

Paper proposal
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No Political Ads Please, We Are Swedish!

A Study of Public Opinions on Emerging Political Advertising in Television

The purpose of this paper is to examine public perceptions on political advertising in TV the first time when such ads were introduced to the Swedish public during the latest National Elections in 2006. Political advertising in television during election campaigns is regarded as a key feature of the modernity 'publicity process' (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999). Initially, the nature of political advertising was often referred to as the most significant character of 'American-style'-politics based on a predominance of images over issues. However, political advertising has also been analyzed in a more comparative perspective and several studies have been conducted focusing on contents, styles and effects of advertising on voters (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha 1995).

Despite this growing interest of political advertising practices and roles in different national election contexts, less scholarly attention has been paid to studies of the emergence of political advertising in TV as a new phenomenon in countries with a less commercialized political culture and with distinct public broadcasting traditions. In such countries, the interest of political advertising may grow as an effect of changing political communication practices in terms of a more volatile public opinion and the rise of more interpretative, and thus unpredictable, forms of news journalism.

This paper will analyze the nature of public opinion on political advertising practices in Sweden and discusses the results in a societal context where general advertisement attitudes, media attitudes and political preferences among Swedish citizens are considered. Previous research has shown that the relationship between the public and advertising is naturally complex, which leads to the conclusion that the public's view of advertising is a result of the interaction between several different factors. In general the relationship can be described as complex and ambivalent, like a love-hate relationship (Grusell 2008). Thus, the public's different attitudes regarding advertisements in general may partly be explained by individuals' ideological points of view and mass media use. However, this paper asks whether the result is the same when it comes to public attitudes on political advertising.

The empirical data of this paper is based on a representative sample of the Swedish population. Data were collected via two national surveys of the Swedish population. The results of the general opinion of advertising are based on 1,700 persons (age 15-85) who answered a national survey in Sweden during November – December 2005 (SOM). Data describing the public perceptions on political advertising is based on a national survey of the Swedish population conducted during the National Election campaign in August – September 2006.

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