Campaign Tone, Political Affect, and Communicative Engagement
Jaeho Cho

Department of Communication, University of California, Davis, CA 95616, USA

Research suggests that, overall, campaign advertising encourages citizen political communication. Extending this line of inquiry, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of ad effects by distinguishing campaign ads based on advertising tone, the candidate on whose behalf the ads work, and voters’ candidate preference. Analyses of a national survey merged with ad tracking data for the 2000 presidential campaign demonstrate that different types of political advertising elicit a range of emotions about the candidates and that some of these emotions impact the likelihood and nature of political discussion. Formal testing of indirect effects reveals that attack advertising encourages homogeneous political discussion by eliciting feelings of anxiety about the opposing candidate. Implications of these findings are discussed.

doi:10.1111/jcom.12064

Previous research suggests that political advertising encourages citizens to engage in communication activities during election cycles (Cho, 2008, 2011; Shah et al., 2007). An influx of campaign advertising in local media markets leads voters to seek information from the news media and to engage in political talk within their everyday communication networks. These findings suggest that campaign advertising functions as more than just a means of shaping voting decisions or of turning out voters on Election Day. It also adds to the deliberative aspect of election campaigns by promoting more fundamental features of citizen participation and grassroots democracy (i.e., seeking information and engaging in political discussion with fellow citizens). Furthering this line of research, this study focuses on the tone of campaign ads and examines the role that attack and advocacy ads play in encouraging citizen communication.

The role of campaign tone in elections and democracy has received a great deal of attention in the literature, as attack advertising has become a hallmark of American politics. The pervasiveness of attack ads has raised concerns that negativism in political advertising spurs political cynicism and thereby demobilizes potential engagement.

Corresponding author: Jaeho Cho; e-mail: jaecho@ucdavis.edu
voters. Yet, research to date has yielded mixed results (Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007). Some have found that attack ads foster cynicism and discourage voter turnout (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999). However, others have found no evidence of such detrimental effects of attack advertising (Finkel & Geer, 1998; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990) or have even found that attack ads promote participation (Geer, 2006; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002; Martin, 2004).

Despite the wealth of research in this area, little attention has been paid to how campaign tone might influence voter communication. Instead, research has largely centered on the impact negative campaigning has on voter turnout or desire to vote. Although important, research only focusing on turnout does not fully assess the impact campaign tone may have on voters. This study extends previous research by broadening the context of ad effects from turnout to communication behavior. Given that political conversation is considered a building block of a deliberative democracy (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Pan, Shen, Paek, & Sun, 2006), the relationship between political advertising and voter communication enriches our understanding of the role campaign tone plays in democracy. Assessing ad effects on political discussion also sheds light on the recurring debate about the democratic value, whether positive or negative, of negative campaigning. If encouraging citizen discussion, attack advertising may contribute, at least indirectly, to voter participation and turnout because political discussion has long been known as a stable, positive predictor of political participation (Shah et al., 2007).

In addition, this study adds to the literature on political advertising by examining the emotional underpinnings of advertising effects, a topic that has received little attention in previous research. To date, much of the discussion on negative advertising has focused on how the overall intensity of campaign negativity impacts turnout, with voters’ attitudes toward the electoral process or political institutions (e.g., cynicism, efficacy, trust) operating as a psychological mechanism of the ad effects (e.g., Ansolabehere et al., 1999). Thus, attack ads about one’s favored candidate and about the opposition candidate are often lumped into a single aggregate measure of “attack” ads (e.g., Ansolabehere et al., 1999; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002; cf. Martin, 2004). In contrast, by distinguishing ads about the favored candidate from ads about the opposing candidate, this study theorizes and tests how voters’ emotional assessment of candidates mediates advertising effects.

Within the context of these theoretical concerns, this study investigates how campaign tone (function in Benoit’s (1999) terms)—either advocacy or attack—affects the extent to which citizens talk about politics in their lifeworld. As a first step, this study categorizes political advertising into four types based on the tone of each ad, the candidate on whose behalf the ad works, and voters’ candidate preference, as follows: attack ads about the candidate the voter favors, attack ads about the candidate the voter opposes, advocacy ads about the candidate the voter favors, and advocacy ads about the candidate the voter opposes. Then, building on theories and research on emotion, this study proposes hypotheses of how the four types of advertising impact
emotions about the candidates and how the emotions change the likelihood and nature of political discussion. Finally, based on the two sets of hypotheses, one for ad effects on emotions and the other for emotion effects on conversation, direct and indirect effects of exposure to each of the four types of advertising on citizen communication are examined.

To test the hypotheses, national survey data collected during the 2000 campaign period were merged with political ad tracking data in the same campaign. To estimate ad exposure more precisely, the objective data on the content-specific ads that aired were combined with geo-coded survey responses of individuals’ propensity to watch the TV programs during which the ads appeared. Thus, ad exposure was measured at the individual level by contextualizing the aggregate volume of various campaign ads into respondents’ television viewing patterns.

Affective intelligence in political ad effects
Research suggests that two subsystems (or channels in Cacioppo and Gardner’s terms)—disposition and surveillance—explain affective responses to external stimuli and outcome consequences (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Marcus, Neuman, & Mackuen, 2000). When a new stimulus is as expected and signals safety, the disposition system turns on and its primary function is to monitor habits and manage how we rely on what has previously been learned; that is, the appetitive stimuli that lead us to safely rely on our habits and routines in processing information, making decisions, and engaging in behaviors. In the context of politics, central to this system is “the emotional reaction of enthusiasm, encapsulating the likes and dislikes the individual holds relative to political stimuli” (Marcus, MacKuen, Wolak, & Keele, 2006, p. 36). The surveillance system, on the other hand, is activated when information is novel or challenges expectations. Once aroused, the system helps an individual identify novel or threatening situations and drives conscious attention to and reasoned consideration of the situations by elevating anxiety levels (Marcus et al., 2000, 2006). Thus, when voters are confronted with stimuli outside their political familiarity and/or diametrically opposed to their political beliefs, the surveillance system turns on as a warning and results in more effortful processing and a conscious behavioral strategy that keeps them alert.

During a campaign period, it is highly likely that the tone of political advertising and the match/mismatch of an ad message with respect to voter preference will activate both subsystems. This in turn will guide emotional experiences and subsequent behaviors. Although novelty and threat do not pose physical dangers in the context of campaign advertising, affective intelligence theory and related research suggest that political stimuli that challenge voters’ values and beliefs endanger symbolic worlds and “produce results that look quite similar to those produced by presumably more dangerous stimuli [from nonpolitical contexts]” (Redlawsk, Civettini, & Lau, 2007, p. 154). Below, drawing on the theoretical framework of affective intelligence (Marcus et al., 2000), this article discusses how each of the four types of ads is related to voter emotions about candidates and how such emotions lead to political conversation.
Affective responses to advocacy and attack ads

Advocacy ads about the preferred candidate
When people encounter advocacy ads that promote a preferred candidate, information processing is quick and easy (Redlawsk, 2006). These ads confirm the prior expectation that the candidate will bring favorable leadership or enact favorable policies, and, thus, the ads resonate with the voter without being scrutinized. The high degree of assimilation to the congruent ads will result in the voter’s emotions reflecting the positivity of the promotional ads. That is, the positive ad tone easily translates into positive emotions, such as hope and pride, toward the candidate, which serves to reinforce the enthusiasm the voter already has. It is, thus, predicted that exposure to advocacy advertising about the favored candidate will be positively related to the level of enthusiasm toward the candidate (H1).

Attack ads about the opposing candidate
An advertisement attacking a candidate whom a person opposes also confirms prior attitudes and, as such, is processed quickly and easily (Redlawsk, 2006). Because of the congruent nature of the message, voters are less motivated to thoroughly review the criticisms made by their favored candidate’s side. Instead, it is likely that voters follow the ads and find reasons to maintain or intensify their prior attitudes. Learning something negative about a candidate the voter opposes corroborates the prior negative evaluation and activates already existing negative thoughts and feelings. Thus, exposure to ads attacking the opposing candidate will strengthen their already negative emotions toward the candidate. Suppose, for example, that a Republican voter encounters a Republican ad criticizing a Democratic candidate’s proposal to reduce corporate tax cuts in order to pay for health care. The Republican voter would likely find the target of the criticism (e.g., the Democratic candidate, his/her tax policy) disturbing and dangerous. That is, the ad walks the voter through how worrisome it would be if the opposing candidate is elected and his/her policy is enacted, which fills the voter with feelings of anxiety. Attack advertising from the favored candidate’s side may also elicit anger against the targeted candidate. Attack messages typically delineate the target candidate as directly threatening political norms and values held by voters, a situation in which anger is a likely emotional reaction. Attack ads often pair the target candidate with a known threat or an evil image, known as the “guilt by association” strategy (Kaid & Johnston, 1991). In addition, attack ads often use highly emotional language, imagery, and sounds to appeal to negative emotions like anger (Brader, 2006; Gunsch, Brownlow, Haynes, & Mabe, 2000). Taken together, it is predicted that exposure to ads attacking the opposing candidate will be positively related to the levels of anxiety (H2) and anger (H3) a voter feels toward that candidate.

There is also the possibility that ads attacking the opposing candidate might create a boomerang effect against the favored candidate. One conclusion shared by much research on political advertising is that people generally disapprove of the sponsor of attack advertising (Garramone, 1984; see also Lau et al., 2007, for...
a meta-analysis). In a similar vein, the black-sheep effect describes how attack ads backfire on the sponsoring candidate, particularly if he is an in-group candidate (Budesheim, Houston, & DePaola, 1996; Matthews & Dietz-Uhler, 1998). Building on social identity theory, the black-sheep effect posits that evaluations of attack ads and the sponsors of the ads are driven by a motivation to preserve a positive social identity. That is, when voters see their in-group candidate engaging in an unfavorable behavior (i.e., using negative tactics), they perceive it as violating group norms and threatening the positive image of the group. This leads voters to evaluate the candidate negatively. As to empirical evidence, Matthews and Dietz-Uhler (1998) found that an in-group candidate who sponsored an attack ad received lower ratings than all other candidates, including an in-group candidate who sponsored a positive ad and an out-group candidate who sponsored either type of ad, advocacy or attack. In support of the black-sheep effect, the result indicates the strongest backlash among supporters of the attacking candidate. However, Matthews and Dietz-Uhler’s study provides a partial understanding of the black-sheep effect. Due to the study’s focus on personal attacks, the data only tell us that a specific type of negativity (i.e., personal attack) creates the black-sheep effect. It is left uncertain whether overall negativity or a different type of negativity (i.e., issue-based attack) generates the same result.

The distinction between personal and issue-based attacks, a point missed in Matthews and Dietz-Uhler (1998), is an important consideration in the black-sheep effect. Given that preserving a positive group identity is the driving force for the black-sheep effect, the extent to which voters perceive their favored candidate’s attack messages as a threat to the value of their identity is key. If voters do not perceive an in-group candidate’s attack message as placing their group identity in danger, there is less motivation to distance themselves from the candidate. Available evidence in the literature of political advertising suggests that the majority of voters consider ads that attack on personal topics unacceptable but issue-based attack ads legitimate (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989; Kahn & Geer, 1994). This tendency for voters to distinguish issue and personal attacks speaks to the need to consider the type of attack advertising when examining the black-sheep effect. One study that did discriminate between issue-based attacks and personal attacks when testing the black-sheep effect is Budesheim et al. (1996). It shows that voters judge their in-group candidate negatively when the candidate engages in personal attacks. Yet, when an in-group candidate attacks the opposing candidate on issues, there is no such backlash. Taken together, it appears that the black-sheep effect is contingent on the nature of the attack. The use of unwarranted personal attack, widely viewed as unfavorable behavior, is what causes a backlash among supporters of the attacking candidate.

This study explores whether attack ads that work on behalf of the favored candidate induce negative emotions, particularly anxiety, about the favored candidate. If the attack ads focus on personal topics, it could be hypothesized that, as the black sheep effect would suggest, exposure to the ads would invoke the surveillance system which then triggers a careful scrutinization of their candidate’s campaign messages and a
rerevision of the in-group candidate. However, because the assumption about the extent to which attack advertising focuses on personal attacks is still speculative, a research question is proposed: How will exposure to ads attacking the opposing candidate relate to the level of anxiety a voter feels toward the favored candidate on whose behalf the ad works (RQ1)?

Advocacy ads about the opposing candidate
When encountering an advocacy ad about an opposing candidate, the ad is likely to bring about uncomfortable feelings. Voters feel the ads deny, at least indirectly, their own point of view and potentially threaten their favored candidate by providing positive images of the opposing candidate. While this perceptual reaction to ads promoting the opposing candidate leads voters to experience some negative emotions, particularly anxiety, it does not induce anger. The differential expectation regarding anxiety and anger is informed by research on political affect. Steenbergen and Ellis (2006) note that while feelings of anxiety can be triggered by a general or uncertain threat, the experience of anger, which is relatively rare, often requires a specific affront to an individual’s goals or beliefs (see also Marcus et al., 2000, 2006). Voters’ perceptions that ads promoting the opposing candidate are inconsistent with and perhaps potentially threatening to their goals can trigger anxiety. Unlikely is the possibility that promoting the opposing candidate will be viewed as a direct attack on one’s own beliefs, resulting in anger toward the candidate. Thus, it is predicted that exposure to advocacy advertising about the opposing candidate will be positively related to the level of anxiety toward that candidate (H4).

Attack ads about the preferred candidate
Ads attacking the candidate the voter favors are likely to be viewed as direct attacks against the voter. Such ads not only deny the value and identity the voter shares with the attacked candidate but also create a sense of threat if the voter believes, as research on third-person perceptions (Cohen & Davis, 1991) suggests, that the attack ads increase the probability that the opposing candidate will win by persuading other voters not to vote for the target candidate. In response to such attack ads, voters are expected to critically assess the validity of the criticism, question the credibility of the information source, and counterargue the message (Meirick, 2002). Along the deeper cognitive processing, voters also feel negative emotions toward the candidate on whose behalf the ad works because they may feel the ad unfairly attacks both their candidate and themselves. Given that the candidate one identifies with is targeted and under attack, this type of ad is considered a direct threat to the voter’s identity, resulting in more hostile emotions, such as anger, toward the sponsoring candidate. This reasoning is consistent with the available evidence on the backlash effect. Some of the backlash studies on the partisan match between candidates and viewers found that backlash is strongest among supporters of the target candidate when the out-group candidate attacks the in-group candidate (Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1990; Merritt, 1984). That is, those who were predisposed toward the target candidate denounce
the attack messages and recoil against the candidate sponsoring it. Although focusing on an overall evaluation of candidates, these studies shed light on how voters would react to such ads in terms of specific discrete emotions. It is thus predicted that exposure to advertising attacking the favored candidate will be positively related to the level of anger toward the opposing candidate (H5).

On the other hand, it is also possible that attack advertising persuades voters who favor the targeted candidate to reevaluate their choice. Kaid and Boydston (1987), for example, found that attack ads significantly lowered the ratings of the attacked candidate. Although this persuasive effect was greater for supporters of the attacking candidate, those already predisposed toward the attacked candidate were also affected. If this is the case, exposure to attack ads would erode enthusiasm among supporters of the targeted candidate. Yet, research to date produces mixed findings about the intended effect of attack advertising (Lau et al., 2007). One possibility to reconcile the inconsistent conclusions would be that the intended effect depends on whether attack messages are deemed legitimate. This is evidenced by Fridkin and Kenney (2004), who found that issue-based attack ads lowered viewers’ evaluations of the target candidate, whereas personal attacks did not. Although this study does not make the in-group and out-group distinction, the result is suggestive of the need to consider the types of attack messages. However, given that the relative focus of attack advertising (issues vs. personal topics) in presidential campaigns is uncertain, the possibility of the intended effect at the affective level is explored in a research question: How does exposure to attack advertising targeting the favored candidate relate to the level of enthusiasm toward this candidate (RQ2)?

**Emotion as a catalyst for political discussion**

Ample research in psychology has suggested that emotions have behavioral implications. The functional theory of emotion suggests that, as a way to maintain individual goals and values, some emotions (e.g., anger) encourage active engagement in certain behaviors while other emotions (e.g., sadness) motivate behavioral withdrawal (Frijda, 1988; Izard, 1993). The three emotions considered in this study—enthusiasm, anger, anxiety—are generally thought to motivate behavioral engagement.

**Enthusiasm**

Scholars agree that enthusiasm has broad motivational power. Feelings of enthusiasm, especially toward the preferred candidate, are thought to energize people to engage in actions. Survey and experimental evidence from Brader (2006), for example, demonstrates that campaign ad-induced enthusiasm leads voters to become more interested in the campaign and more willing to vote. Enthusiasm as an emotion closely tied to the disposition system also activates party loyalties and urges voters to rely more on pre-existing political preference (Brader, 2006; Marcus et al., 2000). Thus, feelings of enthusiasm mobilize voters to engage in the campaign in a manner that reinforces their already-held convictions. In support of this view, Just, Crigler, and Belt (2007) suggest that if individuals feel hopeful about a candidate, they are
inclined to modify their information search strategy to strengthen their positive appraisal of the candidate. They found that hopefulness about a candidate leads voters to seek confirming information and avoid challenging information. Given the nature of behavioral implications of enthusiasm, it is likely that enthusiastic voters will seek to have political discussions with like-minded people through which conforming information is safely shared and expressed. It is thus hypothesized that feelings of enthusiasm toward the favored candidate will be positively related to the frequency of homogeneous political conversation (H6).

Anxiety
Research has also revealed the mobilizing potential of political anxiety. When people feel threatened or become anxious in the face of political stimuli, they are expected to become vigilant in monitoring their environment and attempt to acquire relevant information beyond what they have learned from the stimuli. Research on affective intelligence provides evidence for this, showing that individuals who feel anxious about presidential candidates report greater interest in campaigns, care more who wins, use news media more for campaign information, and pay greater attention to news content (Marcus et al., 2000). Yet the nature of anxiety’s motivating power appears to be different than that of enthusiasm. Through heightened attention to the threat and careful information processing, feelings of anxiety enhance political interest and engagement. At the same time, this happens in a way that loosens the hold of prior convictions and political habits, a point that distinguishes the mobilizing effects of anxiety from those of enthusiasm. Considering that anxiety elicits motivation to confirm the accuracy of information about candidates, anxious citizens are inclined to engage in political conversation, especially conversation in which different views and perspectives are available, to explore how others assess the perceived threat and seek relevant information and alternatives. Hence, it is predicted that feelings of anxiety toward the favored candidate will be positively related to the frequency of heterogeneous political conversation (H7). It is unclear, on the other hand, how feelings of anxiety toward the opposing candidate are related to political conversation because past research on anxiety effects has been largely built around anxiety about one’s own candidate (MacKuen, Marcus, Neuman, & Keele, 2007). The potential of anxiety about the opposing candidate to influence political discussion is explored in a research question: How will feelings of anxiety toward the opposing candidate relate to political conversation (RQ3)?

Anger
A converging body of research on emotion confirms that negative emotions can be distinguished as discrete emotions, especially anger and anxiety, which have distinct behavioral consequences (Huddy, Feldman, & Cassese, 2007; Marcus et al., 2000, 2006; Steenbergen & Ellis, 2006). Anger is considered “an intense, highly potent, and mobilizing emotion” which propels an individual toward action against the anger-inducing stimulus (Steenbergen & Ellis, 2006, p. 111). Although both anger
and anxiety are action-inducing, anger is the stronger motivator. The nature of actions caused by the two emotions is also different. In contrast to anxiety, which is associated with the surveillance system, anger is driven by the disposition system, linked to a less thorough processing of information and to actions based on ingrained habits and convictions. Available evidence suggests that when compared to anxiety, anger produces more actions but fewer thoughts (Bernbau, Fujita, & Pfennig, 1995) and reduces political tolerance (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004). Considering that anger-induced actions are not directed toward achieving an accurate understanding of the stimuli and are, instead, skewed toward prior opinions and stereotypes, citizens who feel angry with the opposing candidate are likely to seek political conversations with like-minded others. Based on theories of emotion and related evidence, it is hypothesized that feelings of anger toward the opposing candidate will be positively related to the frequency of homogeneous political conversation (H8).

Data and measures

Data merge
Two national datasets collected in the United States were merged: the Wisconsin Advertising Project (WAP) collection of 2000 campaign advertising and the 2000 American National Election Study (ANES).

Ad tracking data
The WAP at the University of Wisconsin obtained and coded data originally collected by the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG), which tracked the airing of every political ad in each of the nation’s top 75 markets during the 2000 election season. Using a satellite tracking system, CMAG’s software automatically tagged each ad broadcast for where and when it aired (i.e., local market, television program, date and time of airing). Then, researchers at the WAP coded several basic features of each ad, including the tone of the ad and the sponsoring party. Of particular importance for the purposes of this study is that each ad was categorized as an advocacy ad (i.e., only favorable statements about the sponsoring candidate with an absence of criticism of the opponent), an attack ad (i.e., only critical commentary about the opponent with no positive statements about the sponsor), or a contrast ad (i.e., favorable statements about the sponsor coupled with criticism of the opponent). To be consistent with the conceptual discussions of the two distinct attributes of the ad content, this study uses only advocacy and attack ads (see Martin, 2004). Overall, the 2000 presidential campaign produced a total of 337 different political ads that aired over 300,000 times in the country’s top 75 markets during the election year, including the primary season. Of these, this study counted the advocacy and attack ads from both the Democratic (27,725 spots for advocacy; 35,449 spots for attack) and Republican (28,144 spots for advocacy; 22,245 spots for attack) sides that were aired from August 22 to November 5, 2000. The selected ads (N = 113,563) were
then sorted by four factors: the advertising tone (advocacy or attack), the candidate on whose behalf each ad works (Democratic or Republican ads), the date of airing (one of 76 days between August 22 and November 5), and the program during which the ad was aired (one of seven program or genre categories within which political ads appear). This process generated 2,128 \((2 \times 2 \times 76 \times 7)\) new dummy variables for each of the selected spots. As a last step, these variables were aggregated by media market, and the aggregated data were merged into the 2000 ANES data. As a result, the daily counts of Democratic and Republican spots of the two types (advocacy or attack) seen on particular programs in respondents’ markets were matched to each of the survey respondents.

National survey data
The pre-election survey of the 2000 ANES provides a total of 1,807 interviews completed from September 5 through November 6. Of these respondents, this study first selected 1,537 respondents who intended to vote for either Bush or Gore in the upcoming 2000 presidential election. Regardless of their party identification, a total of 85.1% of respondents revealed their commitment to the current election. The reason for identifying respondents with the intention of voting and measuring their current candidate preference is that, as discussed earlier, this study makes a distinction between the opposing and the favored candidate in campaign ads as well as the citizens’ affective appraisal of candidates. After this initial screening, respondents outside the 75 media markets \((N = 364)\) were excluded in the process of the data merge. As a result, the analyses of this study were confined to respondents \((N = 1,173)\) who resided in one of the top 75 media markets and intended to vote for either the Republican or Democratic candidate in the 2000 presidential election.

Measures
Ad exposure
The 2000 ANES provides measures of each respondent’s viewing pattern for the six program types that drew more than 65% of the presidential ads during the 2000 general election season: Jeopardy!, Wheel of Fortune, daytime talk shows, morning news programs, early evening news, and late evening news (see Freedman, Franz, & Goldstein, 2004, for more details). Respondents were asked how many times in the last week they had watched each of the six program types. For those shows with no specific NES exposure question, the mean score of the six measures of viewing was used as a proxy indicator of general television watching. That is, a seventh category of “all others” is estimated for ads aired outside of the six categories. Then, following the measurement scheme developed by Freedman et al. (2004), estimates of ad exposure were calculated by multiplying the frequency with which the respondent watched each of the six programs/genres by the number of ads of each type (D-Advocacy, D-Attack, R-Advocacy, R-Attack) aired on the corresponding shows in the respondent’s market during the 2 weeks prior to the interview. Similarly, the seventh category of “all others” was multiplied by the number of ads on all other shows. Before the
multiplication, the number of ads aired on news shows (i.e., morning news shows, early evening news, and late evening news) was divided by three, assuming that respondents did not watch news on all three networks simultaneously. Then, these product scores were summed to estimate ad exposure to the four types of ads. As Freedman et al. (2004) suggest, the raw measures of ad exposure were log-transformed to ease the normal distribution assumption and to address the expectation that the marginal impact of advertising would decrease as ad exposure increased.

As a final step, these four exposure measures were combined with the respondent’s answer to the survey question, “who do you think you will vote for in the election for President in November?” These were then recoded into the four variables of interest in this study—(1) exposure to advocacy ads about one’s favored candidate, (2) exposure to attack ads against the opposing candidate, (3) exposure to advocacy ads about the opposing candidate, and (4) exposure to attack ads against the favored candidate. For example, for respondents who intended to vote for Gore, exposure to Democratic advocacy ads was recoded as exposure to advocacy ads about one’s favored candidate ($M = .23; SD = .34$), exposure to Democratic attack ads as exposure to attack ads about the opposing candidate ($M = .19; SD = .30$), exposure to Republican advocacy ads as exposure to advocacy ads about the opposing candidate ($M = .22; SD = .34$), and exposure to Republican attack ads as exposure to attack ads about one’s favored candidate ($M = .18; SD = .30$). The four exposure measures were rescaled to range from 0 to 1, which allows for comparison of the respective magnitudes of effects while preserving the true variances.

Political discussion
Discussion frequency was measured in both homogeneous and heterogeneous contexts. Respondents were asked to name up to four individuals with whom they discuss government, elections, and politics, and how often they discuss these matters with them on a 4-point scale ranging from “never” to “often.” The respondents were then asked which presidential candidate they thought each of their conversation partners supported in the election. The frequency of heterogeneous political talk was measured by summing the frequency of discussion with each person who supported a different candidate than the respondent. Similarly, the frequencies of discussion with like-minded individuals who supported the same candidate as the respondent were summed to measure the frequency of homogeneous talk. Both measures were rescaled to run from 0 to 1. Within these data, the average respondent had political conversation with like-minded individuals ($M = .43; SD = .31$) more often than with individuals with different political views ($M = .24; SD = .26$), which is consistent with findings of previous research (Beck, 1991; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995).

Political affect
Three discrete emotions—enthusiasm, anger, and anxiety—were measured for the candidate each respondent favored and for the candidate each respondent opposed. First, four survey questions were employed to assess respondents’ emotions about each
of the two candidates, Al Gore and George W. Bush. Respondents were asked whether and, if yes, how often each candidate made them feel hopeful/proud/angry/afraid (Abelson, Kinder, Peters, & Fiske, 1982). Each of these emotions toward the candidates was measured on a 5-point scale with 1 being “very often,” 2 being “fairly often,” 3 “occasionally,” 4 “rarely,” and 5 “does not make me feel so.” The responses were reverse coded and rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Of these emotions, anger and anxiety were used as discrete emotions while hope and pride measures were averaged to create an index of enthusiasm, as suggested by Marcus et al. (2000) (cf. Just et al., 2007; alpha = .80 for Gore and .81 for Bush). For each of the two candidates, these three emotion scores were then recoded to create six variables—three for the opposing candidate and three for the favored candidate—depending on the respondent’s candidate preference. For example, if a respondent intended to vote for Bush, his enthusiasm score for Bush was counted as enthusiasm for the favored candidate and his score for Gore as enthusiasm for the opposing candidate. Not surprisingly, respondents’ positive emotions were stronger for the preferred candidate (M = .45; SD = .32) than for the opposing candidate (M = .08; SD = .17). Likewise, respondents exhibited higher levels of anger and anxiety toward the opposing candidate (M = .29; SD = .35 for anger; M = .23; SD = .34 for anxiety) than their favored candidate (M = .05; SD = .15 for anger; M = .03; SD = .12 for anxiety).

Control variables
This study considered a set of control variables. First, to control for local campaign contexts, the electoral competitiveness of the Presidential, Senate, and House races were all measured. Using the Cook Political Report’s classification, a value of 1 was assigned to each respondent if the person lived in a competitive area (state for the Senate and Presidential races; congressional district for the House race). Further, using the ANES survey, mobilization contact by party was measured by averaging responses to two questions, one asking whether anyone from the political parties had directly contacted the respondent and the other asking whether the respondent had been sent mail about the campaign (M = .51; SD = .39).

Second, political knowledge, interest in the campaign, and strength of party identification were measured as controls. Political knowledge was measured by assessing whether the respondent could identify the job or political office four political figures held at the time. The count of correct answers was rescaled to range from 0 to 1 (M = .27; SD = .28). Campaign interest was gauged by a single question asking whether respondents cared who won the presidential election (M = .77; SD = .42). The strength of party identification was calculated from the traditional 7-point party identification scale that ranges from 1 (strong Democrat) to 7 (strong Republican). The party identification scale was folded to run from 1 (independent) to 4 (strong party identifier) and rescaled to a 0-to-1 range (M = .59; SD = .35).

Finally, communication network size and demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, income, education, race) were measured and rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Network size was measured by asking respondents to name up to four individuals who they
considered conversation partners for matters of politics. The sample mean was 1.86, suggesting that the typical respondent routinely discussed politics with about two people ($M = .47; SD = .37$). Age was measured in years and the sample mean was 47.21 years ($M = .49, SD = .17$). Sex (female = 56%) and race (White = 77.1%) are self-explanatory. Respondents’ level of education was measured on a 7-point scale with the sample mean of 4.29 falling between “more than 12 years of schooling, no higher degree (4)” and “junior or community college level degrees (5)” ($M = .61, SD = .23$). Household income was measured on a 22-point scale that ranges from 1 (none or less than $4,999) and 22 ($200,000 and over). The sample mean of 6.76 is between the “$35,000–$49,999 (6)” and “$50,000–$64,999 (7)” brackets ($M = .31, SD = .16$).

**Analysis and results**

**Campaign ads and emotions**

The first set of hypotheses (H1 through H5) predicts whether certain features of campaign advertising, advocacy and attack, influence four specific emotions citizens experience about candidates (i.e., enthusiasm and anxiety about the preferred candidate; anxiety and anger toward the opposing candidate). To test the hypotheses, a series of regression analyses were conducted in which discrete emotions about candidates were regressed on exposure to campaign advertising and a host of control variables. Each regression equation included measures of exposure to the four types of advertising to ensure the statistical analysis tests the unique effect of each type, with exposure to the other types held constant. Another consideration in model specification is that when predicting one of the two negative emotions (i.e., anger, anxiety), the regression model considered the other negative emotion as a control variable. This was driven by a theoretical consideration about the structure of negative emotion. Marcus et al. (2006) suggest that “unless one has independent evidence that aversion [anger] is not a germane response to the focus of investigation, one should include measures of aversion in addition to measures of anxiety. If aversion is absent, these latter items will act as if they are measures of anxiety. If aversion is present, they will differentiate and form a second ‘negative’ dimension of emotional appraisal” (p. 41). Given the interrelation between anger and anxiety, it might lead to oversimplified assessments of emotional reactions if the two emotions are not considered simultaneously. Following this consideration, the regression equation was specified to assess the effects of ad exposure on one type of negative emotion with the other type held constant.

Lending support to H1 and H2, results reveal that both advocacy and attack ads significantly impact citizens’ affect toward candidates (see Table 1). First, exposure to advocacy ads about the favored candidate was associated with a significant increase in enthusiasm about the candidate ($b = .089, SE = .044, p < .05$) (H1). Second, ads in which the favored candidate attacks the opposing candidate lead citizens to fear both candidates, both the one being attacked (H2) and the one attacking (RQ1). Exposure
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Effects of Ad Exposure on Emotions Toward Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm About Favored Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to advocacy ads about favored candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to attack ads about opposing candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to advocacy ads about opposing candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to attack ads about favored candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger toward favored candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger toward opposing candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety about opposing candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Entries are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Values in bold were estimated to test the proposed hypotheses (H1–H5) and research questions (RQ1–RQ2). Although not shown in the table, the following variables were controlled: age, income, education, sex (female = 1), race (white = 1), party contact, and electoral competitiveness for Presidential, Senate, and House races. The full results are available from the author upon request.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
to attack ads about the opposing candidate was associated with a significant increase in the level of anxiety toward the opposing candidate who was under attack ($b = .122$, $SE = .049$, $p < .01$) as well as an increase in the level of anxiety toward the favored candidate, on whose behalf the attack ads work ($b = .024$, $SE = .012$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, H3, which predicted that exposure to attack ads about the opposing candidate would arouse anger toward that candidate, was not supported. Exposure to this type of advertising was not associated with a significant increase in the level of anger toward the target of the criticism (i.e., the opposing candidate).

Regression results also show that ads from the opposing candidate, whether advocacy or attack, do not elicit emotional changes in voters. Thus, neither H4 nor H5 was supported. Exposure to ads in which the opposing candidate advocates for himself was not associated with any significant change in the level of fear of the candidate (H4). Similarly, exposure to ads in which the favored candidate was under attack was not associated with a significant increase in feelings of anger toward the sponsoring candidate (H5) or a significant decrease in enthusiasm for the favored candidate (RQ2). That is, at least at the emotional level, ads attacking the favored candidate neither led voters to recoil against the opposing candidate on whose behalf the attack ads work nor persuaded them to lessen their enthusiasm for the candidate they already support.

Emotions and political discussion

The second set of hypotheses (H6 through H8) looks at whether and how citizens’ emotions about candidates are associated with their everyday political conversation in both homogeneous and heterogeneous contexts. In two separate regression equations, each of the two types of political conversation was regressed on emotions about candidates, exposure to campaign advertising, and the same group of control variables used in the earlier analyses. In addition, when one type of political discussion was predicted, the other type of discussion was controlled to assess the unique effects of the emotions on that specific type of discussion, above and beyond the general propensity to engage in political conversation.

Results suggest that feelings of enthusiasm toward the favored candidate were not associated with a significant increase in political conversation with like-minded people. Thus, H6 was not supported. Feelings of anxiety about one’s own candidate, on the other hand, drove political discussion in a heterogeneous context. As hypothesized (H7), the level of anxiety toward the favored candidate was positively related to the frequency of political discussion with people who support a different presidential candidate ($b = .207$, $SE = .070$, $p < .01$). Although not hypothesized, the data show that anxiety about the favored candidate also leads voters to engage in political conversation with like-minded people ($b = .189$, $SE = .078$, $p < .05$). Taken together, the results suggest that feelings of anxiety about one’s own candidate motivate political discussion regardless of the discussion partners’ political preference.

For RQ3, the data show that when individuals feel anxious about the candidate they oppose, they only seek out homogeneous political discussions. Feelings of anxiety
about the opposing candidate were positively related to a significant increase in the
frequency of homogeneous conversations \( (b = .068, SE = .022, p < .01) \) but were
not related to political discussion with people who support a different presidential
candidate.

Finally, in support of H8, the data reveal that feelings of anger toward the
opposing candidate were positively related to the frequency of homogenous political
corversation \( (b = .067, SE = .022, p < .01) \). Although not hypothesized, the data
suggest that anger toward the opposing candidate also leads to political conversation
in a heterogeneous context \( (b = .040, SE = .020, p < .05) \). In sum, anger toward the
candidate one opposes leads the voter to engage in political talk regardless of the
context, whether it be homogenous or heterogeneous.

### Indirect, direct, and total effects of ad exposure on discussion

The relationship patterns among ad exposure, emotions, and political discussion sug-
gen that, by evoking emotions, campaign advertising indirectly influences political
discussion. Three possible routes of indirect effects were identified from the test-
ing of hypotheses and research questions and tested using Hayes’ (2012) analytical
strategies. Results revealed only one statistically significant indirect effect: attack ads
about the opposing candidate \( \rightarrow \) anxiety about the candidate \( \rightarrow \) homogeneous talk
\( (effect = .010, bootstrap \, SE = .005, 95\% \, CI = .003-.023) \). Although the rationale for
the hypotheses and the findings reported in Tables 1 and 2 hint at the possibility of two
other indirect effects (i.e., advocacy ads about the preferred candidate \( \rightarrow \) enthusiasm
about the candidate \( \rightarrow \) homogeneous talk; attack ads about the opposing candi-
date \( \rightarrow \) anxiety toward the preferred candidate \( \rightarrow \) heterogeneous talk), the estimates
of the indirect effect for these two paths are not large enough to pass the threshold of
statistical significance.

The total and direct effects of ad exposure were also estimated. To assess the
total effects, political discussion was regressed on ad exposure measures and the set
of control variables with mediating variables (i.e., emotions) excluded (see models 1
and 3 in Table 2). Direct effects were assessed in the same regression models used to
test the second set of hypotheses. That is, along with the same set of control variables,
political discussion was regressed on both ad exposure measures and emotions (see
models 2 and 4 in Table 2). As indicated in Table 2, the data suggest that neither total
nor direct effects are statistically significant. Given that the total effect is the sum of
different indirect effects, the results of a significant indirect effect in the absence of a
significant total effect suggest the presence of other unspecified indirect effects that
cancel out the observed indirect effect (Hayes, 2009, p. 414).

### Discussion

Previous research suggests that campaign advertising promotes political discussion
among citizens (Cho, 2008, 2011; Shah et al., 2007). This study extends this research
in three ways. First, unlike previous research, this study distinguishes campaign
Table 2  Effects of Emotions Toward Candidates on Political Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Homogenous Talk</th>
<th></th>
<th>Heterogeneous Talk</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>Model 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm about favored candidate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.044 (.024)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.015 (.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety about favored candidate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.189 (.078)*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.207 (.070)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety about opposing candidate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.068 (.022)**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.036 (.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger toward opposing candidate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.067 (.022)**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.040 (.020)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to advocacy ads about favored candidate</td>
<td>.031 (.032)</td>
<td>.029 (.031)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.004 (.028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to attack ads about opposing candidate</td>
<td>−.046 (.036)</td>
<td>−.060 (.035)</td>
<td>−.003 (.031)</td>
<td>−.017 (.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to advocacy ads about opposing candidate</td>
<td>.022 (.033)</td>
<td>.024 (.032)</td>
<td>.026 (.029)</td>
<td>.023 (.029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to attack ads about favored candidate</td>
<td>.027 (.037)</td>
<td>.024 (.037)</td>
<td>−.004 (.033)</td>
<td>−.001 (.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship strength</td>
<td>.042 (.023)</td>
<td>.034 (.023)</td>
<td>−.021 (.020)</td>
<td>−.022 (.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign interest</td>
<td>.096 (.021)**</td>
<td>.066 (.021)**</td>
<td>.054 (.018)**</td>
<td>.042 (.019)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogeneous talk</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.666 (.020)**</td>
<td>−.684 (.021)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous talk</td>
<td>−.869 (.027)**</td>
<td>−.862 (.026)**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ (%)</td>
<td>62.2***</td>
<td>64.6***</td>
<td>59.8***</td>
<td>61.1***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Entries are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Values in bold were estimated to test the proposed hypotheses (H6–H8) and research question (RQ3). Although not shown in the table, the following variables were controlled: age, income, education, sex (female = 1), race (White = 1), network size, political knowledge, party contact, and electoral competitiveness for Presidential, Senate, and House races. The full results are available from the author upon request.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. 
ads based on their tone, the candidate on whose behalf they work, and voters’
candidate preference. This allows for the investigation of the effects of specific
types of advertising. Second, this study hypothesizes and empirically examines a
psychological mechanism responsible for ad effects, which remains underexamined
in the literature. Finally, this study investigates ad effects on two types of political
discussion (homogenous and heterogeneous). Although this distinction allows us
to better assess the deliberative potential of campaign advertising, it has not been
formally considered in previous research. Based on these theoretical and empirical
specifications, the results of this study provide a more nuanced understanding of
ad effects on political discussion. Further, the finding of ad effects mediated by
ad-induced emotions suggests a range of important implications for the broader
literature of campaign advertising, political affect, and citizen political discussion.
The discussion of these is organized around three main sets of findings.

First, exposure to certain types of political advertising influences voters’ emotional
responses to candidates. Ads where the favored candidate advocates for herself
reinforce the enthusiasm voters already have for their own candidate. This finding
suggests that advocacy advertising is an effective strategy for candidates to energize
their electoral base, elevating pride in their candidate and keeping supporters hopeful
about the future that their candidate would bring (Brader, 2006). On the other hand,
emotional experience is more complex when it comes to ads where the favored
candidate attacks the opposition candidate. This type of ad induces feelings of anxiety
about both the favored and opposing candidates. If this anxiety has negative electoral
consequences, attacking the opponent proves to be a double-edged sword, hurting
both the target and the source. Since the data from this study show that attack ads
from the opposing candidate provoke neither anxiety nor anger about the opposing
candidate (no backlash at the emotional level), it appears that attacking the opponent
backfires, especially when the attack comes from one’s favored candidate. This finding
is consistent with the black-sheep effect (Matthews & Dietz-Uhler, 1998). Perhaps, the
results are reflective of the nature of the campaign discourse in 2000, much of which
revolved around questioning the candidates’ personal qualities (i.e., competence for
Bush and integrity for Gore) (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003). If attack ads had focused
on personal attacks in the 2000 campaign, a backlash effect against one’s favored
candidate would be likely because such ads show the in-group candidate engaging in
unfavorable behavior and thereby threatening the in-group identity.

Another noteworthy finding is that only ads from the favored candidate’s side
impacted voter emotions. Ads from the opposite side did not induce any significant
changes in voter’s emotions. This asymmetry in ad effects may be because ad
messages from the favored candidate resonate with voters more readily and strongly,
at least at the affective level, than ads from the opposing candidate. Thus, while both
advocacy and attack ads elicit voter emotions, the emotional appeals concentrate
on supporters. This holds true even for attack ads from the favored candidate,
which were found to induce an unfavorable emotional assessment of the favored
candidate by his supporters. Yet, the question remains open whether the unintended
backlash in response to an in-group candidate’s attack ads is a general pattern or is an idiosyncrasy of the 2000 campaign.

Second, the findings suggest that emotions, particularly negative ones (anxiety and anger), drive political discussion. Negative emotions have stronger behavioral consequences with respect to political discussion than positive emotions. The data also suggest that the nature of political discussion differs depending on how voters feel about the candidates. Notably, engaging in heterogeneous discussion is driven by anxiety about one’s own candidate but not by anxiety about the opposing candidate. This finding is consistent with affective intelligence theory (MacKuen et al., 2007; Marcus et al., 2000), which suggests that anxiety about one’s own candidate stimulates surveillance motivation and encourages careful information seeking and processing beyond routine convictions and habits, features available when conversing with people on the other side. If political discussion with people holding different views is crucial to deliberative democracy (Mutz, 2006), these results point to the role political affect plays in the process of deliberation, long considered a realm of reason.

Finally, tests of indirect effects reveal that ads where one’s own candidate attacks the opposing candidate provoke anxiety about the opposing candidate under attack, which in turn leads the voter to engage in political conversation with like-minded people. This indirect effect shows that ad effects go beyond learning, vote choice, and turnout, all of which have been routinely used to assess ad effects. In response to a specific type of campaign advertising, voters become socially attuned to politics by conversing with their fellow citizens. Through communicative engagements, citizens can share their opinions and emotions with others, contextualize campaign messages from political elites in their everyday life, and learn to make better choices reflecting their needs and preferences, instead of simply being swayed by persuasive campaign messages and strategies. When coupled with previous research indicating positive functions of attack ads (Geer, 2006; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002; Martin, 2004), the results suggest that attack advertising should not be viewed simply as a strategic exchange of blows or a political fracas among political elites that turns voters away from politics.

By the same token, caution should be exercised when extrapolating the positive indirect effect to a generalized prodemocratic role of attack ads. As discussed earlier, since the total effect of attack ads on political discussion is not significant in the presence of the significant positive indirect effect, it is still possible that some unidentified indirect effects of attack advertising discourage political discussion. Thus, the results of this study only reveal part of the role attack ads play in political discussion. It is also important to acknowledge that political discussion itself does not always promise the normative ideals of deliberative democracy. Indeed, research suggests that routine homogeneous political conversation has divergent consequences for democracy (Mutz, 2006). Although providing a social context for peer-to-peer political mobilization, it also likely reinforces the political identity or preferences to which voters are already predisposed (Beck, 1991; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). If, as found in this study, homogeneous political conversation is
guided by feelings of anxiety and inflamed by attack ads targeting the opposing candidate, the outcome is unlikely to confer the expected benefits of political conversation (e.g., thoughtful reasoning, rational deliberation). Rather, as suggested by previous research (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Finkel & Geer, 1998), attack ads might actually exacerbate the already intense political polarization in America. To better understand how attack ads impact the democratic process beyond political discussion, future research should look at the content of attack ad-stimulated citizen conversation and formally examine how the conversation impacts opinion formation and citizens’ engagement in the race and politics.

To conclude, there are two caveats about the data and analyses of this investigation. First, ad exposure was based on the total number of spots aired during the 2 weeks prior to the interview day. The assumption behind this measurement scheme is that if political ads have any impact, individuals’ behavior at any given time is likely to be the outcome of the ads aired up to that point. At the same time, such cumulative effects surely decay over time (Hill, Lo, Vavreck, & Zaller, 2008). The cumulative cycle might be long or short, depending on the nature of the outcome variables. Given that political conversation is a routine part of everyday lives, ads aired long ago might have lost their influence. Based on this reasoning, a 2-week time period was used to capture the cumulative nature of ad effects. Nonetheless, the choice of two weeks is still arbitrary. Future study of the decay rate of advertising effects would be helpful.

Second, because emotions and ad exposure were based on candidate preference, this study is limited to those who had a preference. Thus, undecided voters, a group of voters who likely determine the electoral outcome, were excluded in the analyses. While this exclusion was necessary, it does limit the generalizability of the study. Studying how campaign tone affects undecided voters would provide insights into our understanding of the role campaign advertising plays in democracy as well as its impact on the electoral outcome.

Acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgement is given to the anonymous reviewers and the editor for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this article. In addition, the author wishes to thank the Wisconsin Advertising Project and the American National Election Studies for providing the data used in this study and also acknowledge that the WAP and the ANES bear no responsibility for the interpretations of the findings and conclusions reached in this study.

References


