming debates will play a crucial role in their decision-making” (Broder & Balz, 2004, p. A01). The debates gave the Bush-Cheney campaign another opportunity to generate uncertainty about Senators Kerry and Edwards, while creating certainty about Bush.

In the first debate on September 30, 2004, Bush bolstered his ethos and attacked Senator Kerry’s ethos, using strategic uncertainty. The war on terror and the war in Iraq dominated the debate. The two issues were what the Bush-Cheney campaign ran on. The Bush-Cheney campaign rhetorically maintained that the President was decisive, resolute, and strong. “The Bush approach was simple and repetitive, and it was to endorse Bush as a wartime president and decisive commander who stood for traditional values and whose reelection campaign message was national security and the war on terrorism” (Kenski & Kenski, 2005, p. 305). President Bush consistently appealed to what Aristotle called practical wisdom, wisdom and expertise, or competency. Practical wisdom demonstrates expertise, which “asserted his personal mastery of a new situation, the exclusivity of his expert information, his personal embodiment of that expertise, and his compact with the people” (Smith, 2005, p. 136). Bush described the achievements of his administration, including funding for the war on terror, Iraq, and homeland security. To appeal to his
practical wisdom and good will Bush used The Department of Homeland Security as an example. He told audiences that his efforts had bolstered the southern border. He also noted his financial support for fire and police ($3.1 billion) (Bush, 2004). By revealing a dollar amount President Bush establishes his practical wisdom, a desire to protect the people. Bush appealed to his practical wisdom regarding the war in Iraq by allying himself with its Prime Minister. He argued that they were “ready to fight for their own freedom” (Bush, 2004). This affirmed his leadership and military expertise. It also created the impression that he had formed a democratic nation.

Bush also reminded the audience that Osama bin Laden is “isolated. Seventy-five percent of his people have been brought to justice” (Bush, 2004). With Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda being the primary enemy in the war on terrorism, Bush appealed to his military leadership and the interests of a now free people. President Bush also reminded the electorate of the world’s uncertainty. President Bush discussed that his administration in conjunction with over 60 nations set in place the Proliferation Security Initiative. The Proliferation Security Initiative disrupts “trans-shipments of information and/or weapons of mass destruction materials” (Bush, 2004). He constantly affirmed that his expertise and actions work for the best interests of the people. Bush provided an example of how the Proliferation Security Initiative operates: “We busted the A.Q. Khan network. This was a proliferator out of Pakistan that was selling secrets to places like North Korea and Libya. We convinced Libya to disarm. It’s a central part of dealing with weapons of mass destruction and proliferation” (Bush, 2004). President Bush also appealed to practical wisdom and good will by noting that the Libyans, a one-time terrorist harboring nation, were peacefully dismantling its weapons programs.
President Bush supported his practical wisdom and good will mainly through well-known examples. Examples provide for the audience proof of Bush's leadership and how that leadership leads to safety. However, to appeal to his character, Bush compared himself to Senator Kerry. Bush argued that the best way to defeat terrorists is to "never waver." After months of establishing Kerry as a flip-flopper the implication was that Kerry would be incapable of defeating terrorism. Twice Bush referred to his refusal to change his core values. President Bush explicitly referred to uncertainty and certainty. He argued that if America shows uncertainty, the world would drift into chaos. The president complements Kerry on his years of service but contends that world leaders only trust certainty. Bush suggests throughout the speech that the only way to win the war is to remain steadfast. He uses the steadfast and resolved issue as his final argument. Bush asserted Senator Kerry's core values change to suit politics: his by contrast, do not. Bush argued that he is reliable and predictable. Uncertainty, he maintained, cannot lead a nation, does not have the nation's best interest in mind, and is immoral.

Throughout the debate, President Bush attacked Senator Kerry's ethos and his lack of certainty. Bush used two messages to generate uncertainty. Bush maintained that Kerry sent mixed messages. President Bush argued that a president needed to speak clearly and not send mixed messages to our troops, allies, or the Iraqi citizens. Though not directly naming Kerry, Bush enthymematically indicted Kerry for sending mixed messages. As a part of the "mixed-messages" tactic Bush repeatedly reminded audiences of Kerry's statement that the war in Iraq was the "wrong war, at the wrong time, in the wrong place." If Kerry believed the war was wrong, it begs the question could Kerry lead? In a time of war, voters do not want to risk finding an inappropriate answer. By
creating doubt regarding Kerry, people perceived him as being uncertain regarding the war in Iraq.

To foster additional uncertainty regarding Kerry, Bush argued that the only thing consistent about Kerry is inconsistency (Bush, 2004). Throughout the debate Bush contended people will not follow someone who constantly changes positions on the issues. President Bush frequently repeated that Kerry had seen the same intelligence reports on Iraq as he. Upon seeing that intelligence, Kerry had voted to give Bush the authority to declare war. A rhetorically devastating perception of Kerry was created. He was seen as someone who says one thing and then another. His inconsistency raised the question whether or not he was wishing to say anything in order to be elected. This called into question his good will. Such behavior does not reflect the core values of Americans. "Bush's commercials had made Kerry's remark that he voted for the eighty-seven-billion-dollar supplement appropriation for the war before he voted against it perhaps his best known statement about the war, at least in the battleground states where the clip of Kerry's remark was being played repeatedly in Bush commercials" (Friedenberg, 2005, p. 105). Kerry's quote was linked with the term flip-flop in large part due to the Bush-Cheney campaign.

Sixty-four million people watched the first debate, an increase from previous presidential debates (Friedenberg, 2005). With a large audience, this gave the Bush-Cheney campaign a chance to rhetorically communicate their message of strategic uncertainty. President Bush's strategy was to generate uncertainty about Kerry while supporting his own ethos as a predictable, competent candidate. He accomplished this in a variety of ways. Bush laid out specific numbers for the plans he had implemented,
creating the perception of competency. He was able to create uncertainty about Kerry’s
good will and character. “The American people had come to know him [Bush] as
someone who was very credible, who was going to deal straight with them” (Cheney,

The second presidential debate took place on October 8, 2004 on the campus of
Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. “This was the town hall debate in which
an audience of 140 undecided voters, identified by the Gallup Organization, asked
questions” (Friedenberg, 2005, p. 113). Whereas in the first debate the contenders mainly
discussed foreign policy, the second debate included domestic issues. Bush’s tactic was
to steer discussion to the war on terrorism and Iraq. The first question posed to Senator
Kerry exemplified how the use of strategic uncertainty had taken hold. “Senator Kerry,
after talking with several co-workers and family and friends, I asked the ones who said
they were not voting for you, ‘Why?’ They said that you were too wishy-washy. Do you
have a reply for them?” (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2004, October 8). The
opening question immediately suggested that people perceived Kerry as uncertain. This
allowed Bush to contrast Kerry to that. He reminded the audience of September 11, 2001
and that through his actions, seventy-five percent of Al Qaeda has been brought to
justice. He also explains how the Taliban are no longer in power in Afghanistan. He later
appealed to his sense of expertise in handling the war on terror when he explained to the
audience “I fully understand the threat” (Bush, 2004) and followed by explaining the
certainty of his war plans. Bush recounted the Iraq finance minister’s optimism, told of
the reconstruction efforts and argued that everything was better than portrayed in the
media. Bush bolstered his practical wisdom giving examples of positive events and plans
unfolding in Iraq. “Casting himself as a strong and resolute wartime leader” (Friedenberg, 2005, p. 118). He later bolstered his good will and character by explaining how his decision to invade Iraq may have been unpopular but that it was the right thing to do. “Bush was effective in presenting himself as a leader who would make an unpopular decision if he believed it was right” (Friedenberg, 2005, p. 116).

For domestic issues, Bush used the same strategy. He maintained that his policies were working. He pointed to tax cuts and environmental plans. His domestic policies, he suggested, benefit the people. Bush briefly contrasted his ethos with Senator Kerry’s. Regarding the war on terror, he explained that increased spending on homeland security had helped secure our borders. He maintained that the war on terror will be long, requiring of us steadfast determinism. Bush argued that Kerry’s plan for the war in Iraq was, in fact, Bush’s plan, suggesting that Kerry could not create his own plan. On domestic issues, he questioned Kerry’s accomplishments in bettering Medicare. Another uncertainty-generating tactic was risky when Kerry answered a few questions, Bush’s initial response was to suggest that he did not understand Kerry’s answer. After Kerry answered a question about abortion, Bush initially responded with “I’m trying to decipher that” (Bush, 2004). When Kerry asserted that Bush was benefiting from tax cuts through his timber business, Bush jovially responded that he did not know he had a timber company. By not responding to what Kerry said and calling into question Kerry’s answers, Bush generated uncertainty about Kerry. If it is hard to understand Kerry’s answer now, it will be hard to understand him as President.

President Bush engaged strategic uncertainty as an offensive for the second debate. He attacked Kerry’s ethos in the two main areas of the debate, foreign policy and
domestic issues. “On both foreign-policy and domestic issues, Bush claimed that the senator constantly changed positions to secure political advantage” (Friedenberg, 2005, p. 118). Kerry’s willingness to change positions deteriorated Kerry’s practical wisdom and character, while the charge of political gain lowered Kerry’s good will.

In response to the first question about Senator Kerry being “wishy-washy,” President Bush launched a strategic uncertainty assault. “I can see why people at your workplace think he changes positions a lot, because he does. He said he voted for the $87 billion, and voted against it right before he voted for it. And that sends a confusing signal to people” (Bush, 2004). Bush then drew attention to Kerry’s original statements that the senator thought Saddam Hussein was a grave threat to the United States. Later, for political reasons, Kerry thought it was a mistake to remove Saddam Hussein. Bush attributed that change in position to political gain within the Democratic Party. By citing Kerry’s inconsistencies Bush was able to bolster the questioner’s uncertainty and adding to the “charge that he was a political opportunist who flip-flopped on issues according to the prevailing political sentiment” (Friedenberg, 2005, p. 118). President Bush’s opening statement previewed later uses of strategic uncertainty.

Bush attacked Kerry’s agreement with military intelligence justifying the war in Iraq. He repeated the rhetorical attack multiple times. He also relied on using Kerry’s “wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time” quote to attack Kerry’s practical wisdom as commander-in-chief. It did not help that “Senator Kerry was never able lay out a coherent position on the war on terror or the war in Iraq” (Cheney, 2006, p. 128). In other areas of foreign policy, Bush continued questioning Kerry as a world leader. He brought up Kerry’s use of a “global test” from the first debate. In the first debate, Senator
Kerry referred to the U.S. passing a global test before it invaded another country. The Bush-Cheney campaign began to use the term “global test” as a way to generate uncertainty. “(Kerry wants) some sort of global test before we can use our troops to defend ourselves,” Bush said” (Guarino, 2004, p. 006). “Global testing” generated uncertainty, creating the impression that Kerry would consult the U.N. rather than the people of the United States. It chained out into the media and generated uncertainty about Kerry. “Each premise of Kerry's terminal strategy is filled with contradictions. Kerry speaks now of the necessity to assuage our allies have U.N. approval and meet a ‘global test.’ Yet as recently as 2002, before 1,000 Americans had been killed in Iraq and when going to war against terrorists and their sponsors was a popular strategy, Kerry took a different position” (Gurwitz, 2004, p. 3H). Kerry’s uncertainty was not just a liability but also a threat. Bush informed the audience that Kerry had advised the U.S. to establish bilateral relations with North Korea. Bush then argued that Kerry was accusing Bush of not acting multilateral with North Korea. President Bush generated uncertainty about Kerry’s ethos on foreign affairs, as well as handling domestic issues.

Friedenberg (2005) stated that in the second debate Bush seemed to be the aggressor when it came to domestic issues. Because Kerry had 20 years in the Senate President Bush was able to juxtapose Kerry’s past with his present. Although he claimed to support domestic issues, Bush noted that Kerry seldom voted for them. “And what are his health programs? First, he says he's for medical liability reform, particularly for OB/GYNs. There's a bill on the floor of the United States Senate that he could have showed up and voted for if he's so much for it” (Bush, 2004). Bush pointed out Kerry’s inconsistent voting record regarding domestic issues. His remarks were designed to
generate uncertainty regarding Kerry’s good will and character. Bush also attacked Kerry’s practical wisdom. “Secondly, he says that medical liability costs only cause a 1 percent increase. That shows a lack of understanding. Doctors practice defensive medicine because of all the frivolous lawsuits that cost our government $28 billion a year” (Bush, 2004). Arguing that Kerry lacked an understanding of medical liability suggests that he lacks expertise in domestic issues. Bush ended the debate thusly: “He complains about the fact our troops don’t have adequate equipment, yet he voted against the $87 billion supplemental I sent to the Congress and then issued one of the most amazing quotes in political history: ‘I actually did vote for the $87 billion before I voted against it’” (Bush, 2004). Kerry’s statement once again returned to haunt him.

Even Kerry’s responses to Bush generated uncertainty. “The sort of gymnastics that they continued to see with Senator Kerry’s position I think raised their discomfort level to the point that they didn’t feel comfortable voting for Senator Kerry” (Cheney, 2006, p. 128). He could not correct for his inconsistent voting record or position-stands.

The final debate was hosted on October 13, 2004 on the Arizona State University campus. The debate focused on domestic issues. It did not cover new issues. Friedenberg (2005) stated the last debate was the least important because candidates would use new questions to repeat comments from previous debates. President Bush used new questions to bolster his ethos and lower uncertainty. He referred to plans and past programs he had initiated. However, Bush’s strategic uncertainty remarks attacked Kerry’s unpredictability.

Bush attacked Kerry on the usual issues. He assailed Kerry’s practical wisdom, suggesting that the senator did not have the wisdom nor the expertise to lead the country.
Bush accomplished this by using Kerry’s voting record against him. The voting record tactic called into question Kerry’s good will, virtue, and practical wisdom. In the final debate, Bush introduced a new tactic. Cheney (2006) argued that it was clear that Kerry did not have a plan for the war on terrorism or the war in Iraq; which, translated into lack of vision. A plan or a vision is essential for a presidential candidate (Strachan & Kendall, 2004). Bush also brought up Kerry’s failure to plan for Medicare, social security, and health care.

Bush generated uncertainty about Kerry’s abilities as a leader, good will, and virtue by pointing to inconsistencies in Kerry’s 20 year voting record, fluctuating positions, lack of vision, and inconsistency with respect to core values. In the meantime, Bush envisioned himself as a strong, resolute leader with a clear vision and a proven record of accomplishment. That clear vision and proven record of accomplishment created a perception of certainty and credibility.

The term flip-flop now symbolized Senator Kerry. Bush supporters used it both humorously and as a symbol of support for President Bush. No longer was the symbol limited to Senator Kerry; it became a means of recognizing Bush’s stalwartness. “At one such event, a veteran questioned whether Bush would permit him ‘the honor of giving our Commander in Chief a real Navy salute, and not a flip-flop’” (Allen, 2004, p. A09). The term flip-flop soon chained out to other campaign attacks. Politicians began to add their own embellishments to the term, as in the Colorado Senate race. “Pete Coors’ Senate campaign charged Sunday that Democratic rival Ken Salazar has ‘flip-flop-flipped’ on his position on Iraq” (Bartels, 2004, October 11, p. 20A). Clearly, as a rhetorical device it was used in a negative way to attack good will and/or practical wisdom.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

In an effort to advance knowledge about uncertainty and its relationship to political rhetoric, this study investigated the conditions, situations, strategies, advantages and disadvantages of uncertainty as a rhetorical strategy. The study was constructed a framework upon which a future theory may be built. The method of analysis was rhetorical generative criticism. Foss (2004) describes generative criticism as generating “units of analysis or an explanation from your artifact rather than from previously developed formal methods of criticism” (p. 411). Given the scope of the study and its research questions, rhetorical generative theory is an appropriate critical tool. According to Foss (2004), rhetorical generative theory can be used to analyze verbal and visual texts. It is also suited for framing future theory (Foss, 2004).

This study is made up of four stages. The first stage identified, collected, and transcribed the Bush-Cheney 2004 presidential election television commercials. The second stage analyzed and coded 59 Republican television ads that attacked John Kerry’s ethos. The third stage interpreted data and answered the research questions. Finally, the viability and risks of uncertainty as a rhetorical strategy will be discussed.

The researcher first identified and collected artifacts, in particular the Bush-Cheney campaign commercials aired on television in select media market-places from January to October of 2004. The ads were produced and financed by the Bush-Cheney 2004 campaign. Candidate ads were analyzed as opposed to ads aired by private interest groups. Analysis of the commercials should reveal the evocative power of the television’s visual grammar (Jamieson, 1992). Television invites strong reaction because it is a part
of everyday life in the US (Brummett, 1994, p.21). Perhaps not surprisingly, then, political television ads impact voters (National Public Radio, October 31, 2006). This study examined 59 ads financed and produced by the Bush-Cheney 2004 campaign, archived at Stanford University’s Political Communication Lab website. The advertisements are archived in the order of the months they appeared (between January 2004 until October 2004). The months were January to March, April to May, June, July, August, September, and October. Fifty-eight of the commercials are thirty seconds long. According to Trent and Friedenberg (2004), the thirty second spot became dominant because research showed that they were just as effective as longer spots. One of the commercials is a two minute and twenty-eight second spot featuring Laura Bush, which contains an embedded thirty-second political ad. Each commercial has a statement of approval by George W. Bush. To assure code reliability a set of coding rules were designed and followed. The researcher conducted all of the coding.

A first viewing analyzed each commercial for a general assessment of its content. Each commercial was assigned to one of three major categories and one minor category. The three major categories include: Attacking ethos, Bolstering ethos, and Miscellaneous. A minor category is “Generating situational uncertainty.” An advertisement that “attacks ethos” has signs and symbols meant to generate uncertainty about a candidate’s credibility. “Bolstering ethos” ads contain signs and symbols that reinforce, remind, or reveal a candidate’s credibility. “Miscellaneous” is a commercial that does neither. The minor category is a commercial that contains signs and symbols designated to generate situational uncertainty.
A second inspection transcribed the verbal text. In order to transcribe verbal texts, each video was played absent images. In the case of a non-identifiable person, only their sex will be identified. In some commercials, the identity of the people speaking is easily recognized. For instance, President Bush, Laura Bush, and John McCain appear in some commercials.

A third viewing of a commercial coded referential and condensation symbols in the video. According to Edelman (1967) "Referential symbols are economical ways of referring to the objective elements in objects or situations....Such symbols are useful because they help in logical thinking about the situation" (p. 6). Images in the commercials depict who or what, which in turn likely supports the verbal text. Images in political commercials serve as arguments that support verbal assertions (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004). The other symbol assessed will be the condensation symbol. According Edelman (1967) a condensation symbol condense into one symbolic event, sign, or act. For example, in commercials dealing with the economy condensation symbols of stock market numbers and people working are used to support the commercial is about the economy.

The fourth viewing aligned the verbal text with the video images. To accomplish this each image will be described separately and in the order of their appearance. Each description of the images was assigned an “Image 1” or “Image 2” category. To align the image with the verbal text, images assigned “1” were indicated in the verbal text with regular font. Images assigned “2” were indicated in italics. The aligning of the images with text allows for a clearer look at where the visuals support the verbal text.
The second stage of analysis examined each Bush-Cheney commercial and coded it for strategic uncertainty appeals. This stage of the analysis was conducted in six steps. Three steps interpreted verbal texts, and three examined images. The first step coded a commercial’s central features. According to Foss (2004), the first part of coding is to discover the central features of the artifact. Three codes constitute the central features of Bush-Cheney commercials. First, Attacking ethos, Second, Bolstering ethos, and Miscellaneous. Situational uncertainty works in tandem with the strategies of attacking or bolstering so it will be identified if present in the commercial.

The next step analyzed the verbal texts. The verbal text is essential to create strategic uncertainty in a commercial. For attacking and bolstering ethos, ethos will be broken into the following sub-categories identified by Aristotle: “Practical wisdom, virtue, and good will” (Aristotle, 1991, pp. 120-121). The verbal text was analyzed for statements that attack or bolster practical wisdom, virtue, or good will. Practical wisdom for this study is defined as competency as leader. Competency is often found in a politician’s actions. In Uncertainty Reduction Theory people seek to predict an individual’s actions to lower uncertainty. Virtue is defined, like in Uncertainty Reduction Theory, as values. Good will is characterized as trustworthiness. Uncertainty Reduction Theory labels it “attitudes.” Because the commercial may not isolate a particular sub-category of ethos, permutations of each sub-category will be assigned. For instance, the permutation of sub-categories could be practical wisdom and virtue, practical wisdom and good will, virtue and good will, or a configuration of all three. Some commercials do not just attack the ethos of a candidate or reinforce the ethos of President Bush, some heighten the perception of situational uncertainty. Statements were analyzed and labeled
PW for practical wisdom, V for virtue, and GW for good will, and any permutation of the three sub-categories of ethos that may come. Any statement analyzed and found to heighten situational uncertainty, it was labeled “Sit. U.” Situational uncertainty-generating statements were identified as they raised probabilities, confusion, or doubt about world events. Four of the five areas of uncertainty code commercials that heighten situational uncertainty: political, environmental, societal, and economic uncertainty, and permutations of these areas. The three general categories are not mutually exclusive. A commercial could attack ethos while bolstering Bush’s credibility or generate situational uncertainty and bolster Bush’s ethos, or attack Kerry’s ethos. The final code is Miscellaneous. These are Bush-Cheney commercials that do not fall under strategic uncertainty. Though these have a rhetorical strategy, they do not further the understanding of strategic uncertainty. Those commercials labeled “miscellaneous” will be discarded from the sample.

The third step determines an ad’s general overview. Coding evaluated the intent of the attack or bolster, expressed in a phrase that sums up the attack’s verbal intention. Foss (2004) suggested writing a paraphrase, phrase, or label that describes what a researcher sees in the passage, quotation, or image, or what it might mean (p. 414). For example, in the pilot study the majority of the statements attacked Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom. The final statement raised uncertainty about Kerry’s good will. The phrase sums up the attack with: Attacking competency raises uncertainty about Kerry’s good will. Though the verbal text establishes the use of strategic uncertainty, images also play an integral part.
Strachan and Kendall (2004) argued that “The use of visual rhetoric has expanded as visual symbols that construct meaning can be readily conveyed to a mass audience” (p. 137). The meaning of the visual symbols used in political television commercials support the verbal text (Strachan & Kendall, 2004, p. 137). Therefore, the visuals were sorted by how they support the attack, bolster, or generate situational uncertainty. Images can be powerful factors in strategic uncertainty. Erickson (2000) suggested that political imagery is used to manipulate and misrepresent the political reality of voters. For example, an image of a man who wears a mask while shooting an AK-47 is an iconic image of a terrorist. Terrorist images manipulate audience’s fears. Implied fear of a terrorist attack heightens a climate of uncertainty.

Image analysis was conducted in three stages. The first stage examined whether images reinforce the verbal texts or whether they mutually support each other. Each statement that coincides with an image was condensed to the basic idea. For example, in the commercial Priorities the first image is a white background with a cursor printing out blue text that reads: “Leadership Means Choosing Priorities.” The voiceover echoes these words as the text prints out. The image was coded as “priorities” to coincide with the verbal text. In some cases, however, the image does not completely align with specific text. When this occurred a general overview of the images was assessed along regarding how those images interact with the overall commercial.

The next step coded an image’s rhetorical intention. According to Edelman (1967) a condensation symbol is meant to evoke an emotion. Whereas, reference symbols depict objective elements like who, what, where, condensation symbols depict ideas and values associated with specific images. “Clearly images can be perceived at different levels of
generality, depending on the context, depending on who the image is for, and what its purpose is” (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 95). For example, in one commercial the verbal text states that Kerry missed a vote to reduce the cost of health care. The verbal text corresponds with a black and white image of an elderly woman. The verbal text suggests that Kerry’s voting record is bad for elderly citizens. The image implies who would be affected by Kerry’s voting record. While the image of the elderly woman suggests who will be affected, the black and white tint is dramatically symbolic. Black and white is used as a condensation symbol communicating that voting to reduce health care is a right or wrong issue. Kerry had a right or wrong decision to make, and he chose to make the wrong decision. Images were coded with a phrase that describes the image’s contextual and symbolic usage and how it relates to the use of strategic uncertainty. Coding consisted of writing a phrase that describes the impression of the image. For instance, in the pilot study the image of the black and white elderly lady was coded as “Kerry’s decisions negatively affect the elderly.”

The final step in analysis of images is the “strategic uncertainty” coding stage. The images were assessed regarding how they support the attack or bolster ethos. This analysis consisted of assessing the previous steps and the coding of PW, V, and GW for each image. For example, if a commercial’s verbal text attacks Kerry’s virtue the images will be assessed for the same effect.

The third stage of the study formulated an explanatory schema for strategic uncertainty as well as answer the research questions. The explanatory schema advanced the previous analyses, as after the artifacts were categorized and coded they were analyzed for commonalities. The commonalities in the commercials helped isolate
specific rhetorical strategies for generating uncertainty. Though prior research exists in political communication (Alvarez, 1997; Berelson, Lazarfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Gelman & King, 1993; Holbrook, 1996; Joslyn, 1990; Popkin, 1991) none of it explains how uncertainty can be used as a rhetorical strategy. According to Foss (2004), rhetorical generative criticism maybe beneficial in developing an explanatory schema. "An explanatory schema is a framework for organizing your insights about the artifact in a coherent and insightful way" (Foss, 2004, p. 419). The explanatory schema for strategic uncertainty should emerge from attempts to answer the research question. Generating uncertainty about a candidate's ethos and the rhetorical situation would explain how perceptions of credibility can be affected in a political campaign.

To create the explanatory schema Foss (2004) offered three techniques-cutting and sorting codes, engaging in a conceptualizing conversation, and brainstorming (pp. 420-421). To create a more robust analysis two techniques were employed. The first technique employed sought to cut and sort codes. Foss (2004) stated that the cutting and sorting codes technique requires the researcher to cut up the notes and codes generated during the analysis. Once the notes and codes are sorted, categories are subsequently created (p. 420). Each commercial was transcribed. Codes and notes were made on the transcription, which were subsequently sorted into major categories, (attacking, attacking and bolstering, bolstering, miscellaneous). Each coded transcription of a commercial was coded if it generated situational uncertainty. Categorized transcripts were sub-divided into the following categories, practical wisdom, virtue, and good will. The sub-categories coincide with uncertainty reduction actions, beliefs, and values. The categories help reveal the commonalities in the commercial to show how strategic uncertainty was
rhetorically implemented. The second technique employed was what Foss (2004) referred to as questioning that “provides an opportunity to challenge assumptions you might be holding about an artifact and to pursue various aspects of it in depth” (p. 424). After the strategic uncertainty appeals are coded, a rigorous analysis of the data should create an understanding of how strategic uncertainty functions rhetorically.

A discussion was generated from the explanatory schema that addressed the study’s research questions. The explanatory schema should reveal the intended rhetorical purposes of strategic uncertainty in political campaigns. A discussion section will explain the structure, viability and risks of strategic uncertainty. The process of generative criticism will help generate a rhetorical appreciation of the television ads used by Republicans in the 2004 campaign. Finally, future research implications will be discussed. This study built a framework for a theory of strategic uncertainty. Hopefully, this framework will help future investigators to construct a theory of strategic uncertainty.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to test the viability of the rhetorical methods employed. Two Bush-Cheney campaign commercials were analyzed. The method was found to be feasible.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

The Uncertainty Rhetorical Situation Feedback Loop

Bitzer (1968) describes a rhetorical situation as “A complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed of discourses introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about significant modification or the exigence” (p. 386). Grant-Davie (1997) suggested that Bitzer’s definition of the rhetorical situation means, “A rhetorical situation is a situation where a speaker or writer sees a need to change reality and sees that the change may be effected through rhetorical discourse” (p. 265).

The use of strategic uncertainty in the 2004 election was augmented by an uncertain rhetorical situation. At the same time, it also generated uncertainty in the rhetorical situation. In the case of the 2004 election, the atmosphere of uncertainty became the exigence for strategic uncertainty. Bitzer (1968) identifies exigence as an imperfection marked by urgency, a defect, or obstacle. In the 2004 election, there were two identifiable exigencies for an uncertain rhetorical situation. First, one exigence was John Kerry’s history as a U.S. Senator. The second exigence, and perhaps the most important, were the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

The uncertain rhetorical situation had established how people were likely to react to terrorist attacks. “Events such as the terrorist spectacle attacks in the United States, Saudi Arabia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Egypt have monumental short-and long term impact on agenda setting” (Matsaganis & Payne, 2005, p. 381). Terrorism and the subsequent war on terror defined the 2004 election. By making the war on terror the focal
point of the 2004 campaign, the Bush-Cheney Campaign not only played to the perceived strengths of President Bush, the Bush-Cheney campaign played to the weakness of John Kerry. Bush-Cheney campaign highlighted Kerry’s inconsistent voting record and his inconsistent statements. Edelman (1967) argues that a political actor must create the personification of the enemy. In the case of the 2004 election, it would have been unproductive to identify Kerry as a terrorist. Instead, the Bush-Cheney campaign identified Senator Kerry with the uncertain rhetorical situation. If there is an atmosphere of uncertainty, then a person who seems uncertain in his or her own actions and values may add more uncertainty. Like in an uncertain market, those perceived as having good information may cause others to follow (Avery & Zemsky, 1998). “A leader whose acts, suggest that he has a strategy and is pursuing it, finds it easy to attract a loyal and enthusiastic following” (Edelman, 1967, p. 82). This attraction becomes more powerful in an uncertain rhetorical situation. People knew who Bush was and where he stood and what he was likely to do (McKinnon, 2006).

As argued before, the attacks of September 11, 2001, and subsequent international actions had created an atmosphere of uncertainty in the United States. This became the exigence to discuss the war on terror. However, discussion about the rhetorical situation generated uncertainty. By mentioning the uncertainty inherent in the rhetorical situation, the rhetor generates additional uncertainty, and thus reinforces the exigence. Ogden and Richards (1928) argued that the context will help create interpretations of symbols “The peculiarity of interpretation being when a context has affected us in the past the recurrence of merely a part of that context will cause us to react in the way in which we reacted before” (p. 53). By talking about terrorism, terrorist attacks, a candidate generates
uncertainty. That uncertainty in turn will affect how people perceive the “symbols” used by campaigns. Ogden and Richards (1928) contended that symbols cause certain thoughts, that create the use of particular symbols. If a candidate generates uncertainty using certainty symbols, the audience will, according to Berger and Calabrese (1975) seek to lower it. To lower that uncertainty people will look to a leader who will use “symbols” of certainty (Avery & Zemsky, 1998; Edelman, 1967). That search for a leader, due to an uncertain situation, creates a need for a leader.

Strategic uncertainty was used in a variety of ways in the 2004 election, to attack Senator Kerry. First, it disrupted the political reality of Senator Kerry. Acceptance of a candidate’s political reality is important for a voter to identify with and vote for a candidate. Strategic uncertainty alters that reality. Second, because strategic uncertainty creates a need for a leader, strategic uncertainty disassociates a candidate from the mythic presidency. However, those effects are encouraged through one important aspect of strategic uncertainty; it creates an opportunity for rhetoric.

Strategic Uncertainty Creates Opportunity for Rhetoric

Sorrentino and Roney (1999) argued that "certainty is a desirable state" (p. 15). Barilli (1989) argues that, rhetoric finds fertile ground in which a person or audience doubts. Bryant (1953) argues that rhetoric exists because there is no certainty in human affairs. Strategic uncertainty creates an opportunity for rhetoric, as it did in the 2004 election. That uncertainty was used to attack ethos through disrupting political reality and separating a candidate from the mythic presidency. Strategic uncertainty was also used to attack and bolster ethos through political antithesis. Finally, bolstering ethos creates certainty in a candidate.
Strategic Uncertainty Disrupts a Campaign’s Political Reality

Atkins and Heald (1976) defined political knowledge as “an individual’s ability to recall candidate’s names, personal characteristics and qualifications; to identify election issues and current campaign developments, and to recognize connections between candidates and issue positions” (p. 216). The creation of a candidate’s political reality is meant to communicate to and affect a voter’s political knowledge. Nimmo and Combs (1983) asserted, “Campaign propaganda aims at mediating two closely related, overlapping fantasies. First, propaganda constructs fantasies about the candidate, his qualities, qualifications, program, and destiny” (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 63). That information lowers uncertainty. With lowered uncertainty about a candidate’s qualities, qualifications, and programs, a campaign hopes people will perceive the candidate as being a credible leader. Their trustworthiness as a leader (good will) is symbolized through their qualities (i.e. virtue and beliefs), qualifications and programs (i.e. practical wisdom). “Second, propaganda mediates realities about the nature of the world, the array of forces, dangers, threats, and enemies that must be confronted and vanquished” (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 63).

The second fantasy helps define the rhetorical situation for voters. Edelman (1988) stated that political reality fits into citizens’ rhetorically created social structures, and constructs a world of threats and reassurances. In those political realities, crafted by the campaign, the first fantasy builds and reinforces a candidate’s ethos. It constructs a reality where the candidate has the qualities (virtue) and qualifications (practical wisdom), to remedy problems faced by the nation. The second fantasy creates those problems. “The linkage of the two fantasies is essential, that is, the destiny of the
candidate becomes the destiny of the political world” (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 63).

The two fantasies work together to create a reality where a candidate is the right choice as a leader. Strategic uncertainty questions political realities by generating uncertainty about the candidate’s “qualities, qualifications, program, and destiny” (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 63). Because of the linkage of the two fantasies, uncertainty affects the second reality. If there is uncertainty about a candidate’s credibility, then there is uncertainty about whether he or she can rectify problems. It becomes important for a campaign to communicate the proper information to lower uncertainty in the electorate. Nimmo and Combs (1983) argued that candidates create their rhetorical visions, and each form of communication from the campaign is carefully crafted to portray that vision. For people to accept that vision they must accept the ethos of the candidate.

A major part of the structure of a political reality is the ethos of the candidate. A candidate’s ethos affirms a large portion of his or her political reality. The threats, danger, and issues structure of the political reality may be independent of the rhetorical visions of a candidate, but credibility helps voters accept a candidate. First, a candidate’s credibility is heightened if voters perceive a candidate as addressing issues important to them. For example, in the 2004 election Evangelicals were “courted” by the Bush-Cheney campaign on the issue of homosexual marriage. That issue was important to a specific segment of the population and by addressing it President Bush’s credibility was heightened. Second, voters must perceive that a candidate understands the rhetorical situation. For example, President Bush in the 2004 presidential election kept reiterating his understanding of the threats posed by terrorists. Third, voters need to believe a candidate can handle threats, dangers and issues posed by a campaign. In the 2004
presidential election President Bush presented himself as a candidate who could handle economic threats, danger of terrorism, and homosexual marriage. If voters are uncertain of a candidate’s ethos, then they may not believe he or she knows what is a threat, danger, or a issue. If a candidate does not know the situation then they cannot rectify the circumstances (Ball-Rokeach, 1973). On the other hand, if voters are uncertain about a candidate’s qualities or qualifications, they may be perceived as not having the ability to rectify dangers, threats, or issues. If a majority of that political reality is affected by uncertainty pertaining to a candidate’s ethos, then people are less likely to vote for the candidate. Strategic uncertainty becomes a weapon used to disassemble political realities. Strategic uncertainty generates uncertainty by attacking the credibility of the candidate and in turn disrupting their political reality. Strategic uncertainty attacks the campaign narrative four ways. First, it puts a campaign on the defensive. Second, it interjects an opponent’s political reality into the candidate’s political reality. Third, it highlights a candidate’s inconsistency. Finally, it redefines the candidate.

Why it is important to be consistent.

A powerful way to generate uncertainty is to highlight inconsistency. “Inconsistency has a negative effect on a candidate’s image. Perceptions of a candidate’s honesty, knowledge, strength, and stability suffered when seen as uncertain of his or her stance” (Page, 1978, p. 142). Highlighting inconsistencies is the main strategy in disrupting a candidate’s political reality. “Contrasting a candidate’s past and present positions is effective, because it raises doubts about what one can believe about the candidate” (Jamieson, 1992, p. 48). Raising doubt creates uncertainty about a candidate’s virtue and good will.
How inconsistencies were highlighted by the Bush-Cheney Campaign. Commercials by the Bush-Cheney campaign attempted to highlight Senator Kerry’s inconsistencies. “With John Kerry we were going to argue ‘unsteady’ as in ‘not consistent politically’” (McKinnon, 2006, p. 40). The “not consistent politically” was highlighted through Kerry’s words and actions.

To understand the attacks on Kerry’s ethos, virtue and practical wisdom, the Bush-Cheney campaign commercials were separated into two categories: Domestic and International. Domestic issues were ascribed to commercials that dealt mainly with domestic issues. International dealt with issues that mainly pertained to foreign policy.

Two patterns began to emerge in highlighting inconsistencies. The first pattern found was the “set-up and refutation. The second pattern was the “flip-flop.” The first strategy consisted of three main parts of the commercial. The “set-up” was a direct quote or citation of Senator Kerry’s words. The “inconsistency” followed with a list of media citations. Media citations add credibility (Jamieson, 1992) to the commercials. Another way to highlight inconsistency in the set-up was to cite directly from Senator Kerry’s voting record. The conclusion summed up the inconsistency. For example, in the commercial Unprincipled, a video of Kerry was played on a computer screen. In the video John Kerry stated, in the set-up, “I have a message for the influence peddlers and the special interests. We’re coming. You’re going.” Shot at eye-level with no actor, the commercial creates involvement (Jewitt & Oyama, 2003) with the commercial. Though not visible an actor talks through the internet search. The commercial continues with the “actor” running an internet search on John Kerry and special interests. This second part, the “inconsistencies” provides the citations that refute the statement by Senator Kerry.
The search provides a *Washington Post* article stating “Kerry Leads in Lobby Money. More special interest money than any other senator.” The use of media outlets provided hard evidence that Kerry is inconsistent, and thus citizens should be uncertain about Kerry’s virtue. If he says one thing and does another, it is implied that voters cannot predict his actions. This kind of attack on ethos targets Senator Kerry’s virtue and practical wisdom, which in turn attacks his ability to lead the people.

Again, in the commercial *Kerry’s Yucca* the announcer provides the set up by attributing words to Kerry then proceeds, with the help of visual text, highlights the inconsistencies. The ad ends with a memorable phrase highlighting inconsistency.

**Title of TV advertisement: Kerry’s Yucca**

Announcer: “Listening to John Kerry you’d think he’d be against Yucca Mountain his entire career.”

Image: Background of dark clouds. In the middle left a green and black image of Kerry. A new image appears, brownish and white, of Kerry talking in front of a crowd. A blue and white image of a headshot of Kerry appears.

Announcer: “But Kerry voted to establish the nuclear repository.”

Image: Background is dark clouds. Green image again. Picture of “Yucca mountain” slides in from the right. Text appears: Kerry voted to establish nuclear repository.
Announcer: “Kerry voted seven times to make it easier to dump waste at Yucca and said “A repository for nuclear waste could be established there and be made functional by 2015.”

Image: Green image slides off to the left. Yucca shrinks to the left side. Image text: Gray white top: The Record Courier. Black text prints up. “Kerry voted for the 1987 Screw Nevada bill, which made Yucca Mountain the only site under study” for the storage of nuclear waste.” – The Record Courier 8/11/04. At the bottom of the screen, Text: Kerry voted 7 times to dump waste.

Announcer: “He even tried to speed waste from Massachusetts to Yucca.”


Announcer: “There’s what Kerry says and there’s what Kerry does.”

Image: Blue Kerry slides to the left. Big: KERRY under it. There’s what Kerry says. There’s what he does.
The opening to the commercial is the “set-up.” The announcer attributes words to Senator Kerry that are later refuted. Three images of Senator Kerry appear, symbolizing this multiple positions.

The commercial begins by highlighting Senator Kerry’s inconsistent voting record, and what he said on in his presidential campaign. The text supports the accusation of inconsistency. The image of storm clouds symbolize trouble brewing. When discussing radioactivity, the color green suggests radioactivity. The commercial continues refute Kerry’s remarks. This creates the perception of inconsistency.

A conclusion attaches a “memorable” phrase and image to a candidate. The phrase boils down as to inconsistency, and is attached to the candidate through the use of his or her image. The visuals for the commercial are a monochromic image of Senator Kerry talking to a crowd. Initially the image is identifiable as Senator Kerry, but the use of it gives the impression to voters that Kerry is saying what the narrator is attributing to him. This builds the idea that Senator Kerry has stated that he is opposed to dumping nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain. The second image has the presence of dark clouds giving an ominous, trouble ahead sense. Text in the commercial from *The Record Courier* 8/11/04 showed Kerry Voting for storage of nuclear waste in the Yucca Mountain. That support is followed by other Kerry votes. The final visual text image is stated by the Announcer: “There is what Kerry says and there is what Kerry does.” Page (1978) pointed out that inconsistencies tend to make voters uncertain about a candidate. By presenting a candidate’s own words and systematically refuting them with either the candidate’s own voting record or “authorities” creates a sense of inconsistency. Inconsistency undermines a candidate’s ethos.
Highlighting inconsistencies on international issues.

A 2004 presidential election issue was whether a candidate had the qualities and qualifications to deal with terrorism. The Bush-Cheney campaign attacked Senator Kerry’s ethos with a set-up refutation

Title of TV advertisement: Intelligence.

Announcer: “John Kerry promises.”

Image 1: A television screen to the right with an image of John Kerry at the Democratic convention. To the left text:

John Kerry promises.

Video of John Kerry: “I will immediately reform the intelligence system.”

Announcer: “Oh really? As a member of the intelligence committee Senator Kerry was absent for seventy-five percent of the committees hearings.”

Image 2: Close up of John Kerry speaking. The text fades out and the video stops. Text: John Kerry…Absent. The word absent is presented in a box. More text fades in: 75% of public Senate Intelligence Committee Hearings. Fades to a far shot of the Democratic convention. Fades back to Kerry speaking.

Announcer: “In a year after the first terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, was absent for every single one.”
Intelligence opens with an announcer preparing the audience for the set up.

Senator Kerry provides the set-up himself with a video recording of his statement “I will immediately reform the intelligence system.” The announcer refutes the set up statement, by listing his voting record towards previous intelligence votes. Each suggests a lack of practical wisdom for the current rhetorical situation. It signals to the audience that if Kerry’s past actions are any indication, he would not handle the war on terror correctly. The commercial goes directly to his good will, which is highlighted in the concluding statement: “There’s what Kerry says. And what Kerry does.”
The Bush-Cheney campaign kept attacking Kerry’s ethos into the fall. The commercial, *Windsurfing*, a commercial McKinnon (2006) called an “iconic ad” (p. 46) used images and verbal means to highlight Kerry’s inconsistency. The commercial was built around Kerry’s inconsistent statements and voting record. His inconsistency and uncertain good will was symbolized by images of Kerry’s windsurfing back and forth. The commercial worked on two levels. The commercial highlighted not only Senator Kerry’s inconsistent statements, but how he changed positions. It also disassociated Senator Kerry from voters. “There are not a whole lot of people in Iowa and Wisconsin who are windsurfers” (McKinnon, 2006, p. 46). The strategy was to make the audience not only uncertain about Kerry’s practical wisdom, but identify Kerry as uncertain. The commercial follows the “flip-flop” strategy. This strategy relies on highlighting inconsistency through a series of changes of position, or “flip-flops.”

**Title of TV advertisement: Windsurfing**

Constant image: John Kerry windsurfing.

Announcer: “In which direction would John Kerry lead?”

Image: John Kerry torso up wearing a wetsuit and sunglasses windsurfing on the water.

Announcer: “Kerry voted for the Iraq war.”

Image 2: Kerry windsurfing. Text at the top: Iraq War. Text on the left: Supported. As he sails to the right.

Announcer: “Opposed it.”
Image 1: Kerry sails left. Supported disappears and new text on the right appears on the right of the screen: Opposed.

Announcer: "Supported it."

Image 2: Kerry sails right. Text: Supported it.

Announcer: "And now opposes it again."

Image 1: Sailing to the left. Text: Opposed it.

Announcer: "He bragged about voting for the eighty-seven billion to support our troops…"


Announcer: "…before he voted against it."

Image 1: Sails to the left past the ferry. Text: Opposed

Announcer: "He voted for education reform…"

Image 2: Sailing right. Text at the top: Education Reform. Text: Supported.

Announcer: "…and now opposes it."
Announcer: "He claims he’s against Medicare premiums but voted five times to do so."

Announcer: "John Kerry…"

Announcer: "…whichever way the wind blows."

Through imagery, text, and speech, the commercial highlights Senator Kerry’s changing positions as one of the more important issues in the 2004 election. The highlighting of inconsistency goes directly to attacking Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom and good will. It creates uncertainty whether Kerry could execute a war on terror. Thus, it casts uncertainty on his leadership, and questions whether he has the best intentions for the American people.

**Emergent patterns of strategic uncertainty.** Two strategies emerge in highlighting inconsistencies. The first strategy is the “set-up and refutation.” A second strategy is listing a series of “flip-flops.” The “set-up and refutation” has a statement directly quoted
from or attributed to what a candidate said in the present or past. The set-up is followed by a series of citations or statements that refute that statement. The ads rely upon an announcer listing the refutations along with visual images of the citations. A series of “flip-flops” relies upon a candidate’s voting record or statements to show a constant changing of positions.

As with the domestic issue commercial, the international issues commercial relied on Kerry’s voting record to highlight inconsistencies. The commercial *No Limits* used both linguistic and visual texts to highlight inconsistency. The prior two commercials, *Intelligence* and *Windsurfing* used texts to support the verbal text, but it is not supported through citation. Highlighting inconsistency was a tactic used throughout the 2004 presidential election. It was rhetorically designed to put Senator Kerry on the defensive, which was another tactic of strategic uncertainty.

*Putting a Candidate on the Defensive*

When generating uncertainty about a candidate’s political reality, support is needed. In order to lower uncertainty, a candidate must inform the public regarding the subject about which they are uncertain. For example, prior to meeting with veterans in West Virginia the Bush-Cheney campaign produced a commercial generating uncertainty surrounding Kerry’s support for troops in Iraq. When confronted by that uncertainty at his meeting, Senator Kerry had to address that issue. That puts a campaign on the defensive. When people are uncertain, they participate in increased information-seeking behavior (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Yet, in a campaign, information is tightly controlled (Nimmo & Combs, 1983; Trent & Friedenberg, 2004). It is hard for a citizen
to find exact information or to open dialogue with a candidate. Therefore, in order to lower uncertainty, a candidate must address messages created by an opposing campaign.

*How it works.* Like previously highlighted inconsistencies, "putting on the defensive" was broken into two categories, domestic and international issues. For domestic issues, analysis of a commercial determined whether it dealt mainly with domestic issues. International commercials that dealt mainly with foreign policy (even if they impacted domestic issues) were designated as such.

*Domestic.* It is a commonly held perception that Democrats raise taxes and spend money recklessly (Montegomery, 2007). The accusation works on two levels. The first level generates economic uncertainty about the raising of taxes. People worry about how their spending power will be affected. They are not sure how much will be withheld. In short, their financial future becomes uncertain. Second, a candidate is forced to address the issue. Senator Kerry was forced to address accusations of raising taxes and the inconsistencies of his statements and voting record. “Trying to counter Bush's charges he is a free-spending liberal, Kerry looked into a television camera and promised if he is elected, he would not raise taxes” (Fornek, 2004, p. 14).

**Title of TV advertisement:** Taxing our Economy

Announcer: “Now Kerry promises.”

Kerry at Convention: “We won’t raise taxes on the middle class.”

Image: Senator Kerry speaking.
Announcer: “Really? John Kerry has voted to raise gas
taxes on the middle class...Ten times. He supported a fifty
cent a gallon gas tax increase. Higher taxes on middle class
parents...eighteen times. He voted to raise taxes on social
security benefits. Ninety eight votes for tax increases.
There's what Kerry says and there what Kerry does.”

Though this commercial would be categorized under highlighting inconsistency, the
subject matter puts it in the area of putting the candidate on the defensive because of the
perception of a “Tax and Spend” Democrat. By playing the video of Kerry promising no
new taxes for the middle class the Bush-Cheney campaign follows the “set-up refutation”
pattern. It begins with the set-up, Kerry in his own words. It then follows with refutation
of those words by highlighting his voting record, which contradicts his statement. It ends
with the conclusion, an easy to remember statement that highlights the uncertainty. The
statement creates the impression that one cannot predict what Kerry will do, and therefore
people should be uncertain. This strategy was also used in commercials about
international issues.

*International*. The Bush-Cheney campaign put Kerry on the defensive with respect to
the war in Iraq. The Bush-Cheney campaign had early-on branded President Bush as a
war president (BBC, February 8, 2004). The war on terror was the focal point in the
election. “9/11 always was the defining event of the race, giving the president the
advantage. Voters felt as though they had a relationship with him coming from 9/11. The
vision and the image they had of him were very fixed as a strong leader” (Cahill, 2006, p.
31). The Bush-Cheney campaign had to generate uncertainty about Kerry’s ability to lead in the war on terror. So the campaign attacked him putting Kerry on the defensive.

An appropriation for $87 billion dollars in the congress became a very topical issue.... we discovered John Kerry was going to West Virginia to talk to an audience of veterans. We believe there was a high likelihood that the subject would be the 87 billion. He had been actually articulating a negative message against the president on arming the troops in battle... We immediately produced an ad on the 87 billion dollar vote. (McKinnon, 2006, pp. 42-43)

**Title of TV advertisement: Troops-Fog**

Announcer: “Few votes in Congress are as important as funding our troops at war. Though John Kerry voted in October 2002 for military action in Iraq, he later voted against funding our soldiers.”

Senate Clerk: “Mr. Kerry.”

Announcer: “No.”

Announcer: “Body armor and higher combat pay for troops?”

Senate Clerk: “Mr. Kerry.”

Announcer: “No.”
Announcer: "Better health care for reservists?"
Announcer: "Mr. Kerry:"
Announcer: "No."

Though it put Senator Kerry on the defensive, the commercial followed the "set-up refutation" pattern. The use of strategic uncertainty forced Kerry to defend his "new" position. The commercial was played prior to Senator Kerry speaking to the group. The commercial followed the highlighting of inconsistencies pattern of point-counter-point. It directly attacked his voting record by suggesting Kerry had voted for the war, but was not willing to vote for the safety of the troops. The use of strategic uncertainty put Senator Kerry on the defensive, when asked about it. Kerry responded with what McKinnon (2006) referred to as one of the most iconic moments in the campaign: "I actually did vote for the $87 billion before I voted against." By putting Kerry on the defensive, the Bush-Campaign was able get Kerry to respond to their accusations. He managed to generate more uncertainty about himself. His confusing statement, or variations of it, was used in future ads. In the 2004 campaign, Senator Kerry was on the defensive about how he would conduct the war on terror. The war on terror was a Bush-Cheney strong point, thus by addressing the issue, Senator Kerry was discussing the Bush-Cheney strong point. By discussing the war on terror, he was also reasserting that Bush was perceived as more knowledgeable with the war on terror (McKinnon, 2006). Thus, Senator Kerry was interjecting the Bush-Cheney campaign political reality into his own political reality.

*Interjecting the Opponent’s Political Reality*

Generally, U.S. presidential elections are essentially dualistic. A Democrat faces off against a Republican for the presidency. Campaigns use dualism on a symbolic level.
Jamieson (1992) asserted that a simplistic duality has existed in presidential elections: friend against enemy, saint against Satan, patriot against the traitor. In the 2004 election, the duality was the “known” and the “uncertain.” The “known” in the election was President Bush, as someone “you knew where he stood” (McKinnon, 2006). The “uncertain” being Senator Kerry, someone a voter did not know and whose actions, values, or leadership traits could not be predicted. In an atmosphere of uncertainty, that uncertainty becomes a liability. In essence a U.S. presidential election, for voters, is an either/or argument.

Each campaign uses communication strategies to establish its political reality. The opposing campaign does the same. This is where strategic uncertainty works. In the duality structure of presidential election campaigns, where one candidate is portrayed as “Satan,” it is implied the other is a “saint.” When the Bush-Cheney campaign generates uncertainty about Senator Kerry, they also imply that Bush is consistent, and the population knows where he stands. When Kerry goes off script and makes remarks that appear to be inconsistent, he not only generates uncertainty about himself he also reasserts President Bush’s “certainty.” When Kerry suggests that the war on terror should be executed in a different manner, through law enforcement, he is going against a “known.” The population already knows the “war on terror” to be a military operation. Therefore, by asserting that the war on terror should be handled differently, Senator Kerry suggests changing to an uncertain tactic.

Title of TV advertisement – World View

Announcer: “First, John Kerry said defeating…”
Image 1: Blue background. Text: First, John Kerry said...

image pulls out to reveal a television screen.

Announcer: “…terrorism was really more about law enforcement and intelligence than a strong military operation.”

Image 2: Still shot of John Kerry in front of rows and columns of blue screens. Cheap outline of word balloon appears with Kerry quote: “Terrorism…more about law enforcement…than a strong military.” Text: Des Moines, IA 1/11/04

Announcer: “More about law enforcement than a strong military?”

Image 1: Zoom in on a screen with text: More about law enforcement than a strong military?

Announcer: “Now Kerry says: “We have to get…”

Image 2: Blue screen text: Now Kerry says...

Announcer: “…back to a place where terrorists are a nuisance like gambling and prostitution. We’re never going to end them.”
In interjecting political reality, a different strategic uncertainty emerges, where campaigns air straight commercials that generate uncertainty about a candidate’s practical wisdom. However, when Kerry’s expertise is attacked, Bush’s expertise is implied. For example, the announcer states: “First, John Kerry said defeating terrorism was really more about law enforcement and intelligence than a strong military” he followed with, “More law enforcement than a strong military?” The questioning suggests that Kerry does not know how to properly execute a “war on terror.” It implies that President Bush does. However, it works on another level. Voters have only known the “war” on terror, they do not know how law enforcement would “fight” terrorism. So Senator Kerry’s plan, his application of practical wisdom for the common good of the nation, is uncertain. The
The electorate does not have information to draw upon to lower uncertainty about such a plan of action. The following attacks further suggest that Senator Kerry does not have the practical wisdom to conduct a proper campaign against terrorism, thus a Kerry presidency would be wrought with situational uncertainty. In fact, in later commercials, the Bush-Cheney campaign suggest that Kerry does not have a goal regarding the war on terror.

McKinnon (2006) stated that in the ad Searching they sought to “capture, as best as we could in 25 seconds, Kerry’s changing positions in Iraq” (p. 47). Even the name Searching implies a goal not yet attained, thus with no clear ending. The future of the war on terror becomes uncertain, because Kerry has uncertain practical wisdom. The “flip-flop” highlighting inconsistency does not have to be a series of flip-flops. It could also consist of one major flip-flop that has major ramifications. In the commercial, not only is the end result of a war on terror conducted by Senator Kerry uncertain, but so is his ability to protect the population.

**Title of TV advertisement: Searching**

Announcer: “He said he’d attack terrorists who’d threaten America.”

Image 1: Black background. White text with blue horizon.

Text: John Kerry on the war on terror.

Announcer: “But at the debate John Kerry said America must pass a global test before we protect ourselves.”
Image 2: Tilted to the right of the screen is a “television” screen. In the screen is a video of John Kerry looking off to the right. He is talking to someone.


Image 1: Same television screen and black surrounding background with yellow images. A distorted headshot of John Kerry speaking.

Announcer: “So we must seek permission from foreign governments before protecting America?”

Image 2: Another headshot of Kerry, slight pulled back to show shoulders. He’s situated to the left of the “screen.”

Announcer: “So America will be forced to wait while threats gather.”

Image 1: Senator Kerry has a microphone and is speaking to a crowd. In the background is a white man with a mustache watching Kerry speak.

Announcer: “President Bush believes decisions about protecting America should…”
Image 2: Headshot of Kerry talking and looking directly into the camera. The picture slowly zooms in on the screen.

Announcer: "...be made in the Oval Office not foreign capitols."

Image 1: The whole image is of the screen that showed the images. John Kerry is holding a microphone and is speaking to a group of veterans (in the background).

Announcer: "None."

Image 2: Image fades to black background. Text: How can John Kerry protect us...when he doesn’t’ even know where he stands?

The argument suggests that only an American knows what is best for America. Senator Kerry’s “flip-flop” is found in his statement that he would protect America, yet he is willing to cede power to other entities to do so. This flip-flop suggests that Senator Kerry would be willing to take the power to protect America away from Americans, and give it to an unknown entity that might not have the best interests of American in mind. That powerless future generates more situational uncertain and more uncertainty about Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom. At the end of the commercial, President Bush’s political reality is not implied but interjected.

*Domestic.* With domestic issues the Bush-Campaign attacked Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom, generating uncertainty about Kerry’s qualifications and programs. One
of the powerful effects of attacking a candidate’s practical wisdom is creating an impression citizens will lose power to make choices over their own lives. This becomes a powerful form of uncertainty, uncertainty about one’s fate. That loss of power is a direct result of Senator Kerry’s actions. In *Don’t take chances*, the commercial suggests Senator Kerry’s plans for health care would remove the power to make choices from citizens. The title itself suggests there is an uncertain future through the invocation of taking a “chance.”

**Title of TV advertisement: Don’t take chances**

Announcer: “You don’t want to take chances with your health or your health care.”

Image 1: Crooked shot of a doctor, left, and elderly man in bed, right. The elderly man is trying to sit up and move his legs in bed. The doctor is holding a clipboard and laying a hand on the elderly man’s shoulder.

Announcer: “But John Kerry and Liberals in Congress would.”

Image 2: The elderly man sits up and the doctor sits down.

Text: John Kerry & Liberals in Congress.

Announcer: “Their big government run health care plan.”
Image 1: The flow chart from the previous commercial appears above blurred image of hospital room. Text: John Kerry & Liberals in Congress.

Announcer: “One point five trillion dollars.”

Image 2: Camera zooms in on $1.5 Trillion Dollar. In the bottom left corner: Individual tax payers, a portion of it is cut off.

Announcer: “Washington bureaucrats not doctors, in charge.”

Image 1: New image of the flow chart. Dept. of Labor, Dept. of Treasury, and IRS all in red boxes. Camera slowly pans left to right over the boxes.

Announcer: “And the federal government not your doctor makes the final decision on your health. Rationing.”

Image 2: Camera pans from top to bottom with a side view of the flow chart. Text in flow chart boxes: Premium Rebate, Pool Agency, Operations, Payment Policy, Coverage Policy, Claims Processing, intermediary, payment rules, internal appeals, external appeals

Image 1: Bottom shot of flow chart with text in boxes:
Internal Appeals, External Appeals, Federal Courts.

Announcer: “One more reason we can’t…”

Image 2: Blurred hospital scene with flow chart over it.

Announcer: “…risk the liberals in congress and John Kerry.”


The conclusion: a phrase, the highlights, the uncertainty suggests there is a risk in electing John Kerry. Risk suggests uncertainty, because a risky venture has unknown or unpredictable results. Don’t take chances also uses disjointed, cluttered images to generate a sense of confusion. The images and camera suggest a confusing, risky plan.

The Bush-Cheney campaign worked to define President Bush as a certainty while Senator Kerry was defined as an uncertainty. In an atmosphere of uncertainty, someone who cannot be predicted has poor credibility. Jamieson (1992) pointed out that the campaign tries to make their candidate’s name synonymous which everything the electorate cherishes. Strategic uncertainty helps interject an opponent’s political reality. For example, the commercials World View and Searching, suggest Senator Kerry does not understand the war on terror, and does not have a clear plan or goal to fight the war on terror. The duality of the U.S. presidential race implies that Bush’s reality is the
opposite; he has special expertise and knowledge and a plan to fight the war on terror. President Bush’s plans have clear goals; he has values and leadership that people know. On the other hand, Senator Kerry lacks the qualities, qualifications, or plans to be the president in times of uncertainty. Kerry is made out to be the epitome of an uncertain president.

Redefines a Candidate

In a modern character-driven presidential election (Baker, 2007) it is important for candidates to define themselves (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004). Definitions help establish a base their political reality. For example, early in the election President Bush began to define himself as a “war time president,” (BBC, 2004, February 8). As a wartime president, people knew where he stood (McKinnon, 2006). He had defined himself as a certainty in uncertain times. This helped to create and support the main issues of his 2004 campaign (Cahill, 2006). It is important for candidates to define themselves as well as their opponent. Highlighting inconsistencies, putting a candidate on the defensive, and interjecting political reality disrupts political reality.

Research shows that voters support candidates who are consistent in their ideologies and issues (Flanigan & Zingale, 1998). Strategic uncertainty defines a candidate as inconsistent with those ideologies and issues. It does this by placing the candidate on the defensive. When put on the defensive a candidate must engage in uncertainty reduction; he or she must address the issues and lower uncertainty. Focusing on uncertainty reduction has two effects; the candidate is no longer defining himself, which allows the opponent to define him. It also interjects an opponent’s political reality into a candidate’s political reality. For example, in the 2004 election, President Bush had
the benefit of being an incumbent and defining himself as someone the population knew (McKinnon, 2006). Once Kerry went on the defensive, he could no longer define either President Bush or himself. Advertisements were designed to define Senator Kerry as an uncertain commodity and to remind "The American people had come to know him as someone who was very credible, who was going to deal straight with them" (Cheney, 2006, p. 122). The tactics of strategic uncertainty had defined Senator Kerry as uncertain. This was fostered by visual images. A common visual effect throughout the campaign was the distortion of Senator Kerry’s images. Though they are discernable as Senator Kerry, the images are often blurred to imply that one can see him but not truly know him.

If uncertainty is something people avoid, in an atmosphere of exaggerated uncertainty, the uncertain candidate becomes problematic. With Kerry’s political reality in question people became uncertain about Kerry’s qualifications and world views. Kerry had become an abstract enemy. “Because the evocation of a threatening enemy may win political support for its prospective targets people construct enemies who renew their commitment and mobilize allies” (Edelman, 1988, p. 66). Kerry was defined as uncertain and that was something people were not looking for in a president. By redefining Kerry the Bush-Cheney campaign were able to separate him from the mythic presidency.

Strategic Uncertainty Separates a Candidate from the Mythic Presidency

Myths help create and support social reality. They accomplish this by helping people to arrange, interpret, and make decisions about their world. According to Campbell (1972), myths structure meaning. Structuring myths helps create social meaning. People use myths to connect their private interests to the public (Delaisi, 1927). This connection is advanced by a myth’s ability to not only structure meaning but
sequence symbolic action. Fisher (1987) explained that myths constitute “symbolic action [that] have a sequence and meaning for those who live, create or interpret them” (p. 58).

The structuring and fostering of social identification, and guiding interpretation make myths a powerful factor in the construction of social reality. “If on the whole the picture conjured up by the myth resembles reality in some way, there will be nothing to disturb the social conscience of the individual” (Delaisi, 1927, p. 12). Myths have the power to move publics in particular directions. In helping create and foster social reality myths are a central factor in the creation of political reality. One myth in particular is important in a presidential election; the mythic presidency.

Scholars (Erickson, 2000; Neustandt, 1990; Roeloffs, 1992; Rossiter, 1956) have identified the mythic presidency as key in public perceptions of a president’s performance. The mythic presidency is a political myth that invokes a multitude of symbols, rituals, and images. The mythic presidency calls up powerful political myths of past presidents. Presidential myths create certain expectations of presidents and of those who wish to become president. Myths of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln create certain expectations. Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s leadership after the attacks on Pearl Harbor and John F. Kennedy’s face-off with Soviet Russia in the Cuban Missile Crisis, reinforced each president as a mythic leader. The mythic presidency creates a perception of a consistent presidential archetype. Felkins and Goldman (1993) asserted that myth collects symbols, reinforces values through familiar plots and consistent characters which in turn lower uncertainty in the population. With a wealth of information to draw upon from the mythic presidency, a population believes they can predict a president’s values, beliefs, and actions. “Without myth we are ‘uprooted’ from
our past” (Felkins & Goldman, 1993, p. 451). Therefore, myth has much rhetorical potential for American presidents (Felkins & Goldman, 1993; Rossiter, 1956), and those seeking the presidency. It becomes important for a candidate to use the mythic presidency by associating himself or herself with the myth. An association creates a positive impression inherent in the mythic presidency.

A part of the mythic presidency is strong leadership (Misciagno, 1996; Neustadt, 1990). Stories are told of strong leaders emerging from an uncertain situation and with certainty; they lead the people to a better land (i.e. the promised land, redemption, freedom, equality, etc.). Leadership, as is the mythic presidency, is affected by the rhetorical situation (Felkins & Goldman, 1993; Neustadt, 1990). There are many aspects to leadership (Neustadt, 1990; Rositter, 1956). However, in the case of the 2004 election, the rhetorical situation heightened the importance of strength. The uncertain rhetorical situation heightened a need for a strong leader to lead the people out of uncertain times. It is during times of bewilderment and uncertainty that citizens look to a leader (Edelman, 1967). In the 2004 election, it had become even more important to tie a candidate to the mythic presidency. Campaigns worked to create the perception of their candidate as being in possession of qualities of strong leadership.

“The president is viewed larger than life and above all else, as seen as a strong leader” (Misciagno, 1996, p. 329). That larger than life leader must be perceived as powerful. “The term ‘leader’ evokes an ideal type which high public officials try to construct themselves to fit” (Edelman, 1988, p. 40). Neustadt (1990) stated that we measure a president as “weak” or “strong”. “Strength is so unquestionably linked to leadership that leadership often comes to be perceived synonymous with and reducible to
strength” (Misciagno, 1996, p. 331). A president represents almost all aspects of the nation, from the economy to politics (Edelman, 1988). The importance of a candidate fitting into that role becomes an imperative to a campaign. To help create that image a candidate must show signs of strength.

A presidency relies heavily on symbolism (Hinckley, 1990). Actions taken to communicate strong leadership are symbolic. A candidate’s leadership is revealed to the population through symbolic actions, voting patterns, and recommended policies. Each past and future symbolic action reinforces a candidate’s practical wisdom. Funk (2004) argued that the models of a politician’s voting behavior bolster a candidate’s image. The symbolic action of voting becomes important in constructing the proper image for a presidential candidate. Edelman (1988) stated that a leader’s policy success and failures are constructed for interpretation. That “interpretation” by the voting population is meant to be positive. Nimmo (1995) argued that voters find it hard to assess a candidate’s presidential or legislative performance but easier to assess their competency. It does not matter if they voted, but whether the symbolic action had positive results. For example, President Bush in the 2004 election discussed the signing of the PATRIOT act. That action is meant to give the impression that President Bush was giving the tools to the nation, to create security. The Bush-Cheney campaign did not discuss the intricacies of the PATRIOT act, but allowed for the impression of security. Therefore, symbolic actions of a candidate are meant to be perceived as for the “common good” of citizens. A perception of a “common good” symbolic action allows for an assessment of a candidate’s competency, rather than an assessment of a presidential or legislative performance. The common good of voting, shows a presidential candidate “in action.”
That common good and action is meant to create an impression of a strong leader. That strong leadership supported through symbolic action, ties the candidate to the mythic presidency. “The myth, an unquestioned belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning, is a particularly relevant form of symbol in the emergence of mass political movements” (Edelman, 1971, p. 53).

Voting records and policy support are not the only way candidates associate themselves with the mythic presidency. Erickson (2000) argued that presidents, and presidential candidates, use images to assume power. Visuals help create the symbolism of strength by actions and convictions (Edelman, 1967). An image of a candidate visiting a factory to discuss economic plans augments the candidate’s plans for the economy. A candidate seen attending church or using iconic value images (e.g. the flag) signals to citizens the strength of the candidate’s convictions. Images can be used to disassociate a candidate from the mythic presidency. For example, in a Bush-Cheney commercial titled Yakuza, when discussing Senator Kerry’s strategy to fight terrorism, a picture of Senator Kerry and a video with an iconic image of a “terrorist” are juxtaposed. Those images suggested that Senator Kerry’s policies did not provide security.

Images are important to campaigns but they are still steeped in the linguistic. Barthes (1972) pointed out that the written and spoken word is still important. “The linguistic message is indeed present in every image: as title, caption [and] accompanying press article” (p. 38). Barthes (1972) explained the importance of spoken and written word for images “Writing, writing and speech continuing to be the full terms of the information structure” (p. 38). Voters rely on the linguistic aspects of political advertisements to help in the interactive process of managing candidate’s images.
(Nimmo & Savage, 1976). Kendall and Paine (1995) stated “While political images are full of implications and the voter can choose among them, the linguistic message helps to guide their interpretation” (p. 27). Candidate images help tie a candidate to the mythic presidency. That image becomes an important factor in a presidential campaign. It also becomes important for the opponent to disassociate a candidate from the mythic presidency. If it is important for a candidate to associate himself or herself with the mythic presidency, it is just as important for them to disassociate their opponent from the mythic presidency. In the 2004 election, the Bush-Cheney campaign rhetorically disassociated Senator Kerry from the mythic presidency.

*How strategic uncertainty disassociated Senator Kerry in the 2004 Election.* Each commercial was analyzed to see why and how Senator Kerry’s ethos was attacked. A trend emerged in the commercials. Attacks on Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom were used to generate uncertainty about his good will. Since leadership is a very important factor in the mythic presidency, the advertisements were placed into a category: disassociates candidate from the mythic presidency. The commercials were, like previous commercials, separated into domestic issues and international issues. Each commercial attacked Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom.

*Domestic.* Four commercials, dealing with domestic issues, were isolated and placed in the category of disassociating Kerry from the mythic presidency. (Two of the commercials were nearly identical to each other.) Though each is different in the issues handled, they each have a common pattern of attacking Senator Kerry’s ethos and generating situational uncertainty. To get an understanding of the advertisement *Wacky,* it
must be placed in proper context. McKinnon (2006) stated that at the time they produced and broadcasted the commercial, the US was going through an oil crisis. The advertisement worked to not only attack Senator Kerry's practical wisdom, but to help heighten the economic uncertainty generated by a "gasoline crisis."

**Title of TV advertisement: Wacky**

Announcer: "Some people have wacky ideas,"

Image 1: Images from a silent movie. Man in the middle of silent movie era cars. The film is in fast motion as the cars circle the man.

Announcer: "like taxing…"

Image 2: Man in sailor suit was looking away from camera looks into camera with astonished look on face.

Announcer: "...gasoline more…"

Image 1: Old time gas pump's price meter going up.

Announcer: "...so people drive less."

Image 2: A sizeable amount of people riding a large tandem bike. The camera "rides" past the bike from back to front.

Announcer: "That's John Kerry, he supported…"

Image 1: Framed. Kerry speaking. Video of image is created to match the silent movie motif. Kerry video put in
fast motion to match the fast motion of the silent movie images. Text: That’s John Kerry.

Announcer: “...a fifty cents a gallon gas tax.”

Image 2: Gas attendant. White man in uniform holding onto a gas pump. He takes off the gas hose from the pump and holds it to the camera. Camera angle looking up at the gas attendant.

Announcer: “If Kerry’s gas tax increase were law the average family would pay six hundred and fifty seven dollars more a year.”

Image 1: Framed. Man waddling away from camera into the woods. He stops and pulls out his pockets to reveal they are empty. Text: Kerry’s Plan: Pay $657 More a Year For Gas.

Announcer: “Raising taxes is a habit of Kerry’s. He supported higher gasoline taxes eleven times.”

Image 2: Framed. Three images. Left of screen, Kerry. Center, digital gas pump price going up. Right, silent movie era looking woman with mouth open, looks shocked, slowly turns from looking right to left, at the gas pump

Announcer: “Maybe John Kerry just doesn’t understand what his ideas mean to the rest of us.”


The images used in the commercial support the comical or “wacky” idea of raising gas taxes. Senator Kerry is identified as the agent of that “wacky” action. The cars work as a referential symbol (Edelman, 1967). People both recognize what the argument is about and identify with the commercial. Cars signal to viewers that they will be affected by Senator Kerry’s gas tax.

The shocked expression on the actor, in relation to the announcer’s mention of raised gas taxes, is a condensation symbol (Edelman, 1967). A gas pump’s meter going up signals to an audience that they will be paying more for gas due to a tax increase. Juxtaposed to previous images, the images of people riding a bike suggests people will no longer be able to afford to drive their automobiles. In other words, it suggested that freedom of mobility would be removed from consumers. The automobile is a symbol of freedom (Neal, 1985; Netting, 1994). When people can no longer drive they symbolically lose their freedom. That loss of freedom can be traced to the “wacky” practical wisdom of Senator Kerry and his gas tax hike.
To disassociate a candidate from the mythic presidency, whatever power he/she
wields must be shown to yield negative results. Using Senator Kerry’s image in the
context of a silent movie connects him to “comedic” visuals, making him less respectable
and making his practical wisdom comical. Those words and actions tie Senator Kerry to
negative effects. Jewitt and Oyama (2003) stated that images from a high angle represent
power over the viewer. The gas attendant, thus gas, has power over the viewer. The
increased gas prices will have power over citizens by reducing their economic power.
With less money an increase in financial uncertainty results.

The referential symbol of quantifying how much extra a family would spend in
gas highlights the condensation symbol of a man pulling out empty pockets. A person
pulling out empty pockets symbolizes a lack of money. Again, this exaggerates the
already economic uncertainty of a gas crisis. It also suggests that Senator Kerry’s voting
record, and future actions, will have a negative impact on citizens.

His commercial argued that Senator Kerry’s past actions should foretell his future
actions. The use of multiple images of Senator Kerry had become a common practice in
Bush-Cheney campaign commercials. However, the images of Kerry are referential.
Multiple images of Kerry create an impression that there are many sides to Kerry.
Numerous sides to Kerry support an argument that Senator Kerry takes multiple positions
on a single issue. An increase in multiple positions and probabilities means an increase in
uncertainty. The other images work as condensation symbols signaling to viewers that the
increase in prices are shocking. The text supports the statements of Kerry voting for
increases in gas taxes.
In the conclusion, an image of a man pushing a car suggests that people would not be able to afford gas if Senator Kerry were elected. Visual text reinforces the suggestion that Kerry, if elected, would raise gas taxes. Again, this fosters situational uncertainty. The verbal text creates the impression that Senator Kerry does not understand the average American. Through strategic uncertainty Senator Kerry’s leadership, is attacked. That attack is conducted by highlighting Senator Kerry’s voting record of raising gas taxes. His voting record, or practical wisdom, is used to suggest that he does not understand the average American citizen’s need for his/her car. Therefore, he cannot identify with the average citizen. If Senator Kerry cannot identify with the average American, then it seems likely an average American could not identify with Senator Kerry. When people cannot identify with an individual they tend to not see any similarities. Berger and Calabrese (1975) stated that when people perceive dissimilarities uncertainty increases. Increases in uncertainty levels produce decreasing in liking.

An inability to identify with the average American became a common theme in the disassociation of Kerry with the mythic presidency. In Priorities, the Bush-Cheney campaign attacked Kerry’s good will by highlighting voting behavior, and suggesting it had negative effects.

**Title of TV advertisement: Priorities**

Announcer: “Leadership means choosing priorities.”

Image 1: White background. Cursor prints out in blue text:

Leadership means choosing priorities.

Announcer: “While campaigning…”
Image 2: Picture of John Kerry pulls out to see multiple images of original image of Kerry.

Announcer: “…John Kerry has missed over two thirds of all votes.”

Image 1: A large number of the John Kerry images delete to reveal the Capitol building and text: Missed 2/3 of all votes. Worst attendance record in the U.S. Senate. Bottom right CQ Floor Vote 1/1/03-7/6/04.

Announcer: “Missed a vote to reduce health care costs by reducing frivolous lawsuits against doctors.”

Image 2: Black white image of elderly woman. Cut to video of elderly lady talking to someone off camera to the right. Upper left hand corner of framed image, Kerry haloed in red. Cursor prints out text: Missed a vote to lower health care costs. Bottom right $.2207 CQ Vote #66 4/7/04.

Announcer: “Missed a vote to fund our troops in combat.”

Image 1: Black and white image of head shot of a male soldier wearing a helmet and sunglasses as he slowly scans over the camera. Image fades to a male American soldier, in black and white, with helmet on holding an M-16 in a
crouching position. He slowly looks left into the camera. Upper left hand corner of framed image, Kerry haloed in red. Cursor prints out text: Missed vote for funding our troops in combat. Bottom right of image: $ .2400 CQ Vote #106 6/2/04.

Announcer: “Yet, Kerry found the time to vote…”

Image 2: Headshot of Kerry talking. Text: Voted against Laci Peterson Law.

Announcer: “…against the Laci Peterson law.”


Announcer: “It protects pregnant women from violence.”

Image 2: Image of same woman but she is facing the camera. Only her eyes, nose, and top of her mouth are visible.

Announcer: “Kerry has his priorities. Are they yours?”
Image 1: Woman facing camera looking off to the side in a house. Text: Kerry has his priorities. Are they yours?

In the introduction, visual and verbal text worked as referential symbols. The verbal and visual text sets the situation of the commercial. It identifies for the viewer that the commercial is going to be about the qualities of leadership.

The multiple images of Kerry work as a referential symbol and condensation symbol. The referential symbol associates Senator Kerry with what the commercial is discussing. As a condensation symbol, the multiple Senator Kerry images symbolize multiple positions Senator Kerry has taken on single issues. By suggesting that Kerry takes multiple positions on single issues, the commercial generates uncertainty about Kerry’s ethos. A wavering, or flip-flopping, on a stance removes a candidate from the perception of an “unwavering” strong president. To support the statement a citation is used as a referential symbol. In Priorities, the citation supports Kerry missing votes. It shows he does not take action, and that casts uncertainty on his ability to be a strong leader. That lack of “proper” action is highlighted on domestic and international issues. However, domestic issues out-number international issues in disassociating Senator Kerry from the mythic presidency.

The commercial continues to attack Senator Kerry’s voting record, using images of people affected by his lack of understanding. The black and white image of an elderly woman evokes emotions about the effects poor health care have upon the elderly. Kerry’s inability to identify with the public and his lack of competency has negative effects upon the nation’s elderly.
When dealing with international issues Senator Kerry's lack of practical wisdom affects citizens. Senator Kerry's lack of voting on funding troops suggested he was not competent to execute the war on terror. Indeed, he does not have the troops' best interests in mind.

The verbal text is associated with the referential symbols of Senator Kerry's image and visual text. Again, the text points to his voting record, and that he voted against a bill designed for the security of women. The referential symbol of a woman creates a condensation symbol of who is affected by Senator Kerry's voting behavior. A citation is used as support for the statement, he voted against the law.

In the conclusion, a final statement by the announcer and text, disassociate Senator Kerry from the population. After repeatedly highlighting his lack of practical wisdom, the final statement suggests that, as a leader Kerry would be incapable of identifying with his constituents. If a leader is going to lead and represent a people, he or she must be able to understand their needs. He must be there for important decisions, like health care, and monetary and technical support for the military. The commercial suggests that Senator Kerry lacks insight into people's needs. Like previous commercials, Priorities use Senator Kerry's past to generate uncertainty about the future. This lack of leadership is not just of his own doing.

Title of TV advertisement: Tort Reform

Doctor Interview: 'There is a crisis in health care. There is a crisis in women's access to health care in this country.'

Image 1: Female doctor looking slightly off camera. Text:
Dr. Patricia Stephenson OB-GYN.
Announcer: “Maternity wards closing.”

Image 2: Head-shot of a doctor wearing a surgery mask.

Text: Maternity wards closing.

Announcer: “OB-GYNs being forced out.”

Image 1: Three actors, two female and one male. One female is facing the two others with her back to the camera. The man is sitting down, wearing a stethoscope, and seems to be examining the woman with her back to the camera. The other woman is standing behind the man.


Image 2: Two men, outside, walking down steps away from pillars. Both men are in suits the one to the left is one step behind younger and wearing sunglasses. The man one step ahead is older with white hair carrying a brief case. The younger one is facing the older one and appears to be engaged in talking. Text: Frivolous Lawsuits. New text appears: John Kerry & the Liberal in Congress > Side with Trial Lawyers.

Announcer: “They opposed legal reform ten times.”
Image 1: Close-up of a gavel coming down and hitting a table. Text: John Kerry & the Liberal in Congress >
Opposed Legal Reform 10 Times.

Dr. Interview: “If Mr. Kerry and his allies were elected I don’t think there would be any hope for tort reform in this country.”

Image 2: Dr. Stephenson again talking to someone off camera.

The commercial opens with what appears to be an interview. The text appears as a referential symbol. The mixture of the woman and her position creates a condensation symbol creating a symbolic event. She is talking about female health care in the United States. Her position and sex build ethos for the commercial.

In the body of the ad, the image of a doctor works as a referential symbol. It shows viewers who will be affected by the refusal to pass tort reform. According to the commercial, there appears to be certainty in the closing of maternity wards in the future. The result is situational uncertainty. Though it is implied that maternity wards are going to close, it does not say what kind of effect it will have on voters. Voters are left without enough information to draw a conclusion. What they are left with is a negative outlook for an uncertain health care future.

Images show who will be affected if tort reform is not enacted. This is cause for the audience to identify with those affected by lack of tort reform. The verbal text poses
imaginary future scenarios that create a "need" for tort reform. That need is Senator Kerry's voting record, and his allegiance to trial lawyers. The men in suits symbolize trial lawyers in the commercial. The need established earlier is given a cause in both linguistic and visual texts. Senator Kerry's virtue is questioned. Senator Kerry's allegiance to trial lawyers links him to the possibility of maternity wards being shut down and OB-GYNs forced to resign.

A referential symbol showed how often Senator Kerry voted against tort reform. This helped voters to logically understand the situation. It allowed the audience to draw a conclusion that if elected, Senator Kerry would still oppose tort reform. That would lead to the problems previously listed. Senator Kerry becomes a symbol for possible future problems.

The commercial systematically sets up problems, provides a cause, and links the cause to Senator Kerry. Senator Kerry is linked to the cause of possible future problems through his voting record or practical wisdom. The linkage to the cause of the problems, suggests Senator Kerry does not understand the needs of the population. In fact, it suggests that Senator Kerry would rather side with a few special interests than the American public. This lack of identification, shown through his voting record, casts uncertainty on Senator Kerry's good will. It questions whether Senator Kerry would be a leader looking out for the population, or looking out for a small special interest group.

*Domestic use of strategic uncertainty.* The domestic issues commercials have three emergent tactics that work together. The commercials attack Senator Kerry's practical wisdom by questioning his actions and voting records. Kerry's actions and voting records show he does not understand the population and its needs. As a leader, a president must
represent the people. If that president does not understand the people, he cannot fully represent them. Because of this lack of identification with the population, Kerry cannot identify with the population. According to Berger and Calabrese (1975), lowered identification leads to heightened uncertainty. Heightened uncertainty leads to avoidance.

*International issues.* The war on terror and all its components (9/11, Iraq, etc.) were the defining issue of the 2004 election (Cahill, 2006; Donilon, 2006; Smith, 2005). However, it was more of an asset to the Bush-Cheney incumbency campaign. A part of an incumbent’s strategy is to convince voters that “despite their doubts about the incumbent, the challenger presents greater risks” (Smith, 2005, p. 132). In other words, there is uncertainty in political change (Cioffi-Revilla, 1998). In an atmosphere of heightened uncertainty, people look for a leader with special knowledge (Avery & Zemsky, 1998; Edelman, 1967). If they look for a leader with proper expertise, it is safe to say people are less likely to take risks. In the 2004 election, a strategy of making Senator Kerry appear to be a risk was important. According to Maestas (2003) risk and uncertainty tend to be positively correlated so they do move in identical directions. To show that the Senator Kerry was a risk President Bush’s campaign attacked Senator Kerry’s ethos not only on domestic issues but international issues. If a challenger is perceived as not being a credible leader voters might vote against him. This need for a credible leader becomes heightened with a high level of situational uncertainty. If Senator Kerry’s ethos is attacked with strategic uncertainty, he is less likely to associate his image with the mythic presidency. If Kerry cannot associate himself with the mythic presidency, he loses access to its inherent credibility.
Nimmo and Savage (1976) found voters have an idealized image of what they want in a president and compare the candidate to that ideal. On one level, they want someone they can identify with through values, someone who has the same values as they. On the other hand, they want someone who is competent and fits the mythic presidency mold (Kendall & Paine, 1995). If a candidate is perceived as having uncertain values, and voters are uncertain about his/her practical wisdom, the candidate’s competency comes into question. This moves the candidate away from the idealized, mythic, presidency. The mythic presidency becomes an even more important symbol in an atmosphere of exaggerated uncertainty. During uncertain times, people look to leaders with special qualifications to lead them (Avery & Zemsky, 1998; Edelman, 1967). The mythic president becomes more desirable during times of war and uncertainty. By generating uncertainty about Senator Kerry’s ethos in international matters, the Bush-Cheney campaign was able to disassociate him from the mythic presidency, and the defining issue of the election. To disassociate Senator Kerry from the mythic presidency, the Bush-Cheney campaign had to generate situational uncertainty. This creates the need for a competent, strong, resolved leader. Bush-Cheney attacked Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom to get at the public’s perception of Kerry as a strong competent leader. A politician’s voting record symbolizes his or her actions. By casting uncertainty upon a candidate’s actions, the candidate can be perceived as “weak.” To be associated with the mythic presidency, weakness is not a desirable quality.
Title of TV advertisement: PATRIOT Act.

Announcer: “President Bush signed the PATRIOT Act…”


Announcer: “…giving law enforcement vital tools to fight terrorism.”

Image 2: Text: Fight Terrorism. Left camouflage military man walking with a rifle slung over his shoulder. Right a man with police jacket, with POLICE on back, with back to camera is putting a man into a police car. Fade out.

Announcer: “John Kerry…he voted for the PATRIOT act…”

Image 1: White background. Text left to right: John Kerry voted for Patriot Act. – H.R. 3162, 10/25/01. Shadow of text below text. Right: Headshot of Kerry speaking into a microphone at a podium.

Announcer: “…but pressured by fellow liberal he’s changed his position.”
John Kerry Change Position – Remarks at Iowa State University, 12/2/03.

Announcer: “While wire taps, subpoena powers, and surveillance are routinely used against drug dealers and organized crime…”


Announcer: “…Kerry would now repeal the PATRIOT Act’s use of these tools against terrorists.”

Image 2: Black text on white background. Text: Kerry would repeal Patriot Act’s use of wire taps, subpoenas, and surveillance.…

Announcer: “John Kerry playing politics with national security.”

The word “politics” at the upper left corner falls into blank spot.

In the opening of the commercial, both the verbal and visual text worked as referential symbols. The symbol of “to fight terrorism” set the context of the commercial. President Bush, through his practical wisdom for the common good, is symbolically fighting terrorism by signing the PATRIOT Act. He is the agent of security. However, the commercial reveals Senator Kerry as an agent of uncertainty. Uncertainty that is generated by his actions and inaction.

The PATRIOT Act becomes a condensation symbol for the fight against terrorism and a tool for security. President Bush becomes the agent of power and security. The PATRIOT Act is conduit for that power and the rhetorical device to “give” tools to fight terrorism. The two images work as reassurance to the audience. Through President Bush’s symbolic action, the people are more secure.

The commercial revealed there is an agent who at one time supported the tool of security. However, due to politics Senator Kerry began to oppose the PATRIOT Act. Verbal and visual text, working as referential symbols, established that Senator Kerry voted for the PATRIOT Act. This flip-flop created uncertainty regarding Kerry’s ethos.

Senator Kerry’s voting for the PATRIOT Act is the referential symbol but it becomes a condensation symbol for his uncertainty. Not only did this produce uncertainty regarding his support of the PATRIOT Act, but it also suggested that his good will was uncertain. If Senator Kerry is willing to change his position due to political pressure, it questions his leadership regarding the war on terror.
The commercial makes the argument that aspects of the PATRIOT Act have been in use prior to the Act having been signed into law. The images used create the impression of the PATRIOT Act in action. Since the PATRIOT Act helps in the war on terror, the actions of the Act protect the people. The PATRIOT Act becomes a symbol of security, a sense of protection that lowered uncertainty.

At first, Senator Kerry voted for the PATRIOT Act, which symbolizes the war on terror, now he would repeal it. Senator Kerry would take away the security of the United States for political purposes. This signals to the audience that not only would the U.S. be in danger in an uncertain world if Senator Kerry were president, he would also take away protection from terrorism. It also signals that Senator Kerry would not be a consistent leader, his values and practical wisdom are suspect. Black and white text suggests a black and white situation that Kerry does not appear to perceive.

In the end, the commercial consistently attacks Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom regarding the war on terror, leadership needed in uncertain times. Senator Kerry does not have the qualities, qualifications, or the strength to protect US citizens. Kerry having uncertain qualities, qualifications, and strength, affect his perception of the war on terror.

Title of TV advertisement: Yakuza

Announcer: “John Kerry says he’s author of a strategy to win the war on terror…”

Image 1: Black screen with text: Author of strategy to win the war on terror? Upper left corner black and white photo of Kerry at a desk with title: THE NEW WAR: Senator John Kerry. Image grows and moves center as word
STRATEGY grows and moves right of picture and question mark grows over the word.

Announcer: “...against the Japanese Yakuza.”

Image 2: Yellow and black “Japanese” sun rays. Black and white image of Kerry imposed over the rays to left of the screen. Right: Cartoon, manga art, of Japanese man holding a gun.

Announcer: “Never mentions Al Qaeda.”

Image 1: On the left of the screen black and white, image of John Kerry again. On the right is a question mark over video of back of man shooting an AK-47.

Announcer: “Says nothing about Osama bin Laden.”

Image 2: On the left of the screen black and white, image of John Kerry. “Terrorist” image fades out and fades into an image of Osama bin Laden sitting in front of a map. Red question mark appears over Osama.

Announcer: “Calls Yasser Arafat a statesman.”

Image 1: On the left of the screen black and white, image of John Kerry. The image slowly grows bigger. Image of
Osama fades out and fades into an image of Yasser Arafat. Text: “Statesman” with blue halo appears over Yasser. The lower right corner text cites statesman text: “The New War” p. 112.

Announcer: “The New Republic says Kerry’s plan misses the mark.”

Image 2: On the left of the screen black and white image of John Kerry. The image slowly grows bigger. Yasser Arafat image fades out as an image of the New Republic magazine cover fades in, with an image of Barack Obama on it. Text appears over New Republic image: “misses the mark.”

Bottom right, date of New Republic quote: 2/9/04.

Announcer: “And Kerry’s focus? Global crime.”

Image 1: Previous images fade out to black with white text: Kerry’s focus? White background with moving black silhouette images. Male figure looking up to the left holding a spinning globe on his index finger. Text: Global crime

Announcer: “Not terrorism.”
Image 2: Image fades out as the text Not Terrorism fades in over an image of Osama again.

Announcer: “How can John Kerry win a war if he doesn’t know the enemy?”

Image 1: Black and white image of Kerry with emerging thought bubble with a question mark in it.

The commercial *Yakuza*, like the previous commercials, attacked Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom to generate uncertainty about his leadership, or good will. Like the previous and later commercials, *Yakuza* seeks to create uncertainty about Senator Kerry’s leadership skills to disassociate him from the mythic presidency, while exaggerating situational uncertainty. The commercial works on three levels. The first level, dissects Senator Kerry’s symbolic actions, and attacks them separately through referential and condensation symbols. On another level, those attacks not only criticize Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom, but some visuals help in exaggerating the sense of situational uncertainty. On a broader level, the commercial suggests that Senator Kerry does not understand the war on terror. It argues that John Kerry does not recognize the real enemy. It creates the perception that Senator Kerry lacks special knowledge or expertise to be a leader in times of uncertainty.

The introduction to the commercial establishes the rhetorical situation. It communicates the political reality of a terrorist threat (Nimmo & Combs, 1983). It begins by suggesting that Senator Kerry has a strategy to fight the war on terror. It looks at a form of Senator Kerry’s symbolic action for the war on terror. Images support the fact
that Kerry authored the strategy. However, it begins the generation of uncertainty by using an image of a question mark over the word strategy. It visually creates doubt about Senator Kerry’s strategy to fight terrorism. That doubt is created by uncertainty.

The first attack points out that Senator Kerry’s strategy targets the wrong enemy. The commercial implies that Senator Kerry does not understand the war on terror and its participants. The average citizen knows that Al Qaeda is the main target in the war on terror. Yet Senator Kerry does not. It questioned Senator Kerry’s qualifications for president if he does not understand a basic component of the defining issue of the 2004 election. An image of Senator Kerry ties him to a cartoon character. Cartoon images suggest that Senator Kerry’s strategy was childish and should not be taken seriously.

The images attacked Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom by showing that Kerry’s strategy does not reference the war on terror. The first image of a “terrorist” gives a visual to the announcer’s mention of Al Qaeda. That image is followed by the iconic referential and condensation symbol, Osama Bin Laden. Osama’s image is short-hand for the attacks of on “9/11,” the threat of terrorism and Al Qaeda. The two images present the true targets of the war on terror while creating an atmosphere of uncertainty. Osama remained free, and terrorism was still a factor in everyone’s life. That factor was the lack of information of when, where, and how a terrorist attack will happen. Creating uncertainty creates a need for a leader with the proper knowledge to defend the people.

To further cloud Senator Kerry’s credibility on conducting the war on terror, the announcer cites Kerry referring to Yassir Arafat as a statesman. To draw upon the imagery of Yassir as a terrorist the Osama image slowly fades out as the image of Yassir Arafat fades in. The end result suggests that Senator Kerry calls a terrorist a statesman.
To add credibility to attacks, the New Republic is cited as stating Senator Kerry’s strategy “misses the mark.” Visual texts support verbal texts. It creates an impression that Senator Kerry’s strategy is flawed. It also creates an impression that an unbiased source is making the argument. However, when combined with the previous sections of the commercial, it makes an argument that Senator Kerry does not understand the broader implications of the war on terror.

Instead of understanding that the war on terror is about terrorism the commercial argues that Senator Kerry’s strategy targets organized crime. The black and white imagery used puts the war on terror into a rhetorical situation of good versus evil, right versus wrong. It implies that there is a right way to execute the war on terror and a wrong way to execute the war on terror. The previous attacks clearly positioned Senator Kerry as being on the wrong side of conducting the war on terror.

The second to last image of Osama was used to remind the audience who and what the war on terror is about. It also reminds voters that he is out there, and that raises the uncertainty of future attacks.

The final portion poses a rhetorical question: “How can John Kerry win a war if he doesn’t know the enemy?” This suggests Senator Kerry did not understand the “threats and dangers” in the war on terror. It also generated uncertainty about his leadership. If he is to be president, how can he protect the people if he targets the wrong people? It also works on the perception of voters and their image of a president. Citizens should not have a better grasp of international issues than the candidate. It removed Senator Kerry from the mythic presidency.
Title of TV advertisement: Peace
Announcer: “History’s lesson; strength builds peace.”

Image 1: Community clock off to the left of the screen. A man in a business suit appears and walks towards and past the camera.

Announcer: “Weakness invites those who would do us harm.”

Image 2: Woman jogging down a street pushing her baby in an exercise stroller. The image is fast forwarded so that she is physically closer to the camera.

Announcer: “Unfortunately after the first World Trade attack…”

Image 1: A ceiling fan shown spinning on the ceiling.

Announcer: “…John Kerry and the Congressional liberals tried to slash…”

Image 2: A man wearing sunglasses hails a taxi. He pulls the glasses off and looks at his watch. Text at Bottom: John Kerry & Congressional liberals.

Text appears in a box middle left of screen: Slashed intelligence.
Announcer: “...six billion dollars from the intelligence budget...”

Image 2: Kid looking out a window. Light envelopes whole face. He turns from the light into partially shadows.

Announcer: “...and tried to cut or eliminate over forty weapons now fighting the war on terror...’


Announcer: “...and refused...”

Image 2: A woman on the phone, she looks at her watch.

Text: John Kerry & Congressional Liberals. New text appears in white outline box: Putting our troops at risk.

Announcer: “…to support our troops in combat with…”

Image 1: Video in fast forward. Image of mother helping children into a minivan. Text: John Kerry & Congressional Liberals. Text in white outlined box: Putting Our Troops at Risk
Announcer: “...the latest weapons and body armor.”

Image 2: Clock hands spinning around a clock in fast motion. Passing of time.

Announcer: Ticking noise in the background.

Image 1: Black background. Text: John Kerry & Congressional Liberals. The following text glows into vision. Putting our Protection at Risk.

By systematically attacking a candidate’s practical wisdom, his or her symbolic strength is lessened. In the opening sequence of Peace the announcer talks about strength and weakness. In the background, a sound of a ticking clock sets the mood for the commercial, and represents time. An image of a man appears and disappears, representing work. The images fade out as the announcer claims weakness. An image of a woman jogging with a stroller moves towards the camera. The woman and child work as condensation symbols of who is at stake in the war on terror. The ticking clock and the actors’ motion set the tone that things are in motion and time is running out. Those two effects work to create tension in the audience. The sense of tension is heightened by listing Senator Kerry’s poor voting record.

The commercial targets Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom on two fronts in the war on terror, intelligence and the military. The commercial also generates situational uncertainty. It accomplishes these two effects through the use of referential and condensation symbols of past terrorist attacks, and by invoking the current war on terror. The use of the attack on the World Trade Center situates the risk of terrorism in a manner
to which voters can relate. The announcer relates how Senator Kerry and the Liberals in Congress reacted to the attacks. Indicating that Senator Kerry slashed the intelligence funding by six billion dollar, voters get a referential symbol of Kerry’s practical wisdom. The images of a man in motion looking at his watch suggest energy and time.

A key component to the war on terror is the United States military. The commercial, Peace, attacked Kerry’s practical wisdom in conducting the war on terror by asserting he would not fund the military. Again, the commercial used the referential symbol of numbers to give an exact definition of how Senator Kerry’s lack of competency will affect the war on terror. The images suggest that both soldiers fighting the war and civilians at home will be affected by Kerry’s incompetence.

The conclusion to the commercial keeps the tension up with a ticking clock; the test suggests that electing Senator Kerry is a risk. Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom in a time of uncertainty is cast into doubt. His past indicates what he might do as president.

Title of TV advertisement: Risk

Announcer: “After September eleventh…”

Image 1: The ruins of the World Trade Center with an American flag waving to the left. The image is broken up into boxes. Text: After September 11th our world changed.

Announcer: “…our world changed. Either we fight terrorists…”
Image 2: Back shot of black capped male shooting an AK-47 at an unseen target.

Announcer: “...abroad or face them here.”

Image 1: Close up of a male child’s face in the boxes.

Announcer: “John Kerry and liberals in Congress had a different view.”

Image 2: Boxes disappear and camera zooms in on child’s eye.

Announcer: “They opposed Reagan...”

Image 1: With a white time line at the bottom, old television images are shown as the shot pans from the time line. Image of Ronald Reagan walking towards the camera holding paper.

Announcer: “...as he won the Cold War.”

Image 2: At top of screen in a box text: John Kerry and his Liberal in Allies. Four men standing near a flag shaking hands. Text: Opposed Reagan as he won the Cold War. Text is underlined and a line points to a point on the time line. A ghost image of “The 80s” on the screen.
Announcer: “Voted against the first Gulf War.”

Image 1: At the top of the screen in a box text: John Kerry and his Liberal Allies in Congress. Military coming out of the back of a troop air carrier. Fades into sight. A ghost image of “The 90s” appears. Text of the time-line: Voted against the first Gulf war. A helicopter flies over an American flag.

Announcer: “Voted to slash intelligence after the first Trade Center attack.”

Announcer: “Repeatedly opposed weapons vital in winning the war on terror.”

Image 2: At the top of the screen in a box text: John Kerry and his Liberal Allies in Congress. Ghost text of “Today” appears. Time-line text appears: Repeatedly opposed weapon vital to the war on terror. Background image of a missile being shot into the air from the ground. Image scrolls off as a new one scrolls on. A tank rolling through the desert.

Announcer: “John Kerry and his liberal allies, are they a risk we can afford to take today?”
The commercial *Risk* begins, like previous commercials, by generating situational uncertainty. It accomplished generating uncertainty by using inartistic proofs. That was a day (9/11) when everything changed in the United States. Sorrentino & Roney (2000) stated that emerging new paradigms cause uncertainty. The invocation of September 11, 2001 not only created fear in the audience, but reminded citizens to fear change. Senator Kerry represents change. By heightening situational uncertainty, the commercial defines Senator Kerry as uncertain. However, the commercial also disassociates Senator Kerry from the mythic presidency by tracing his lack of competency. A history of poor practical wisdom when dealing with enemies of the United States communicates weakness. Weakness does not fit the mold of the mythic presidency.

The commercial traces common historical events of symbolic value through an ongoing visual time-line of images and a line denoting time-periods. The time line spans the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. The time-line gave common experiences of bold decisions made by leaders in regards to perceived enemies and threats. For example, one such historic event shown was the fall of the Berlin Wall. The fall of the wall symbolizes the end of communism. It also explains that Senator Kerry opposed each “bold” decision. This accomplishes two things. It affects the perception of the future. If Kerry were elected president, he would likely make poor decisions if confronted with threats. Poor decisions would cause unknown problems in the United States. That sense of the unknown is what people want to avoid. Kerry’s history of poor Kerry’s history of poor
decision signals the impression that he would not be a strong president for the common good.

The ad’s conclusion suggests that it would place us at risk to elect Senator Kerry. That risk creates uncertainty. Change is not always good. Senator Kerry has a history of incompetence. That lack of competency signals weakness when strength is needed.

**Title of TV advertisement: Wolves**

Announcer: “In an increasing...”

Image 1: Above shot of a forest. Fog rises from the forest.

Announcer: “…dangerous world…Even…”

Image 2: Up close shot of a plant. The image blurs out of focus as the background forest comes into focus. Forest shot darkens out.

Announcer: “…after the first terrorist…”

Image 1: Below shot looking up at trees. Sunlight shines down from above. Camera pans down from top towards the ground.

Announcer: “…attack on America…John Kerry and the liberals in Congress voted…”

Image 2: Eye-level shot of the forest, in the forest.
Announcer: “...to slash America’s intelligence operations...”

Image 1: A wolf running through the forest.

Announcer: “Silence from announcer.”

Image 2: A quick pan through the woods. A partial shot of a wolf face appears for half a second.

Announcer: “...by six billion dollars...”

Image 1: Camera pans through the forest. A wolf is seen partial through the brush running through the woods.

Announcer: “Cuts so deep they would have weakened America’s defenses.”

Image 1: Camera pans outside of the forest. Text: Kerry & Liberals in Congress Intelligence cuts 6 Billion. CQ Vote #89 '94.

Announcer: “And weakness attracts those who are waiting to...”

Image 2: Six wolves sitting outside the forest looking at the camera.
Announcer: “...do America harm.”

Image 1: The wolves get up and start heading towards the camera.

Like previous commercials, the introduction establishes an atmosphere of uncertainty. The images of fog create a sense of the unseen, the unknown. A forest represents nature, something that cannot be controlled and cannot be predicted. In times of uncertainty a leader is needed to control uncertainty. A strong leader must possess the qualities and qualifications to confront dangers, threats, and enemies.

The commercial follows the same format of pervious commercials. It reminds the audience of the World Trade Center attacks. Senator Kerry shown voting to slash America’s intelligence operations by six billion dollars. It suggests that cuts in intelligence would show weakness. The quick visual, cuts through the obscured forest, and the implication of wolves on the move create a perception of threat. That threat creates a sense of foreboding and uncertainty. The viewer cannot quite make out the wolves. The wolves represent terrorists (McKinnon, 2006) and at the end when the wolves are finally shown, they rise and move toward the camera. However, their final destination is not shown. The viewer is left with a mystery. Burke (1969) argued humans seek to overcome mystery. To not resolve mystery creates uncertainty. The commercial attacks Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom sufficiently to disassociate him from the mythic presidency and to generate uncertainty about his leadership. It does not provide new attacks on Kerry’s practical wisdom. The final message of the commercial generates situational uncertainty. By generating situational uncertainty, the Bush-Cheney campaign makes Senator Kerry less desirable.
International use of strategic uncertainty. In times of uncertainty, people look to leaders with special knowledge and expertise. The mythic presidency helps create a perception of "president-as-expert" (Neustadt, 1990). It also creates the perception of strength (Misciagno, 1996). It becomes important for candidates in a presidential election to associate themselves with certainty. The emergent strategy of strategic uncertainty follows three steps. First, the commercials create situational uncertainty, accomplished in a variety of ways. One means by which situational uncertainty was evoked through the use of verbal and visual texts to recall terrorist attacks on US soil. The attacks of February 26, 1993 were most commonly used while September 11, 2001, was used once. However, each attack was used in the opening moments of the commercial to set the rhetorical situation. The use of terrorist attacks remind people of the unpredictable nature of terrorism. Another method of exaggerating situational uncertainty was the invocation of the war on terror. War spawns an atmosphere of uncertainty. Once the rhetorical situation was set and the topic of the commercial revealed, the next step attacked the practical wisdom of Senator Kerry.

By attacking a candidate's practical wisdom the ads address a candidate's symbolic strength. In an atmosphere of exaggerated uncertainty, the attacks also question a candidate's leadership. This disassociates a candidate from the mythic presidency. If a candidate is perceived as having poor practical wisdom, he or she is not going to work for the common good of the population. If in an atmosphere of situational uncertainty the electorate does not perceive a candidate as having leadership qualities and qualifications, they will seek one who does.
The final step in strategic uncertainty is to disassociate Senator Kerry from the mythic presidency. Like previous commercials the concluding verbal and visual texts are meant to resonate with the audience. The constant attacks on Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom in a situation of heightened uncertainty generate more uncertainty about Senator Kerry’s leadership. By attacking his symbolic actions, Senator Kerry is meant to be perceived as a weak politician who lacks leadership qualities. For example, in *PATRIOT Act* the ending verbal text states: “John Kerry playing politics with national security.” That statement after a series of attacks on his lack of consistency suggests that Senator Kerry is willing to change his mind simply to become president. It begs the question, would he be consistent as president? It suggested that Senator Kerry would rather “play politics” than make sure the people were secure and safe.

*Attacking and Bolstering Ethos*

In between attacking and bolstering ethos in strategic uncertainty lies a mixture of bolstering a candidate’s ethos while at the same time attacking their opponent’s ethos.

*Political Antithesis.* Burke (1972) identifies a type of rhetorical identification as antithesis, an us-versus-them distinction. Political antithesis in strategic uncertainty attacks a candidate’s ethos while bolstering the uncertainty generator’s ethos. It juxtaposes contrasting political plans to create a known versus unknown. For example, the Bush-Cheney campaign commercial showed Senator Kerry’s plan to fight the war on terror, which generated uncertainty. The commercial then revealed the Bush-Cheney plan to fight the war on terror, which seemed more certain and sensible. In the 2004 election, political antithesis was used in two ways. One way was the proven past versus the
unknown future. The commercial frames the election to be about President Bush’s past actions and their benefits, versus Senator Kerry’s lack of practical wisdom. The second way, was the political equivalent of “vaporware.” Vaporware is “a product preannouncement that can be timed to steal the momentum from a competitor” (Pfaffenberger, 2000, p. 79). The Bush-Cheney campaign presented a vaporware plan as it attacked Senator Kerry’s plan.

In the initial analysis, five commercials were identified that bolstered and attacked ethos. However, one of the commercials, *Forward*, was removed from the data set because it did not clearly present Senator Kerry antithetically. The remaining commercials were placed in separate categories because the bolstering and attacking were so clearly defined. Political antithesis commercials make a clear distinction between candidates.

*Proven past versus unknown future.* The strategy of showing proven past versus the unknown future relies on common experiences and quantifiable and unquantifiable events (increase of jobs, decisions made) to bolster a candidate’s ethos. It also attacks the practical wisdom and or values of a candidate. Common experiences can have the added benefit of heightening situational uncertainty. For example, the common experience of “9/11” or economic recession helped heighten situational uncertainty. This plays to the strength of President Bush’s expert knowledge about the war on terror, which is something people look for in uncertain times (Avery & Zemsky, 1998; Edleman, 1967).
Title of TV advertisement: Pessimism

George Bush (Looking off to the side of the camera): “I’m optimistic about America because I believe in the people of America.”

Image 1: George and Laura Bush looking to the side of the camera.

Announcer: “After recession, 9/11…”

Image 2: Street scene. People on the streets walking away from the camera. White man walking away from the camera. Text in a white box at the top of the screen: After recession, 9-11, and war…

Announcer: “…and war. Now the economy…”

Image 1: Shoe store. People in background. White male walks in front of camera as if he is shopping.

Announcer: “…has been growing for ten straight months.”

Image: Cuts to shoe salesperson sitting on the ground pulling a shoe out of a box. Text in white box: Now our economy has been growing for ten straight months.
Announcer: “The largest tax relief in history.”

Image 2: Man in hard hat, in front, pointing to something.

Black man in hard hat behind the white man. Text: The largest tax relief in history

Announcer: “One point four million jobs added since August.”

Image 1: The diner scene from previous commercials. Text: The largest tax relief in history fades to new text: 1.4 million jobs added since August.

Announcer: “Inflation, interest, and mortgage rates low.”

Image 2: A man wearing a yellow hardhat standing on scaffolding surrounded by I-beams. Text: Inflation, interest, and mortgage rates low. Cuts to a man in business attire on the phone, smiling and spinning in his chair. He pumps his hand in the air appearing to be happy. Text: Inflation, interest, and mortgage rates low fades out.

Announcer: “Record homeownership.”

Image 2: A couple with a baby walking into the back of a brick house. Text: Record home ownership.
Announcer: “John Kerry’s response, he’s talking about the Great Depression.”

Image 1: Video of headshot of John Kerry speaking. Text John Kerry’s Response. Text over face: America’s job recovery is the worst since the Great Depression. – John Kerry for President press release 05.07.04

Announcer: “One thing is sure, pessimism never created a job.”

Image 2: Image bleaches out to white text: One thing is for sure. Pessimism never created a job.

Title of TV advertisement: Global Test

Constant image: Kerry speaking at a debate. Shoulders and head only. Text above: John Kerry.

Announcer: “He said he’d attack terrorists who’d threaten America.”

Image 1: Inside a black frame Kerry speaks.

Announcer: “But at the debate, John Kerry said America must pass a global test before we protect ourselves.”
The Kerry Doctrine: A Global Test.


So we must seek permission from foreign governments before protecting America?

Announcer: “So we must seek permission from foreign governments before protecting America?”

So America will be forced to wait while threats gather.”

Announcer: “So America will be forced to wait while threats gather.”
Announcer: “President Bush believes decisions about protecting America should…”

Image 2: Image of President Bush standing up at a desk, talking on the phone, looking at a piece of paper and in the Oval office. Framed by blue edges.

Announcer: “…be made in the Oval Office not foreign capitols.”

Image 1: Profile of President Bush sitting and talking on the phone.

Proven past versus unknown future commercials followed a common pattern. First, the commercial introduced the main agent. In the two commercials’ introductions, President Bush and Senator Kerry are introduced as the primary agents. In both commercials, situational uncertainty is heightened through the invocation of past events. In Pessimism, the attacks of September 11, 2001 along with the economic recession of early 2001 are mentioned to heighten social and economic uncertainty. In Global Test, the war on terror is mentioned.

In the main body of the commercial ethos is attacked and bolstered. The proven past related to the public’s knowledge of President Bush. For example, Global Test framed an argument regarding America’s ability to make its own decisions. It argued that Senator Kerry would take away the United States’ sovereignty with respect to making decisions to protect itself. The commercial then revealed that President Bush believed decisions to go to war should be made by the President. On the surface, it appeared to be
a statement about the future of defense. However it invokes the proven past of President Bush making decisions to go to war in Iraq. Voters have a collective experience of President Bush persuading the nation to go to war to “protect” America. However, there is no collective experience of Senator Kerry making such decisions. There is no information provided for voters to predict how Senator Kerry would react. With no information to draw upon there is only conjecture, and uncertainty. By proposing Senator Kerry would hand over decision making to outside forces, the commercial argued that Senator Kerry would take away the power of choice from the United States. This produced uncertainty of how others would protect the United States. The argument that Senator Kerry would put defensive measures to a “global test” is a direct attack on Senator Kerry’s practical wisdom. By suggesting Kerry would give decision-making powers to other nations argues that Senator Kerry would not be able to keep America secure.

_Pessimism_ begins by creating a scene of President Bush’s economic plan. Most of the positive effects are quantified. For example, to give voters a logical understanding of the job market, the announcer stated “1.4 million jobs were added.” The list of positive effects of President Bush’s leadership is juxtaposed against Senator Kerry’s lack of practical wisdom, beliefs, and values. The commercial stated that Senator Kerry’s pessimism would not create jobs. Economic uncertainty is insinuated.

_Images used in_ the commercial are mostly used to bolster President Bush’s ethos and tie Senator Kerry to his own words. In _Pessimism_, images of a robust economy are used along side a verbal list of President Bush’s proven economic record. Images of people working and purchasing give a visualization of the idea that President Bush’s
practical wisdom has helped the economy. Visuals of people walking into a house insinuated house ownership. In Global Test images of President Bush in the Oval Office are used. Both commercials use images of Senator Kerry when attacking his ethos, thus tying Kerry to his bad decisions.

*Political Vaporware.* The use of political vaporware presents an ambiguous policy to deal with a problem, threat, or danger. The use of political vaporware in the 2004 election dealt mainly with domestic issues. This was because as McKinnon (2006) remarked that, Democrats were perceived as being stronger on domestic issues. In marketing vaporware is used by an organization to recapture a publics’ attention away from a new product. Jenkins (1988) contends that vaporware persuades consumers that grave risks are associated with the adoption of new products. In a political sense, vaporware presents a “policy” by a candidate and suggests that an opponent’s policies are a risk, an uncertainty.

**Title of TV advertisement: Economy Common Sense vs. Higher Taxes**

Announcer: “President and our leaders in Congress have a common sense plan to grow our economy…”

Image 1: Blue screen background. Text:

www.agendaforamerica.com

Announcer: “…and create jobs. So small businesses can expand and hire.”
Image 2: The shot pulls out to a workstation, the blue screen is revealed to be in a computer. There is an empty desk.

Image 1: Text appears on computer screen. Shot zooms in.


Announcer: “The liberals in Congress…”

Image 1: Pulls out from screen to see an African American woman sitting at the computer and looking at the text.

Announcer: “…and Kerry’s plan raises taxes on small business…”

Image 2: New text appears on computer screen. Shot zooms in on text: Liberals in Congress & Kerry’s plan: Raises taxes on 900,000 small business owners.

Announcer: “…nine hundred thousand business owners…”
Image 1: Quick cut to previous text on screen. A white woman at a desk is looking at the text with hands on her face, looking distressed.

Announcer: “...would pay higher tax rates than most multinational...”

Image 2: Back to text. Liberals in Congress & Kerry’s Plan: Raises taxes on 900,000 small business owners. Small Businesses pay more taxes than big corporations.

Announcer: “...corporations.”

Image 1: Far shot. The room is smoky with light beaming in through a window. The light illuminates a man at a table with hands on chin looking at a lap top.

Announcer: “Tax increases would hurt jobs. Hurt small business and hurt our economy.”

Title of TV advertisement: Health Care practical vs. big government

Announcer: “On health care.”


Image 2: Pulls out to empty work space. New text appears on screen.

Announcer: “President Bush and our leaders in Congress have a practical plan.”


Announcer: “Allow small businesses to join together to get lower insurance rates…”

Image 2: Pulls out to a woman looking at the computer screen at home.

Announcer: “…big companies get.”

Image 2: Pulls out to a woman looking at the computer screen at home.
Announcer: “Stop frivolous lawsuits against doctors. Health coverage you can take with you.”

Image 1: Zooms back in with previous text plus “Stop Frivolous Lawsuits.” “Health Savings Account – Job to Job Coverage.”

Announcer: “The liberals in Congress…”

Image 2: Back shot of an older couple, male left female right, looking at white computer in home work space.

Announcer: “…and Kerry’s plan. Washington Bureaucrats in control.”


Announcer: “A government run health care plan.”

Image 2: Younger couple looking at computer monitor. Woman on right standing up and pointing at screen. Man situated left leans in to look.

Announcer: “One point five trillion dollar…”
The two domestic issues dealt with in the political vaporware commercials are the economy and health care. Each commercial begins by introducing the subject. Both commercials stated President Bush and Leaders in Congress have a plan. Each plan was separately described as common sense or practical. The use of common sense or the term “practical” to describe the plans implied that they were simple and easy to understand. If a plan is common sense, it is obvious to everyone and not laden with complicated ideas and concepts. The term “practical” created a perception of a plan’s feasibility. Both descriptions suggest the plans are not risky and therefore not uncertain.

The Bush-Cheney campaign plans are vague. In *Common Sense Vs. Higher Taxes*, the Bush-Cheney plan is to “grow the economy.” In the commercial there is no explanation of how it will grow. The end encourages viewers to log onto the Bush-Cheney website. However, compared to the Kerry plan, which raises taxes, the Bush-
Cheney plan, no matter how vague, according to the ad, appeared more credible. Senator Kerry's practical wisdom is attacked by suggesting that he will raise taxes; it generates situational economic uncertainty (Hartman, 1985). The attacks also question whether Senator Kerry has the common good in mind.

In *Health Care vs. Big Government*, the body is broken into two parts. The first part presents the Bush-Cheney plan for health care. The second part presents the risky nature of Senator Kerry's plan. The Bush-Cheney health care plan presents a basic understanding of its content. The plan allows for small business to join together to get discounts, and allows individuals to take their health care with them. There will not be large changes, only slight adjustments. People recognize there would be minimal changes. The commercial also takes a plank from the Bush-Cheney platform of tort reform. It infers that trial lawyers' lawsuits are a major cause of health care problems. However, Senator Kerry's plan is presented as a major change. Change brings risk and risk brings uncertainty (Cioffi-Revilla, 1998). According to the commercial, Senator Kerry's plan also removes power from an individual, by suggesting they will lose the ability to choose their doctor. Senator Kerry's health care plan is "risky" because of the massive political change that it requires. Most citizens do not know how such a plan works. The Bush-Cheney campaign supplied an explanation that generated uncertainty. First, they point out that government bureaucrats would run the Kerry health care proposal, taking away the individual's power to make decisions. The Bush-Cheney campaign also argued that a government plan would cost 1.5 trillion dollars. Though the commercial does not say it, it implies that new taxes will be necessary to cover the $1.5
trillion price tag. As pointed out earlier, an increase in taxes increases economic uncertainty (Hartman, 1985).

Images that appear in both commercials are similar. Both commercials have actors interacting with computers as if they are reading about the Bush-Cheney and Kerry plans. Both advertisements cue the audience on how to react. People are seen studiously reading the Bush-Cheney plan. By contrast, people appear worried or despondent as they react to Kerry’s plan.

In both commercials, the conclusion ends by generating situational uncertainty. *Common Sense vs. Higher Taxes* stated: “Tax increases would hurt jobs. Hurt small business and hurt our economy.” It left the audience with economic uncertainty. It does not say how Kerry’s plan will hurt jobs or the economy. It open-endedly allows each person to contemplate potential ways of how it would hurt. In *Healthcare Practical vs. Big Government*, the commercial ends reminding citizens they would lose individual power to make their own decisions when it comes to healthcare. Both commercials leave the audience with a sense of an unknown economic future.

Strategic uncertainty generates and exaggerates uncertainty while at the same time creating perceptions of certainty. A candidate using strategic uncertainty not only attacks an opponent’s ethos, but they must also bolster their own ethos. In bolstering ethos a candidate creates a perception of certainty in an atmosphere of uncertainty.

*Bolstering Ethos*

“Political reality” establishes a candidate’s “qualities, qualifications, program, and destiny” (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 63). For a candidate to be electable he or she must be perceived as credible and competent. A campaign must create qualities, qualifications,
and policies to support an image of credible and competent leadership. In a presidential campaign the mythic presidency becomes a factor in creating a perception of a credible and competent candidate. In the 2004 election, due to the war on terror and other mitigating circumstances, credibility and competence were supplemented with consistency. The consistency and strength in the mythic presidency helped foster a political reality of a strong, competent and consistent leader.

The mythic presidency was important in the 2004 election. According to Misciagno (1996), technology has ended the mythic presidency, lessening its strength. In an atmosphere of exaggerated uncertainty a perception of strength in a presidential candidate is important. To recreate a mythic presidential persona a candidate must be credible and competent. Bolstering ethos works in three areas: qualities, qualifications, and policies. Qualities reveal a candidate’s virtues. Qualifications reveal a candidate’s practical wisdom. Policies reveal consistency. One of the most important aspects of the Bush presidential reelection campaign was the perception of consistency (McKinnon, 2006).

Bolstering ethos by elaborating the candidate’s qualities was achieved by tying President Bush to virtues. For example, faith and freedom are mentioned in several commercials, thereby building a perception of a virtuous President Bush. Seven advertisements were identified as bolstering ethos through presidential qualities. Each commercial followed the same pattern. First, the commercial exaggerated situational uncertainty. Two common ways of generating situational uncertainty to conjure up terrorism and economic uncertainty were used. After generating situational uncertainty,
virtues were presented as values that hold true through times of uncertainty. Third, those virtues are linked to President Bush and his leadership.

Title of TV advertisement: Tested.

Announcer: “The last few years…”

Image: Black and white image of the back of a young boy in a door way looking outside. The boy leans onto the door frame.

Announcer: “…have tested America…”

Image: Fade to the close up of a young girl’s face. Camera is looking down on her as she looks up into the camera.

Announcer: “…in many ways…”

Image: Fade to home with a flag hanging outside in front of the home. The house is black and white while the flag is in color.

Announcer: “…Some challenges…”

Image: Fade to a young lady looking through a window into the camera.

Announcer: “…we’ve seen before…”

Image: Fade to the profile of an elderly man (black and white imagery). The man slowly turns towards the camera.
In the background an American flag, in color, blows in the wind.

Announcer: “...and some...”

Image: Fade to young man slowly looking at camera then to the older man in the forefront of the shot.

Announcer: “…were like no others…”

Image: Fade to a close up of the ruins of the World Trade Center with a colored American flag blowing in the wind.

Announcer: “But America rose to the challenge.”

Image: A man with a young a girl next to a flag pole raising the American flag. Camera is looking down on the two as they raise the flag.

Announcer: “What sees us through tough times?”

Image: Two young girls, wearing backpacks and carrying lunch boxes, run past a white building with three open windows. The far right window has a globe in it.
Announcer: “Freedom.”

Image: Fade to school classroom. Shot from the back of the room. Students are standing up with their hands over their hearts facing the American flag. The teacher, a white woman, is facing the class with her hand over her heart.

Announcer: “Faith.”

Image: Three girls run on the lawn in front of a white church.

Announcer: “Families…”

Image: A woman, in the background, and a man are lying on a bed. They are both smiling at the baby in the hands of the man. He is holding the baby up in the air.

Announcer: “…and sacrifice.”

Image: Two men, one in the background and another in the foreground. They are wearing fireman helmets and sitting on the back of a fire truck. The man has his arm propped up on the truck. They both look at the camera.

Announcer: “President Bush, steady leadership in times of change.”
Image: President Bush and Laura Bush are on the left of the screen. In the middle is an image of President Bush, in profile, at a podium, and right of screen is a close up profile of Bush on the phone. Text over the images: PRESIDENT BUSH Steady leadership in times of change.

Title of TV advertisement: Safer Stronger

Text: President Bush

Image: George W. Bush being sworn in. Hand on Bible.

Jenna, Laura, half of a judge with a frame of the American flag.


Image: Stock market images. Numbers, Tokyo, loss.

Text: An Economy in Recession. The Challenge fades in over the text.

Image: Stock market numbers. White man with glasses lowers his head into his hands and rubs his forehead. A woman fades in and out.


Image: URL address being typed into Internet Explorer browser.
Text: The challenge: a dot com boom...gone bust.

Image: American flag waving in a close up shot of the World Trade Center ruins.

Text: Then...a day of tragedy.

Image: Reused images. A man with a young girl at the base of a flag pole, pulling on the rope. Camera angle looking down on the two. Screen right firemen carrying flag draped coffin.

Text: A test for all Americans.

Image: Left Bush speaking at podium. Right: Two men, a one in the background and another in the foreground. They are wearing firefighter helmets and sitting on the back of a fire truck. A man has his arm propped up on the truck. They both look at the camera.

Image: Left: A man running with younger girl. Right: Close up of young girl smiling wearing a flower cap.

Text: Today. America is turning the corner.
Image: Corner diner. Female waitress turning on open sign. Appears to be dawn. Woman walking around the corner.

Text: Rising to the challenge.


Text: Stronger. Safer.

Image: Ends with flag. President Bush steady leadership in times of change.

Title of TV advertisement: Changing World

Announcer: “The world is changing.”

Image 1: White wall, white door, very young boy in yellow pajamas. Holding his Teddy bear, he opens a door to a bright light on the other side. In that doorway appears an image of Asian woman looking at the camera away from a microscope.

Announcer: “Some times in ways…”

Image 2: The image of the a woman changes to Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai.
Announcer: “...that astound.”

Image 1: Image of Hamid changes to a bicycle race.

Announcer: “And others...”

Image 2: Camera moves, at a rapid rate, past the young boy holding the door open. An image of a tank coming around a corner towards the camera. In the background is a building.

Announcer: “...that terrify.”

Image 1: The man shooting an AK-47 from previous commercials. An American tank rolling down a street past a man.

Announcer: “We depend more than ever on our...”

Image 1: The images go to color. A shot from in a garage to four men in firefighter gear standing outside the garage in the sunlight.

Announcer: “…values.”

Image 2: President Bush partially turned away from camera leans over, grabs the hand of a young girl. In the background a man takes a picture.

Announcer: “Family.”
Image 1: Young girl with a young boy behind her. Half his face is covered by the grinning face of the girl.

Announcer: “Faith. The freedom we celebrate.”

Image 2: Elderly man, young boy, young girl. Man and girl are doing the hoola hoop while the young boy watches. Far shot of President Bush leaning against a column with arm around Laura. The image is up close to them.

Announcer: “In today’s changing world…”

Image 2: Woman and man in back with five kids in front. Two boys and three girls are smiling.

Announcer: “…the answers aren’t easy.”

Image 1: Kids jumping out of a yellow school bus.

Announcer: “We need a sense of purpose. A vision for the future.”

Image 2: Girl running away from the camera. She runs up a hill covered in green grass. Text: A vision for the future.

Announcer: “The conviction to do what’s right.”

Image 1: President Bush at a podium speaking and smiling with a giant American flag. Text: Conviction to do what’s
right. People hugging. Back through the door from the
beginning. The younger boy is replaced with an older boy
standing in the door way.

Title of TV advertisement: Together
Announcer: “The last…”
Image 1: Black and white video of a male and female
couple standing under an umbrella. Next to them is a For
Sale sign. Trees line the background.

Announcer: “…few years…”
Image 2: Quick shot of the World Trade Center ruins. The
American flag is waving in the wind.

Announcer: “…have tested…”
Image 1: A man is looking up with his chin jutted out.
Announcer: America…
Image 2: Close up then a quick cut to a far shot of fireman
gear hanging on a wall. Shot in black and white.

Announcer: “…in many ways.”
Image 1: A woman slowly looks directly into the camera.
Announcer: “But together…”

Image 2: Far shot of a pastoral field. There is a tree in front and on top of the hill. A silhouette of a man walks to a woman. Quick cut to the two figures holding hands. The man points to the sky up to the right of the screen.

Announcer: “…we’re rising to…”

Image 1: Four firemen. Two on the outside are in uniform while the two in the middle wear Bush for President shirts.

Announcer: “…the challenge.”

Image 2: Two men smiling. The man to the left has a dark complexion and is smiling. To the right is a man with his arm around another man.

Announcer: “Standing up against terrorism…”

Image 1: Male soldier in camouflage is walking away from camera. He has an M-16 slung over his shoulder. He is walking in what appears to be a shipping yard.

Announcer: “…and working to…”

Image 2: The same image of a diner opening in the morning as shown in other commercials.
Announcer: “...grow our economy.”

Image 1: A man in yellow outfit in a factory is grinding on some metal as sparks fly. In the background a man wearing a yellow hard hat looks up.

Announcer: [Silence]

Image 2: A family of seven. The male and female parents are in the back, the mom is to the left while the father is to the right. The four kids are in front. Three boys and two girls.

Announcer: “What gives us optimism...”

Image 1: Kids jumping out of a yellow school bus.

Announcer: “...and hope?”

Image 2: Headshot of a child looking to the left while smiling.

Announcer: “Freedom.”

Image 1: Camera pans from behind a wooden chair to a family sitting on a couch. Two kids lick ice cream. One girl sits on the father’s lap, the other sits on the mother’s lap. There is a flag in the background.
Announcer: “Faith.”

Image 2: A family around a dinner table with their heads bowed and hands folded.

Announcer: “Families.”

Image 1: Family in a photo-like pose. Two kids, two parents smiling into the camera. Adult male, “dad” stands behind the family with his arms around the daughter (to the left) and the mother (to the right). Only the smiling head of the boy appears from below the frame.

Announcer: “And sacrifice.”

Image 2: The two firefighters, one standing up one sitting on the back of the fire truck, from previous commercial.

Announcer: “President Bush moving America forward.”

Image 1: Man with a mustache is finishing putting up an American flag sticker on a glass door. Shot from inside the building.

Title of TV advertisement: Ownership

President Bush: “One of the most important parts of a reform agenda is to encourage people to own something.”
Image 1: Head shot of President Bush talking to someone off camera.

President Bush: “Own their own home.”

Image 2: A house with an American flag hanging out front.

President Bush: “Own their own business.”

Image 1: Image of the waitress turning on the lights of the diner, again.

President Bush: “Own their own health care plan.”

Image 2: Two elderly people talking. We only see a partial profile of an elderly man’s right ear and his glasses. The elderly woman’s face is in full view. They are conversing.

President Bush: [Silence]

Image 1: Older man sits between two white kids. In the forefront is a young girl, in the background a young boy. The man appears to be reading to them. No narration.

President Bush: “Or own a piece of their retirement.”

Image: George Bush profile head shot. George is speaking to “someone” off camera.
President Bush: “Reforms that...”

Image 1: A woman is holding up from a book, and smiles directly into the camera.

President Bush: “…trust the people.”

Image 2: Two men smiling. The man to the left has a dark complexion and is smiling. To the right is a man with his arm around another man.

President Bush: “Reforms that say government must stand on the side of people.”

Image 2: George Bush, profile head shot. He is speaking to “someone” off camera.

President Bush: “‘cause I understand if you own something…”

Image 2: A man in yellow outfit in a factory is grinding on some metal as sparks fly. In the background a man wearing a yellow hard hat looks up. Fades to three men standing. All are wearing white hard hats. The middle man is holding a clip board and pointing to something. The other two look at the sparks flying in the background.
President Bush: “...you have a vital stake in the future of America.”

Image 2: George Bush profile head shot. George is speaking to “someone” off camera.

Title of TV advertisement: Rock
No voiceover.

Image 2: Waves continue to beat against the rock. Text: Strength builds peace.


Title of TV advertisement: Time
Announcer: “It is a time for unwavering strength.”

Image 1: From Rock commercial, sea washing up on a rock. Text: It is time.
Announcer: “Leaders we know.”

Image 2: Roses in the forefront, in the back President Bush’s head as he talks on the telephone.

Announcer: “In times that challenge the world. A time for conviction…”

Image 1: World Trade Center ruins with flag waving.

Announcer: “…born in the soul.”

Image 2: Crowd of camouflaged soldiers and Bush with bowed heads.

Announcer: “Time to continue…”

Image 1: The capitol building framed by two trees.

Announcer: “…strengthening America.”

Image 2: A shot of firefighters walking away from the camera kicking up dust from the WTC.

Announcer: “Keeping families safe.”

Image 1: Ground shot of woman in the background, man in the middle pushing a young boy in a tire swing. The child swings towards the camera. A house is in the background.
Announcer: “Rebuilding our economy and work force.”

Image 2: Silhouette of construction worker standing on two I-beams, with two I-beams slowly moving towards him.

Announcer: “Today our children…”

Image 1: An older hand sticks out. A younger hand clasps the older hand.

Announcer: “…and our country needs that strong leadership…”

Image 2: Laura and George Bush lean on a wooden fence at a ranch. Fade to a close-up profile of George W. Bush smiling.

Announcer: “…more than ever before.”

Image 2: An evening view of the Capitol from the reflecting pond. Text: It is time.

**Title of TV advertisement: Whatever it Takes**

President Bush (Accepting Party Nomination): “These four years have brought moments I could not foresee and will not forget.”

Image 1: Black background with white text: President Bush
President Bush: “I’ve learned firsthand that ordering Americans into battle is the hardest, even when it is right. I have returned the salute…”

Image 2: President Bush at the Republican National Committee nomination convention. Bush is standing in front of a classical column and American flag.

President Bush: “…of wounded soldiers who say they were just doing their job.”

Image 1: Lone man with military cap and three mini-American flags, waving them.

President Bush: “I have held the children of the fallen who are told their mom or dad is a hero but would rather have their mom or dad. I’ve met with the parents and wives and husbands…”

Image 2: President Bush speaking again.

President Bush: “…who have received a folded flag.”

Image 1: Lone woman in crowd. All faces are looking up.

President Bush: “And in those military families…”
President Bush: “I have seen the character of a great nation…”

President Bush: “Because of your service and sacrifice, we are defeating the terrorists…”

President Bush: “…where they live and plan and you’re making America safer.”

President Bush: “I will never relax in defending America, whatever it takes.”

Though the pattern had slight variations to it, each commercial presented situational uncertainty and tied values to President Bush’s leadership. The use of situational uncertainty accomplished two things. One, it exaggerated uncertainty. Two, it
highlighted President Bush's consistency. That consistency is represented in American virtues. In uncertain times, people seek certainty (Avery & Zemsky, 1998). The commercials proposed consistency it found in American values. The President of the United States stands for American ideals and values (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004). Each commercial sought to create an impression that President Bush embodies those values. They did so by evoking President Bush's leadership. It suggested that his leadership helped lead Americans through uncertain times. For example, in the commercial *What Ever It Takes* President Bush discussed decisions he had made, and some negative results. By admitting negative consequences, he created an impression of certainty. Bush also stressed his experience at handling those decisions and results, thus reinforcing his special knowledge. Situational uncertainty created a need for special knowledge (Avery & Zemsky, 1998; Edelman, 1967). In the commercials, President Bush fulfilled that need.

There are three types of images used in the “qualities” commercials. The first type establishes the situational uncertainty. For example, images of Osama bin Laden, terrorists, and rubble from the September 11, 2001, attacks create uncertainty. Economic uncertainty was generated with the use of iconic economic images. For example, people at work, factories, and construction. The second type of image is the “average” American image. Images of American citizens representing American values. Those images of average Americans representing American values are associated with President Bush. In the commercial *Together*, after the uncertainty generating images, images of firefighters are shown. In one visual, two firefighters wear Bush-Cheney 2004 shirts. It associates “heroes” with President Bush.
Qualifications. Qualification commercials seek to bolster presidential practical wisdom. They explain a candidate’s expertise and past policies. The expertise and policies are portrayed as seeking the common good. For the 2004 election the common good was identified as social and economic security. Security on a social level was identified as safety from terrorist attacks. Economic security was identified as job production, home ownership, and economic growth. President Bush’s expertise and past policies were portrayed as what stood between the population and chaos. It created an impression that President Bush would provide security.

Two things identified qualification commercials. First, each commercial stressed President Bush’s experience, his special knowledge and expertise. Second, past and future policies championed by President Bush were highlighted. Past policies had been enacted, and therefore referenced as having achieved positive results. Future policies constitute political vaporware. Both forms of policies, past and vaporware, infer that a voter can expect positive results from President Bush.

Three commercials were identified and categorized as expertise. Each qualification commercial was categorized according to its main topics: Two expertise commercials dealt with international issues and one dealt with domestic issues.

Title of TV advertisement: Lead

President Bush: “One of the things that must never change

is the entrepreneur spirit of America.”

Image: Opens with a diner. Female server is turning on open sign. It appears to be dawn. A woman walking around the corner.
President Bush: “This country needs a president that clearly sees that.”

Images: Fades out and into President Bush and Laura Bush.

Laura Bush: “The strength, the focus, the characteristics...”

Image: Fades to President Bush on the phone in office.

Quick cut to President Bush opening presidential notebook.

Laura Bush: “…that these times demand.”

Image: President Bush and Laura Bush, headshots. Laura is talking to someone off camera.

Announcer: [Silence].

Image: Shift to long shot with people walking in front of storefront. Man is shown dialing a cell phone

President Bush: “And as the economy grows, the job base grows...”

Image: Image of a woman at a meeting. Close up of woman nodding. She holds up a pen and talks.

President Bush: “…and somebody looking for work...”
Image: Male construction laborer carrying wood, wearing a hardhat, and tool belt. As he puts down the wood, a man passes behind him.

President Bush: “…will be more likely to find a job.”

Image: Someone wearing a welder’s mask is doing metalwork. Sparks are flying.

President Bush: “I know exactly where I want to lead this country.”

Image: President Bush and Laura Bush. President Bush is talking to someone off camera. He holds up his hand to the camera when stating “Where I want to lead this country.”

President Bush: “I know what to do to make the world…”

Image: Silhouette of person pulling rope.

President Bush: “…more free and more peaceful.”

Image: Fade to a woman in camouflage and black beret holding a baby. Out of frame is man’s leg and finger.

President Bush: “I know what we need to do to make sure…”
President Bush: “...that every person has a chance...”

President Bush: “...to realize the American dream.”

President Bush: “I know what we need to do to continue economic growth so people can find work.”

President Bush: “To raise the standards of schools...”

President Bush: “…so children can learn.”
President Bush: “To fulfill the promise to America’s seniors.”

Image: Two women. One in the background young the other in the forefront of the shot, elderly. Both are smiling and looking off screen left.

President Bush: “Americans are hardworking...decent...generous people.”

Image: A “family” around a table. Young girl is cleaning off the table. Youthful looking male “dad” smiles. Long shot of family, boy and older male at table. Young girl walks right to left carrying plate. Older woman walks into room from left.

Woman is standing over man. Man places arm around hip of woman and smiles up at her. She looks down at him and smiles. Camera pans left to reveal blond hair of young boy.

President Bush: “I’m optimistic about America because I believe in the people of America.”

Image: Bush is looking up to right of the screen. Text on lower left corner: www.georgewbush.com
Title of TV advertisement: First Choice

Senator John McCain: “It’s a big thing, this war.”

Image 1: John McCain at a podium, looking to the right of the screen. Background: Various people in casual and business dress.

Senator John McCain: “It’s a fight between right and wrong, good and evil.”

Image 2: White background with bleached out gray figures of the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue. Text: Senator McCain on the war on terror and President Bush. Text fades out and full image of the Saddam statue being dragged fades in and fades out.

Senator John McCain: “And should our enemies acquire for their arsenal…”

Image 1: Fades in from Saddam statue. Black and white image of the back of a man in a shooting stance, shooting an AK-47. On the walls before him is Arabic graffiti.

Senator John McCain: “…the chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons they seek…”

Image 2: McCain, in color, speaking.
Senator John McCain: “...this war will become an even bigger thing.”

Image 1: Black and white image of a male American soldier wearing a helmet and holding an M-16 in a crouching position. He slowly looks left into the camera.

Senator John McCain: “It will become a fight for our survival.”

Image 2: Black and white image of the combat boots of a soldier walking away from the camera as the camera follows. Fades to the head shot of a white male soldier wearing a helmet and sunglasses as he slowly scans over the camera.

Senator John McCain: “America is under attack by...”

Image 1: Senator McCain speaking.

Senator John McCain: “…depraved enemies...”

Image 2: Close up of Osama bin Laden’s face. A map in the background to the left of Osama’s head.

Senator John McCain: “…who oppose our every interest and...”
Senator John McCain: "...hate every value we hold dear."

Senator John McCain: "It is the great test of our generation..."

Senator John McCain: "...and he has lead with..."

Senator John McCain: "...great moral clarity and firm resolve."

Senator John McCain: "He has not waivered. He has not flinched from the hard choices."
Senator John McCain: “He was determined and remains determined to make this world a better, safer, freer place.”

Image 1: Shot from below looking up at George W. Bush. President Bush is talking on the phone. Fades to a far below up shot of Bush speaking at a podium. The shot pulls back to get a full shot of Bush. Bush and McCain together at a rally. Bush is in the forefront waving and smiling. McCain is a bit back blending into the crowd applauding.

Senator John McCain: “He deserves not only our support but our admiration.”

Image 1: Camera pans from photos of Laura Bush, father George H.S. Bush, and an elderly woman, to a head shot of President Bush speaking, nodding his head, and smiling.

Senator John McCain: “That’s why I’m honored to introduce to you…”

Image 2: Descending shot from down to Bush talking in front of a painting.

Senator John McCain: “…the President of the United States, George W. Bush.”

Image 1: McCain walking towards Bush. The two hug.
Title of TV advertisement: Solemn Duty

President Bush: “My most solemn duty is to lead our nation…”

Image 1: George and Laura Bush look off to the side of the camera. They are sitting. They are on the left side looking off to the right. Background consists of a home looking interior.

President Bush: “…to protect ourselves. I can’t imagine…”

Image 2: Close up of George touching his chest over his heart with his hand.

President Bush: “…the great agony of a mom or dad having…”

Image 1: Close up, profile of George and Laura. George is talking while Laura is looking off to the right.

President Bush: “…to make the decision about which child to pick up first on September 11.”

Image 2: Camera shot pulls out to show head and torso shot of George and Laura Bush sitting. Laura has her hands laid upon her lap. George’s hands are off to the side.
President Bush: “We can not hesitate. We cannot yield.”

Image 1: Head shot profile of George and Laura looking off to the right.

President Bush: “We must do everything in our power to bring an enemy to justice before they hurt us again.”

Image 2: Head and shoulders shot of George and Laura. George is talking, Laura looks to George, then looks down and back to the right.

Image 1: George Bush quits speaking. Blue background with white text slowing grows “closer” to the screen. Text:

President Bush: Moving America Forward

Unlike previous commercials, the expertise commercials did not employ an announcer. Instead, each commercial used an excerpt from a speech by either President Bush or Senator John McCain. The commercials bolstered President Bush’s practical wisdom through expertise by explaining how President Bush understands America and his duty as president. By contrast, Senator Kerry’s “flip-flops” suggest he does not understand the duty of the Presidency. Each commercial supported Bush’s experience in a different way.

One commercial, First Choice, worked on two levels establishing President Bush’s special knowledge. On one level, the speaker Senator John McCain listed President Bush’s decisions in past uncertainty generating situations. The listing of
decisions showed that President Bush had experience in decision-making. It inferred that President Bush would take that special knowledge into the next term. The advertisement worked on another level, using Senator McCain’s war experience. Senator McCain’s experience in a war gave him special knowledge. Supporting President Bush by lauding his decisions during wartime symbolically transfers Senator McCain’s special knowledge to President Bush.

The other commercials used speeches by President Bush. In each commercial President Bush outlined his expertise. He demonstrated special knowledge in two ways. In *Lead*, President Bush repeatedly stated, “I know…” He suggests that he “knows” where he wants to lead the country. He “knows” what to do to make the world free. He “knows” how to handle the U.S. economy. By repeating, “I know” he not only shows his special knowledge, he also created a perception of consistency. Voters vote for him because they know he comprehends what to do.

In *Solemn Duty*, a speech by President Bush establishes his expertise. In it he discusses his duty as leader. He transitions to using “we” in referencing what the nation must do to fight terrorism.

Four main images were used in the commercials to establish practical wisdom. The first image is of a speaker or referent (President Bush). The commercials use speeches by Senator McCain and President Bush. Images are used to generate uncertainty and to support verbal text. For example, images of Osama bin Laden, terrorists, the war in Iraq, and economic images are used. A third image type was Americans. Because a large part of the presidential campaign is voter identification, multicultural Americans are used in the imagery. Many images supported the verbal text. If positive economic results
were mentioned Americans were shown benefiting from the results. Examples include, construction workers and people working in an office.

Two commercials were categorized as past policy commercials. Both commercials dealt with domestic issues. Because Democrats were polling higher with domestic issues the Bush-Cheney campaign had to establish President Bush’s ethos with domestic issues (Donilon, 2006). The commercials either present a policy and its achievements or render implied results.

Title of TV advertisement: Key to Success

Announcer: “As Governor, George Bush enacted…”

Image 1: All framed with white and at bottom www.georgew.bush.com. President Bush, in profile, is on the phone.

Announcer: “…reform that produced…”

Image 2: Children are getting into a school bus.

Announcer: “…dramatic results.”

Image 1: Blond girl looking at paper. Blonde woman sitting at desk instructing young girl.

Announcer: “As president, he signed the most significant education reforms in thirty-five years.”

Image 2: Washed-out outside shot of pervious school (with globe). Two blond white girls crouch outside. One stands.
The image fades out. The girls are no longer to the left but to the right. Then they run from right to left. Text: No child Left Behind.

Announcer: “Because accountability…”


Announcer: “…and high standards are…”

Image 2: Two boys running up stairs. Flash – The kids are at the top of the stairs and sitting through the rail. The other kid is standing looking down, leaning over the rail. Text: High Standards…Accountability.

Announcer: “…the keys to quality schools.”


Announcer: “The president’s reforms give parents the tools needed…”

Image 2: Older man writing while young man with a pen in hand looks on. Flash – to a close up of a boy.
Announcer: “...to measure a child’s progress.”

Image 1: A young girl sitting against wall with knees up, writing in a book.

Announcer: “Today public schools require raised standards...”

Image 2: Woman sitting at table nods to young man with a dark complexion whose back is to the camera. In the background a young girl looks out a window. A woman sitting at table points to a book. A boy is reading the book and nodding. Young teen male looking up at a face whose arm is leaning on the table.

Announcer: “...well qualified teacher...”

Image 1: A woman in blue shirt from previous images lone shot with kids in the background.

Announcer: “...accountability to parents.”

Image 2: Far shot of “study” father sitting in chair holding papers. Young boy facing camera looks on.

Announcer: “Because no child in America should be left behind.”
Title: Nearly 2 Million Reasons

Announcer: “There are many reasons to be hopeful about America’s future.”

Image 1: Horizontal split screen. Top: A man in the middle of two kids. The front kid is a girl, in the back is a boy.
Text in the middle: America Has Reasons to be Hopeful.
Bottom: Girls running in front of a white building.

Announcer: “Nearly two million new jobs in just over a year.”

Image 2: Horizontal split screen. Top: Head-shots of two men smiling. One man is looking at the other man. Text in the middle: Nearly Two Million New Jobs. Bottom: A man, only his forehead and eyes are visible. His face is looking off screen to the right but his eyes are looking into the camera.

Announcer: “Nearly two million more people back working.”

Announcer: “Nearly two million more people with wages.”

Image 2: Top: A man, woman and four children are smiling. The father has his arms around them. Middle text: Nearly Two Million More People With Wages. Bottom: Two women working in a diner.

Announcer: “Nearly two million more people with security.”

Image 1: Top: A low shot framed by two chairs. Two adults and two kids. Woman on the left with a young boy on her lap, both are eating ice cream. On the right the man with a girl on his lap. They are also eating ice cream. Middle text: Nearly Two Million More People with Security. Bottom: Head shot profile of a boy looking at something.

Announcer: “Nearly two million more people able to provide for their families.”
Both commercials present President Bush’s policies and results, which provides evidence of Bush’s qualifications. That evidence bolsters President Bush’s practical
wisdom. The ad shows how Bush’s policies benefit the American people, thus benefiting the common good.

Past policy commercials rely on revealing positive results as examples of practical wisdom. Those examples are visualized through images of Americans working and iconic images of the economy. In the opening of Key to Success images are used in alignment with the verbal text explaining how as Governor, Bush enacted reform. An image of President Bush on the telephones is used to suggest symbolic action. Images used throughout are various condensation symbols of teachers and children reacting in positive ways. In Two Million Reasons, two main images were used to reinforce the verbal text. First were condensation symbols of family. Families were consistently shown in positive emotional reactions. For example, a family would be shown with each other smiling or enjoying some activity. Other condensation symbols were economic benefits. Americans were shown in various forms of work, and reacting positively to that work. Both commercials created a positive perception of President Bush’s past policies. Examples of President Bush’s practical wisdom suggest to voters he is a trustworthy leader.

Inherent in humankind is a need to control uncertainty (Maslow, 1943). The Bush-Cheney campaign enacted this sense of control through President Bush’s expertise and policies. Bush’s expertise is presented as the line between order and social economic chaos. President Bush’s policies are portrayed as symbolic actions that give order to U.S. society. That order created a common good. Therefore, President Bush had sufficient credibility to secure votes.

Political vaporware. Whereas qualities and qualifications deal with the past and present, vaporware policies deal with the future. Candidate’s identify problems and
provide solutions. In the 2004 election, Kerry was polling higher on domestic issues. The Bush-Cheney campaign had to create a perception of having “plans” for domestic issues. However, to do that they had to create a perception “that problems can be solved without a basic restructuring of social institutions, and without the threat of a radical reordering poses both to the contended and to the anxious” (Edelman, 1974, p. 171). Political vaporware creates the perception that it addresses issues with solutions requiring minimal change. For example, in the 2004 election the Kerry campaign was suggesting a radical change in health care. The Bush-Cheney campaign implied that their plan would cause more uncertainty, and take away individual choice. The Bush-Cheney campaign offered a counter plan that would not significantly change the current system.

For the commercials, presenting political vaporware, three categories were identified: homeland security, economy, and healthcare. The ad dealing with homeland security discussed the war on terror and how Bush would protect citizens. Commercials dealing with economic factors dealt with jobs, taxes, insurance, and the economic impact of education. Healthcare, dealt mainly with high costs, taxes, tort reform, and family healthcare.

Two tactics of strategic uncertainty emerged during the analysis of the advertisements. First, each commercial used an appeal to the leadership and expertise of President Bush. The second appeal was to create policy support through voter identification. For example, President Bush in Agenda uses “we” to create what Burke (1972) referred to as “unseen” identification. Commercials were categorized by their appeals.
Title of TV advertisement: War on Terror Agenda

Constant Images: Background consists of orange blurry squares. Green border around scrolling images with iconic symbols at bottom: Camera, American Flag, Tank.

Announcer: “President Bush and our Leaders in Congress have a plan.”

Image 1: Present Bush & Congressional Leaders in a box.

Announcer: “Enhance border and port security.”

Image 2: Background consists of orange blurry squares.
Green border around scrolling images with iconic symbols at bottom: Camera, American Flag, Tank.

Announcer: “Increase homeland…”

Image 2: Trucks driving by to a border patrol stop point.

Text: 1 > Border and Port Security
2 > Homeland Security

Announcer: “…security measures.”

Announcer: “Reform and strengthen intelligence services.”

Announcer: “Renew PATRIOT Act giving law enforcement tools against terrorists.”
Image 1: Law enforcement light bar.

Text: 3 > Reform and Strengthen Intelligence

4 > Renew PATRIOT Act

Announcer: “Create a national counter terrorism center.”

Image 2: Troop helicopter with troops repelling from it.
Other troops seen on the ground.

Text: 5 > Tools Against Terrorists

6 > Counter-Terrorism Center

Announcer: “Transform our military.”
Announcer: “Give the military all it needs.”
Announcer: “Find terrorists where they train and hide.”

Image 1: Front shot of a grounded stealth bomber.

Text: 7 > Transform Military

8 > Find Terrorists

Announcer: “Learn more…”

Image 2: Military ground vehicle.

Announcer: “…at agenda for America dot com.”

Image 1: American flag with Agenda for America cover framed.
Title of TV advertisement: Health Agenda

Constant Images: Background, shades of blue squares.

Scrolling images go from right to left. At the bottom iconic images of people, Rx, and caduceus symbol.

Announcer: “President Bush and our leaders in Congress have a plan.”

Image 1: Text: President Bush & Congressional leaders. In a box.

Announcer: “Lower health care costs.”

Image 2: Male and female medical professionals, dressed in scrubs with stethoscopes, looking at each other. As that image scrolls off text appears: 1 > Small Business Better Rates.

Announcer: “Allow small businesses to band together to get insurance rates big…”

Image 1: Medical professional wearing white lab coat. As image scrolls text 1 > Small Business Better Rates scrolls off as a line draws across the screen to the next text: 2 > Health Savings Account.
Announcer: “...companies get.”

Announcer: Tax free health savings account families own.

Image 2: Previous image along with Health Savings Account text scrolls off. Line draws from text to next text as new image scrolls on. The image is a group of people in surgical gowns standing over a body. Text: 3 > Stop Junk Lawsuits.

Announcer: “Stop junk lawsuits against doctors and hospitals.”

Image 1: Image and text scroll off. Line draws from text to new text. New image of the back of a man’s head and the profile of a woman. Man is shaking the hand of another man, who is smiling. Text: 4 > Keep Doctors. Lines draws to new text. 5 > Health Centers. Image scrolls off new text appears Text: 6 > Every Child Covered.

Announcer: “Keep doctors in their communities.”

Announcer: health centers in every poor county.

Image: Man with a beard smiling and nodding his head.

Announcer: “Every eligible child with health coverage.”
Every Child Covered.

Announcer: “Learn more… at agenda for America dot com.”

Image 1: Line draws to a box that forms and Bush’s Agenda For America: A Plan for a Safer World and more Hopeful America appears. Background is a flowing American flag.

Title of TV advertisement: Economic Agenda

Constant Image: Green background with Ben Franklin one hundred dollar bill. Iconic signs down and to the right of the frame: hammer, farm equipment, people.

Announcer: “President Bush and our leaders in Congress have a plan…”

Image 1: President Bush & Congressional leaders in a box.

Announcer: “Strengthen our economy…”

Image 2: People building a house.

Announcer: “Life long learning…”
Image: Scrolls from People building a house to a woman sitting in front of a computer.

Text: 1 > Life long learning

Announcer: “Invest in education…”

Image: Still woman in front of computer

Text: 2 > Invest in Education.

Announcer: New skills for better jobs...

Image: “Scrolls from woman in front of computer to a man smiling and nodding his head.”

Text: 3 > New Skills for Better Jobs

Announcer: A fairer simpler tax plan...

Image 2: Man smiling at camera.

Text: 4 > Fairer Simpler Tax Code

Announcer: “Reduced dependency on foreign energy.”

Image 1: Global background.

Text: 5 > Reduce Foreign Energy

Announcer: “Freer fairer trade.”

Image: Global background.

Text: 6 > Fairer trade
Announcer: “Incentives to create jobs.”

Image Global background scrolls to people standing around.

Text: 7 > Job Incentives

Announcer: “Comp and flex time for working families.”

Image: People standing around.

Text: 8 > Comp and Flex Time

Announcer: “Strengthen Social Security.”

Image: People standing around.

Text: 9 > Strengthening Social Security

Announcer: “Legal reform.”

Image 1: Two women working with plants.

Text: 10 > Legal Reform

Announcer: “Permanent tax reform.”

Image 1: Two women working with plants.

Text 11: Permanent Tax Relief

Announcer: “Learn more…”

Announcer: “…at Agenda for America Dot Com.”
An appeal to leadership in political vaporware commercials relies on the President’s “authority” to make the plans appealing. Authority appeals tend to be at the heart of an introduction (Richards, 2003, p. 185). Each commercial begins by asserting President Bush and the leaders in Congress have a plan. The warrants of the vaporware “Affirms the reliability of the source from which they are derived” (Brockriede & Ehninger, 1960, p. 51). The appeal to authority establishes the hierarchy of power and provides President Bush with bolstered practical wisdom. The presidency stands for power (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004). Verbal text used in the commercials reinforces that perception of power. When the announcer states that President Bush’s plans “allow,” “give,” “create,” and “stop” it suggests that President Bush’s policies will exert power over the problems cited. There are three commercials and each ad dealt with one problem. However, with each problem President Bush’s plan would create multiple positive results. For example, in Economic Agenda, the economy is presented as an issue. President Bush’s plan would address that issue in a variety of ways. By listing the variety of ways of dealing with the issue the commercial signals there is a plan. The plan has been thought through enough to know how and what it would do to handle the economic issue.
The listing of each plan also creates an impression that each plan would provide positive results of security. That security is mostly found in security from uncertainty of terrorism, economic fluctuations, and healthcare costs. The uncertainty is reinforced through terrorism, outsourcing of jobs, and rising health care costs. That creation of security reigns in the atmosphere of uncertainty caused by those issues. This controlling of situation uncertainty accomplishes two things. First, it bolsters President Bush’s practical wisdom. His plans are fully thought through, and would work for the common good of society. The second effect bolstered Bush’s practical wisdom; it reinforced Bush’s good will.

Images in leadership commercials worked on different levels of political symbolization. What the announcer stated in the verbal text was repeated in the visual text. For example, in Economic Agenda, when the announcer states “Invest in education” printed text “Invest in education” appears on the screen. The repetition of the verbal and visual text produced amplification. The condensation symbols used were of Americans in various actions providing visualization for the main thrust of each commercial. For example, in War on Terror Agenda, to signal enhanced border and security for seaports, images of border guards and security guards at the seaports are shown. Later in the commercial, military personnel are seen, images that reinforce the idea that the military provides security. In Economic Agenda, various images of economic development are shown. Homes being built, a woman working at a computer, and people at work communicate a thriving economy.

Presidential candidates attempt to foster identification with voters (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004). To bolster good will a candidate presents plans in ways that promote
identification with the larger population. The Bush-Cheney campaign commercials

*Agenda* and *Twenty First Century* create a perception of participation in decision-making, that perception, which fosters identification.

**Title of TV advertisement: 21st Century**

President Bush: “We’re in changing times and…”

Image 1: Opens with a panning shot of a smoke filled bar.

The people in it are in silhouette.

President Bush: “…the economy is changing.”

Image 2: Head shot of George and Laura Bush. George is looking up and off screen while talking. Laura is looking at George while he talks.

President Bush: [Silence].

Image 1: A man with an apron on, framed by green wooden and glass door. Turns sign from closed to open and unlocks door.

President Bush: “We need new small business owners.”

Image 2: Images of two workers. One man is in jump suit grinding metal with sparks flying. Another man in the background wears yellow hard hat. Holds something as he looks up.
President Bush: “That’s why the policies…”

Image 1: A woman in blue apron, hand on pink roses.

Another woman looks up from white apron looks and looks at the other woman’s roses.

President Bush: “…I put forth help…”

Image 2: Hazy diner. Sun shining in the windows as people arrive through the front door. People are sitting in the booths and a waitress is bringing them food.

President Bush: “…small business.”

Image 1: A man leans over a table to shake the hand of someone off camera. A woman sitting next to the man standing up is smiling. It appears to be a business situation.

President Bush: “We’ve got tax cuts in place…”

Image 2: A man is sitting in a chair at a desk. He is talking on the telephone smiling and throws up his hand as he talks on the phone. He appears to be happy.

President Bush: “…that will help the economy grow.

We’ve also got plans…”
Image 2: Head shot of George and Laura Bush. George is looking up and off screen while talking. Laura is looking at George while he talks.

President Bush: “...to help people get...”

Image 2: Woman typing on a Mac computer.

President Bush: “…the skills necessary to fill the new jobs of the…”

Image 1: A person wearing a welders mask as he/she welds. Sparks are flying.

President Bush: “…twenty-first century.”

Image 2: A woman wearing goggles looking through a beaker as she slowly looks away from the camera.

President Bush: “I’m optimistic about America because I believe in the people of America.”

Image 1: George and Laura Bush head shots. George is talking as Laura looks where George is looking, up and away.
Title of TV advertisement: Agenda

Constant Image: Yellow and black distortion of images except President Bush.

President Bush: “We have come through a lot…”

Image 1: American flag waving. Image scroll by.

President Bush: “…together.”

Image 2: The diner with the woman turning on the open sign.

President Bush: “During the next four years we’ll spread…”

Image 1: President Bush, in a white shirt, speaking at a podium.

Text: Ownership…Opportunity.

President Bush: “…ownership and opportunity.”

Image 2: Men working in a factory.


President Bush: “We need to make our economy more job friendly…”
Image 1: A man wearing an apron walks through some items.

Text: Keep Jobs in America.

President Bush: “…to keep American jobs here in America.”

Image 2: President Bush speaking at a podium.

President Bush: “We must allow small employers to…”

Image 1: A man is on the phone and smiling.

Text: Insurance…Small Business

President Bush: “…join together to purchase insurance.”

Image 2: Back of a man wearing a hard hat pointing at something.

President Bush: “We must end…”

Image 1: President Bush at podium speaking.

President Bush: “…the junk lawsuits and enact tort reform.”

Image 2: People sitting and standing around table.

Text: End Junk Lawsuits…Enact Tort Reform.
President Bush: “We go to make sure our workers…”

Image 1: Woman sitting talking to man who is shuffling papers.

President Bush: “…have the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the twenty-first century.”

Image 2: Clear image of Agenda for America with flag rippling in the background.

To accomplish identification the word “We” is used to associate President Bush with the people. Burke (1972) argued identification “derives from situations in which it goes unnoticed” (p. 28). The use of “we” in the commercials is an example of that unnoticed identification. It unites voters in policy making. When individuals perceive identification, uncertainty is lowered (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The commercial Twenty First Century uses the identification strategy, while at the same time generating situational uncertainty. The calling to mind of change in an atmosphere of uncertainty exaggerated the risk of change. By exaggerating uncertainty and risk, the commercial amplified President Bush’s practical wisdom. It amplifies it by listing what the plan will do, which provides voters information regarding how President Bush would lead in uncertain times. Information regarding President Bush’s practical wisdom enables voters to feel more comfortable about his leadership.
Like previous commercials, the images used were referential and condensation symbols. In *Agenda* images of people working are used to signal job growth and growth in the economy.
Table 1

*A Model of Strategic Uncertainty*

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**Model**

**Attack Ethos**

Highlight inconsistency

The “Set-up-Refutation”

The “Flip-Flop”

Putting a candidate on the defensive

Raise uncertainty causes a candidate to lower uncertainty.

Interject the opponent’s political reality

When a candidate is on the defensive they address issues of significance to the opposing campaign. Thus, they remind the audience about the opponent’s strong points.

Redefines candidate

Creates perception of candidate as contributing to situational uncertainty and an uncertainty quantity

Separate candidate from mythic presidency

When a candidate is redefined as uncertain, the perception of strong leadership is affected. It becomes harder for a candidate to attach their image to the mythic presidency.

**Attack and bolster ethos**

Political antithesis

Proven past vs. unknown future

Political vaporware

**Bolstering ethos**

Exaggerate situational uncertainty

Provide candidate as solution to that atmosphere of uncertainty

Highlight and elaborates a candidate’s ethos.
Kennedy, in Aristotle (1991), defines rhetoric as “the energy inherent in emotion and thought, transmitted through system of signs including language, to others to influence their decisions or actions” (p. 7). A presidential campaign is the use of information transmitted through a system of signs including language and images to influence voting behavior. Berger & Calabrese (1975) and Shannon & Weaver (1949) argue that uncertainty is the absence of information that facilitates prediction. As a rhetorical stratagem, uncertainty rhetorically manipulates information in order to lessen voter predictions. Strategic uncertainty obscures information that influences voting behavior. Strategic uncertainty works best in an atmosphere of heightened uncertainty. In times of stability, change and uncertainty may be perceived as less risky. Uncertain rhetorical situations create a “need” for certainty. To keep that “need” in the forefront of voters’ minds a candidate must create a political reality that accomplishes three things. First, it must feed uncertainty. Second, it must present an opponent as contributing to “problems.” Finally, the candidate is presented as a “solution” to the “problems,” a certainty in uncertain times. In the 2004 election, the Bush-Cheney campaign followed these three guidelines when employing strategic uncertainty.

A common way to describe a campaign is a “platform” metaphor. A platform is made up of “planks.” Each plank is an issue defined by a campaign as important to the American public. For example, in the 2004 campaign the war in Iraq was a plank in both campaign platforms. To extend that metaphor, if each issue is a plank, a candidate (and his or her campaign) is the carpenter for a platform. A candidate builds the platform. For
a candidate to assemble the planks he or she must be perceived as credible. A candidate’s ethos is the “nails” that hold the planks together. Each “nail” represents a candidate’s qualities or virtues, qualifications of practical wisdom and good will, and their policies. Situational uncertainty is a factor in the extended metaphor. Situational uncertainty is a wind that shakes the platform, testing its strength. Situational uncertainty becomes a “test” for a candidate’s virtue, good will, and practical wisdom.

A campaign seeks to get voters to adopt a candidate’s political reality. The adoption of it should positively affect voting behavior. A campaign does not just build political reality, it attacks it. A campaign attacks an opponent’s political reality so that voters will not identify with it. Strategic uncertainty is one way to attack a candidate’s political reality. Strategic uncertainty systematically casts uncertainty on a candidate by undermining ethos. Strategic uncertainty also bolsters a candidate’s ethos. Strategic uncertainty removes or weakens one candidate’s platform while strengthening another’s.

As seen in a large selection of commercials, the Bush-Cheney campaign refers to situations that generate uncertainty regarding Senator Kerry’s ethos. However, there are many areas of situational uncertainty, including social, economic, and political.

Social uncertainty was generated in voters through fear of terrorism and the lack of security. The exigence for those fears was the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Fear of future attacks along with the subsequent war on terror had become the focal point of the election (Cahill, 2006; Kenski & Kenski, 2005). Verbal and visual texts in the Bush-Cheney commercials analyzed suggest that terrorism and its byproducts (i.e., war in Afghanistan, terror alerts, etc.) were used to create uncertainty. The fear of another terrorist attack partially stemmed from a lack of information of when, where, and how.
Lack of information increases uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The only thing assured was the “who.” The “who” was revealed through Osama bin Laden images.

Though not as important to the 2004 campaign as the war on terror another area of social uncertainty was healthcare. The uncertainty of not having healthcare as well as its cost of healthcare became an issue. However, the most powerful rhetorical issue to generate situational uncertainty was economic uncertainty. “A number of events contributed to a climate of uncertainty…including terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, corporate governance and accounting scandals, and geopolitical tensions surrounding the war in Iraq” (United States Congress, 2004, p. 234). An important factor in a presidential election is the condition of the economy (Erikson, 1989). The economy, war on terror, and war in Iraq were all large factors in the 2004 election (Kenski & Kenski, 2005). All generated uncertainty in the population (United States Congress, 2004).

After an economic recession and corporate scandals in 2001, voters found they were directly affected by the uncertain economy, especially job creation and loss. “The rise of long-term unemployment is one of the most troublesome features of recession” (United States Congress, 2003, p. 45). The rise of unemployment raised uncertainty in the public. This is the reason the government sought to control uncertainty (United States Congress, 2003). By feeding situational uncertainty, it created a need for certainty. Situational uncertainty created a need for people to “know” that a potential leader has the courage to lead. The Bush-Cheney campaign rhetorically manipulated information to generate uncertainty about Senator Kerry. In the 2004 election strategic uncertainty
rhetorically manipulated information to create a specific perception of Senator Kerry, his 
ethos.

Senator Kerry’s ethos was attacked by commercials that highlighted his past 
inconsistencies. Krauthammer (2004) stated that Bush campaign spent months of 
advertising portraying Kerry as inconsistent, weak, and uncertain. To keep that in the 
forefront of the campaign, the term “flip-flopper” was attached to Kerry. The political 
symbol “flip-flop” was a main tactic of the Bush-Cheney campaign. Highlighting Senator 
Kerry’s inconsistencies created an enthymeme for the term “flip-flop.” Any time “flip-
flop” or its variations was evoked voters were primed to think of Senator Kerry. 
Highlighting inconsistency with the help of a highly charged political symbol like “flip-
flop” was a powerful tactic.

The use of flip-flop and inconsistency has been used in other elections (Kern, 
1989), but not to the success and degree of the 2004 presidential election. Highlighting 
inconsistency, though accomplished in a variety of ways had two main results. Strategic 
uncertainty in the 2004 presidential election influenced undecided voters. Kenski and 
Kenski (2005) pointed to Karl Rove, President Bush’s chief political advisor, who 
depicted John Kerry as a “‘flip-flopper,’ not as a man who says what he believes, but as a 
man who says what he believes people want to hear” (p. 303). That uncertainty is an 
example of what other scholars (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Katona, 1975; Knight, 1921) 
suggest make people back away from a candidate. Highlighting inconsistency, creating a 
perception of a “flip-flopper,” should make undecided voters think, “I don’t know John 
Kerry.” “I don’t know his values.” “I don’t know if he can conduct a war on terror.” 
Polled voters did not know where Senator Kerry stood on the campaign issues (Morin &
Deane, 2004). At the same time, it should make undecided voters think, “I do know President Bush. I may not agree with him, but I do know where he stands.” Highlighting inconsistencies attacked all three levels of ethos. Kern (1989) stated that flip-flops “also concern the candidate serving his or her own interest” (p. 105). It created a view that Senator Kerry is not looking out for the common good of the electorate. Kenski & Kenski (2005) found that voters considered President Bush more honest and trustworthy than Senator Kerry. The strategic uncertainty tactic of highlighting inconsistency created a chain reaction. By creating a perception of Kerry as a “flip-flopper,” he had to clarify the manipulated information.

The uncertainty-generating candidate is generally perceived as credible. For example, Kenski & Kenski (2005) found the voters perceived Bush more credible in conducting the war on terror. Kerry’s ethos was consistently attacked with regard to the war on terror. Once he began to address the Bush-Cheney campaign strong point, Kerry moved off script. Senator Kerry moved away from domestic issues (Donilon, 2006). Voters’ perception of Kerry’s ethos was rhetorically manipulated by strategic uncertainty. Senator Kerry’s tattered ethos in turn caused an uncertainty chain reaction that disassociated him from the mythic presidency.

In the 2004 election, strategic uncertainty was used to attack each aspect of Senator Kerry’s ethos, virtue, practical wisdom, and good will. Strategic uncertainty was used to attack Senator Kerry’s virtue and practical wisdom to generate more uncertainty about his ability to lead. The perception of leadership ability is important to an image of a president (Misciagno, 1996). This was why Senator Kerry was disassociated from the mythic presidency. Voters did not perceive Kerry as fitting a presidential image. By
contrast, Kenski & Kenski (2005) found that Bush was perceived as being a strong leader. Thus, strategic uncertainty disassociated Senator Kerry from the mythic presidency.

Strategic uncertainty was used to create uncertainty. One result of strategic uncertainty was the suppression of voters who identified with the Democratic Party in as much people abhor uncertainty (Katona, 1975). Morin & Dean (2004) reported that “Nearly half of all Democrats -- 46 percent -- and a majority of political independents say they are not sure what Kerry stands for” (p. A01). After the election, the numbers showed there was a suppression or defection of Democratic Party voters. Kenski & Kenski (2005) showed “Kerry lost two of the seventeen Democratic states” (p. 317). Kenski & Kenski (2005) also showed that “Kerry...lost three of the Democratic competitive states” (p. 317). Strategic uncertainty, which highlighted inconsistency, placed Kerry on the defensive.

Strategic uncertainty also affect undecided voters. Strategic uncertainty was meant to make undecided voters move away from Senator Kerry and “herd” towards President Bush. With fostering situational uncertainty, people are more likely to seek certainty (Avery & Zemsky, 1998; Maslow, 1943). In the 2004 election President Bush was presented as that certainty. A candidate using strategic uncertainty simultaneously attacks an opponent’s ethos while bolstering his or her own ethos. They depict themselves as the certainty people seek. This perception is fabricated through two methods. First, commercials that both attack Kerry’s ethos while bolstering Bush’s ethos. Second, strategic uncertainty can be used in a commercial to just bolster Bush’s ethos.
The tactic of attacking ethos amplifies both the uncertainty of an opponent and the certainty of a candidate. Commercials using strategic uncertainty attack an opponent’s ethos to generate uncertainty. They then provide a solution a candidate portrayed as consistent. The Bush-Cheney campaign commercials accomplished this two ways: (1) political antithesis, and (2) a candidate is defined as unpredictable and the other candidate is defined as predictable. In the case of the 2004 election, this played to what Dowd (2006) described as voters feeling like they knew President Bush. They knew where he stood even if they did not agree with him. Many voters believed they had a relationship with President Bush because they had “been through” the attacks of September 11 with him (Cahill, 2006).

The other way to generate uncertainty was to steal mindshare from Senator Kerry’s proposed policies. The theft of audience attention is accomplished through the use of political policies. For the 2004 election, Senator Kerry was perceived as stronger on domestic issues (Donilon, 2006). In order to lessen that perception, the Bush-Cheney campaign presented policies dealing with the economy and healthcare. They cast Senator Kerry’s plans as taking away personal decision-making from voters. This was a powerful persuasive device because the removal of control over one’s own life heightens uncertainty (Weitz, 1989). Attacking and bolstering ethos commercials heightened the tension between uncertainty and certainty regarding Senator Kerry’s actions and voting record. However, President Bush and his policies were presented certainties. The Bush-Cheney campaign exaggerated situational uncertainty. The commercials provided guideposts for short term herding in situations of exaggerated uncertainty (Avery & Zemsky, 1998). The guideposts in an atmosphere of uncertainty point to President Bush
as having special knowledge. When perceived as having special knowledge it is sufficient to induce all others to follow (Avery & Zemsky, 1998). The end result is to bolster the ethos of President Bush. However, because of time limits they are not able to fully elaborate President Bush’s qualities, qualifications, and policies. Thus, when using strategic uncertainty a campaign runs commercials that specifically bolster ethos.

To create a perception of presidential timber a campaign using strategic uncertainty both questions a candidate’s ethos while bolstering their own. A campaign must create a perception that a candidate has the qualities, qualifications, and policies to lead (Nimmo & Combs, 1983). After generating situational uncertainty, and defining Senator Kerry as uncertain, the Bush-Cheney campaign presented President Bush as the solution to uncertainty.

Bolstering ethos in the 2004 election relied on three factors. First, it relied on the voter’s perception of President Bush as consistent (Dowd, 2006). Voters have prior experience and information about a president (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004). Having been president during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, President Bush was seen as having first hand knowledge regarding prosecuting the war on terror. He was also perceived as having gone through the experience (Cahill, 2006). “Voters were reminded of 9/11 through Bush ads that, without over claiming, recalled our shared experience and evoked a sense of how different the world is now because of this experience” (Kenski & Kenski, 2005, p. 339). Because of the terrorist attacks and the subsequent war on terror, President Bush had special knowledge and identification with voters. Second, the campaign relied on how in an atmosphere of exaggerated uncertainty, amplified through strategic uncertainty, people are attracted to an individual with special knowledge (Avery
Finally, the Bush-Cheney campaign rhetorically used the notion of security (Kenski & Kenski, 2005). Security was used to hold at bay what Kern (1989) referred to as "the harsh reality" (p. 106). With harsh reality comes uncertainty (Kern, 1989). Security provides control from harsh reality and uncertainty. The Bush-Cheney campaign bolstered ethos by revealing President Bush's qualities, qualifications, and policies. Each factored in the public's notions of consistency, special knowledge, experience, and security.

President Bush's virtues and qualities were portrayed as consistent. This virtue was presented as consistent with American values, which lowers uncertainty and raises identification (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). "Despite misgivings about the war or unease about the economy, they said, it was Mr. Bush, not Senator John Kerry, who shared their beliefs and understood their way of life" (Zernike & Broder, 2004, p. 3). "He also benefited from a large percentage of voters who associated him with traditional values" (Kenski & Kenski, 2005, p. 339). President Bush was presented as both consistent and sharing values that get people through uncertain times. President Bush was perceived as consistent in uncertain times. A part of that consistency came from a shared sense of history.

The incumbent in any campaign has more name recognition (Trent & Friedenberg, 2004). The Bush-Cheney campaign reinforced President Bush's special knowledge and qualifications to lead and conduct a war on terror. George W. Bush having been President during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 fostered the impression a strong leadership, which translated into expertise. War is one of the major contributors to uncertainty (Liesman, 2005), and special knowledge being a contributor to
certainty. That perception led to people wanting to elect an individual with special
knowledge (Avery & Zemsky, 1998). By bolstering President Bush’s qualifications in a
time of uncertainty people were “herded” toward him. Past policies provided examples of
President Bush’s practical wisdom, virtue, and good will. Future policies created a
perception of consistency in times of change.

Policies enacted in President Bush’s first four years were offered as evidence that
he provided security for the common good. The policies protected citizens’ safety,
families, and jobs. Security was often presented as controlling external situations beyond
voters’ control. To signal that control the Bush-Cheney campaign commercials used the
language of control. For example, in commercials President Bush’s policies controlled
situations by using the language of “allowed,” “create,” and “permit.” President Bush’s
policies would provide security by controlling situational uncertainty. “President Bush
believes decisions about protecting America should be made in the Oval Office not
foreign capitols.” Bush’s policies, along with qualifications and qualities created a
perception of trustworthiness. When asked whom they trusted more to do a better job
handling the U.S. war on terrorism, Bush or Kerry, 54% percent said Bush and 36% said
Kerry” (Kenski & Kenski, 2005, p. 330). However, Bush’s policies were not just to
create control, they were meant to discredit Kerry’s policies.

Policies were also meant to steal “mindshare” from Senator Kerry. According to
Jenkins (1988) when stealing mindshare a campaign successfully persuades an audience
that grave risks await those who switch to a competitor. This tactic relied upon the
perceptions of certainty and uncertainty developed around President Bush and Senator
Kerry. Bush-Cheney Political Vaporware commercials used the language of control and
suggested that President Bush’s policies would give people control over their own lives. They also suggested that Bush’s policies would control situational uncertainty. When faced with uncertainty people want to feel in control of their lives (Weitz, 1989). However, Senator Kerry’s policies were presented as taking control away from voters.

The use of uncertainty in the 2004 presidential election elucidated a new area of research, strategic uncertainty. Strategic uncertainty relied upon a perception of the world as uncertain, a perception of a “harsh reality” (Kern, 1989). That worldview is amplified through the use of strategic uncertainty. Situational uncertainty permeated the Bush-Cheney 2004 campaign. Many of the commercials fed the situational uncertainty by reminding voters of uncertainty of terrorism and an uncertain economic future. That situational uncertainty set the rhetorical situation for the three other tactics of strategic uncertainty: Attacking ethos, attacking and bolstering ethos, and bolstering ethos. Each relied on voters being fearful of the unknown. That unknown was augmented through rhetorical means by evoking past events that remind voters of the uncertain nature of the world. To further the strategy of strategic uncertainty an opponent must be portrayed as a major contributor and or a part of that uncertainty.

The Bush-Cheney campaign rhetorically manipulated information about Senator Kerry to create a perception of a leader whose actions revealed an unpredictable flip-flopper. A lack of prediction caused two effects. One, people wanted a sense of certainty and consistency in a leader during uncertain times. A lack of prediction increases uncertainty, an increase in uncertainty causes a decrease in identification. A lack of identification could likewise affect voting behavior. By defining Senator Kerry as a flip-flopper, he became a part of the problem. By contrast, President Bush was presented as
someone with whom voters could identify (Denton, 2005; Kenski & Kenski, 2005). Identification through similar values and beliefs fostered a perception of consistency. President Bush was also presented as having policies that would control for an encroaching “harsh reality.” His policies would provide security, protection from an uncertain world.

Strategic uncertainty was a powerful factor in the Bush-Cheney 2004 campaign strategy and it showed on November 3, 2004. “Jon Meacham, Newsweek managing editor, observed that “because the President got his 52 percent he did talk about the culture of life, he talked about wanting to stand for something amid an ocean of chaos. And more people voted for order than voted for what they thought might be a more chaotic culture under the democrats” (Denton, 2005, p. 275). President Bush represented certainty. Voters were uncertain about Senator Kerry, and thus did not vote for him.
CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

After the 2004 election, 48.3% of the population voted for Senator Kerry; 50.7% voted for President Bush. It was considered the highest voter turnout since 1968 (Faler, 2005, p. A05). Strategic uncertainty predicted that Senator Kerry would receive fewer votes due to uncertainty regarding undecided and suppressed voters. The high turnout of voters question's strategic uncertainty's ability to suppress voter turnout. However, Karl Rove, Chief Bush strategist stated in regards to President Bush and Senator Kerry: “At the end of the day, people voted for him for two reasons. One, they thought he could do the job, and two, they had deep doubts about the other guy” (Bumiller, 2004, p. 2). That doubt spawned from uncertainty generated about Senator Kerry. “Other factors, Republicans said, were Mr. Bush's gamble to run on terrorism and his repeated use of a clear, concise message. And Bush campaign officials said they were helped by the man they called a dream opponent, Senator John Kerry, whose nuanced statements about Iraq gave them an opening, day after day, to attack him as a ‘flip-flopper’” (Bumiller, 2004, p. 1). The 2004 Bush-Cheney campaign use of strategic uncertainty illuminates the need to further study it.

The study of uncertainty in communication has been investigated empirically (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Cioffi-Revilla, 1998; Gudykunst, 2005; Potthoff & Munger, 2005; Sorrentino & Roney, 2000). However, strategic uncertainty is a logical fit with rhetorical theory. For example, politicians and economists rhetorically manage uncertainty. Thus, the rhetorical use of uncertainty in political communication is a subject open to research. Recommendations for future studies include the analysis of verbal and
visual tropes that generate uncertainty. For example, in the Bush-Cheney commercial *Wolves*, visuals of nature are used to produce a perception of uncertainty. Perhaps nature is a verbal or visual trope that generates uncertainty. Viewers do not have enough information to know when and where the wolves/terrorists will strike. In the Bush-Cheney commercial *Safer Stronger*, an announcer states, “America is turning a corner.” A corner connotes a visual image of a path with an unforeseeable future; the corner hides information of what lies ahead. Those traveling on the path have a lack of information to predict future actions. A corner creates what Gudykunst (2005) described as the “feeling of being uneasy, tense, worried, or apprehensive about what might happen” (p. 13). Thus, a corner may work as a trope to generate uncertainty. In many of the Bush-Cheney commercials visuals of Senator Kerry moving from one side of the screen to another could be construed as a visual “flip-flop.” Rhetorical critiques of visual and verbal tropes that generate uncertainty may spawn future research.

The use of “flip-flop” was a campaign strategy in the 2004 election. Political inconsistency’s acceptance into popular culture creates an opportunity for further research. In a political system that appears to demand consistency from representatives, what are the rhetorical implications of rhetorically strategic “flip-flops?” Why is it not acceptable for politicians to change their stance on issues? The rhetorical use of uncertainty could build a foundation for further research.

Presently, no social scientific research examines strategic uncertainty in political communication. This study hopefully lays the groundwork for future empirical research regarding strategic uncertainty. Once verbal and visual tropes are better understood, a quantitative analysis of uncertainty may add to the knowledge base of political
communication. For example, the camera work and use of nature in *Wolves* could yield insight. Quantitative research into the effects generated by strategic uncertainty may provide the discipline a better understanding of how verbal and visual texts work, and how they affect voter decision-making. In addition, how does situational uncertainty play in the generation of uncertainty? For example, situational uncertainty played a major role in the 2004 election. In times of stability, there is a social need for change; voters are not as risk averse and therefore more comfortable with uncertainty. An energy crisis factored into situational uncertainty during the 1980 election; voters felt it was time for a change. However, during the 1992 election, the political climate was stable. In a time of stability, change appears to be less risky.

Although the findings of this study add to our understanding of the function and importance of strategic uncertain, there are limitations to its generalizability. This study analyzed only the 2004 presidential election. Election years are filled with multiple elections ranging from Federal congressional elections to local city council representatives. These various elections may or may not be affected by strategic uncertainty. This requires future investigation regarding how strategic uncertainty works at various levels of elections.

Second, Kellerman and Reynolds (1990) conducted studies testing motivation in uncertainty reduction and found that “wanting knowledge rather than lacking is what promotes information-seeking” (p. 7). One of the axioms of uncertainty reduction theory suggests that people seek information when confronted with uncertainty. That axiom helps explain information seeking in campaigns and more importantly, it questions Avery & Zemsky’s (1998) herding behavior in an atmosphere of exaggerated uncertainty.
Perhaps people are not so easily herded in a political election, especially in the absence of motivation. Motivation of individual voters is a variable requiring additional inquiry.

A final limitation of this study is its scope. Television has a powerful impact on voters (NPR, October 31, 2006). However, there are multiple mediums used in presidential elections. Direct mailing, radio, print media, and word of mouth all play important parts in political communication. The expansion of the use of the internet in the 2004 election and future elections require further research. For example, a television commercial may be used to rhetorically manipulate uncertainty. A motivated voter may log onto a candidate’s website to view a digital video response to an ad, thus lowering uncertainty. In addition, the interjection of political symbols into the political/cultural landscape requires study. The concept of “flip-flop” spread through the political landscape, helping to generate uncertainty. Though fostered by various mediums, “flip-flopper” behavior may have generated and reinforced uncertainty. Future research needs to analyze the relationship between strategic uncertainty and various channels of communication.

The rhetorical use of uncertainty in political communication (and other areas) has multiple implications. The study of uncertainty as a tool of rhetoric could open up myriad areas of research. In society, we see uncertainty in the competition for power and legitimacy among various ethnicities, mainly between dominant and subordinate groups. In the economy, there is a plethora of areas to study. In addition, the political world is rife with possibilities. Strategic uncertainty has the potential to create new areas of rhetorical research as well as empirical research.
Carl Hovland appropriated Aristotle’s artistic proofs and empirically tested them. This scholarship fostered modern persuasion research. Perhaps this study lays the groundwork for strategic uncertainty research. Strategic uncertainty appears to have untapped potential as a research field.

Aristotle (1991) saw the function of rhetoric as the discovery of “the available means of persuasion” (p. 36). In the 2004, presidential election strategic uncertainty appears to have been a means of persuasion. Uncertainty permeates life; it surrounds us. Uncertainty exists in nature and natural events, in people, nations, governments, economies, politics, and communications. It holds one of the keys to explaining the success or failure of political campaigns. The 2004 presidential election presented an opportunity to study components of the rhetorical manipulation of uncertainty. The Bush-Cheney campaign affected the public’s perceptions regarding Senator Kerry’s ethos. Their ads created “uncertainty” about the Kerry’s trustworthiness, competence, and moral character. The successful rhetorical campaign of the Bush-Cheney team set the stage for even more complex advertising, designed to build the public’s apprehension for the uncertainty involved in voting for Senator Kerry.

The shift toward campaigns built around the “uncertainty” of supporting a candidate, musters the growth of rhetorical research and analysis of the people and institutions of the 2008 presidential election. There should be ample opportunity to create a clearer and more useful understanding of the roles rhetoric plays in an advanced democracy.
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