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PS 829: Political Communication

7 May 2020

Traditional vs. New Media in the 2018 Midterm Elections:
Impacts on Congressional Campaign Advertising

Introduction

In the last fifteen years, congressional and presidential candidates have increasingly harnessed the popularity of social media and other online resources to reach larger audiences with their campaign advertisements. This change is fairly recent given the long history of candidates relying on television to reach the mass public. Given this revolution in how candidates are trying to gain support from the electorate, there is a question of whether politicians alter the content of their messages now that they are using new platforms. Does the content and messaging of campaign advertisements on new online media differ from that of advertisements broadcasted on the traditional medium of television? This paper explores this question by introducing a new dataset of all candidate-sponsored advertising originating on television and online from twelve competitive 2018 elections for the US Senate. These data aim to reveal if social media alters candidates' choices of theme and function in their advertising platform decisions. This paper argues multiple key points: incumbents are using media platforms in similar ways to their opponents, advertisements online are significantly longer than those on television, advertisements on television and online do not differ in their content as drastically as previous research has indicated, and incumbents do not differ in the content of their advertised

contrary to convention wisdom. This paper also highlights the importance of political ideology in future research of campaign ads on traditional and new platforms.

Relevant Literature

There is vast disagreement among scholars about the impact of new technology on how candidates choose to campaign and if new media allows candidates to change how they garner public support. These discrepancies in the existing literature partly drove this study given the need to bridges these differences in proposed trends of new technology use by political campaigns. Some past research shows that candidates alter their behaviors with voters online compared to how they reach audiences on television (Foot and Schneider 2002; Xenos and Foot 2005). Other research shows the opportunities for online campaigning only provide additional outlets for reaching constituencies, but candidates do not change their content or strategies when using this new technology (Bimber and Davis 2003; Margolis and Resnick 2000). For example, Gibson et al. (2003) suggest political actors use the internet to perform already existing functions and do not alter their priorities with its existence or consider innovative strategies. Sulkin et al. (2007) emphasize similarities and differences do exist between the platforms and should be explored. These differences are largely related to cost, format, audience, and content.

Cost

Television advertising has been important to campaigns for decades in helping reach voters and communicating policy positions; in 2014 alone, a combined \$1.4 billion was spent on Senate, House, and gubernatorial advertising on television (Fowler and Ridout 2014). However, advertisements on television are more expensive because of production costs and expensive

airtime, and the limited time provided in thirty-second commercials forces candidates to be selective with the content they include (Egkolfopoulou 2019). Online advertisements, however, have fewer time constraints which allows candidates to expand on the information they want to provide. Candidates also produce less expensive advertisements and can disperse them for free using social media. There has been a noted trend in increased digital advertising spending in each election cycle (Kaye 2017; Lapowsky 2015); this trend is occurring in at the same time as an observed plateauing in television ad spending (Fowler, Ridout, and Franz 2016). Online advertising also offers a unique opportunity for campaigns to track returns on investment in the amount they spend for each online ad (Barnard and Kreiss 2013). Conveniently, some campaigns have seen success in using online media to gain free attention from television reporting on the ads (Kreiss 2016; Lipinski and Neddenriep 2004).

Some studies have focused on the differences between incumbents and their challengers in the media platforms they choose to focus their attention and funding on. The cost of television advertising is often seen as an advantage incumbents have over their challengers as they often have better-financed campaigns (Goldstein and Freedman 2002). A rising incumbency advantage has been traced back to the 1960s, and some scholars contribute this rise to television advertising. Incumbents have received greater vote shares in districts with television stations and margins increase in proportion with the number of television stations (Prior 2006). Given the financial capital needed for television ads, it seems challengers would focus more on cheaper online advertising. Challengers have been shown to tweet more than incumbents, and competitive elections see higher rates of Twitter adoption (Evans, Cordova, and Sipole 2014; Gainous and Wagner 2014). Conversely, another study showed incumbents and better-financed candidates post more YouTube campaign videos to their channels (Gulati and Williams 2010).

Findings seem to be mixed in this regard. Despite the findings in the this last study, most past research seems to indicate incumbents have more financial capital for television advertisements than their challengers do. Thus, Hypothesis 1 states:

(H1): Incumbents will use traditional media for releasing their advertisements more than online media; challengers will use online media more than traditional media for releasing their advertisements.

Length and Format

Another difference in online and offline advertising is seen in advertisements' formats and length. Television advertisements are largely limited to 30 or 60 second commercial time slots while this limitation does not exist for ads published online. Campaigns can post long advertisements in addition to shorter 5 or 10 second ads to quickly expose viewers to their candidate. One study showed the relationship between the compressed format of ads online and the attention viewers give to online communications (Dunaway, Searles, Sui, and Paul 2018). Another study using data from 2010 found online advertising is more memorable to consumers as it is positively associated with ad recall and high exposure (Ridout, Fowler, and Branstetter 2012). While a useful precedent for comparing content and coding media coverage, the study focused more on how viewers consume media and how they are impacted by different sources of advertisements rather than focusing on comparing the formats of online and offline media. Put simply, the constrained format of television advertisements may result in shorter ads placed on television than online.

(H2): Advertisements released online will be longer than advertisements released on television.

Audience

Campaigns have used television advertisements to appeal to specific demographics and send particular messages to those individuals. Advertisers in general (not just political ones) can select programs in an attempt to reach desired audiences based on the viewers known to be most likely to watch that programming (Lovett and Peress 2015). Campaigns also know to place the bulk of their advertising during local news broadcast in order to appeal to the broadest audience of likely voters (Feltus 2012; Lovett and Peress 2015; Ridout, Franz, Goldstein, and Feltus 2012). Local news programming does not tend to be as biased as partisan media and do not often try to appeal to specific ideologies. Partisan media creates more fragmented audiences, and campaigns in democracies with centralized, ideologically centered media have less fragmented markets (Plasser and Plasser 2002). Campaigns can utilize this fragmentation to their advantage.

Even with the targeting available to campaigns in the television programming they choose to broadcast on, online platforms allow for even more particularized microtargeting. There is less selectivity available to viewers when watching television versus picking their content online (Bimber and Davis 2003; Norris 2003). This can allow campaigns to reach different markets online. Online ads can use specific messaging to target subsets of voters based on their partisanship and policy priorities which can aid campaigns in persuading and mobilizing these smaller groups of people (Kang, Fowler, Franz, and Ridout 2018; Serazio 2014). Television does not allow for the sophisticated targeting and microtargeting of voters online advertising allows for.

Content

Recent studies have tried using media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, e-mail, and campaign websites to shed light on whether online campaigning has changed the content of

campaign advertisements or if campaigning practices have continued as usual even with the expansion of new media. In a comparison between tweets and television ads, researchers found campaigns used a “single coherent message strategy,” meaning they emphasized a similar message across modes of communication, though these messages differed in tone (Bode et al. 2016). A similar study compared the issue agendas in 2014 on Twitter and e-mail to television advertising and revealed a moderate level of consistency between the issue agendas of Twitter and television advertisements (though less convergence between e-mail and television) (Kang, Fowler, Franz, and Ridout 2017). Ballard, Hillygus, and Konitzer (2016) also found candidates talk about the same issues in online ads and television ads; however, the engagement with issues online is less than that on television. Most recently, in a comparison between television and online advertising during the 2016 campaigns, researchers found predictors of issue discussion online and on television largely similar with no difference in likelihood of mentioning positions on issues (Franz, Fowler, Ridout, and Wang 2020).

These studies would seem to indicate few differences between online and television advertisements for political candidates. However, another group of research indicates candidates vary in the platforms they choose to attack their opponents on. There is largely a fear of voter backlash if a campaign uses negative ads to attack opponents by “going negative” (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1996; Dowling and Wichowsky 2015; Lau, Sigelman and Rovner 2007; Roesse and Sande 1993). Incumbents and their challengers vary in their use of negative ads with negative campaigns shown to be more common during competitive races and challengers being more likely to go negative with their ads (Djupe and Peterson 2002; Goldstein and Freedman 2002; Sigelman and Buell 2003; Theilmann and Wilhite 1998). Some studies show more negativity in television ads over online ones on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Bode et al. 2016;

Krupnikov 2011; Roberts 2013). It is unclear if the literature claiming campaigns are consistent in their messaging and the literature claiming the advertisement medium impacts the tone of ads are in conflict with each other.

William L. Benoit (2007) developed an important typology to help classify the functions and types of content in political campaign ads. Campaigns create political television advertisements with functions that (1) acclaim the candidate and emphasize positive statements and credentials that make them the better candidate; (2) attack the credentials of opponents; and (3) defend against attacks from opponents. Candidates use these three functions with either policy themes or character themes within the ads. Policy themes discuss actions related to past legislation and general goals while character themes discuss personal qualities, values, principles, and leadership abilities of candidates. This classification has been used in past studies to aid in comparing the function and content of online and offline campaign ads (Roberts 2013). A study of more recent media that compares online videos to offline videos using this typology could provide a more reliable comparison of the content between new and traditional media campaign advertisements. The indications from these cumulative studies is that the themes and functions of ads seem to vary across platforms, and challengers to incumbents may rely on different content and attack the challengers in their ads.

(H3): The themes of advertisements released on television will be different from the themes of advertisements released online.

(H4): The functions of advertisements released on television will be different from the functions of advertisements released online.

(H5): Challengers will rely more on attack ads than incumbents will.

Research Design

To search for potential differences between televised and online political advertisements, I create a novel data set of 726 political advertisements from the 2018 Congressional midterm election. Specifically, I focus on Senate campaign advertisements released by candidates who ran in twelve competitive elections as see in Table 1.¹ Senate race campaigns are spread across entire states rather than smaller, more homogenous districts, and a contested statewide election for a six-year seat would likely result in candidates focusing heavily on advertisements, more so than campaigns for the House of Representatives or local office positions. These twelve elections are chosen because of the national attention directed toward them and the necessity for candidates to reach mass audiences and articulate policy positions.

¹ 12 states came out of election day with instances of the winner having less than a 10 percent margin of victory. These included, in order of increasing margins, Florida, Arizona, Texas, West Virginia, Montana, Nevada, Missouri, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Mississippi, and California. I chose not to include Michigan and Ohio as the campaigns leading up to election day showed the predicted results being safely Democratic which indicated the election was not perceived to be competitive, and this would mean national attention was not directed at these states as much as others. Other states with uncompetitive elections in 2018 included Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. These elections leaned heavily toward the incumbent party, and it was unlikely there would be a flip. I chose to include the election in Minnesota because of the national attention directed towards it, New Jersey and Tennessee because the results were predicted toss ups for most of the campaigns, and North Dakota because there was a party flip against the incumbent. This brought the final sample of states to 12 in total.

Table 1. Sampled State Senatorial Elections

State	Republican Candidate	Democratic Candidate
Arizona	Martha McSally	Kyrsten Sinema*
Florida	Rick Scott*	Bill Nelson^
Indiana	Mike Braun*	Joe Donnelly^
Minnesota	Jim Newberger	Amy Klobuchar*^
Missouri	Josh Hawley*	Claire McCaskill^
Montana	Matt Rosendale	Jon Tester*^
Nevada	Dean Heller^	Jacky Rosen*
New Jersey	Bob Hugin	Robert Menendez*^
North Dakota	Kevin Cramer*	Heidi Heitkamp^
Tennessee	Marsha Blackburn*	Phil Bredesen
Texas	Ted Cruz*^	Beto O'Rourke
West Virginia	Patrick Morrisey	Joe Manchin*^

*winner, ^incumbent

I use candidates' websites, their YouTube channels, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts to gather a collection of advertisements that appear on television or online. I consulted the Facebook Ad Library to find advertisements posted on Facebook. Campaigns also had their Twitter accounts, and I consulted these for the ads they posted there. In instances where television advertisements were later posted online (which is often the case), I classify them as television ads given this was the original publication. I was able to determine which ads were intended for online or television because candidates' websites often had this information in video descriptions or mentioned where the ad would be broadcast in press releases. This was fairly common throughout the process of collecting advertisements. I classify each advertisement as either traditional (originating on television) or new (originating online). Tracking television advertisements from multiple states can be difficult when not all advertisements are available

online, so while this data aims to be exhaustive, campaign advertisements could have aired on television that were not published online or mentioned by their campaign on online platforms, and this missing data could influence findings.

I exclude advertisements paid for by special interest groups and PACs as I am interested in the trends of candidates and their campaigns' advertising intentions, not their supporters. For this reason, I only include ads paid for by the candidate's campaigns; for example, Senator Amy Klobuchar's advertisements in 2018 were paid for by Klobuchar for Minnesota, so these were the only ads I collected for this candidate.

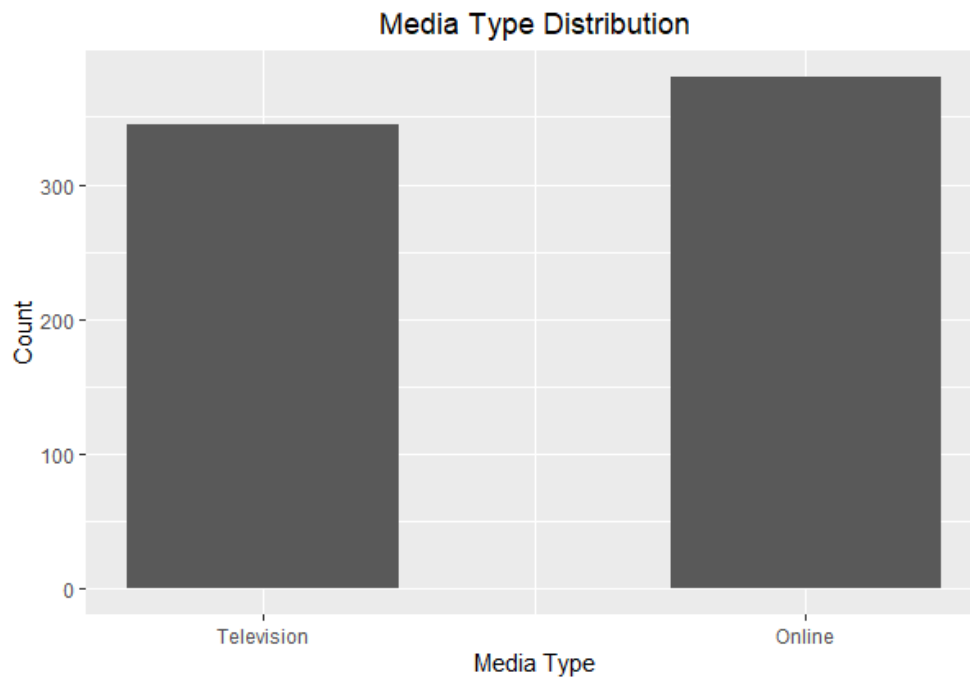
I classify the theme of for each advertisement as either policy-focused or character-focused and the function for each being to acclaim, attack, or defend (classifications made by Benoit 2007). While some advertisements may arguably have multiple themes or functions, advertisements are classified based on the themes and functions candidates spend the most time on. Throughout the advertisement collection process, it was apparent some ads were focused more heavily on policy or character, so their variable was not too difficult to code. If an advertisement talked about position towards issues of Obamacare, immigration, gun control, abortion, court nominations, or other policies, the ad's theme was coded as "policy." If an advertisement talked about personal attributes, opponent flaws, or scandals, its theme was coded as "character." The function of ads worked similarly. "Acclaim" ads were those taking credit for policy or personal accomplishments, "attack" ads mentioned character or policy flaws in opponents, whether individuals or the opposing party, and "defend" ads were in response to allegations made by another third party or justified policy positions and legislative voting recordings. For each advertisement, I also record its title (when applicable), the candidate it

promotes, the candidate's party, the candidates incumbency status, the length of the advertisement, and the source of the funding for the ad (the candidate's campaign name).

Findings

In a preliminary look at the advertisement data, there are a few general observations we can make of the media types, video sources, and the ads' themes and functions. Each advertisement was coded for originating either on television or online meaning the ad was released on a traditional medium or a new medium. Figure A shows the media type distribution of the ads; it shows the 726 observations split nearly even in their media type origin. Each advertisement was collected from either YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, or Vimeo (links from candidate websites were often accessed through this last platform).

Figure A. Distribution of Media Type in Campaign Ads – Television vs. Online



There are also basic observations of the theme and function of the ads in the aggregate. Each advertisement's theme was coded for either focusing on policy or character, and the distribution for the ads' themes are evident in Figure C. Each advertisement was also coded for its function being to acclaim, attack, or defend, and this distribution is shown in Figure D. Very few ads were coded as "Other," but those that were tended to be too vague and/or short to effectively categorize.

Figure B. Distribution of Campaign Ad Themes – Policy vs. Character

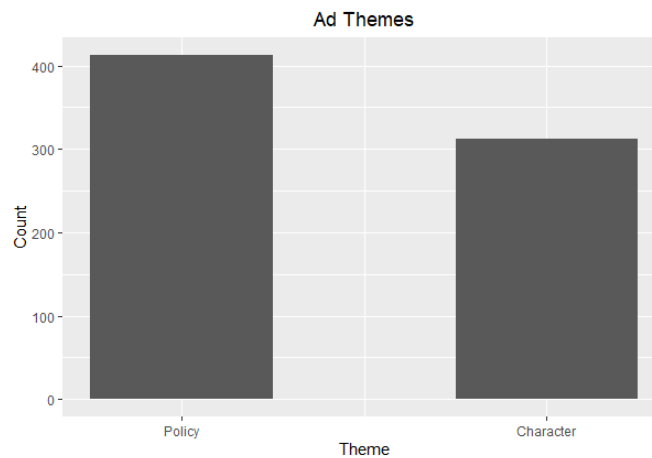
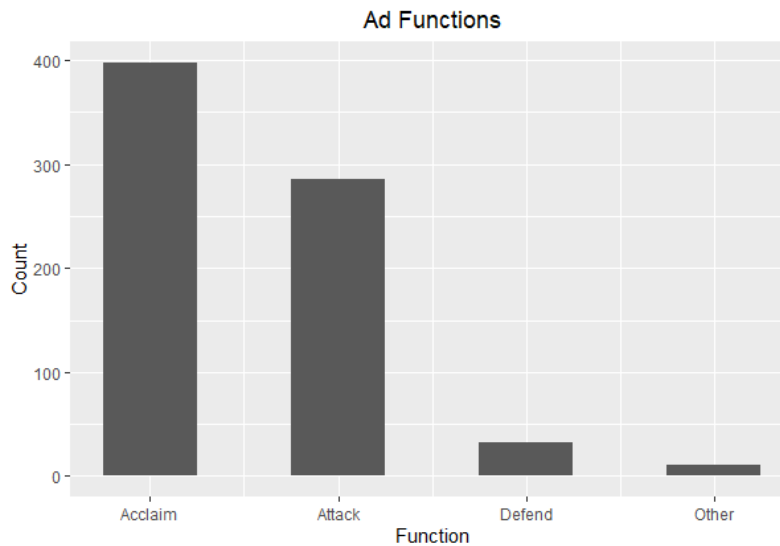


Figure C. Distribution of Campaign Ad Functions – Acclaim, Attack, or Defend



After exampling the data on a basic, descriptive level, I conducted a statistical analysis in looking for relationships between the collected variables. One focus going into this work was looking for variances in media use between candidates running as incumbents and those who were not. Hypothesis 1 predicted differences in media type incumbents and challengers focus their advertising on. Specifically, it predicted incumbents would rely on traditional, televised media more than challengers while challengers would rely on new, online media more than incumbents would. Table 2 provides a logit model showing the relationship between incumbency status and media type while controlling for party. This table shows no significance between incumbents and challengers in their use of online versus television platforms for their advertisements, thus rejecting Hypothesis 1. This model does, however, show a significant difference in ideology, specifically that Democrats (coded as 1) relied on online media for their advertising significantly more than Republicans did.

Table 2. Logit Results for Ideology and Incumbency on Media Type – Traditional (0) vs. Online (1)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	media_type
ideology	0.591*** (0.172)
incumbent	0.016 (0.174)
Constant	-0.230 (0.184)
Observations	725
Log Likelihood	-494.101
Akaike Inf. Crit.	994.203
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Hypothesis 2 predicted length differences between ads released on television than ads released online; specifically, it predicted those released on television would be shorter than those online given the restraints placed on ads aired during television programming, a restraint not present online. Table 3 provides the results of an OLS linear model regression with ad length as the dependent variable and media type as the independent variable with a control for ideology. This table shows significant difference between ads placed online (coded as 1) and those released on television (coded as 0). There is a positive relationship between the two meaning traditional ads are shorter than ads released using new media. Also interestingly, the constant for this model is roughly 32 seconds, and this is finding has high significance. This does not surprise me. I had a hunch television ads would primarily be 30 seconds long in length given the set lengths provided during commercial breaks, and this shows 32 seconds tends to be the expected length for ads released on television. The results from Table 3 support the theory in Hypothesis 2 that online ads would be longer than those released on television.

Table 3. OLS Results for Ideology and Media Type on Length of Campaign Ads

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	length
ideology	-1.240 (1.864)
media_type	3.568* (1.860)
Constant	32.001*** (1.588)
Observations	725
R ²	0.005
Adjusted R ²	0.003
Residual Std. Error	24.751 (df = 722)
F Statistic	1.917 (df = 2; 722)
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Theme was an important variable in coding for differences between the two different ad types. Ads were coded for being either policy or character focused. Hypothesis 3 predicted there would be differences between the two mediums in the theme of the advertisements which is in line with previous research. It is worth noting what this relationship would be, however, was not predicted. Table 4 shows the results of a logit model with media type as the independent variable, theme as the dependent variable, and ideology as a control. Media type is not significant in this model meaning there does not appear to be a difference between the themes of online and offline advertisements thus rejecting Hypothesis 3. There is, however, a significant relationship between ideology and media type again as seen in Table 2, a logit model of media type and incumbency status. The relationship here is negative meaning Republicans were more likely to produce ads focused on policy while Democrats were more likely to focus on character (coded 1) in their ads.

Table 4. Logit Results for Ideology and Media Type on Campaign Ad Themes – Policy (0) vs. Character (1)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	theme
ideology	-0.296* (0.152)
media_type	0.122 (0.152)
Constant	-0.186 (0.129)
Observations	725
Log Likelihood	-493.452
Akaike Inf. Crit.	992.904
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Function was also an important variable in coding for differences between the two different ad types. Each ad was coded with the primary function being either to acclaim (coded as 0), attack (coded as 1), or defend (coded as 2). These are in addition to an “other” category for the few ads too short or vague to confidently code (coded as 3). Hypothesis 4 predicted there would be differences between the two mediums in the functions of the advertisements though what these differences would be was not predicted. Table 5 shows the results of a multinomial model in which the function of ads is modeled against media type while controlling for ideology. Ignoring the “other” category, this table shows the only function in which the platforms significantly differed was in their use of defensive ads, and this relationship is shown to be negative. This means ads released on television focused more on defending candidates against attacks, whether policy or character focused, than those released online on social media platforms thus supporting Hypothesis 4. We see again a significant finding in regard to ideology. Table 5 indicates a negative relationship between ideology and attacks which means Republicans were more likely to use ads attacking their opponents’ characters or policy than Democrats were. This was the only function in which there appeared to be a significant difference between the two parties.

Table 5. Multinomial Results for Ideology and Media Type on Campaign Ad Functions – Acclaim (0), Attack (1), or Defend (2)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)
ideology	-0.725*** (0.160)	0.472 (0.393)	1.846* (1.064)
media_type	0.167 (0.160)	-1.678*** (0.468)	-0.345 (0.645)
Constant	-0.052 (0.133)	-2.233*** (0.321)	-4.933*** (1.029)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,265.185	1,265.185	1,265.185
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01		

I also looked for relationships between the themes and functions of advertisements in the data set. Table 6 provides a logit model in which theme is used as a dependent variable and function as an independent variable and ideology as a control. This table indicates three important findings regarding all three functions. First, there is a significant negative relationship between policy and acclaiming. This means ads tend to acclaim the supporting candidate for their policies more than character. Second, there is a significant positive relationship between theme and attacking. This means ads focused on policy focus less on attacking opponents than ads focused on character. Lastly, there is a significant positive relationship between theme and defending. This means candidates defend their character more than they defend their policy in their campaign advertisements. Summarizing these findings, it seems candidates are primarily using ads to make policy acclaims, attack their opponents for their character, and defend attacks on their own character.

Table 6. Logit Results for Ideology and Campaign Ad Function on Campaign Ad Theme – Policy (0) vs. Character (1)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	theme
ideology	-0.175 (0.156)
f.func1	0.716*** (0.161)
f.func2	0.622* (0.369)
f.func3	0.259 (0.656)
Constant	-0.507*** (0.139)
Observations	725
Log Likelihood	-483.303
Akaike Inf. Crit.	976.606
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

The last findings within these models regards incumbency status again, specifically the difference between incumbents in the themes and functions of their advertisements. First, Table 7 provides a logit model incumbency status as the independent variable and theme as the dependent variable with ideology as a control. This table indicates no significant relationship between incumbency status and the theme of advertisement. Incumbents and their challengers focus on policy and character similarly. Table 8 provides a multinomial model for incumbency status and the functions of their campaign ads with incumbency status as the independent variable and function as the dependent variable with ideology as a control. This table indicates no significant differences between incumbents and challengers in acclaiming, attacking, or defending thus rejecting Hypothesis 5. There does appear to be more significant evidence Republicans attack their opponents more in their ads than Democrats do.

Table 7. Logit Results for Ideology and Incumbency on Campaign Ad Theme – Policy (0) vs. Character (1)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	theme
ideology	-0.157 (0.171)
incumbent	0.257 (0.175)
Constant	-0.349* (0.184)
Observations	725
Log Likelihood	-492.687
Akaike Inf. Crit.	991.373
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Table 8. Multinomial Results for Ideology and Incumbency on Campaign Ad Functions – Acclaim (0), Attack (1), or Defend (2)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)
ideology	-0.773*** (0.182)	0.208 (0.434)	1.931* (1.098)
incumbent	-0.157 (0.185)	-0.064 (0.414)	0.311 (0.666)
Constant	0.158 (0.192)	-2.616*** (0.470)	-5.340*** (1.165)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,283.768	1,283.768	1,283.768
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01		

Discussion

These numerous models in their totality present multiple important findings. First, incumbents and their challengers seem to be using traditional and new media similar to one another. This goes against the conventional knowledge that incumbents have the campaign

capital to more easily afford expensive television airtime, leaving their challengers to rely more on cheaper, online media. The findings here suggest this may not be the case meaning challengers may not see the barriers to television advertising as previously suggested.

Second, there are significant differences in the lengths of ads released on television and those released online. Television ads are notably much shorter than those released on social media; this is not particularly surprising. Television ads are restricted to the time constraints provided to them by networks and the commercial breaks present within and between programming. These ads blocks are typically about 30 seconds in length, and these findings back up this length as an expectation for televisions ads. Online advertising is not restricted by networks in the lengths their ads may be meaning they can have ads 10 times as long online than those televised.

Third, there were not significant differences between media type and their themes. Previous studies have indicated ads may alter the content of their messaging with the introduction of social media as an avenue for reaching constituents. One argument has been tools like microtargeting allows ads to be more precisely focused on issues and topics relevant to specific groups on individuals. The findings here, however, indicate these differences do not exist between the platforms in their focus on policy or character content. There does appear to be a significant difference between programming and their use of defensive ads. Television ads are used for defending more than online advertising is. The reason here is unknown as television ads are not simultaneously more likely to attack. The variances, or lack thereof, between traditional and online media use for campaign ads suggest there may be subtle differences in their content. We also see evidence the themes and functions ads are using have important trends. Ads are focused primarily on making policy acclaims of the supported candidate, attacking the character

of the opponent, and defending the character of the supported candidate. Other combinations of these themes and functions are not significant.

Fourth, there does not appear to be a difference in the content of incumbent advertising and challenger advertising. Previous research has indicated challengers focus more on using campaign ads to attack the challenger for policy or character issues. For example, Evans, Cordova, and Sipole (2014) suggest incumbents tweet differently than challengers. Findings here, however, suggest this may not be the case. There are not significant differences between incumbents and their challengers with their focuses on theme versus character and their use of ads to acclaim, attack, and defend. Incumbency status may not be as important as previously believed. The null results about the different themes and functions of ads and incumbent use of ads may be explained by missing data. As mentioned previously, there may be television ads missing from this data set if advertisements were aired on television but never released online. Television ads posted online may have been selected by politicians and their campaign staff if these ads were seen as more suitable for an online-sharing environment. Future studies could expand on this data and work to include these excluded ads.

Lastly, this research shows important, unintentional findings regarding ideology and media use online versus on television. Media type and content are both significantly different between the two major political parties. Republicans are relying on televised ads much more than Democrats are. Additionally, Republicans are focused more on policy while Democrats are focused more on character; Republicans are also focused more on attacking their opponents than Democrats are. These findings are important. Evans, Cordova, and Sipole (2014) highlight the potential difference in social media use between Democrats and Republicans but do not indicate differences in traditional versus online media use. The findings in this paper may indicate that

while media type is important in analyzing campaign advertisements, ideology may actually be more important than previously believed when analyzing media use.

Future research should focus on more extensive explorations into how the parties use different forms of media and why these differences may exist. This analysis lacks an coder reliability check which is one hindrance to its findings. Future studies should prioritize this in coding political advertisements. A look at trends over time would also be additive to our understanding here as this study is limited to only one election year. We may see different trends across time. In its totality, this paper highlights the existing differences and surprising similarities in online and traditional media use during campaign advertising.

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