

2020 ELECTION: Time for Advertising Strategy Rethink

NEW YORK – Do you have advertising scheduled in the lead up to the 2020 United States presidential election? Particularly if there is a chance that your ad spot follows political content, we strongly recommend a rethink of your media plan. This urge is borne from an extensive body of work which found brands to be severely impacted by proximity to political advertising.



Insights by Ken Roberts, Forethought USA

July, 2020

KEY TAKE OUTS

- All political advertising, irrespective of negative or positive messaging or viewer's political affiliation, elicits negative emotions.
- The residue of negative emotion elicited by the preceding political ads significantly damages the performance of the brand ads therefore wasting advertising investment.
- The implications for context and brand-safety are profound: the hangover effect of negative emotions generated by political content flows directly into the brands.
- The simple solution is to ensure your advertising does not follow political advertising although with programmatic media buying, that may be more easily said than done.

As political advertising ramps up in the lead to the November election, it is time for brands that are committed to effective advertising, to rethink their media strategy.

Brand-safety does not just relate to the kind of extreme material involved in the YouTube brand-safety scandal of 2017. Forethought has shown that any preceding content that elicits a negative emotion, can markedly affect the performance of subsequent brand advertising.

During the 2016 United States presidential election, Forethought in partnership with J. Walter Thompson NYC, measured the impact on the efficacy of neighboring ads when the brand ad followed a spot for presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. In total, 12 different political ads were tested for their effect on brand ads. (These findings were published in [‘The effect of context on ad receptivity,’](#) Michael Sankey and Ken Roberts ADMAP, November 2017.)

The hypothesis going into the research was that just the attack spots (denigrating the opponent) would be damaging to the following spot however, all political ads significantly detracted from the following brand ads’ performance. This finding held true regardless of whether the person was a Democrat or Republican voter even when assessing their own party’s advertising.

Figure 1 - Negative political advertising generates negative emotions in consumers

Negative Hilary & Trump 2016 Ads

- Negative Clinton spot - Crooked Hillary (n=206)
- Negative Clinton spot - Dear Hillary (n=208)
- Negative Clinton spot - So help us (n=201)
- Negative Trump spot - Punishment (n=205)
- Negative Trump spot - Quotes (n=204)
- Negative Trump spot - The best words (n=205)

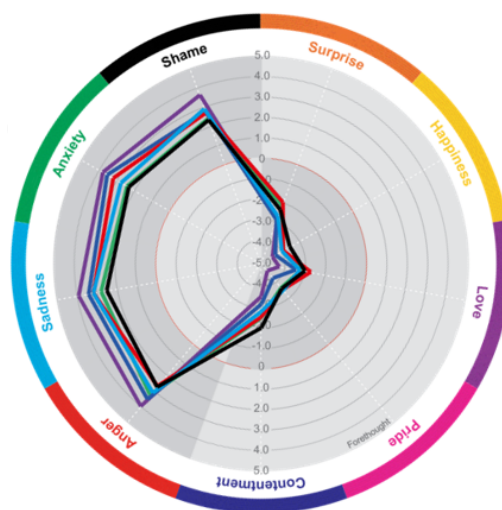
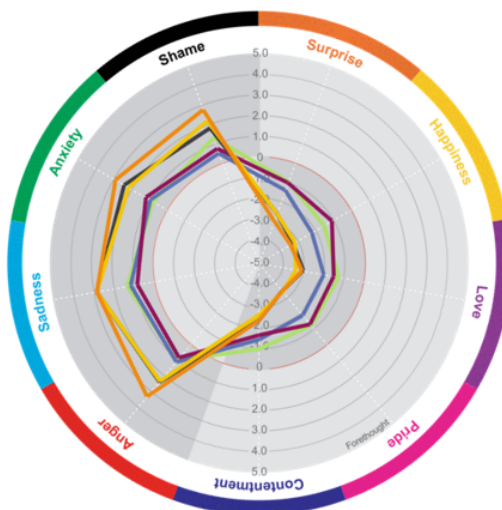


Figure 2 - Positive political advertising also generate negative emotions in consumers

Positive Hilary & Trump 2016 Ads

- Positive Trump spot - Voters speak (n=203)
- Positive Trump spot - Washington is broken (n=207)
- Positive Trump spot - Ivanka Trump (n=202)
- Positive Clinton spot - All the good (n=202)
- Positive Clinton spot - Fighting for you (n=204)
- Positive Clinton spot - Family strong (n=205)



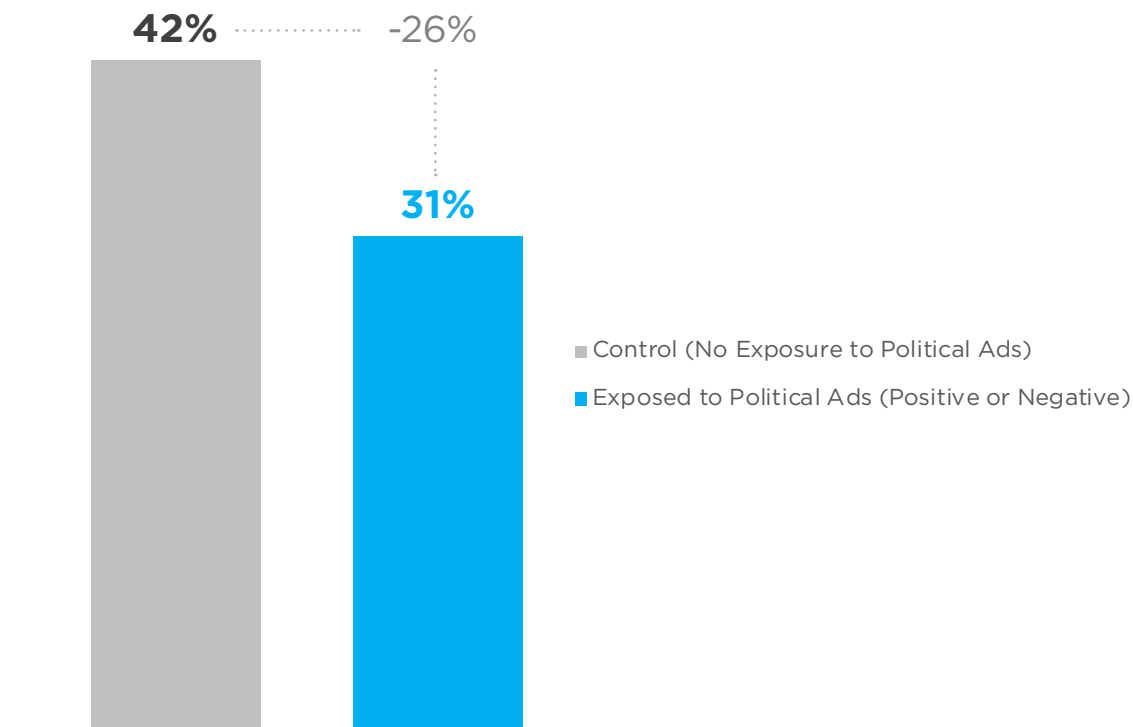
The hangover effect of negative emotions generated by political content flows directly into the brands.

In short, the residue of negative emotion elicited by the preceding political ads significantly damaged the performance of the brand ads therefore wasting advertising investment. The implications for context and brand-safety are profound: the hangover effect of negative emotions generated by political content flows directly into the brands.

- When the brand ad ran after a political ad, it was perceived as 32% less relevant, 29% less entertaining and 27% less appealing.
- The brand itself was also negatively impacted. Viewers rated the brand's reputation, product quality and value lower as a result of the negative political spot.
- Most concerning for brand marketers was the 26% decline in current customers' purchase intent.

Figure 3 - Political advertising also has a negative impact on customers' likelihood to purchase

Purchase Intent



Impact on Purchase Intent of Brand Ad
(TOP BOX - 10 on 10pt scale)

‘So What?’ for Brands

The simple solution is to ensure your advertising does not follow political advertising although with programmatic media buying, that may be more easily said than done.

Were these findings generalizable to beyond just political spots? The Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) sponsored Forethought to repeat the experiment using brand spots that intentionally elicited unresolved negative emotions (specifically anxiety, anger and sadness). The ads were for an insurance brand (Allstate Insurance).

The results showed that the findings from the political study were replicated with the same negative hangover effect occurring after consumers had watched the insurance ads. (These findings were referenced in [‘How Context Can Make Advertising More Effective,’](#) Horst Stipp, Journal of Advertising Research, June 2018.)

How Context is Being Used Today?

***Organizations
are applying
the learnings to
positive effect
advertisers
communications
performance***

Converse to the effects of negative ads, an elicitation of positive emotions from media content results in a more favorable, non-conscious processing of the advertising shown alongside that content.

Leading advertisers and media proprietors are learning to adapt to the findings from brand-safety research. Organizations are applying the learnings to positively affect advertisers’ communications performance. Soon, we are certain to see media proprietors charging premiums to advertisers for placement of spots following relevant positive content. For example, a brand that is seeking to elicit happiness, presenting an ad to a New York Yankees fan immediately after the Yankees has scored a home run.

In the meantime, either pay the extra to take the first ad in the break or think very seriously about ad placement that avoids political advertising or news.

For more information:

Ken Roberts

Executive Chairman, Forethought

400 Madison Avenue, Level 5, New York NY

ken.roberts@forethoughtusa.com

+1 929 239 3080

www.forethoughtusa.com

