

To: Ryan Alessi

From: Rebecca Bonifacio

Date: Nov. 19, 2019

Re: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's "The Courage to Change"

The Recommendation:

After ample research on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's political advertisements for the 2018 Democratic Primary senate race, I have ultimately decided that her well-produced ad is persuasive, engaging and overall effective. The advertisement, powerfully titled "The Courage to Change" gave Ocasio-Cortez who had little political experience and was essentially unheard of in the 14th Congressional District of New York, a platform to voice her policy changes and grievances with the current elected officials. Ocasio-Cortez went on to win the seat against strong opponents, as her strong marketing got the word out and encouraged constituents to vote for her, therefore fulfilling the duties of the advertisement and making it effective.

Background:

In 2018, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, (AOC) went head to head with a long term incumbent for New York's 14th Congressional District. Ocasio-Cortez was raised within the district and although it was never her intention to run for office, she sought change and found an opportunity to enact it. At the time, Ocasio-Cortez had little political recognition, and was running against a strong incumbent Democrat, Joseph Crowley, who was first elected in 1998, making this a particularly difficult race ("New York's 14th Congressional District," 2018). At the time of the election, Crowley held a position within the house as Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus and was even seen as a potential replacement for Nancy Pelosi as the Speaker of the House, ("New York's 14th Congressional District," 2018). Although Crowley spent significantly more on his campaign, AOC dominated the primary race, winning 57% of the vote on June 26th, 2018 (Goldmacher & Martin, 2018). AOC went on to win the congressional seat by a landslide, with 72.8% of votes. There is no doubt that her strong advertisements played a crucial role in her win.

Advertisement Summary:

Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez's advertisement is a motivating piece that shows the story of a self-fulfilling prophecy. "The Courage to Change" struck a chord with the 14th Congressional District of New York, as it vibrated across the United States. AOC's powerful story resonated

with every mover and changer, anyone who's ever felt like they didn't have a chance because of their race, their hometown, their resources, or other demographics they couldn't control.

The 2 minute 8 second advertisement, which can be found on [youtube](#), takes from all aspects of political campaign advertisements to make a compelling piece. Ocasio-Cortez uses the ad as means to introduce herself to constituents who don't necessarily know her, beginning with the powerful statement "women like me aren't supposed to run for office," (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 2018). As someone with little political experience, AOC took this opportunity to create an image for herself. While giving viewers an accurate viewpoint of her life, she also discussed key policies, mainly how to best represent working class families (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 2018). AOC mentions medicare for all, tuition free college and criminal justice reform. While doing all that, Ocasio-Cortez is still able to attack her opponent, without being too critical. Although Crowley is not directly named, his image is placed in the advertisement and AOC's narration refers to him multiple times, most specifically when she mentions that not all democrats are the same, mainly that "A democrat who takes corporate money, profits off foreclosure, doesn't live here, doesn't send his kids to our schools, doesn't drink our water or breathe our air cannot possibly represent us," (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 2018).

What makes AOC's advertisement so impactful is arguably the authenticity that went into it. According to Ocasio-Cortez's twitter, "not a single consultant was involved" in the video (Ocasio-Cortez, 2018). Cortez wrote her own script and narrated it, featured her own family and real constituents and even used her actual bodega in the video. Ocasio-Cortez's entire platform is that she's just a working class individual looking to make a change for those with similar concerns, and this video penetrates all necessary layers to get this message across. Ocasio-Cortez hired Means of Production, a detroit based production company founded by Democratic Socialists of America activists, for less than \$10,000 to work on video production (Beer, 2018). The video was primarily published through social media, and received almost three million views, which is groundbreaking for a do-it-yourself advertisement (Sherman, 2018).

Fact-Checks:

While a majority of AOC's advertisement is based on her own truth, she still draws conclusions about her opponent and his policies, or lack thereof. For example, halfway through the advertisement, AOC's narration bellows, "everyday gets harder for working families like mine to get by: the rent gets higher, healthcare covers less, and our income stays the same," (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 2018). According to the censusreporter.org, as of 2018, 43% of constituents had an annual income of \$50,000 or below. This rate is about 10% higher than the average within New York and just a little higher than that within the United States (Census profile, n.d).

But real testimonies turn this statistic into an actual concern. On June 30, 2018, right after AOC was deemed the winner of the Democratic primary, Janelle Marte, a writer for The Washington Post published an article about how the working class survives within the district. The article cites Ali Ahmed, a voter within the district who owns a convenience store and drives Uber in his spare time that combines to make a living wage (Marte 2018). Ahmed is not alone in his struggles, and according to Marte “despite record-low unemployment across the nation, those who live on the fringes of a strong economy find they are working double time just to keep up,” (Marte, 2018). Ahmed has noticed a change among neighbors, friends, and family, as young professionals are moving to more affordable homes within the district, and in turn, pushing out lower income families and immigrants with a stronger financial market.

Beyond concerns within the congressional district, Alexandria makes bold claims about her opponent, Joseph Crowley. Crowley, a career politician, won the 14th Congressional District seat in 2013, and essentially ran unopposed since (Joseph Crowley, n.d.). Ocasio-Cortez brings up some unethical things that Crowley partook in during his term, such as taking corporate money, profiting off of foreclosures, and not even living within the bounds of the district. According to [opensecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org), the majority of campaign dollars raised by Crowley came from Political Action Committees such as Votesane PAC, or private equity firms, such as New York Life Insurance and Blackstone Group (Rep. Joseph Crowley, n.d.) The top industry backing Crowley’s campaign was real estate, cashing in at just over \$320,000 dollars. From these statistics alone, it is clear that Crowley is capable of taking donations from financial powerhouses who may not have the constituents best interests at heart. On the flip side, over \$2,000,000 of AOC’s funds were from small individual contributors, or individuals donating \$200 or less to the campaign. Compare that to Crowley’s \$28,000 raised within this sector and it is easy to draw conclusions on which candidate is more supported by those their representing.

Furthermore, Crowley didn’t even reside within the district, let alone New York state, during the 2018 primary and his previous time as Congressman. According to the New York Times, Crowley’s family resides in the Washington D.C. area, a fact that many constituents didn’t know. Although both Crowley and Ocasio-Cortez grew up and were raised within the district, AOC returned to the district and ran within it out of hopes of fixing things for all constituents. Crowley had no personal stake in the changes he made within the district, as long as he continued to win.

The Effect

There is no doubt that “The Courage to Change” made a profound impact on constituents, as Ocasio-Cortez defeated Joseph Crowley by 13.4% in the Primary Democratic election. This advertisement was produced solely to get AOC’s name out during a rather difficult primary period, as she was running with little political virtue and against a strong incumbent candidate.

Ocasio-Cortez's strong advertisement is the work of a lot of moving parts working together. However, it is arguable that her strongest appeal is the use of emotion tied to fact to promote change. The first thirty seconds of the advertisement clearly target a well known demographic among her constituents: lower income, first generation immigrants. AOC is able to relate to them as she too, resides among the demographic and understands the limitations of these statistics can put on an individual's growth. Ocasio-Cortez says it best herself, when she states, "I was born in a place where your zip code determines your destiny." Even if the viewer herself did not relate to these struggles, it's hard not to sympathize with the story so many Americans know too well.

Beyond the emotional appeals, Ocasio-Cortez's use of visual aid helps her tremendously. The video follows a day in the life of AOC, who quite frankly, lives life very similarly to that of her potential constituents. She is seen switching from flats to heels waiting for public transportation, taking the subway to work, and even shopping at her actual bodega. Upon further research into the advertisement, one would find out that those featured within the advertisement were genuine citizens willing to volunteer their time, or family and friends of Ocasio-Cortez. No person shown in the advertisement was hired for their time, showing unheard of political authenticity, but also a strong support system behind her decision to run for office.

Arguably the most important part of "The Courage To Change" is AOC's genius way of combining all types of political advertisements. This advertisement not only provides background information on who Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is, but also strongly attacks her opponent. Ocasio-Cortez is willing to lay it all on the table to be as transparent with her potential constituents as possible, mentioning that she waited tables and didn't even consider politics as part of her life plan. Her truth goes beyond her own qualifications, when she chooses to attack her opponent, Joseph Crowley. AOC compares her potential policies to the ones currently enacted by Crowley, instead of directly attacking him. In the mere two minutes it takes to watch this advertisement, AOC develops her own story, explains qualifications, attacks current policies, while simultaneously sounding well-educated and evoking emotion among viewers.

Conclusion:

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's choice to voice her truth in such a raw and emotional way is what helped her win the race and ultimately taking over the seat. Many constituents can see the advocate within themselves in her, and even if they can't, they can relate to those who don't necessarily have the ability to use their voice. "The Courage to Change" has proved to be a strong political advertisement like no other that future political candidates will attempt to remake time and time again.

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