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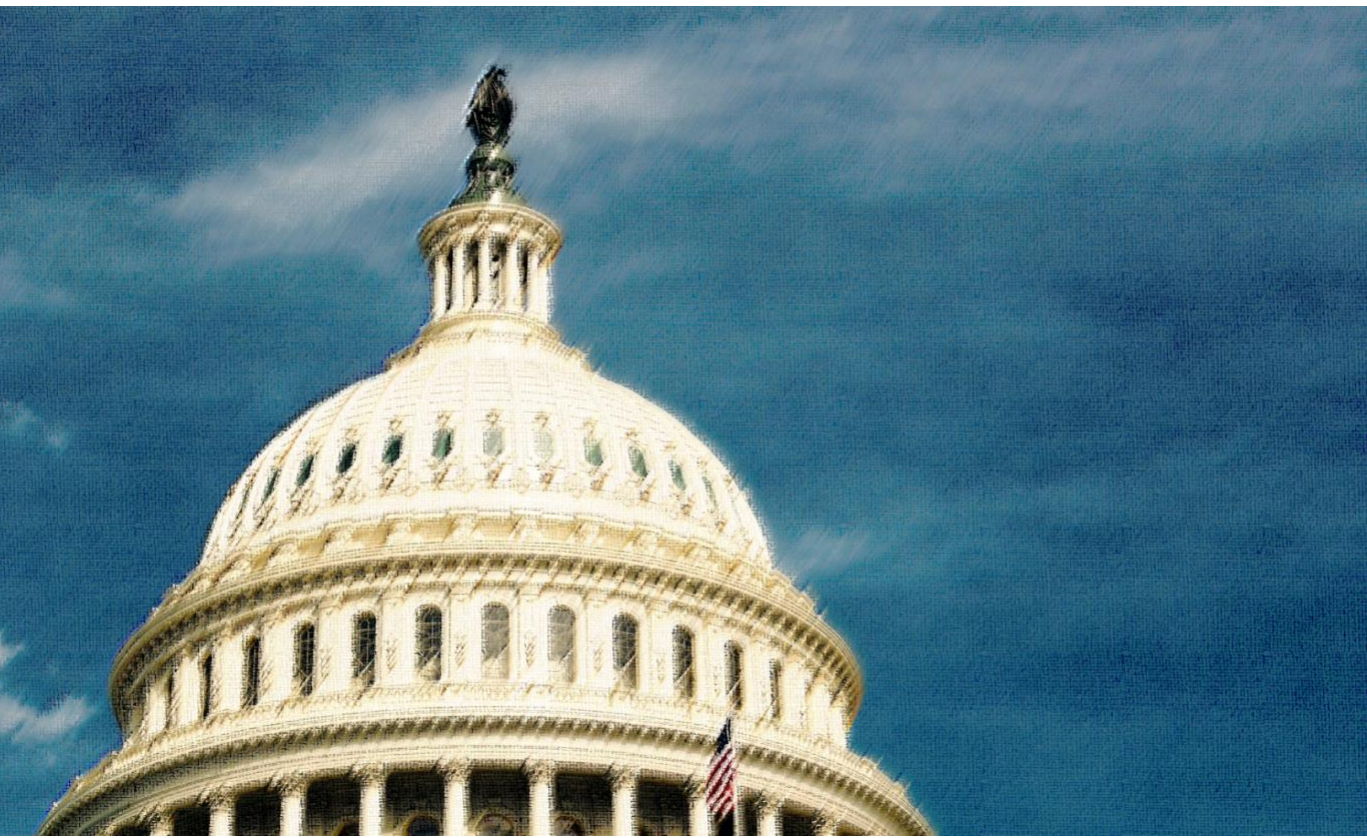
Spenser Horton

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Political Consultants, Negative Advertisements, and the Mitten State

Spenser Horton[1]

Honors Research

Dr. Christopher Soper

The 2012 Presidential election pitted the incumbent Barack Obama against the former Governor of Massachusetts and Republican opponent, Mitt Romney. Fresh off of a historic first term as the United States' first and only African-American President, Obama was looking to secure another four years in the White House. The public faces of these campaigns, however, blocked from the view of the important, behind the scenes role of political consultants. The political consulting industry has come to be a main feature of campaigns. In the 2012 Presidential election, "consulting firms billed federal candidates, parties and super PACs more than $3.6 billion for products and services. Of this, more than seventy percent went to firms specializing in the production and placement of media."[2] The amount spent, both from the campaigns and from outside organizations, far exceeded spending on the placement of advertisements that occurred in previous elections. Researchers from Wesleyan University found that "spending by groups in support of the GOP nominee in 2012 is up over 3,000 percent from 2008."[3] Many of these outside groups also hire consultants and other staff to produce, place, and run advertisements. This includes the background work of message testing, polling, electorate research, and other work that political consultants and outside firms typically conduct. Somewhere along the way, campaign ads have been shaped by the influence of a political consultant. And what type of ads were being placed in 2012? According to the data, attack ads constituted 63 percent of ads placed supporting Obama and 61 percent ads supporting Romney.

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[2] Adam Sheingate, "The Political Consultant Racket," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/30/opinion/campaign-stops/the-political-consultant-racket.html.
[3] "Obama Dominates Advertising in Key States," 2012 Elections, Wesleyan Media Project, Wesleyan University, Accessed February 5, 2019, http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/releases/obama-dominates-ads-in-key-states/.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have sought to define negative or attack advertisements since they first appeared in the arsenals of political candidates. In 2012, Jason Johnson identified a theme common among researchers studying negative ads: the failure to ask the ad creators themselves how they define the term. Johnson proposed new definitions for the terms "negative" and "attack" advertising, based on the responses of political consultants:

> Negative advertising is simply *any message criticizing your opponent, with whatever materials you have, with whatever evidence you have, so long as it is the truth and at least tangentially relevant to the campaign…*[attack advertisements are] *any messages in political campaigns that are factually untrue and that focus on issues that cannot be readily understood as relevant to the campaign.*[4]

While these definitions are widely accepted, the dataset that I am using from the Wesleyan Media Project does not have a variable for "negative" ads. Furthermore, the Project fails clearly to define their criteria for assigning the terms "negative" or "attack." I will therefore adopt Johnson's definition for "negative" ads into this definition for "attack" ads, to mean "any messages that criticize your opponent, that may or may not be untrue, but has intention of causing harm to your opponent's image." Throughout this paper, the terms negative and attack will be used interchangeably.

Although research on the topic of political advertising has shown that "the effect of campaign negativity on the political process is ambiguous," the existence of a highly partisan electorate warrants the discussion of how political consultants may affect this phenomenon through negative ads.[5] Although some have found that attack ads have little tangible effect on the

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[4] Jason Johnson, *Political Consultants and Campaigns,* 142. Italics included in original source.

[5] Conor M. Dowling et al., "The Effects of Negative Advertising," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, (November 2016). Oxford University Press, http://politics.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-51.

electorate, there are models that researchers have developed to show that political advertisements do, in fact, effect the electorate. These come in the form of the minimal effects model, and the subtle effects model. Both models are still used today to explain media effects on the populace, and inevitably help to explain how negative ads can have an effect on voters.

The "Minimal Effects Model" attempts to determine the influence the media plays on citizens. During the Presidential campaign of 1940 researchers Paul Lazarsfeld, Barnard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet conducted a 6-month study with 600 citizens living in Erie County, Ohio in order to "assess the campaign messages that were circulating in the local media environment and examine what effect, if any, those messages had on voters."[6] They found that 50 percent of the interviewees who had decided their preferred candidate in May, voted that way in November. Lazarsfeld and colleagues coined the term "reinforcement effect" to describe the lack of change in opinion, arguing that the campaign messages viewers watched served to strengthen their commitment to their initial decision.[7] Similar to the "minimal effects" model is the "activation effect" which posits that citizens who were unsure of who to vote for in November paid more attention to the election once being exposed to campaign messages. However, "citizens did not pay attention to all aspects of the campaigns. Instead, citizens honed in on particular magazine articles and newspaper stories that corresponded with their political predispositions."[8] In other words, the presence of political messages served to reinforce partisan beliefs while also encouraging those with political biases to seek out media and information reinforcing that bias. The placement of advertisements during television and news programs that draw partisan viewership could therefore have the same effect today. When those advertisements

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[6] Information for the above comes from: Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley, *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice* (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2016), 90.
[7] Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley, *Public Opinion*, 90.
[8] Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley, *Public Opinion*, 90.

are negative or attack ads there is reason to believe that feelings of anger and disparagement towards the opposite political party could be reinforced, while also encouraging the search for news sources that then reinforce this view.

The subtle effects model is another method to explain media influence. This model embodies the processes of framing, agenda setting, and priming that take places during electoral campaigns. The model contends that public influence can be swayed by the media through "(1) affecting what the public thinks about, (2) affecting which issues and traits shape the evaluation of leaders, and (3) affecting which considerations are viewed as most important when assessing a political issue."[9] In the context of this research, the use of negative advertisements could have an effect through this model. Through the first step of agenda setting, negative and attack advertisements inform the public what policies and issues to think about during the campaign. Exposure to these types of ads could create the impression that the election is a battle for the future of America, or any similar metaphor. The second process in this model is the process of "priming," where voters determine which candidate to support based on the issues that the media has portrayed as the most important.[10] Again, the use of negative advertisements in this model could have the effect of establishing issues that draw partisan vitriol (such as abortion, immigration, LGBTQ rights) as the main issue to judge candidates on. The third step in the process is "framing," which serves to "identify which aspects of a problem are relevant and important, and they imply which characteristics of a problem are not significant."[11] This third step can be exampled through an advertisement that focusses on immigration. An important issue to Republican base voters might be border security, deportation of illegal immigrants, and

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[9] Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley, *Public Opinion*, 90.
[10] Information for the above comes from: Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley, *Public Opinion*, 91-94.
[11] Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley, *Public Opinion*, 95.

preventing illegal immigrants from using social services. To appeal to a Democratic base,

progressive policies towards immigrants would be emphasized. Meanwhile, the drawback of

each party could also be expressed. This has the effect of reinforcing in the minds of Republicans

or Democrats the solution and problems that their party proposes, along with building upon

attitudes towards the other parties' candidates who may not focus on aspects of a problem that

appeal to their opposition.

Another factor in campaign advertising that researchers have started to take notice of is

fear. Travis N. Ridout and Michael M. Franz note that "one may need to move beyond the

traditional categorization of ads as positive or negative to consider the specific emotions they

elicit."[12] Franz and Ridout's data shows that during the 2004 Senate and Presidential elections,

fear and anger were the most common emotional appeals made in attack ads, across both major

parties and both Congressional and Presidential contests.[13] Furthermore, Corrigan and Brader

note that political consultants themselves have advocated for the use of fear in ads.[14]

Consultants sit in an industry which can inspire the effects of the minimal and subtle

effects model in their political advertisements. Yet, while researchers have framed the agenda

setting and polling activities of consultants in a negative light, other, more recent work, contend

that these practices ensure a more robust democracy. Lake notes that elevating issues during a

campaign that the people care most about will help contrast candidates and involve voters in the

race.[15] Dulio mentions that many scholars on the subject have assumed that consultants tell

candidates which view to take on issues in order to win. Dulio contends, however, that,

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[12] Travis N. Ridout and Michael M. Franz, *The Persuasive Power of Campaign Advertising* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2011), 80.

[13] Travis N. Ridout and Michael M. Franz, *The Persuasive Power of Campaign Advertising*, 83.

[14] Bryce Corrigan and Ted Brader, "Reassessing the Impact of Campaign Ads," in *New Directions in Campaigns and Elections*, ed. Stephen K. Medvic (New York: Routledge, 2011), 82.

[15] Celinda Lake, "Political Consultants: Opening Up a New System of Political Power," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 22, no. 1 (1989): 26-29. doi:10.2307/419865.

"…pollsters do not use survey research to tell candidates *how* or *what* to think about issues, but help candidates find issues and language that best describes what the candidate will do once elected."[16] According to Dulio, candidates decide what stance to take on an issue, consultants simply find a way to make that stance more politically acceptable. The idea that consultants are recruiters who, "… look for people who have orientations like their own, who will rely on research information, be able to use the mass media, and who have or are able to raise money," is demonstrably false, according to Dulio.[17]

The arguments made above paint a picture of political advertising as mildly effective psychologically, but I want to take the question out of the theory and see what the data says about the use of negative or attack ads. Whether or not political ads are effective—as the theories above attempted to explain—is important. Likewise, it is also important to know what types of are used the most and attempt to find out why. I also want to find out how the placing of negative and attack ads work in real life. I will attempt to answer the first question by looking at campaign advertisements from the 2012 presidential election in the state of Michigan. This data, compared with voting history of the region, will give us an image of any relationship between the two. I will also consider the question of how consultants understand the work that they do in the placing and recommending the use of negative or attack ads.

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[16] David A. Dulio, *For Better or Worse? How Political Consultants are Changing the Elections in the United States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 72.
[17] David L. Rosenbloom, *The Election Men: Professional Campaign Managers and American Democracy* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 162.

METHODS

There are a number of important assumptions that I will be making throughout this research. First, I will assume that any political advertisement placed in Michigan during the 2012 presidential general election was the work of a political consultant. I will also assume that television advertisements are the best source to use to analyze the impact of campaign advertisements. A 2012 survey found that 67% of respondents reported having received "most of" their news from television sources during the 2012 presidential election.[18] Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that citizens were exposed to campaign commercials and that they used them to make judgements on the respective candidates.

The main questions to be asked in this research are: what does the data say about negative or attack ads, and who is to blame for placing negative/attack advertisements? I will use data compiled by the Wesleyan University Media Project to attempt to answer the first question. This project has been tracking and coding federal election campaign advertisements since 2010, with Kantar Media and their Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG) serving as Wesleyan's source. The Wesleyan Media Project sends out collectors—along with CMAG—to analyze and report on advertisements in all media markets using technology that can identify certain characteristics of the ad including the sponsor and program it was placed on.[19] Advertising data and the video files are then sent to Wesleyan project staff, who then:

> [R]esearch the entity responsible for airing each political spot, distinguishing between those paid for by candidates, parties, and interest groups. Finally, the Wesleyan Media Project codes the content of each ad on an extensive battery of questions using a web-based content analysis platform called Academiclip, a CommIT media research application.[20]

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[18] "Pew Research Poll Database," Question Search, Pew Research Center, Accessed April 4, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/question-search/
[19] "Project Background," Wesleyan University Media Project, Wesleyan University, Accessed February 5, 2019, http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/about/project-background/."
[20] Wesleyan University, "Project Background."

Further detail on the variables chosen will be given before the discussion of the case study.

The answer to my second research question will be explored through a survey of political consultants. To compile a random sample for the survey, I identified 40 Republican, 40 Democratic, and 30 Independent consulting firms. I identified the partisanship and contact information of these firms from the American Association of Political Consultants and Campaigns & Elections websites. After compiling these lists, I assigned each a number, and used a random number generator to pull a sample size of 60 consultants to contact. I made sure to pull equal proportions of Democrat, Republican, and Independent consultants. Of those 60 consultants, 29 responded to every question on my survey, for a total N=29 (See Appendix for the survey) The survey also asked if the consultants would be willing to conduct an interview; based on those responses I then conducted telephone interviews with six consultants. I am fairly confident that I have a random sample of political consultants. The consultants I surveyed ranged in the political spectrum, stretched from coast to coast, including plenty in the middle of the country, and spanned specialties from public affairs, digital strategists, full-service campaign firms, ballot initiative strategists, and more.

RESULTS

Analysis of the 2012 Election

As I noted earlier in the paper, $3.6 billion was billed to political consulting firms in the 2012 election, with more than 70% going to the production and placement of media.[21] While this category includes media placed on social media, radio, and newspapers, an extraordinary amount was still spent on television advertisements. There was one stark difference between the way the two campaigns spent on advertising.

Candidate Ads Supported	Campaign Spending	Independent Expenditures*	Overall Amount Spent	Number of TV Ads Placed Nationally
Romney	$57,272,390	$142, 655,346	$199,927,736	126,748
Obama	$163,763,350	$66,482,084	$230,245,434	363,010

*Table 1 2012 Advertising Totals. *By Political Action Committees with Known Ties to the Candidate*

As Table 1 shows, the Romney campaign spent much less of its own money on television advertisements. This is essentially the opposite of how the Obama campaign spent on its ads. Romney's campaign spent less and relied more on outside groups placing ads on their behalf; meanwhile, Obama's campaign spent large amounts, over $163 million, while receiving less than half that in support from independent expenditures.

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[21] Adam Sheingate, "The Political Consultant Racket," *The New York Times*.

The Mitten State: A Case Study

How the Candidates Advertised[22]

There are 11 designated market areas (DMAs) within the state of Michigan (see Figure 1[23]). Three of these media markets are located around the metropolitan areas of cities in different states, yet include one or two counties within MI. Only the DMAs of South Bend and Alpena were not included in the data that I am using. The Detroit DMA— as described below—will be excluded from my data. I will therefore analyze data from 8 DMA's within the state of Michigan.
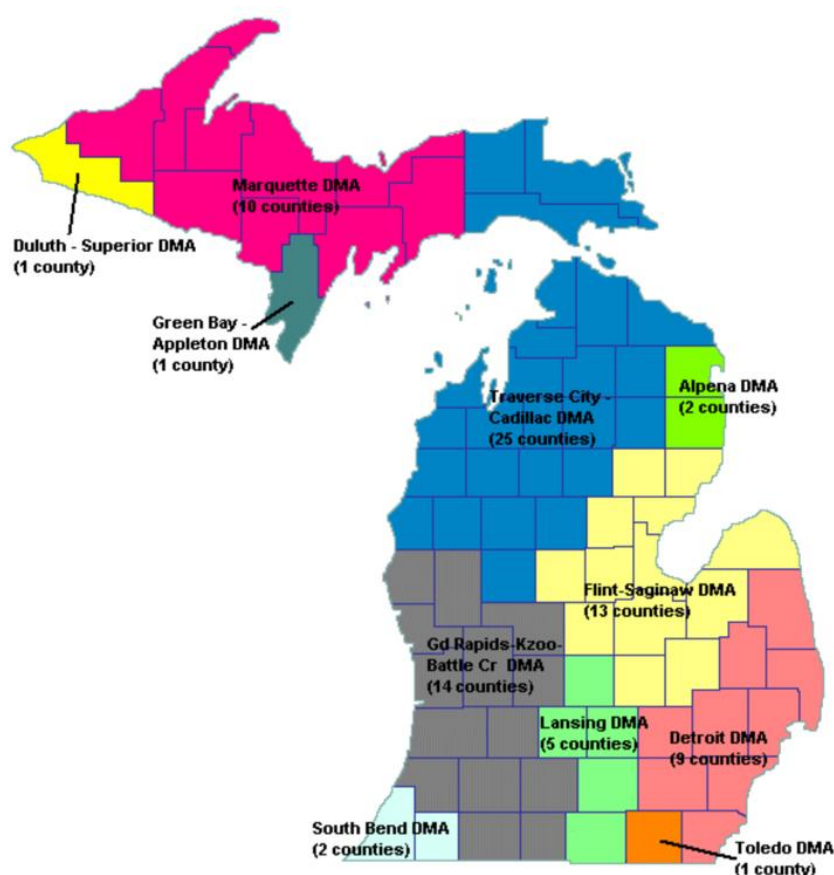

Figure 1: Map of Michigan Designated Market Areas (DMAs)

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[22] From now on, statistics concerning ad amounts, including variable titles will be sourced from: Wesleyan University Media Project, 2012 Presidential Codebook and Data, Accessed February 10, Unpublished Raw Data, Retrieved from: http://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/dataaccess/. Furthermore, all data on county voting is taken from the following two sources: New York Times, "Michigan," Election 2012, Accessed February 10, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/states/michigan.html; New York Times, "President Map," Election Results 2008, Last modified December 9, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2008/results/president/map.html.
[23] All Occurrences of this Image taken from: "Michigan Television Markets," Station Listings, Michiguide.com, Accessed February 12, 2019, http://www.michiguide.com/tvmarkets/.

Using the data from Wesleyan, I identified and created dummy variables for the various media markets within MI. I eliminated the most populous DMA of Detroit to ensure when I ran a regression analysis that there was no large populous that could skew the results. I then chose five variables with which to run cross tabulations between certain MI DMA's and the various types of ads I wanted to observe. These variables were: attack ads, ads that focused on personal characteristics over policy, ads that appealed to fear, ads that showed disapproval of Obama, and who the ad supported: Obama or Romney. While I could not find strict definitions on the Wesleyan Media Project website, I was able to come up with the following definitions of these ads. Attack ads in this paper will be defined as, "Any form of communication, whether true or untrue, that criticizes the opponent while highlighting issues not easily tied to the campaign." Ads that focus on personal characteristics are relatively easy to explain; these would be ads that focus on the personal lives, habits, or even families of candidates. Choosing ads that appeal to fear was a decision made after speaking to consultants, who shall be profiled later, and learning that these types of ads are becoming more common. There were no ads coded for disapproval of Romney, which is why we will only be observing the disapproval of Obama ads. Finally, determining who placed the most ads on behalf of the two candidates will give a clear look at who was busiest in the area. It is also important to note that ads may be coded as two variables, and all of the data refers solely to television advertisements.
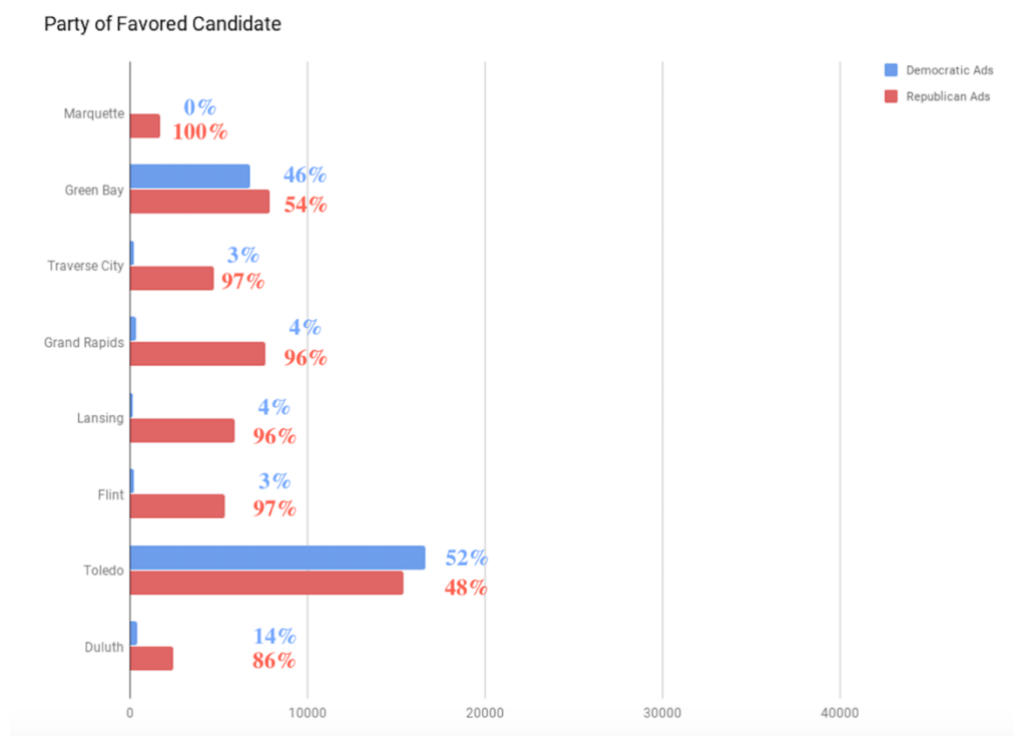
Types of Advertisements within the Designated Market Areas

In total, there were 82,361 campaign advertisements placed within in the eight DMA's during the 2012 election. Table 2 provides details on the proportion of attack ads, ads that appeal to fear, ads that show disapproval of Obama, personal over policy ads, and which proportion of ads supported which party. The largest proportion of ad type present actually came from those ads that were placed in support of the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney. His supporters were out in force and placed 69% of the total ads, while Democrat supporters placed the remaining 31% of the ads in these DMAs. One statistic that surprised me was the low proportion of ads that focused on a candidate's personal aspects. Throughout much of my research, a common thread among those early researchers of the industry was the claim that

Type of Ad	Number of Ads placed	Proportion
Attack	51,151	62%
Appeal to Fear	23,193	28%
Disapproval of Obama	42,474	52%
Personal over Policy	4,741	6%
Ads in support of Republicans	56,716	69%
Ads in support of Democrats	25,371	31%

Table 2 Total Ad Placement in Michigan

political consultants are slowly turning elections from policy contests into personality ones. However, this data point shows that this really may not be the case. Although these ads are present, this 6% is broken up between each of the eight DMAs, so the presence of them is even much smaller when looked at that way. I was not, however, shocked by the high proportion of attack ads, at 62%. Many consultants, as will be shown later, told me that they recommend the use of these ads, under the right circumstances. Clearly, some of the circumstances in this presidential contest could have warranted the use of these ads.

Party of Favored Candidates

Figure 2 Party of Favored Candidate

Observing which parties placed advertisements in support of their candidate in 2012 will better help to determine a few characteristics of the DMA's in this case study. The most important being the political competitiveness of the state of Michigan. The Marquette DMA encompasses the rural surroundings—10 counties worth—of one of the larger cities in the Upper Peninsula (UP) of MI. This DMA would appear to fit the rural image of Republican voters, however this DMA's counties largely voted for Obama in 2008. Maybe because of this voting history, there were absolutely no ads placed in this DMA to support then-President Obama in 2012 (see Figure 2). In the 2012 election, only 1 county in this DMA maintained support for the Democratic candidate. The DMA's (see Figure 2) of Traverse City, Grand Rapids, Flint, and Lansing, were heavily bombarded with Romney supporting ads. While those DMA's that fell

entirely within the state experienced plenty of Republican ads, it appears that Obama's

Democratic campaign largely ignored these types of DMAs.

Attack Ads:
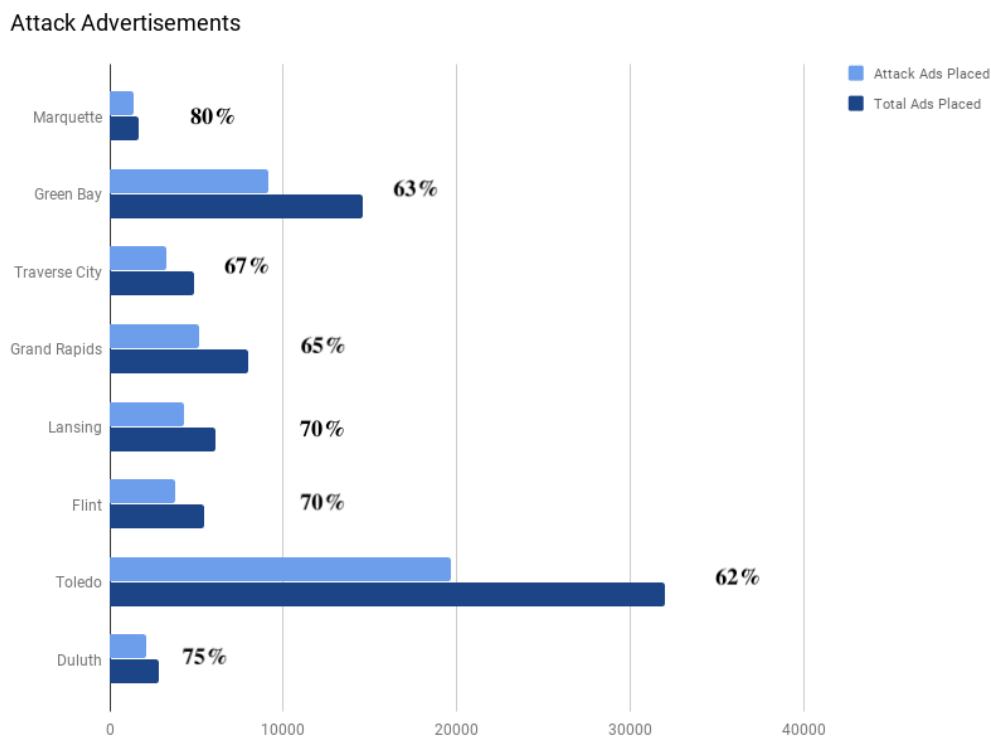
Figure 3 Attack Advertisements

There was a total of 52,491 attack ads placed in these 8 DMA's. Figure 3 depicts the

proportion of attack ads present in each market area. Marquette, which we saw had no ads placed

by Democrat supporters, had the highest proportion of attack ads present, at 80%. Obviously,

these must have been placed by Romney supporters. Duluth includes one county in MI, that of

Gogebic, and is located on the far east side of the UP, sharing a border with Wisconsin and

sitting on the edge of Lake Michigan. Obama won the county in 2008, besting McCain. In 2012,

Obama still won the county; however, he did lose 600 votes between the two elections. There is

a reason then for Republicans placing a high number of advertisements within this DMA. As an area that voted for Obama in 2008 by a fairly large margin, the Republican Party and their supporters were most likely interested in siphoning off some of these voters. On the Democratic side, the large margin of victory in 2008 probably led to a confidence that Gogebic County would follow that trend in 2012. The general trend can be clearly seen in the high proportions of attack ads being placed in these DMAs. The DMA with the lowest proportion of attack ads was that of Toledo, where 62% of ads placed fell into this category. This DMA actually had more advertisements placed by Democrats than Republicans (see Figure2). This leads me to hypothesize that consultants and advisors decided to place fewer attack ads here since it was relatively competitive and so as not to alienate the other side. There was a similar proportion placed in Green Bay (see Figure 3), a DMA that also saw a closer proportion of television ads aired by both campaigns (see Figure 2). No DMA in this case study saw a proportion of attack ads that was less than 60%, and those DMA's that aligned closer with this percentage followed the trend of being advertised in by both candidates' supporters.

Ads Showing Disapproval of Obama
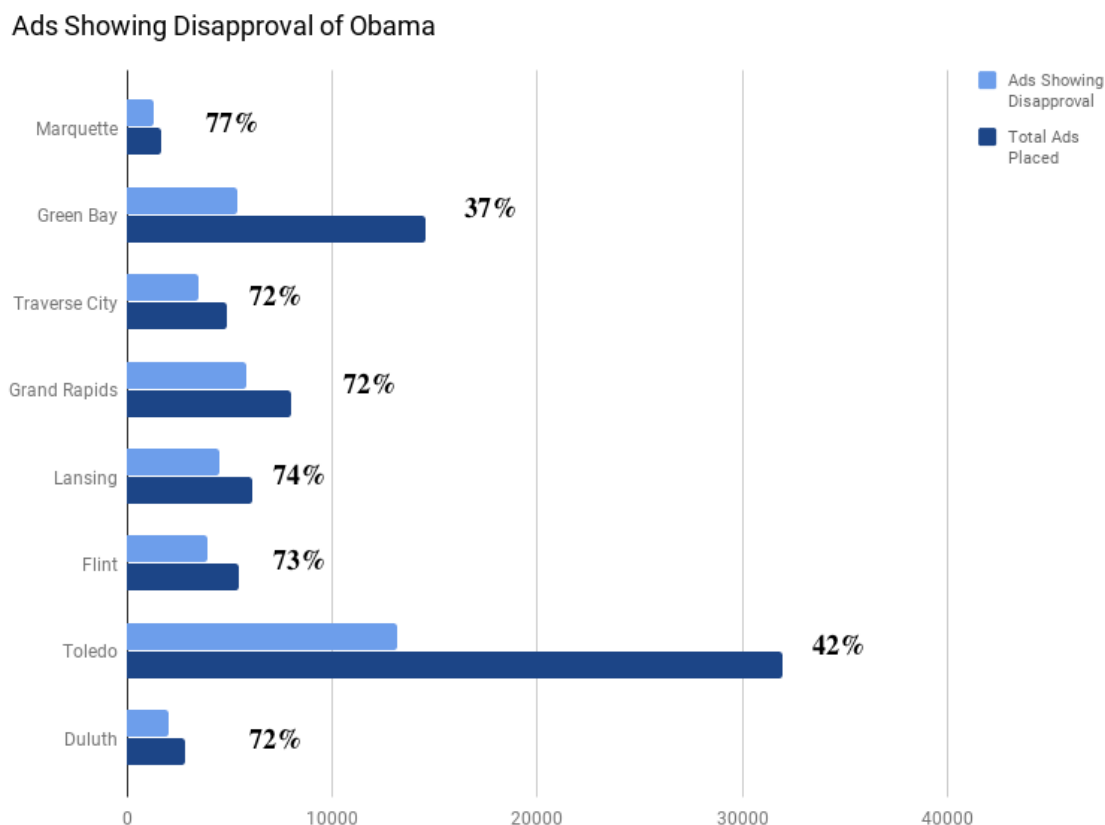
Figure 4 Ads Showing Disapproval of Obama

There were 43,763 political advertisements framed in order to show disapproval or opposition to then-President Barack Obama. This is not surprising; He was the incumbent office-holder at the time—a target for anyone seeking the same office. The DMA of Toledo had one of the two lowest proportion of ads placed showing disapproval of Obama, at 42% (see Figure 4). This DMA is another one that only includes one county in MI. This one is located in the southeast portion of the state (see Figure 1), and is relatively rural, besides including the college town of Adrian. This DMA was advertised heavily by both Democrats and Republicans (see Figure 2), possibly accounting for the low number of these types of ads. However, Republican supporters might have this seen county as convertible—Obama won in 2008 while Romney did

in 2012. Lansing received a large proportion of ads showing disapproval of Obama (see Figure 4), which makes sense considering only 4% of ads here were placed by Democrat supporters (see Figure 2). Overall, the DMA's in our study by and large received large proportions of ads that were meant to criticize the incumbent President, and they were aimed at areas where Democratic operatives failed to place ads. The Traverse City DMA received a large proportion of these commercials showing President Obama in a bad light (see Figure 4). Traverse City was heavily advertised by Romney supporters (see figure 2) and the 25 counties that fall within the market would have been a Republican target. In 2008, eight out of the 25 counties supported then-candidate Obama. The vulnerability would be clear, and there were largely no Democratic supporting ads placed here. In 2012, only 2 counties supported Obama. If this was the Republican consultants' goal, they surely achieved it.

Ads That Appeal to Fear
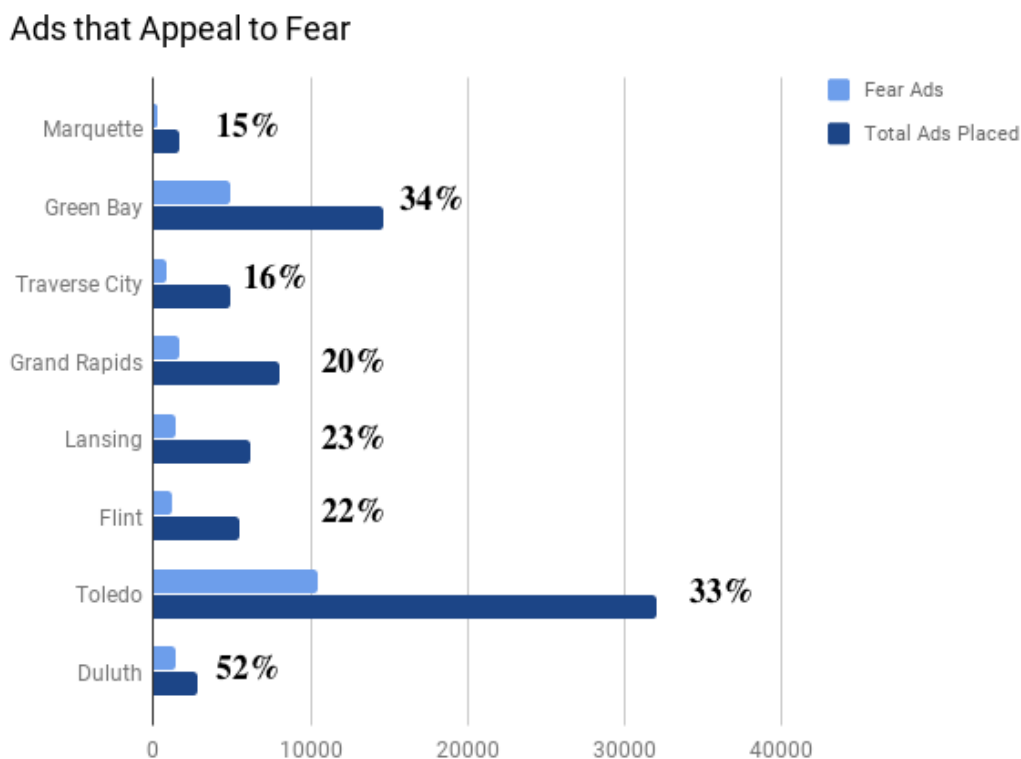
Figure 5 Ads That Appeal to Fear

The consultants that I interviewed and my research on the topic consistently described the

effect that an ad that appeals to fear could have on driving voters to the polls. According to one

consultant, this tactic has become common strategy throughout their party. So, was the emotion

of fear used throughout our DMA's to drive people to the polls? First, the total number of ads

that appealed to fear in our DMA was 23, 449. Campaigns are clearly still employing a larger

amount of attack ads, yet fear is also used in plenty of ads. The DMA of Flint-Saginaw includes

two industrial cities in the heart and 'thumb' of Michigan. Flint, in particular, has become well

known throughout the nation due to the presence of dangerous levels of lead in their drinking

water. Figure 2 shows that 97% of the ads placed here were by Romney supporters. However, as

Figure 5 above shows, there was a relatively low percentage of these types of ads placed. In fact,

the highest proportion of these ads came from DMA's that included only one county in MI, Duluth, Toledo, and Green Bay. Duluth deserves mention as they received the largest proportion of fear ads. There is a large chance that at least some of there were placed by Republican and Democratic campaigners, as this DMA received advertising from both parties' supporters (see Figure 2).

Personal Ads
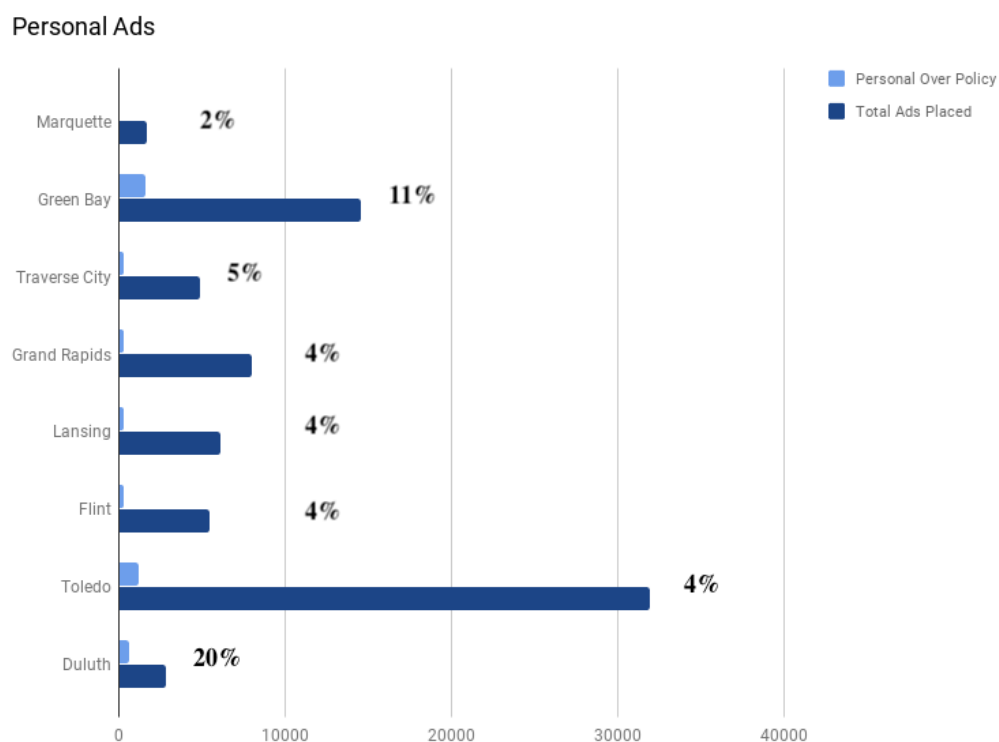
Figure 6 Personal Over Policy Ads

In the early years of political consulting, many feared that these "political tricksters" would turn elections from policy battles into personality contests. However, the data largely shows that these concerns are an overreaction to a yet to be understood industry. Conversations with consultants will later reveal that by and large, these types of ads are not commonly

recommended. Green Bay is the most competitive of the DMA's we are observing (see Figure 2), despite that, only 11% of the ads placed here focus on a candidate's personal aspects (See Figure 6). The DMA of Green Bay includes, again, only one county in MI, located by Wisconsin and Lake Michigan. This county voted for Obama in 2008 and it's possible that some data told consultants that this area might be susceptible to these types of ads. While Duluth and Green bay both had the highest proportions of personal ads (see Figure 6), the other DMAs, including Grand Rapids, had low proportions. The Grand-Rapids DMA is named after one of the largest and fastest growing cities in MI. Located in the western part of the state, 6 out of 13 counties in the Grand Rapids DMA voted for Obama in 2008, but in 2012 9 out of the 13 counties supported Romney. Overall, those counties that were heavily advertised by Republican supporters, including Marquette, Traverse City, Lansing, and Flint, also had a low number of personal ads placed. Duluth, however, where 14% of ads placed supported Obama (see Figure 2), 20% of campaign ads focused on an opponent's personal aspects (see Figure 6). This leads me to believe that operatives on the Republican side might not have been expecting this much Democratic ad placement here, and as a result went for these types of ads. However, the low number of personal ads causes me to think that the wariness of the consultants I interviewed to place any type of ad containing a personal attack, extends to others I did not speak with. However, the presence of these ads should not be discounted. They are evidence that some consultants, with their candidate's approvals, are still willing to place advertisements against an opponent focused on personality over policy.

The People Behind the Ads

In order to get a more nuanced understanding of political consulting I conducted a survey of political consultants and followed up with personal interviews (see Appendix for survey). I received responses from a wide array of political consultants, including digital advertisers, campaign managers, message strategist, media specialists, and from Democratic, Republican, and Independent consultants. Furthermore, the consultants that I interviewed and surveyed were spread across the country, with representatives from each geographical region. In order to receive a thorough understanding of how political consultants operate, I asked those that I interviewed to give me a brief overview of how they see their role in a campaign. Many of the answers were very client focused, with respondents consistently mentioning how best to serve their client; "I think my role in all of this is in ensuring that my candidates… run the best race they possibly can. My role is to use my experience and my skills to help you run a solid race and be the best candidate you can be."[24] I also got the sense that political consultant largely serves as a sort of translator between complicated public opinion research and candidates and campaigns. "A lot of my work is driven by public opinion research. What are the arguments that lead people to vote yes…What are the arguments that move people?"[25] In this response, we see the data driven message strategists that earlier researchers described and lamented. Polling is conducted in order to test campaign messages, wording, and themes on a certain population similar to the one the candidates will be advertising. The reliance on data was confirmed again by one interviewee, "We'll dig deep into the polling… And that's what drives my recommendations to the client."[26] Consultants take the polling data that they receive, take the platform of their

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[24] From interview with political consultant
[25] From interview with political consultant
[26] From interview with political consultant

candidate, and combine both aspects to ensure a message and strategy that resonates with voters. Whether this leads to the placement of negative or attack advertisements, however, is much more nuanced, and will be discussed in further detail later.

The second question asked consultants which party most of their clients belong to. Figure 7 below shows the variety of clients that these consultants serve. This chart is interesting for a few reasons. First, it shows that many consultants in my sample work with candidates from the same party as themselves. It is possible that these consultants truly entered the profession in order to further their political beliefs. Early writers labored over the idea that political consultants entered the industry to make money. While money may be a benefit, it is also likely that the consultants at least support what they work for.

Who They Work For

Other 13.0%

Independent 7.0%

Republican 45.0%

Democrat 35.0%
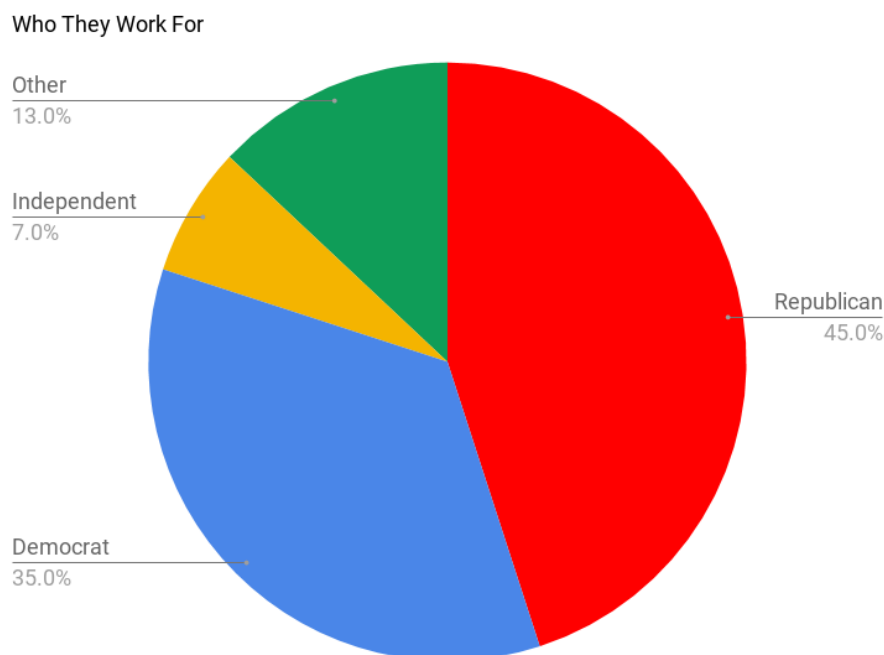
Figure 7 Partisan Background of Political Consultant's Clients

Figure 7 also shows that 13% of the consultants fall in the "other" category of respondents who work in non-partisan elections, issue campaigns, public affairs, or even work for candidates from all political leanings in figure 7. While there are those who will stick with their party, a proportion of our consultants will work with clients of any political stripe.

The question of how consultants understand the impact of negative ads gets to the root of what I am looking at in this paper. If negative ads weren't effective, then there would be no need to place them. However, as was seen in the advertising data and Figure 3, many of our DMA's contained a large proportion of these types of ads. What do the message creators and placers of these attack ads have to say about their use? There was a wide range of responses among the consultants on how effective, in their opinion, these ads are. Figure 8 shows that my respondents saw this as a complex issue. Only 21% reported that these ads, at face value, are more effective than other types of political campaign materials. The largest category of respondents came from those who wrote in answers that largely fell under the category of negative/attack ads effectiveness being influenced by a number of factors. One respondent wrote, "It depends on the candidate, the opposition, the political climate, the district."[27] However, "Well produced, fact-based negative ads can be very effective under the right political environment."[28] An interview respondent made the connection between data use and ad effectiveness, writing, noted "…It's been extraordinarily effective as long as you understand as the consultant or the campaign manager or the candidate, what it is you are actually going to get out of negative ads… Many people don't understand what a negative advertisement actually accomplishes."[29] In this case, understanding what the ad will accomplish can come from looking at public opinion data and
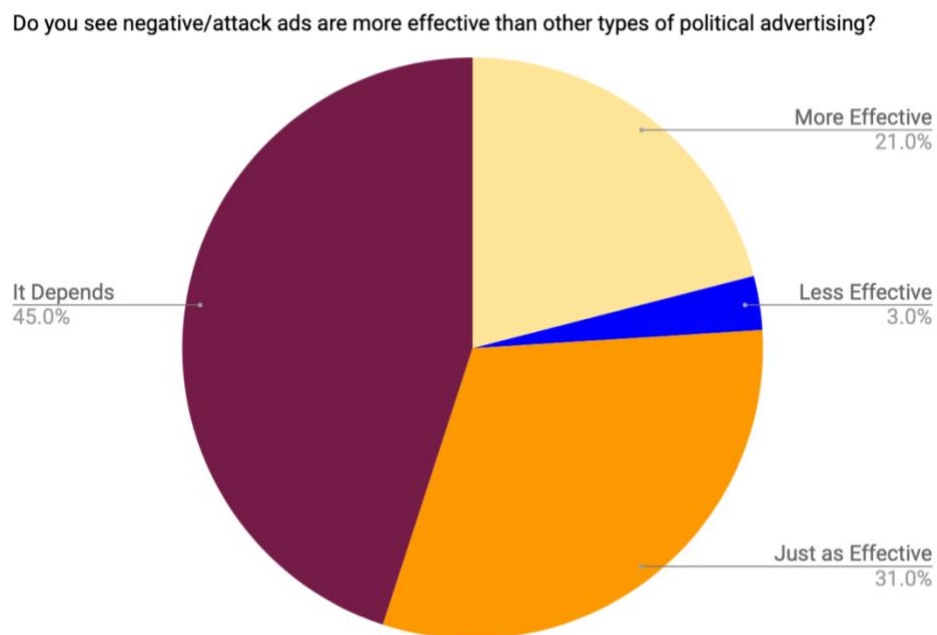
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[27] Anonymous survey respondent
[28] Anonymous survey respondent
[29] From interview with political consultant

determining whether the electorate is susceptible to these types of commercials. One consultant

felt that the effectiveness of negative or attack ads is influenced by partisanship: "It used to be

Figure 8 Consultant's Views on Effectiveness of Negative or Attack Ads

most effective for Republicans but it's becoming just as effective for Democrats."[30] Overall, the

climate of the race, political situation, election context, and other factors were seen as playing an

integral role in the effectiveness of ads.

One respondent went even further, stating that I may have been asking the

"Wrong question…. the terms 'negative' or 'attack' must be defined before answering this

question. Because voters certainly have clear definitions of what they find to be an 'attack' and

it's not the same as most analysts and media think."[31] During a following interview, we went

into further detail on this response. The consultant told a story about an election wherein they

placed mail, digital, and television advertisements that were heavily contrasting and negative;

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[30] From interview with political consultant
[31] Anonymous survey respondent

"What we said about her was completely negative." However, these negative/attack ads were not received in the way that many would anticipate; business owners approached the consultant and complimented him on the positivity of his campaign, applauding the fact that the candidate had never gone negative. The consultant explained, "If it's about issues that people care about, that they feel like they legitimately want to make their voting decision based on that issue, they don't consider that an attack." However, if an ad doesn't focus on relevant issues, "[I]f it feels mean spirited…acts mean spirited, then that's an attack."[32]

The idea that the definition of negative or attack ads offered by researchers and consultants differs from how voters and viewers define and categorize political ads is interesting. After all, political advertisements are created for the voters, not the consultants. Therefore, Jason Johnson and I may both be mistaken in looking to political consultants to assign definitions between "negative" and "attack," the voters may be the ones who should decide the definition. Overall, there are a number of different factors that can influence the effectiveness of negative or attack advertisements, including public opinion data, the opponent's strategy, the issues in a campaign, and more. To better understand the effectiveness of ads however, future research should first start by identifying how voters define the different types of political ads.

The next question on my survey asked whether or not the consultants believe that negative/attack ads actually affect how people view the candidates. Figure 9 shows a clear majority of respondents thought that the ads did affect voters' views of the candidates. Only 3% of consultants felt the opposite. Again, there is a category of answers that can easily fall under the label of "it depends". Similar to the last question, these responses largely pointed out that

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[32] The above quotes came from the same political consultants during an interview

whether or not a candidate's image can be harmed relies on numerous factors. One consultant

wrote in "Yes if they are credible—no if they seem contrived."[33] This response placed trust in

the electorate that they are able to differentiate between negative or attack ads that display the

Does Negative or Attack Advertising Have an Effect on Voter's Views of Candidates?

It Depends
14.0%

No
3.0%

Yes
83.0%
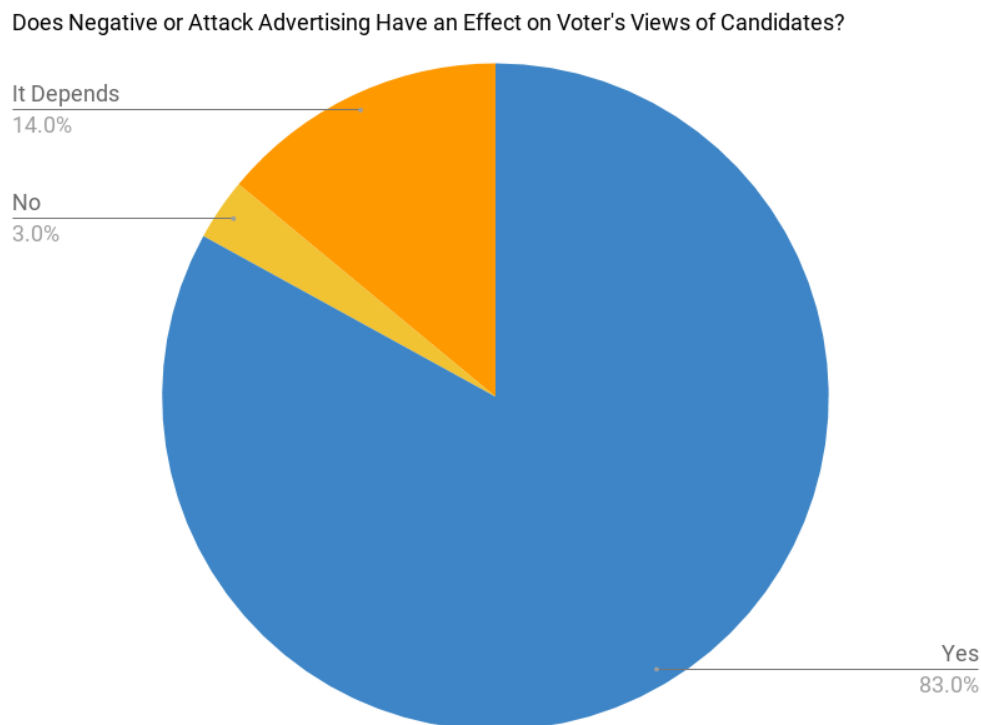
Figure 9 Does Negative Advertising Affect Views of Candidates?

truth as compared to those that make up lies about an opponent. Another respondent noted

"[Having an effect on voter's views of the candidate] Depends on the message with the

advertising. Some 'negatives' can actually reflect worse on the candidate rolling them out versus

their target if the message is too aggressive."[34] This last response was another common thread

throughout my research; there was general wariness in placing ads that were deemed as being

extremely negative or abrasive.

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[33] Anonymous survey respondent
[34] Anonymous survey respondent

In the subsequent interviews, one of the consultants maintained their reliance on polling and public opinion data to determine whether or not a particular message or ad type will work. This is conducted before the television commercial is placed on air and involves diligent and complex work. One interviewee pointed to a race where negative ads might be more effective at damaging an opponent's image "usually its if you're going against an incumbent you got to bring them down a peg or two and give voters a reason to fire these people."[35] This should remind readers of the data on advertisements that were meant to show disapproval of Obama. Clearly, as an incumbent, he was a top target for Republican advertisements. Figure 4 shows that large proportions of these ads were placed in areas almost exclusively advertised in by Romney supporters, attempting to knock Obama down "a peg or two."

As we have seen throughout this essay, consultants often conclude that the political context is important for the success of negative ads. When I asked one consultant specifically whether they believe that negative or attack advertisements work best with those who identify as "extremely liberal" or "extremely conservative," the answer was a clear and simple, "Yes."[36] Another interviewee concluded that effectiveness was also split on party lines, "Negativity overall has always been more effective in the Republican side… but it was almost a plank of the Republican party platform, that was not the case as broadly with Democrats, now that's changing."[37] Other consultants I spoke with disagreed however there were still attack ads and other types placed in DMA's in proportions by the two parties. Whether or not Democrats started placing these ads recently, they certainly were in 2012.

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[35] From interview with political consultant
[36] From interview with political consultant
[37] From interview with political consultant

The validity of claims made about negative or attack advertisements was seen as another factor in these ads affecting voter's views of candidates. One consultant I spoke to felt that the bar was higher for truth telling as a Republican consultant in a largely Democrat state; "We try to be really careful about that honesty and how we're talking about the truth, because we know that we're going to be scrutinized much more intensely by opposition."[38] Telling an easily debunkable lie during a campaign in an area dominated by members of the other party, is a very clear way to lose an election. While this consultant may feel held to a higher stand because of geography, many consultants also said, through the survey and interviews, that placing outright lies in an advertisement is not a good strategy.

We have seen from the data already that ads focused on personalities over policies are generally not widely placed. During an interview, one consultant touched on this telling me that consultants and campaign managers, "[Don't] separate their decision to go negative based on personal lifestyles and choices versus policy issues. Those are two different of many different avenues that a negative advertisement can go through."[39] For this consultant at least, the decision might not be between the two, and the infrequent use of these types of ads shows other types of ads are being utilized far more. Ads that focus on a candidates' personal life may fall under those types of ads that are considered "too far" for some consultants to recommend placing. Overall, consultants believe negative or attack advertisements can harm a candidate's image, as long as they are rooted in reality, used in a context where they are needed, and appropriate. As one consultant said in our interview: "If you're talking about something relevant to their voting

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[38] From interview with political consultant
[39] From interview with political consultant

decision, then its fair game, as long as you do it in a way that comes across as believable. Credible and relevant, people consider fair."[40]

I next wanted to pose some queries to figure out the question that all researchers and writers on this topic have at one point looked at: if everyone claims to despise negative or attack ads, why are they still used? I asked the consultants if, in their opinion, negative or attack ads are now a necessary part of a campaign strategy. The majority of respondents (59%) said "Yes." However, only 10% of consultants indicated that such ads were not necessary. Those who did not affirm a simple yes or no once again referred to the campaign context to answer the question. One respondent wrote "if I am working for a front-runner with good positives and a weak challenger, I would not recommend using negative ads."[41] Presumably the need to resort to negative or attack ads would not be as pressing if there were other issues where the candidate can more effectively make her or his appeal to voters. A response that reinforces this came from one subject; "Considered necessary, so expected. But we have many cases of wins with NO negative advertising."[42] The experience of some consultants, in short, supports the idea that negative or attack ads are not always necessary. One consultant simply writes that they dislike the use of these types of ads, writing, "I would say it's unfortunate that people have to resort to this behavior."[43] It seems that consultants feel that they are not necessary in all situations and all strategies yet attack and negative ads are still a viable option in their arsenals.

There was a wide array of answers, but one respondent noted that the medium in which the ad is placed is also important: "Necessary, but the vehicle through which it's communicated

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[40] From interview with political consultant
[41] Anonymous survey respondent
[42] Anonymous survey respondent
[43] Anonymous survey respondent

can hedge against political blowback to the campaign putting out the negative pieces."[44] The

'vehicles' that many campaigns use today include mass-emails, social media pages, YouTube

channels, and, a relatively new addition, live-streaming through Facebook and other platforms. A

negative or attack ad placed on Twitter or Facebook in static writing, for instance, may not have

the same effect as seeing a typical negative or attack commercial on television. Seeing a

commercial that eviscerates an opponent, whether based on lies or honesty, could have a much

stronger effect than seeing a candidate post a tweet about their opponent.

What came first, the political consultant or the partisanship? To try and answer this

question I asked consultants whether or not they see themselves as contributing to partisan

animosity. Once again, there was a wide range of responses to this question. As is shown in

Figure 10, 49% of consultants agreed that their industry contributes to partisan animosity. The

next largest category of "other" came from a range of answers. A respondent wrote, "Both.

Political consultants respond to existing animosity, but then use that to build support or

opposition for particular candidates, which contributes to the partisan animosity as well."[45]

Another similarly argued "Consultants only exploit areas where there is a natural divide

occurring. Then they tend to exacerbate it in their efforts to exploit that divide to benefit their

clients."[46] Contributing to partisan animosity, according to these consultants, is their use of

dividing issues to win support to their cause. If there were no existing partisan divides, then there

would be no ability to manufacture it. My interviews largely confirmed this idea. One respondent

noted the new forms of digital advertisements where, "[W]e just have so much more information

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[44] Anonymous survey respondent
[45] Anonymous survey respondent
[46] Anonymous survey respondent

at our fingertips now than we ever have before. With smart strategist you can kind of deploy those attack messages in a much more micro way than we have before."[47] Political consultants now possess not only the knowledge of which partisan issues to push, but where to place the ads to pinpoint those they have identified as most susceptible to them.

My interviews confirmed this overall impression that the partisan environment is a product of both a divided electorate and the consultants who seek to win over these voters. One interviewee told me clearly, "We absolutely did everything we could to take that partisan divide that existed already, those fears that people had already in their minds, and exploit that to get them to vote."[48] Another felt strongly that if the electorate stopped responding to negative ads,

Do Political Consultants Contribute or Respond to Partisan Animosity in the Atmosphere?
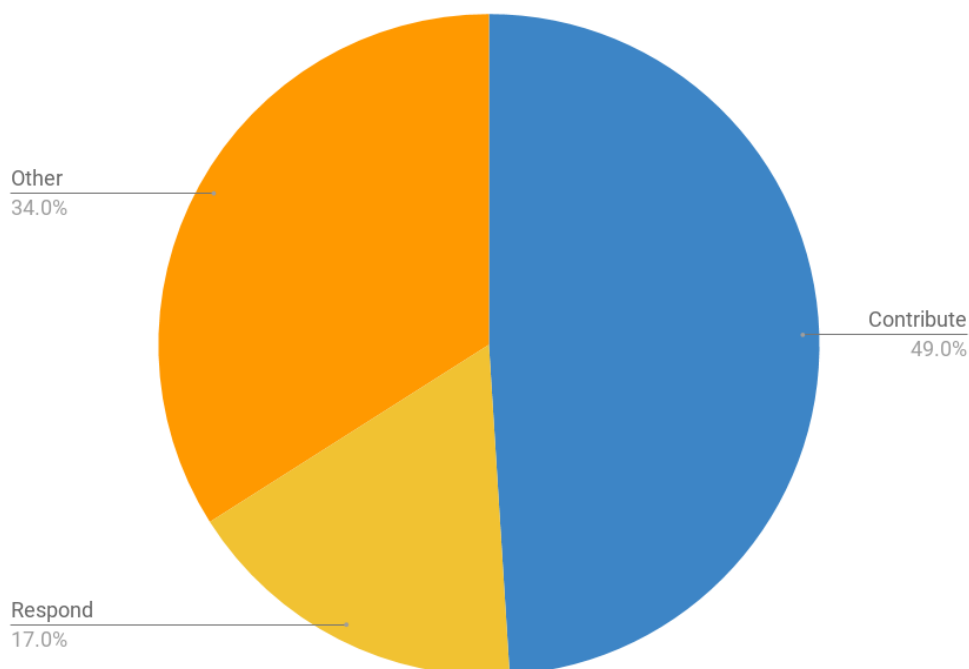
Figure 10 Political Consultants on Their Industry Contributing to Partisan Animosity

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[47] From interview with political consultant
[48] From interview with political consultant

then there would be no need for them. Using the metaphor of fast food restaurants, this consultant argued that if fast-food chains placed negative ads against each other, they would lose business, and possibly be boycotted. Therefore, part of the blame might be due to an electorate that allows candidates to use these types of ads. However, this interviewee was quick to note that no one entity is to blame: "It's flawed from the ground up and tends to be a chicken or the egg argument."[49]

The comparison to a fast food restaurant illustrates clearly the cognitive dissonance that many of us seem to hold. While the attitude behind negative or attack ads are regularly lambasted by politicians and voters, they are still routinely employed in campaigns. However, more subjects pointed out "[T]he whole redistricting, how so many states now are so partisan. There are hardly any moderates getting elected."[50] It is common knowledge that redistricting has been an issue in the United States. The process of gerrymandering has been undertaken in many states, including Michigan. Appealing to those who already agree with you, with the addition of those who fall to the extreme right or left, must contribute to cynicism.

A differing response came from a consultant who noted that "Many I know find it effective to show their candidate rising above partisan animosity. There are certainly some who contribute to it – if they see it pushing a constituency to the polls."[51] Another consultant I interviewed showed wariness in placing negative or attack ads, "Even if my client really wanted to go negative…I would say we would try very hard to understand why they are feeling this way."[52] These two consultants were largely out of the ordinary. Even among those I spoke with who did not feel the need to place these types of ads, many would do so if the data showed they

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[49] From interview with political consultant
[50] From interview with political consultant
[51] Anonymous survey respondent
[52] From interview with political consultant

could be effective. The two above signal a possible reaction to the decades of partisan animosity boiling in the American electorate.

The last two questions I posed to consultants concerned whether they recommend the use of negative or attack ads, and what their most important consideration is when placing one. 21% reported that they do recommend the use of these ads. However, a much larger number affirmed that while they do advise placing these ads, there are certain qualifications that must be considered. One typical written response noted that it "depends on the dynamics of the race."[53] Some of the dynamics mentioned might include the tactics of the opponent, as another subject noted, "I usually let the opponent use a negative tactic first, then we attack primarily on their record."[54] Time and again we see the common theme of context being important. It also apparent yet again that data and polling are important considerations. A number of consultants wrote that using data to determine where the opponent has a vulnerability in the electorate affects their decision.

A number of respondents noted that they would not recommend placing a negative or attack ad if their candidate is doing well in the race. For instance, one survey participant noted "If I have a candidate who is far ahead of his/her opponent, then no. If we're behind, then hell yes."[55] The need to draw down a candidate who is doing far better than you in the polls is seen easily throughout campaign. The person farthest ahead is like the incumbent: an easy target. These types of ads often come in play during moments when candidates need to make strong distinctions between themselves and the opponent. A write in respondent commented about the

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[53] Anonymous survey respondent
[54] From interview with political consultant
[55] Anonymous survey respondent

use of negative or attack ads: "Only if completely necessary to illustrate a dramatic difference between the candidates or to reveal a flaw that merits the attention of the voter."[56] This consultant signals hesitation to place these ads, but nonetheless, as with most of our respondents, will place them if the need arises, or "only as a last-ditch effort."[57]

What are the most important considerations taken into account when political consultants place negative or attack ads? We have touched already on their heavy reliance on polling data. One consultant's response gives more insight into the process: "Polling results based on the small sample we tested on the negative messaging, and its impact versus blow back on our opponent vs. us."[58] Clearly, airing an ad that would put your candidate at a disadvantage would not be a good idea. One respondent raised a new concern in writing that her consideration is "How swing voters respond based on research."[59] The fact that some consultants are still attempting to win swing voters contends with the image of consultants as attempting to only win their candidate's base.

Other subjects considered the validity and truthfulness of the content of the ad they would run as one of their deciding factors. These consultants' responses largely relied on the theme that political advertisements "must be based on fact and be believable."[60] Those who believe that political consultants peddle lies, might be wrong. A respondent wrote, "Truth. That the opposition candidate has truly shown to have done what will be in the attack ad."[61] There is clear concern among consultants about the effect of placing something untruthful in an advertisement. This worry is most likely warranted; if a candidate is caught deliberately spreading lies about

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[56] Anonymous survey respondent
[57] Anonymous survey respondent
[58] Anonymous survey respondent
[59] Anonymous survey respondent
[60] Anonymous survey respondent
[61] Anonymous survey respondent

their opponent, it tends to look much worse on the candidate who sponsored the ad. Another

consultant saw the truth as important but claimed to base his recommendation on whether the

information is pertinent to the voter, "sometimes these can be viewed as 'attack' ads but in fact

are simply providing information… As a voter I want to know the facts. Political advertising

should reflect this."[62]

There were two responses to this last question which deserve attention One respondent

noted that the most important consideration for themselves was to "make sure negative ads

would be building on an already existing (even if only to a small extent) perception of a

candidate…not creating something negative out of thin air."[63] Negative or attack ads, therefore,

might not tell lies, but their use is certainly meant to build upon presumably negative perceptions

already held towards someone. It is easier to build upon negativity than to create it, it seems. The

other response stood out to me as it focused on the use of fear; "Fear is a powerful motivator, but

the attack must be substantiated by a real threat, be it ideological or otherwise. Contrived,

personal attacks can backfire."[64] This response focuses on one of the aspects of campaign

advertising that past researchers have found is one of the most effective parts; evoking fear in an

audience. This response clarifies that the threat must be a real threat "ideological or otherwise."

An ideological threat, for instance, could be the fear of Democrats or Republicans winning back

power from the other party.

The dominant theme in my surveys and interviews is one of men and women who are

very invested in seeing their client-candidates win. However, the charges laid against consultants

that they deliberately spread lies and deceive the public is not held by those I interviewed and

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[62] Anonymous survey respondent
[63] Anonymous survey respondent
[64] Anonymous survey respondent

surveyed. In fact, I got the sense during my telephone interviews with some respondents that there is a higher standard for the placement of negative ads than other types. The placement of a negative or attack ad is largely contingent on the data, whether the consultant or their politician client approves of it, and what sort of campaign the opponent is running. The context of the race—which candidate is ahead in the polls, whether it is a local race or national one—also plays an extremely important role in consultant's decisions.

On Who Decides to go Negative

In my follow up interviews I asked the consultants a question I had not posed in the survey During a campaign, who decides to go negative, the candidate/politician or the consultant? Virtually all responded that the actual decision maker is always the candidate; the campaign is a reflection of themselves. However, the recommendation typically comes from a consultant or other campaign staffer

Across the board, it was clear that it was, at best, unusual for a client running for office to approach their political consultants first about the possibility of going negative. One consultant said, "Very rarely is it a situation where the candidate looks at us and says, 'Hey I really don't like this guy, he said something nasty about my wife in college, I really want to go out and smear him.'"[65] Consultants are typically the first to recommend the use of any type of advertisements. In fact, may consultants who mentioned this also said that they would be extremely wary of any candidate who did; "[I]f a candidate right off the bat says they're willing to go negative then there is something else going on there. Then their reasons for wanting to be elected are not necessarily for the greater good."[66] However, there were few who said that some candidates will

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[65] From interview with political consultant
[66] From interview with political consultant

ask. Typically, as I was told, these are the candidates who have been in office before or are coming from the campaign world.

A candidate or campaign that wants to go negative reinforces some of the early concerns about the consulting industry. However, the consultants above show that these types of politicians are not common. In actuality, the recommendation to place a negative or attack ad generally comes from the consultant. Furthermore, consultant responses show that this recommendation typically comes after extensive analysis of polling data on the messaging and content of the ad. One consultant detailed this, "You obviously do your polling and your messaging and say here's what we got to do to win, and it's up to the candidate."[67] As always, the final decision on placement is left to the final approval of the candidate. Therefore, the process if fairly simple. Candidates decide they want to run, hire their campaign staff and outside consultants, who then create a campaign message and strategy, poll this messaging, poll the electorate, and consultants then recommend the placing of negative or attack ads. Consultants therefore "place negative ads based on anticipated needs of the campaign and based on information that points to a trajectory for campaign."[68] This trajectory can either lead to positive ads being placed or negative/attack ads. Generally, the image of a candidate or consultant delighting over the placing of negative ads, or doing so for purely personal reasons, is unfounded.

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[67] From interview with political consultant
[68] From interview with political consultant

CONCLUSION

In the case study, I wanted to look at the state of Michigan to see what the data indicated about the use of the different types of political ads. What I found was a complete marketing and advertising blitz on the part of the Republican Party and Mitt Romney during the general Presidential Election of 2012. In every DMA that was entirely composed of Michigan counties, there was a significantly higher number of ads placed in support of Mitt Romney than Barack Obama. In those DMA's that included only one or two counties in MI, save Duluth, there was a similar number of ads placed in support of both candidates. In all of the DMA's containing only MI counties, there were not only more ads aired in support of Romney, but also a significantly higher number of attack ads and ads meant to show disapproval of Obama. In fact, the proportion of attack ads present in each DMA were large, and the fact that consultants believe that these ads are effective could be a reason why. Republican operatives must have seen MI as a state where they could win some voters. The low proportion of Democratic ads in each of the DMA's was shocking to me. That also leads me to believe that Obama and his supporters must have thought they could win the state without a large influx of ads, which they did. Further research in this first conclusion should continue by looking for more instances in which negative or attack ads were actually placed and look further into those regions and how they might have affected actual vote choice through panel and longitudinal studies.

The pieces of evidence that I compiled through my survey attempted to address an area where Johnson noticed a lack of research; "Current literature generally fails to consider the role of consultants, either assuming that decisions are driven primarily by the candidate or overlooking the various levels of relationships between campaign operatives and their clients."[69]

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[69] Johnson, *Political Consultants and Campaigns*, 203.

The conversations that I held with consultants helped to illustrate a small piece of the relationship; the placement of negative or attack ads. What I learned was that the decision to place any type of advertisements comes after extensive research, message testing, and polling. Pertaining to negative advertisements, it was considered an unordinary occurrence if a candidate approached a consultant with the intention of placing these types of ads. By and large, the consultants I spoke to were unlike the mudslinging, lie-spewing operatives that researchers described of those early entrants into the burgeoning industry. Instead, for some, the standard of truth is even higher when considering a negative or attack ad. Furthermore, political consultants by and large do believe that negative or attack ads are effective, and the data shows that these types of ads are used in large numbers. Finally, the context of an election is cited by many consultants as what determines the effectiveness of ads. When researchers ask questions about the use of negative or attack ads, the reasons the answers seem various is most likely because every election is different. Researchers come from the outside but those who live it know; there is always a time and place for negative or attack ads, context is king.

I did not set out at the beginning of this research to find a new definition for the terms negative and attack advertising. However, speaking with one of those consultant's that I interviewed pointed me in this direction, and I noticed that his claim was true: researchers fail to ask voters how they define negative or attack advertisements. Johnson's definition was based off of answers he gleaned from consultants and operatives, while other researches simply amended definitions given by previous ones. Therefore, it would be worthwhile for further research to assess what the voters view as negative advertisements. While consultants are the crafters of the ads, the voters are the receivers. Having a clear definition of what these ads are, based on the groups that the ad creators are wishing to effect, would give researchers greater ability to

understand and measure how these ads play a part in the electoral process. Furthermore, the effect that one consultant experienced, of placing negative, issue based-attack ads, and voters not seeing it for such, should also be explored, and serve as an example of the necessity of new research on the topic.

There are, of course, numerous factors that voters consider when deciding who to cast their ballot for. Perhaps the largest implications of my research stems from how best to move forward in defining and categorizing negative/attack ads. There should be more focus on how voter's themselves categorize the ads they are seeing, and how the issues within the ads may impact the definition voters assign to them. My research builds upon earlier work by stepping out of attempting to understand a voter's psychology as affected by negative ads and detailing the possible electoral consequences of using these types of ads.

Appendix

<u>Survey</u>

1. Do you consider yourself a:
    a. Republican
    b. Democrat
    c. Independent
    d. Prefer not to respond
    e. Other (fill in)
2. Are most of your clients?
    a. Republican
    b. Democrat
    c. Independent
    d. Prefer not to respond
    e. Other (fill in)
3. Do you see negative or attack advertising as more effective than other forms of political communication?
    a. More effective
    b. Less effective
    c. Just as effective
    d. Negative/attack advertisements are not effective
    e. Other (fill in)
4. In your opinion, does negative or attack advertising have an effect on voters' views of candidates?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Other (Fill in)
5. In your opinion, has negative or attack advertising become a necessary part of campaign strategy?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Other (fill in)
6. In your opinion, do political consultants contribute to or respond to partisan animosity in the electorate?
    a. Contribute
    b. Respond
    c. Other (fill in)
7. When advising candidates, do you recommend the use of negative or attack ads?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Other (fill in)
8. What is the most important consideration in your decision to recommend the use of negative or attack ads?
    a. Short Answer (fill in the blank)

Respondents were also asked to indicate their willingness to participate in a 10-20-minute phone interview to gain further detail on why some consultants answered the way they did. The following questions were posed to consultants who chose to participate in a telephone interview:

1. How do you see your role in the election process? More broadly, how do you believe the political consulting industry has played a role in elections? Has that role been largely positive or negative?
2. Can you give a little more detail as to why you think that political consultants may or may not contribute to the partisan animosity and attitudes in the electorate?
3. What is the process that goes into the decision to place a negative/attack ad? Is it often the client/candidate that proposes the use of the ad, or do you tend to recommend it first?
4. Are there any instances you can recall where you placed a negative/attack ad and felt that the ad had an effect on the election? Please, by specific
5. Is negative and attack advertising necessary in today's political climate?

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