

General election campaign advertising surpasses \$50 million in first two months

July 30 2008

(PhysOrg.com) -- Presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain are airing more advertisements in more media markets than their counterparts did during a comparable period in the 2004 election campaign, according to a University of Wisconsin-Madison study.

From June 3, when the primary season ended, through July 26, the two candidates have aired more than 100,000 ads, while only 77,000 ads were aired during the same time period in 2004, the Wisconsin Advertising Project found. McCain's campaign has spent just more than \$21 million on television advertising since June 3, while Obama has spent more than \$27 million.

Interest groups have aired just more than 4,000 ads, significantly fewer than at this point four years ago. In 2004, the two major parties had not aired any general election television advertising before July 26, but this year just under \$4 million has already been spent on ads by the parties.

The general election started much earlier in 2004 than it did in 2008, and there was significant advertising in 2004 starting in early March. Still, due to the competitive Democratic contest between Obama and Clinton, there were also more primary ads in more states this year than there were in the last presidential election.

McCain, a Republican, took some advantage of the prolonged Democratic primary, airing 5,374 ads and spending \$2.2 million prior to June 3. These ads were aired in Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and

West Virginia and are not included in the totals in this report.

As of July 26, the Democratic National Committee had yet to air a single presidential election ad, while the Republican National Committee (RNC) has aired 6,005 ads, spending approximately \$3.6 million.

During the post-primary period, the Obama campaign out-advertised the McCain campaign by nearly 9,000 ads: 55,312 ads for Obama to McCain's 46,563 ads. However, when the RNC ads are added to McCain's total, the margin drops to just 2,744 ads.

Likewise, although Obama has spent \$6 million more than McCain on television advertising, including the spending by the RNC decreases the margin to roughly \$2.3 million. The messages for the McCain and RNC ads have been essentially the same, focusing on issues of national security, energy policy and the economy, with the combined Republican advertising consisting of roughly 45 percent negative ads.

"Obama's fundraising totals allow his campaign to purchase more ads," says Ken Goldstein, director of the Wisconsin Advertising Project and UW-Madison political science professor. "But to this point, we have yet to see that advantage translate to a massive advantage in paid media."

The McCain ad effort is more narrowly focused, with intense attention being paid to four states: Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. McCain is out-advertising the Democratic nominee in these four states where the RNC has also entered the fray. That said, in seven other battleground states where both campaigns are up (Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Nevada and West Virginia), the McCain campaign is also out-advertising the Obama campaign.

Despite being out-advertised in nearly all states where both candidates are airing ads, Obama continues to advertise in states that have recently

been unfavorable to Democratic presidential candidates.

Obama is airing ads in 37 markets where McCain has not aired a single ad, while McCain is advertising in only two markets where Obama is not. Although Florida was the pivotal state in the 2000 presidential election, McCain has not aired a single ad there since June 3.

Obama has aired more than 7,000 ads in Florida since becoming the presumptive Democratic nominee and has spent more money in Florida than in any other state. Other states where only Obama's paid advertising message is being heard are Alaska, Georgia, Indiana, Montana and North Carolina. Neither Al Gore in 2000 nor John Kerry in 2004, both Democrats, won any of these states. Alaska, Georgia, Indiana, North Dakota and Montana are also states where Kerry did not advertise at all during 2004 election.

"It is certainly worth noting that Obama is up in these red states and has the airways all to himself. That said, we won't really know if he's expanding the playing field until September," Goldstein says.

The George W. Bush and Kerry campaigns were advertising in several states — Louisiana, Arkansas, Virginia and Arizona — during July 2004 that ultimately did not receive any advertising during the final weeks of that campaign." Furthermore, Goldstein notes, "Even with all the attention paid to expanding the playing field in 2008, like 2004, massive attention is still being paid to four key Midwest battlegrounds: Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin."

In general, the campaign advertising appears to be mostly about Obama and less about McCain. More than 90 percent of the ads aired by Obama are positive in nature and do not mention McCain. In contrast, approximately a third of the McCain campaign's ads are negative, contrasting the two presidential candidates. None of the ads aired by the

RNC are positive — all compare the two candidates, referring to Obama negatively.

"This campaign is about Barack Obama, not John McCain," says Goldstein.

The Democratic nominee should be favored to win this year, with a strong advantage in party identification, a struggling economy, the war in Iraq, and an unpopular incumbent Republican president. To win, therefore, Obama must clear a threshold of credibility with voters.

"What the McCain campaign needs to do is convince the electorate that Barack Obama is not a credible commander in chief, and to do that they need to run negative ads. What Sen. Obama's campaign and campaign advertising needs to do is persuade people that he is a credible president," says Goldstein.

To date, Obama has exhibited much greater overall message discipline in his campaign than Kerry did in 2004. One of the biggest critiques of the way Kerry ran his campaign was that he dealt with too many different issues in his television ads. Obama, by contrast, is dealing with fewer issues in each ad, presenting a clearer, more consistent message to the voting public. In 2004, Kerry talked about 25 different issues between June 3 and July 26, while during a comparable period Obama has only mentioned 14 issues.

The study also found:

* To date, McCain has narrated 20 percent of the ads sponsored by his campaign, while Obama has narrated 51 percent of the ads sponsored by his campaign.

* In terms of issues, the two campaigns largely appear to be talking past

each other. The top three issues Obama addressed in his television ads were jobs, welfare and defense policy, respectively. McCain talked about energy policy, national defense and economic recession in his ads.

* Throughout the primaries, Obama labeled himself "the candidate of change." Since winning the Democratic nomination, however, less than 1 percent of his ads mention the word "change."

* McCain used the word "hope" in more than 34 percent of his ads, while Obama has not used the word "hope" since June 3.

* Once the target of much criticism for not wearing an American flag pin on his lapel, Obama featured the flag in more than 68 percent of his ads. The flag appeared in approximately 37 percent of McCain's ads.

Using data obtained from the TNS Media Intelligence Campaign Media Analysis Group, the Wisconsin Advertising Project codes and analyzes nearly all of the political advertising that is aired in 2008 federal and gubernatorial races across the country. The project, considered the single most important and credible source of information on campaign TV advertising, is funded in 2008 by a grant from the Joyce Foundation.

The Wisconsin Advertising Project codes political television advertising for sponsors, issues, tone and numerous other characteristics — all in real time.

Provided by University of Wisconsin

Citation: General election campaign advertising surpasses \$50 million in first two months (2008, July 30) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-07-election-campaign-advertising-surpasses-million.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.