



Persuasive Media Information and Voting Behavior

Demographics as Moderators of Online Effects

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Abstract

This study aims at determining if online information may affect, in a meaningful way, the voting decisions of media audience. Three regression models were built to establish the level to which online channels of communication can create a significant impact on the behavioral decisions of the audience responding to electoral campaigns. All three models are with moderated effect. The goal of this research is to examine how such demographics as age, income, and level of education are more likely to moderate the ways online persuasive media information is being consumed by target voters. By analyzing these moderated relationships the applicability of a communication theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which focuses on the way persuasive communication is consumed, is actually being tested in the context of electoral campaigns.

Questions & Hypothesis

Research Question 1: Does online information affect in a meaningful way voters decisions in an electoral campaign?

Hypothesis 1: Online advertising is used by politicians in electoral campaigns to attract and develop relationships with target voters. By acknowledging the potentials of online media, American politicians communicate faster and reach potential voters in a more effective manner without the traditional role of mass media.

Research Question 2: Does age, education and income influence the effect of online information on voting behavior?

Hypothesis 2: Demographic characteristics affect voting behavior through interaction with online information.



Methodology

Dataset

To test the hypotheses, data from a telephone survey of American population was employed. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International during the period August 3 to September 5, 2007. Sample size is 2,400.

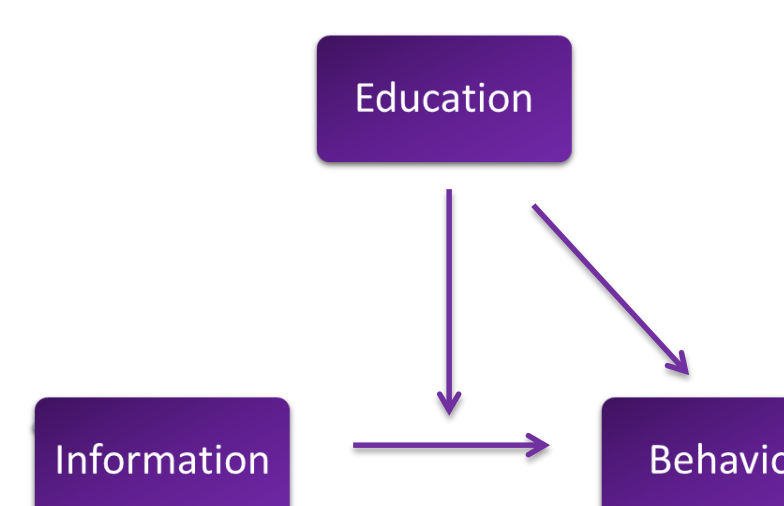
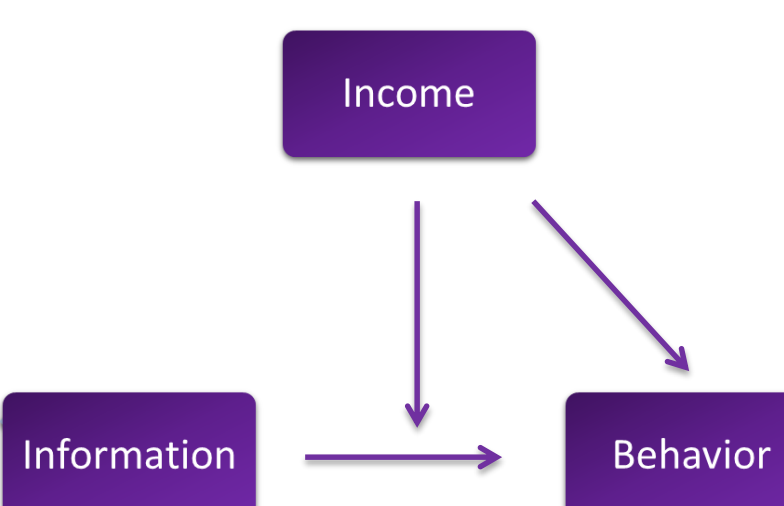
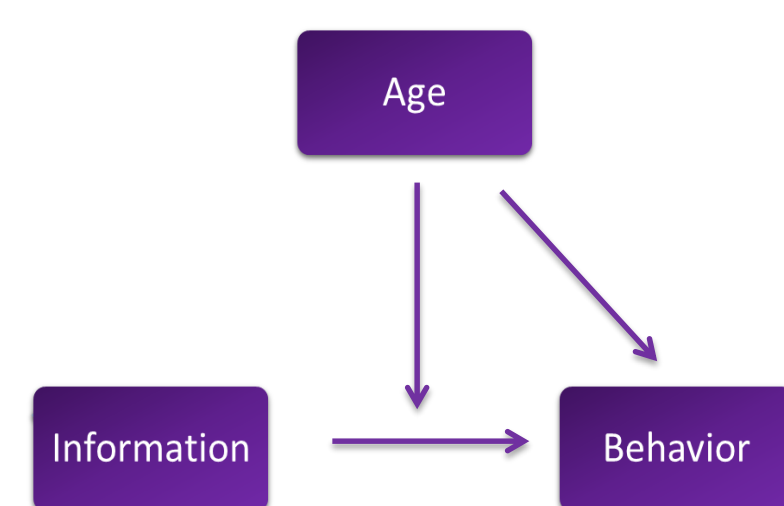
Variables

Independent variables: Online information, and three moderators(age, income, level of education).

Dependent variables: Voting behavior

Methodology

Three regression models were developed to determine the relationship between variables. All three models are with moderation effect. The regression model presented in Figure 1 shows that the variable age moderates the causal relationship of the variable information on the dependent variable behavior. The regression model presented in Figure 2 shows that the variable education moderates the causal relationship of the variable information on the dependent variable behavior. The regression model presented in Figure 3 shows the variable income moderates the effect of online information on the dependent variable voting behavior.



Results

■The effect of online information on voting behavior is more likely to increase, when the variable, age, moderates the relationship, such that when age increases the effect of online information on voting behavior tends to increase as well. Although age affect the way information is perceived by the individual the older generations tend to be more influenced by the online political content then the younger one, which comes in contradiction with the initial hypothesis. Based on the findings we can conclude that older generations are more susceptible to online messages used in electoral campaigns.

■The effect of online information on voting behavior is more likely to increase, when the variable, income, moderates the relationship, such that when income decreases the effect of online information on voting behavior tends to increase.

■The effect of online information on voting behavior is more likely to increase, when the variable, education, moderates the relationship, such that when the level of education decreases the effect of online information on voting behavior tends to increase.

The moderators age, income and education influence the way online information affects the voting behavior of the public. The level of influence is different for each moderator, but it is insignificant across all the three moderators.

Conclusion

In every electoral campaign, it is vital for politicians to understand different communities and target specific groups within those communities when using online information.

The key is to establish electoral campaigns in the same way an advertising campaign is being constructed. Politicians have to promote themselves as products by establishing political brand loyalty. There is a new marketplace for political campaigns; it is called new media.