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Abstract

As the original 1998 Pilot Study stimulus memo noted, the "great barrier" in exploring the effects of political advertising in surveys has been the need for adequate measures of exposure. Exposure to a particular television ad is best thought of as a function of three factors: the frequency with which an advertisement is aired in a particular media market, the quantity of television viewing by a particular respondent, and that respondents' tendency to pay attention to commercials (as opposed to, for example, leaving the room or "channel surfing"). In the absence of experimental control over the exposure of subjects to particular ads, scholars have needed information about both the viewing habits of citizens and the targeting decisions of ad buyers. Put simply, we need to know: who was watching, and what were they seeing?

Our objective in the 1998 Pilot was to come up with a short battery of items that we could merge with contextual data on ad buys to estimate the likelihood that a given respondent has seen a given ad (or more broadly, a given category of ads). Because it is not possible to ask questions about every TV show broadcast, and because ad-buy data were originally made available to us by time of day ("daypart" segment), the 1998 Pilot Study included a series of questions about respondent television viewing by daypart. Our original plan was to merge these data on TV-watching during particular parts of the broadcast day with information on the volume of specific political advertising during those very same daypart segments, an approach we have implemented in prior work (Freedman and Goldstein 1999)

Unfortunately, because the focus of the 1998 Pilot Study instrumentation was on gubernatorial races, while the ad-buy data that have been processed to date are confined to House and Senate contests, our ability to analyze a merged ad-buy dataset using the daypart questions is limited. Although ad-buy data on all 1998 campaign spots - including House Senate, and gubernatorial races - will be made available to the scholarly community, the grant to purchase the 1998 CMAG data had a primary focus on congressional races. In this memo, we use the available 1998 ad-buy data to outline a new, more effective strategy for measuring exposure to campaign advertising. (See Appendix for a brief discussion of daypart and ad attention patterns.)