

Do political ads work?

This year, we have been bombarded with political ads on TV, especially in swing states. I can attest to this since my TV DMA covers Northern Virginia, and Virginia is a swing state, so we have been seeing (too) many here in Maryland.

The spending is in the billions. Adweek reports: Political TV Ads Shatter Records. It's not over yet. According to Adweek, as of last week, 915,000 presidential ads have appeared. Add to that congressional and senate ads, and ballot question ads, and I would be surprised if you have seen even one commercial for Viagra!

In today's Washington Post, Ned Martel writes in the article "Could the campaign ads benefit from Mad Men touch" that the ads are not even that good. He says:

To advertising executives, this onslaught of attack ads looks like a giant waste of money. It certainly runs counter to every risk-conscious maxim the industry has honed since the days of "Mad Men."

Negative ads have been a staple of political campaigns forever. You want to discredit your opponent, that is understood. Unfortunately, this year especially (or so it seems...memories are short), we are seeing that not only are these ads negative, they are also factually challenged. Glenn Kessler, "The Fact Checker" writer at the Washington Post, today rated one of Mitt Romney's ads regarding Obama's so-called Apology Tour four Pinnochios (which means that this particular ad includes falsehoods).

We are seeing a lot of back and forth: Romney says one thing, and Obama answers it. And to add legitimacy, we are seeing the use of news footage. An Obama ad recently used footage from a 60 Minutes interview of Mitt Romney.

But does any of it make any difference in trying to reach the mythical undecided voter? I am not sure. I think it must have some impact but does it change minds? Do people watch the ads or do they tune them out? I don't know. What are your thoughts?