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Introduction

Marketing and advertising are powerful revenue-generating tools used to create brand awareness, customer acquisition and retention. Just like a company selling a product, a political candidate and his or her party are an entity whose main purpose is to convince voters (*consumers*) why they should vote on (*consume*) the ideas (*products*) that the campaign (*advertisers*) proposes (*offers*). Parties, candidates and activists deploy marketing techniques such as persuasive advertising to convince voters why they should vote for a particular candidate or measure that the party or organization promotes. Like marketing campaigns, political campaigns use the psychology of consumer behavior to understand how best to appeal to potential voters. The psychology of consumer behavior strives to understand how consumers “think, feel and reason” between options (Perner, 1999). Consumer behavior is

the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society (Perner, 1999).

Understanding consumer behavior and decision-making patterns is important for any brand, including political brands, because understanding how consumers (*voters*) make decisions between options affects how a political campaign will advertise to specific subsets of voters.

Today, big data extracted online has further empowered marketers by creating greater access to information about consumers, including potential audiences and current target markets. Similar to marketing campaigns, political campaigns use data about potential voters to promote their candidates and ideas. Advancements in

random to receive easy compensation). Of the 468 total responses to the age screening question, 294 were screened out because their age did not lie within the 18–30 age range. Of the 174 who responded to the voter eligibility question, 15 were screened out for not being registered voters of the United States. Of the remaining 159 responses, 23 responses were screened out for failing quality assurance questions or not completing the survey. The resulting sample size was 136.

Table 1 provides the demographics of the sample population. The sample population indicated some higher than average education levels for some areas including high school degree, which accounted for 13.2 percent of participants compared to the national average of 32.1 percent for people ages 18–29 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). For all education levels less than Bachelor's degree, the sample population was lower than the national average and for all education levels that were Bachelor's degree and higher, the sample was above the national average. The national average for ages 18–29 that have completed an Associate's degree or less is 75.3 percent compared to this sample, which indicated only 55 percent. National average for Bachelor's degree or greater for this age group is 24.7 percent compared to the sample, which indicated that 44.8 percent of participants completed Bachelor's degrees or higher. The average income of respondents was about \$37,900. In 2013, the reported average income for ages 15–34 was \$33,407. Income of the sample population is slightly higher than the national average (Short, 2014).

to, "Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements."⁵ The statements were: (1) "Voting gives people an effective way to influence what the government does" (2) "I can make a difference if I participate in the election process." (3) "My vote makes a difference" and (4) "I have a real say in what the government does" These items were combined into a four-item index of political self-efficacy ($\alpha = .95$), with higher scores indicating higher political self-efficacy.

Situational Political Involvement. Using a 9-point Likert-style scale with *strongly agree* (1) and *strongly disagree* (9), situational political involvement was measured by directing respondents to, "Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements." The statements were: (1) "I pay attention to election information" (2) "I like to stay informed about the elections" (3) "I'm interested in election information" and (4) "I actively seek out information concerning elections."

These items were combined into a four-item situational political involvement index ($\alpha = .98$), with higher scores indicating higher situational political involvement.

Perception of Political Advertisements on Social Media. Using a 9-point Likert-style scale with *strongly agree* (1) and *strongly disagree* (9), respondents were asked, "Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements." The statements were: (1) "Political advertisements on social networking sites are informative" (2) "Political advertisements on social networking sites have helped me to make a voting decision on at least one candidate in the last 6 years" (3) "Political advertisements on social networking sites are misleading" (4) "Political

⁵ 9-point Likert-style scale was chosen because nine is the maximum number of categories that a person can store in short-term memory as he or she is processing. Additionally, people typically lean to one side of the scale immediately, so using nine points gives them more options to discriminate within one end of the scale.

Exposure to Ads on Twitter	0.035	-0.008
Exposure to Ads on Pinterest	-0.085	0.014
Exposure to Ads on Instagram	-0.042	0.024
Exposure to Ads on LinkedIn	0.058	-0.048
Exposure to Ads on Google+	0.013	-0.085
Exposure to Ads on YouTube	0.112	-0.023

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Comparison of Groups

Political Self-Efficacy. An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference between income levels on political self-efficacy ($M_{high} = 5.52$, $M_{low} = 4.70$, $t(134) = -2.297$, $p = .023$). Higher income participants—those respondents that made \$40,000 per year or more—reported greater self-efficacy than those respondents with less income.

Situational Political Involvement. An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in situational political involvement between high education and low education participants ($M_{high} = 4.83$, $M_{low} = 3.89$, $t(134) = 2.42$, $p = 0.017$). High education participants—those with a bachelor's degree or greater—reported greater situational political involvement than less educated participants.

Perception of Political Advertisements. An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference between income levels on perceptions of political advertisements ($M_{high} = 4.36$, $M_{low} = 3.61$, $t(134) = -2.35$, $p = .020$). Higher income participants reported having a more positive perception of political advertisements on social networking sites than lower income participants.

online. Those participants who reported lower political self-efficacy reported ignoring political advertisements online. Thus, while political self-efficacy was not a direct indicator of whether participants saw advertisements, for people who did see political advertisements on social media, their level of political self-efficacy determined whether or not they would ignore the advertisement. This result is important for politicians and campaign managers because, as the Obama campaign discovered in 2012, apathetic versus undecided yet persuadable voters are entirely different audiences that require different messages. In the case of the Obama campaign, they determined that focusing on undecided young voters, and not apathetic ones, would be a more constructive use of time and resources. Our results confirm their theory, as voters who do not believe their vote matters—apathetic citizens—are not as likely to read or engage in political messages on social media.

Although political self-efficacy and situational political involvement were not strong indicators of perceptions of political advertisements, our results did find significant correlations between perceptions of political advertisements and exposure to political advertisements online. Those respondents who reported more positive perceptions of political advertisements on social media were more likely to be exposed to political advertisements on the various social networking sites used in the study. There are a few explanations for this behavior.

Narrowly construed preferences relate to more positive perceptions of targeted advertisements. If someone who is already interested in politics sees an advertisement by the political party he or she supports, he or she is more likely to have a positive perception of that advertisement than an apathetic voter that gives little regard to the

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