

WHICH FACTS MATTER: HOW CAN WE BUILD ADVERTISING LITERACY ABOUT CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ADVERTISING?

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Abstract

This research examined U.S. voters' persuasion knowledge about political advertising and knowledge of a new form of political messaging ("political influencers"), as well as the coping mechanism of skepticism. We also were interested in exploring which facts about political advertising were perceived as the most 'concerning' and useful for people to know in order to more carefully scrutinize political advertising. Results of our online survey of 175 voters revealed only about 50% correct answers on the 28-item scale of political advertising persuasion knowledge with no demographic differences. Only one in three voters correctly knew that political ads are not fact-checked before media broadcasts. As predicted, persuasion knowledge about political advertising was positively related to skepticism of political advertising. Understanding that "unlike product advertising, there are no regulations requiring the content of political advertising is truthful or non-misleading" was the fact considered to be the most concerning (important) and the fact that voters perceived would lead them to be more careful viewers of political advertising. Additionally, the fact that "Anyone, even foreign countries with interests outside of the U.S. can create political ads/messages and place them on U.S. social media" was also perceived as a fact that would help people to be careful viewers of political advertising. Implications for theory and building a political advertising literacy education and intervention campaign are discussed.