

Negative campaigning (Election Campaigning Communication)

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KEYWORDS

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION

One of the most crucial decisions political candidates make ahead of an election is whether they want to focus on their image or that of their political opponents in their advertisement (Lau and Rovner, 2009). During electoral campaigns, candidates need to decide whether they use political advertisement to display a positive image of themselves or whether they try to make the opponent look bad. The first strategy is referred to as **Acclaim** or **Positive Ads**. The second approach, according to Surlin and Gordon is called **Negative Campaigning** and is applied by a political candidate when (s)he “attacks the other candidate personally, the issues for which the other candidate stands, or the party of the other candidate” (1977, p. 93). However, measuring negative campaigning poses a challenge to academic research since content analyses often fail to address the grey areas of this concept. To begin with, many political ads compare positive characteristics of a candidate against opponents’ more negative ones. (Lau & Rovner, 2009). Ads that contain both strategies, shedding positive light on the candidate while also highlighting negative aspects about the opponent’s character or policies are called **Comparison** or **Comparative Ads**. These comparisons are difficult to code with straightforward approaches. For example, analyzing campaigns along a positive/negative dichotomy by discounting attacks to the oppo-

nent from positive self-presentations may equate strongly positively and negatively charged political advertising to neutral campaigns. Also, negativity in political campaigning is studied in different contexts and has been extended as a number of studies on negative campaigning look in particular at **Attacks** and **Rebuttals/Defense** from opponents after an attack (Benoit, 2000; Benoit & Airne, 2009; Erigha & Charles, 2012; Lee & Benoit, 2004; Torres, Hyman, & Hamilton, 2012). This distinction raises other important methodological and theoretical implications. Sweeping measures of negativity based on common scholarly definitions do not consider voters’ tolerance towards the use of certain forms of negativity by candidates (for example, rebutting an attack from an opponent) that may be perceived as legitimate. Not accounting for such nuances is what makes many negativity measures unable to accurately gauge the effects of negative campaigning among the electorate (Sigelman & Kugler, 2003).

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Negative campaigning and its related constructs (such as attacks or rebuttals) have been often associated with current trends in political communication of modernization and professionalization of election campaigns (Voltmer, 2004). Negative campaigning is indeed a development that can be observed across many different political contexts (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006). Campaign strategies using negative messages about a political opponent have been studied relying on theories from social and cognitive psychology (Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Lau, 1985) and mostly in regard to their potential consequences for a healthy democracy (Lau & Rovner, 2009). Their operationalization follows a simple schema by coding whether a certain construct is present in



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a given advertising piece or not. Alternatively, it is coded which kind of category best reflects on the content of a given political advertisement.

REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Negative campaigning and related constructs have been studied through content analysis both of paid advertisement (Benoit, 2000) and news coverage by the mass media (Lau & Pomper, 2004); The features and effects of negative campaigning have also been analyzed through voter surveys (Brader, 2005, 2006) and interviews with campaign managers (Kahn & Kenney, 1999). Its effects were furthermore more precisely measured through numerous experimental studies (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; overview see: Lau et al., 2007).

EXAMPLE STUDIES

see Table 1

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Table 1. Overview exemplary studies measuring interaction, discussion, participation, and related

Authors	Unit of analysis	Constructs	Values	Reliability
Benoit (2000), Benoit & Airne (2009), Lee and Benoit (2004)	Television ads, direct mail, newspaper ads, and candidate web pages	Acclaim	Acclaims portray the sponsored candidate in a favorable light, both his/her character and/or policy (Benoit, 2000, 281, 295) 0 = not present 1 = present	Cohen's kappa average = .96
Erigha & Charles (2012)	Television and web advertisements	Non-negative/ advocacy	A non-negative/advocacy ad favors a party's candidate, focusing solely on that individual. 1 = non-negative / advocacy 2 = comparison 3= attack ads (exclusive options)	Cohen's kappa average = .96
Torres et al. (2012)	Presidential candidate-sponsored TV ads	Non-comparative ad	If the ad simply mentions positive attributes of a particular candidate without mentioning an opponent, the ad is coded as a non-comparison (positive) ad (p. 196) 1 = comparative ad 2 = negative ad 3= non-comparative ad (exclusive options)	Cohen's kappa average = .98

Authors	Unit of analysis	Constructs	Values	Reliability
Steffan & Venema (2019)	Campaign posters	Textual negative campaigning Visual negative campaigning	Based on Lau and Pomper's (2002), textual/visual negative campaigning indicates whether the image / text on the campaign posters referred to other political parties or candidates. (p. 273) 0 = not present 1 = present	Visual negative campaigning: Krippendorff's $\alpha = .82$ Textual negative campaigning: Krippendorff's $\alpha = .84$
Torres et al. (2012)	Presidential candidate-sponsored TV ads	Negative ad	If the ad criticizes the opposing party and/or candidate but offers no alternative (in essence, the ad presents negative information about an opponent but no information about the candidate on whose behalf it is run), then the ad is coded as a negative ad. 1 = comparative ad 2 = negative ad 3 = non-comparative ad (exclusive options)	Cohen's kappa average = .98
Ceccobelli (2018)	Facebook posts	Negative rhetorical strategy	The posts taken into consideration are those in which leaders employ a purely negative campaigning strategy. Cases in which a hypothetical leader A attacks one or more political opponents by comparing his/her own figure or policy proposal with the one(s) of her/his competitor(s) are not coded, since they denote a comparative rhetorical strategy (p. 129) 0 = not present 1 = present	Krippendorff's α average = .85
Benoit (2000), Benoit & (2009), Lee & Benoit (2004)	Television spots, direct mail pieces, newspaper ads, and	Attack	Portrays the opposing candidate in an unfavorable light, both his/her character and/or policy (Benoit, 2000, 281, 295)	Cohen's kappa average = .96

Authors	Unit of analysis	Constructs	Values	Reliability
	candidate web pages		0 = not present 1 = present	
Erigha & Charles (2012)	Television and web advertisements	Attack ads	Attack ads criticize the opposing candidate without referencing the sponsoring party's candidate (p. 443) 1 = non-negative / advocacy 2 = comparison 3 = attack ads (exclusive options)	Cohen's kappa average = .96
Benoit (2000), Benoit & Airne (2009), Lee & Benoit (2004)	Television spots, direct mail pieces, newspaper ads, and candidate web pages	Defense	Defense responds to (refutes) an attack on the candidate, both on his/her character and/or policy (Benoit, 2000, 281, 295) 0 = not present 1 = present	Cohen's kappa average = .96
Erigha & Charles (2012)	Television and web advertisements	Comparison	A comparison ad weighs two credentials, characteristics, or policy stances (p. 443) 1 = non-negative / advocacy 2 = comparison 3 = attack ads (exclusive options)	Cohen's kappa average = .956
Torres et al. (2012)	Presidential candidate-sponsored TV ads	Comparative ad	If the ad criticizes the opposing party and/or candidate and recommends alternative courses of action by comparing two candidates on specific points so as to present one in a more positive and the other in a more negative light, then the ad is coded as a comparative ad (p. 195) 1 = comparative ad 2 = negative ad 3 = non-comparative ad (exclusive options)	Cohen's kappa average = .98