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Citation for final published version:

Dermody, Janine, Hanmer-Lloyd, Stuart, Koenig-Lewis, Nicole and Zhao, Anita Lifen 2014. Young British partisans' and non-voters' processing of attack election advertising and the implications for marketing politics. *Journal of Marketing Management* 30 (9-10) , pp. 974-1005.  
10.1080/0267257X.2014.933866 file

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.933866>  
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.933866>>

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# Young British Partisans' and Non-Voters' Processing of Attack Election Advertising and the Implications for Marketing Politics

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**Cite as:** Dermody, J., Hanmer-Lloyd, S., Koenig-Lewis, N. and Zhao, A.L. 2014. [Young British partisans' and non-voters' processing of attack election advertising and the implications for marketing politics](#). *Journal of Marketing Management* 30(9-10), pp. 974-1005. ([10.1080/0267257X.2014.933866](#))

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## Abstract

This article presents an empirical study of young partisans' and non-voters' processing of attack ad messages utilised in the 2010 British general election. Expanding understanding of how these messages are processed is important because they can aid electoral and civic engagement, which is declining amongst youth. Currently there is limited understanding of how youth process these ad messages and how they influence their engagement. We applied motivated reasoning to explore this in a national survey in England with 18-22 year old British first-time voters; with data from 646 respondents presented in this paper. Overall our young partisans and non-voters employed motivated reasoning - (de)selection and critical appraisal - in their ad processing; thereby advancing understanding of how youth process attack election advertising. Concerns surrounding the use of attack election advertising emerge, suggesting the need for greater appraisal of the relevance of marketing in the development of election campaign strategies.

Summary statement of contribution: Through the biases enacted through party identification, we expand understanding of young voters (partisans) and non-voters processing of image and issue-attack election advertising messages. We also highlight some parameters upon which the use of attack election advertising, as an electoral engagement tool, can be critically considered.

**Keywords:** advertising processing, attack election advertising, motivated reasoning, partisanship, political marketing, youth electoral engagement

# **Young British Partisans' and Non-Voters' Processing of Attack Election Advertising and the Implications for Marketing Politics**

## **Introduction**

In this article we present the findings of an empirical study of partisans' (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats) and non-voters' attitudes towards the image and issue-attack advertising used in the 2010 British general election. In particular we are interested in their processing of these advertising messages. Expanding understanding of this is important because the provision of information is deemed to be a major factor in enhancing youth electoral and civic engagement (Tonge & Mycock, 2010). However, while negative political campaign advertising has been extensively investigated, there remains no consensus on how effective or detrimental negative campaigning actually is in aiding the electorate's message reasoning (Lau, et al., 2007); meriting further research.

Developing a fuller understanding of the effects of negative campaigning can be usefully explored from a motivated reasoning perspective, most evident in bias elicited by party-identification (partisanship). This identification orientation influences the way in which messages are processed. However, the application of party identification to political advertising has largely been ignored (Chang, 2003); albeit it is well-established within the political-behaviour scholarship. Our paper therefore seeks to redress the paucity of evidence on the impact of election image and issue-attack advertising on young British partisans and non-voters. We go beyond studies on negative attack advertising that do not differentiate between responses of partisans, third-party voters and non-voters. This enables us to more fully understand how young adults process attack ads as voters (partisans) and non-voters. In addition, this study contributes to understanding of the differential effects of image and issue-attack advertising.

Our study also raises a plethora of research questions surrounding the use of attack election advertising, particularly in relation to engaging the youth electorate. Thus we also proffer a critical appraisal of the relevance of marketing theory and practice to electoral politics. This enables us to consider the theme of this special issue, namely the relevance of marketing to the broader disciplinary agenda and practice. Given the nature of our research, we narrow this question to consider how one element of marketing, namely advertising, and more specifically negative attack advertising, is being employed and justified in the development of election campaign strategies for political parties. In so doing, we critically examine the translation of academic studies into political marketing practice.

The contribution of our paper is therefore twofold. Firstly, through the biases enacted through party identification, we expand understanding of young voters (partisans) and non-voters processing of image and issue-attack election advertising messages. Secondly we highlight some parameters upon which the use of attack election advertising, as an electoral engagement tool, can be critically considered. We begin our account by presenting the context within which our study resides, namely the 2010 British general election and youth electoral disengagement.

### **Context of the study**

Set against the national crisis of economic recession, debt, the risk of cuts and increasing unemployment, banking failures and the MP expenses scandal, the national advertising campaigns in the 2010 British general election were largely attack-orientated (Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd, 2011). Labour ran a personally attacking campaign aiming to undermine Conservative leader David Cameron; which focused on creating fear of the consequences of electing a Tory government. The majority of the Conservatives advertising concentrated on maligning Gordon Brown to emotionally remind Britons that Brown was personally

responsible for ‘breaking’ their country and hence could not be trusted. The Liberal Democrats (LibDems) Labour Conservative guerrilla viral advertising campaign attacked both Labour and the Conservatives for their years of electoral broken promises.

With respect to youth engagement with electoral politics, concern is growing amongst Western societies surrounding increasing youth political disengagement. Numerous studies indicate that this is most evident through their non-voting and limited political activism and volunteering. For example, reviewing the voting statistics from the previous three British general elections, it is evident that the majority of 18-24 year olds consistently do not vote;<sup>(1)</sup> and the proportion of young voters is declining.<sup>(2)</sup> Further, in contrast to older age-groups, British young people are more highly distrustful of politicians, sceptical about political institutions and broadly negative towards anything they consider to be (party) political (see for example Dermody, et al., 2010; Fieldhouse, et al., 2007; Hay, 2007; Hay & Stoker, 2008; Henn & Foard, 2012; Russell & Stoker, 2008; Tonge & Mycock, 2010). As a result they are less convinced by the utility of voting. Accordingly the problem of youth political disengagement relates to both their perceptions, attitudes and their behaviour. Compounding this, research also suggests a potential generational effect where young people consistently opt out of electoral participation (see for example Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society, 2006; Hansard Society, 2013; Russell Commission, 2005; Youth Citizenship Commission, 2009). Furthermore, according to Hannon and Tims (2010), the unremitting societal, political and economic challenges facing this generation of young adults will remain unsolved unless they proactively and enthusiastically engage with government to develop solutions. Thus, in failing to do so, they continue to facilitate their disempowerment and limit opportunities for *their* future. Consequently youth political disengagement is an acute problem. It inhibits effective policy-making, undermines the future legitimacy of parliamentary politics, and damages youth civic agency and identity.

Why, then, are young people politically disengaged? From our evaluation of the evidence on youth political disengagement,<sup>(3)</sup> the causes are multiple and complex. Research suggests primary factors include low trust, high levels of political cynicism and scepticism, limited knowledge and comprehension, feelings of isolation and alienation, and their perceptions of the irrelevance of parliamentary/presidential politics to their everyday lives (see appendix 1). Overall these studies consistently argue that this disconnection from electoral politics can lead young people to feel highly politically disenfranchised compared with older age groups, creating a cycle of disengagement as their 'identity' is undermined as politically and socially active members of society. In a paradoxical twist, however, this disenfranchisement might have been exacerbated by the political parties disbanding their youth divisions in a bid to deactivate their dissenting voice (Kimberlee, 2002).

Given this evidence, it might be considered surprising to find young British adults voting in elections. The question of why has received less research investigation (see Dermody, et al., 2010; Fieldhouse, et al., 2007; Pleyers, 2005; Russell, et al., 2002; White, 2010). These studies suggest that young voters also hold the cynical attitudes and beliefs characteristic of non-voters, albeit to a lesser degree. Consequently the broad issues surrounding the electoral engagement of young British adults would appear to apply to both non-voters and voters. Therefore the consequences of youth political disengagement (and their limited engagement) for both democracy and for young people themselves and the ongoing challenges this raises for marketing electoral politics to youth deem the British youth electorate of significant research interest. Hence they constitute the focus of our research investigation. We now move on to present the conceptual foundations of our study.

## **Conceptual development: partisanship, motivated reasoning and negative attack advertising**

We have previously presented detailed accounts of attack advertising and partisanship, consequently it is not our intention to repeat these reviews here (Dermody et al fc; Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd 2011). Instead we identify salient issues that arise from this scholarship to enable readers to understand the conceptual foundations of our research and our research hypotheses. Motivated reasoning is integrated into our synthesis to illuminate the processing bias embedded within individuals' advertising message evaluation.

### ***Partisanship and motivated reasoning***

Partisanship is of value in exploring youth attitudes to attack advertising because it establishes that party orientation influences voters' processing of campaigns (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Bothwell & Brigham, 1983; Chang, 2003) and, beyond this, is a comprehensive powerful force shaping individuals' perceptions and responses to the political world (Bartels, 2002). As Bartels (2002, p. 138) observes "...partisanship is not merely a running tally of political assessments, but a pervasive dynamic force shaping citizens' perspectives of, and reactions to, the political world".

Partisanship can be more fully understood with reference to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), because it helps to explain the behaviour of partisans. Social identity is "...part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Social identity generates a 'sense of belonging' to a social group, by highlighting similarities to members of their own social group and simultaneously establishing distinctions to others (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1999). It is in this respect that social identity is pertinent to the study of

partisanship as partisans' identity significantly influences their responses to persuasive messages and media campaigns (Duck, et al., 1998; Elder, et al., 2006). Consequently partisans might show favouritism towards in-group members (i.e. their own political party) and perceive greater differences to out-group members (i.e. from an opposition party) than actually exist (Greene, 2004; Kelly, 1988). This distinction between in-groups and out-groups suggests a universal need to maintain a positive evaluation of the self and the social groups one belongs to (Mackie & Smith, 1998). As a result, those who strongly identify with an in-group are more likely to display a stronger bias in favourably evaluating the in-group, its members, products, and experiences (Hewstone, et al., 2002; Turner, 1999; Verlegh, 2007). Thus the origin of selectivity in partisans' processing of election attack ads becomes clearer. Furthermore, in attacking the source of this identification, in this case a political party, the self-esteem of its partisans (those who identify with the party) can be threatened (Einwiller, et al., 2006). In such circumstances partisans will adopt coping strategies to try to defend their social identities and compensate for the disadvantaged position of the group (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Mummendey, et al., 1999). This signals how social identity is a significant antecedent of attitudinal and behavioural commitment (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Identification is hence the key depiction of an individuals' relationship with an organisation, for example a political party, and the proximal cause of motivated reasoning (Brown, et al., 2005; Einwiller, et al., 2006).

The theory of motivated reasoning is a widely accepted psychological account of how individuals process political information, thus it underpins understanding of partisanship and its effects (Mutz, 2007; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010). It originates from the selective-processing literature and is defined as the unconscious motivation of individuals to arrive at a particular conclusion in a rational way and to justify their desired conclusion with supporting evidence (Kunda, 1990). It therefore entails a processing bias, whereby individuals seek to



maintain their cognitive consistency with their existing attitudes and latent directional goals (An, 2002; Frey, 1986; Sweeney & Gruber, 1984). As a result, people who are motivated to arrive at a particular conclusion about an issue cannot believe whatever they want to about it because there are pressures to maintain “an illusion of objectivity” (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987, p. 302). Motivated reasoning theory is therefore of value in our research because it can explicate the potential effects of (party) identity on the perception and processing of negative information (Einwiller, et al., 2006).

Drawing on the theory of motivated reasoning, it is suggested that partisanship results in biased processing of messages via selective information processing; whereby partisans sift and analyse information that supports the party they are loyal to, thereby maintaining their existing attitudes and thus their cognitive consistency (Chang, 2003; Frey, 1986; Goren, 2002; Lodge & Taber, 2000; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). Partisans are not passive recipients of information, but are actively involved in information selection and processing, including interpretation and counter arguing (Meffert, et al., 2006; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Consequently partisans have a strong motivational bias in how they collect, appraise and integrate information in order to appraise its value (or not), for their existing attitudes towards their party and opponents (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Fischle, 2000; Klein & Kunda, 1992; Kunda, 1990; Stoker, 1993). Therefore, in line with Einwiller et al (2006), motivated reasoning, initiated by strong identification, is expected to affect partisans’ attitudes towards offending organisations, for example political parties and media and also their evaluation of negative information, for example election attack ad messages. There is certainly evidence for the biasing nature of party identification in interpreting political advertising (e.g. Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Bothwell & Brigham, 1983; Kaid & Tedesco, 1999) and in evaluating media coverage of political parties (Vallone, et al., 1985). As Goren (2002, p. 639) observes “... partisans are motivated to generate negative evaluations of opposition party

candidates and look for cues that enable them to do so in a seemingly rational and objective manner”. In reality, however, there is interplay between partisans’ emotional and cognitive responses, and both will influence the nature of the biases ensuing from their ad processing (Robideaux, 2002). This interplay is explored further in our appraisal of attack advertising. In conclusion bias arises when partisans are motivated to seek cues confirming their positive evaluations of their party and negative evaluations of opposing parties. With respect to partisanship we thus hypothesise:

***H1a:** Labour partisans have significantly more positive attitudes towards the ad attacking the Conservative Leader than the Conservative partisans.*

***H1b:** Conservative partisans have significantly more positive attitudes towards the ad attacking the Labour policy issue than the Labour partisans.*

It has been suggested that partisans and independents experience the same advertising stimulus differently (Stevens, et al., 2008), in that strongly identified individuals (i.e. partisans) are likely to preserve and protect their positive beliefs when these are challenged by negative information (Einwiller, et al., 2006). However, the third party voters in the election, the LibDems and the non-voters may not share the attitudes of the two main parties in relation to the ads presented, thus the following hypotheses are proposed:

***H2a:** Labour partisans have significantly more positive attitudes towards the ad attacking the Conservative leader than the LibDem partisans.*

***H2b:** Conservative partisans have significantly more positive attitudes towards the ad attacking the Labour policy issue than the LibDem partisans.*

***H3a:** Labour partisans have significantly more positive attitudes towards the ad attacking the Conservative leader than the non-voters.*

*H3b: Conservative partisans have significantly more positive attitudes towards the ad attacking the Labour policy issue than the non-voters.*

### ***Image versus issue-attack advertising***

It has been purported that negative advertising, particularly issue and image attack ads win election contests (Perloff & Kinsey, 1992). Image attacks are highly personalised assaults that denigrate the personalities – and hence reputations – of opposing candidates, whilst issue-attacks assail their policies. Studies indicate the majority of attack advertising is issue-based (Kaid, 2012; Scammell & Langer, 2006), albeit there is also an extensive use of image-attack ads in British election advertising (Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd, 2005; Dermody & Scullion, 2001).

Research indicates that attack advertising has a cognitive impact in terms of improving the electorates' attention-levels, memory (although this is marginal), comprehension, evaluation and decision-making, and it is emotionally engaging and risk reducing (Brader, 2005; Carraro, et al., 2010; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Geer & Geer, 2003; Martin, 2004). In contrast, however, evidence also suggests attack ads are highly damaging to electoral involvement because they feed cynicism, facilitate political alienation and discredit political argument (see for example Ansolabehere, et al., 1999; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Kaid, et al., 2000; Schenck-Hamlin, et al., 2000; Stevens, 2009). These 'contradictions' partially reflect individuals responding differently to different forms of election advertising, which thus requires greater specificity in who and what is being researched in political advertising investigations than has historically been the case.

In addition, the motivated reasoning bias is not always so straightforward. Arcuri et al. (2008, p. 372) note, "... if the emotions elicited by the new information are coherent with previous evaluations stored in memory and automatically activated, the new information is

acquired, accepted and stored. In contrast, new information that contradicts current spontaneous evaluation is denied, challenged, or simply ignored.” Consequently, the information reasoning of partisans can become more polarised and biased unless negative emotions arise in their minds, e.g. anxiety, which then affects their message interpretation and electoral decision-making (Arcuri, et al., 2008; Stevens, et al., 2008). This interplay between cognitive and affective processing is important in more fully understanding processing bias. It has been explored to a limited extent within studies investigating negative advertising (see Pinkleton, et al., 2002), but merits further attention. Therefore examining the differences between affective and cognitive evaluations can add further insights into the attitudes of young partisans (and non-voters) towards image and issue-attack ads. Given the nature of attack advertising, attack ads might affect our young partisans and non-voters emotions (affective) more than their reasoning (cognitive). Thus we tentatively propose the following hypotheses:

***H4a:*** *Affective evaluations of image-attack ads will be significantly more negative than cognitive evaluations.*

***H4b:*** *Affective evaluations of issue-attack ads will be significantly more negative than cognitive evaluations.*

The literature posits that the immunising effect of identification (i.e. tolerating negative information about the organisation) will eventually reach its tipping point as the degree of negativity increases (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Einwiller, et al., 2006). Thus it is not surprising that with respect to acceptability, evidence suggests issue-attack ads are judged to be more acceptable than more personally malicious image-attack ads (see Brooks, 2006; Dermody, et al., 2013; Kates, 1998; Meirick, 2002; Pinkleton, et al., 2002; Robideaux, 1998, 2002, 2004; Stevens, et al., 2008), possibly because of opportunities to cognitively engage

with policy-based messages. We thus propose the following hypothesis in the context of young partisans and non-voters.

*H5: All three partisan groups and non-voters will find image-attack less acceptable than issue-attack advertising.*

There is no consensus in the literature with regards to the influence of attack ads on voter turnout. Whilst some authors maintain that attack ads are highly damaging to electoral involvement, thereby demobilising turnout (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Kahn & Kenney, 1999), others argue that there is no evidence that negative advertising suppresses turnout (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Lau, et al., 2007). In addition, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1997) found that the effects of attack ads differ according to the degree of partisanship. We thus finally propose that the influence of the attack ads on voting decision-making will vary for partisans and non-voters:

*H6: Partisans will be more influenced by attack ads in their decision to vote than non-voters decision not to vote.*

## **Method**

### *Procedure and sample*

A quantitative approach was adopted for this research. Our survey was conducted in England during the three-week period immediately following the British general election in May 2010. The target population were 18-22 year old British first-time voters, eligible to vote in the 2010 British general election.<sup>(4)</sup> Similar to most opinion polls, street-intercept interviews took place in principal towns in geographic regions throughout England. Data was collected in central locations at various times of the day to minimise potential bias (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Filter questions were used to ensure that only those respondents who fulfilled the sampling criteria were interviewed. Two poster ads, which were

attacking in tone, were used as stimuli in the research. Ad1 – ‘*Camera on/off*’ is an example of an image attack, whilst Ad2 – ‘*Let’s stop Labour’s job tax*’ is an example of a policy issue warning (see appendix 2). The questionnaire was fully piloted prior to the start of the survey and minor revisions were made. It took the interviewers approximately twenty minutes to ask respondents all relevant questions and show stimulus and prompt cards.

This study is only concerned with those respondents who identified themselves either as non-voters or as partisans of the three main political parties, namely Conservative, Labour, or LibDem. Of the 733 fully completed questionnaires received, 646 were thus eligible for analysis. Our sample therefore comprises of 222 (34.4%) non-voters and 424 (65.6%) voters (see appendix 3 for our sample profile). Of the 424 voters in the sample, 26.7% voted for Labour, 38.7% for Conservative and 34.7% for LibDem.<sup>(5)</sup> Thus, there is a fair representation of partisans for the three main parties and non-voters in the sample.

The gender split represents the gender distribution within the UK population for this age group (ONS (Office for National Statistics), 2012). While we cannot fully cross-reference our 18-22 year olds with the broader population of 18-24 year olds, our sample is biased towards students and voters. 43% of young people in Britain are in University education (2011 figures). Further, according to Ipsos MORI (2010), voter turnout for 18-24 year olds in the 2010 election was 44%. While there are several possible explanations for our higher proportions of students and claimed voters, the debriefing with the interviewers revealed the difficulty they experienced in securing completed questionnaires among our sample group, in sharp contrast to 2005 and 2001. The authors do not believe that this was due to the interviewers, but rather to the context within which the election took place, with our interviewers reporting a pervasive political malaise once the potential respondents learnt the questionnaire was about the election.<sup>(6)</sup> Consequently, claimed voters (and the majority being students) may have had a much stronger predisposition to participate in the survey.

## *Measures*

To test the research hypotheses, previously validated and reliable scales were adapted to the context of this study on the basis of exploratory research. The ad evaluations were assessed with ten bipolar adjective pairs presenting the cognitive and affective domains adapted from Robideaux's studies (Robideaux, 1998, 2002, 2004), Hill (1989) and Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy (1994) to our context. The items 'trustworthy', 'helpful' and 'persuasive' were added on the basis of exploratory research within the domain of persuasion and credibility. The affective items were labelled bad – good, unpleasant – pleasant, irritating – non-irritating, like – dislike, whilst the cognitive dimension was measured with the following items: uninteresting – interesting, uninformative – informative, unbelievable – believable, unhelpful – helpful, untrustworthy – trustworthy and not persuasive – persuasive. The items were coded on a five-point scale with higher values indicating a more positive attitude, e.g. 1 (bad) to 5 (good) with a neutral response in the middle. Respondents were also asked to indicate on a five-point scale how acceptable they find personality and issue attack advertising in general and to what extent attack print advertising influenced their decision to vote/not to vote.

A principal components exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with orthogonal rotation (Varimax) was applied to the ten ad evaluation variables to reveal the underlying dimensions of attitudes towards the ads in our context. An examination of the results indicates that the data is appropriate for EFA. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy exceeds, at .88 for Ad1 and .87 for Ad2, the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974) and Bartlett's Tests of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) were statistically significant ( $p \leq .000$ ) for both stimuli ads. In accordance with the Kaiser criterion, only those factors with Eigenvalues greater than one were retained for further analysis (Hair, et al., 2007). The solution derived from EFA indicates two distinct and interpretable factors for both ads explaining 57.86% of

the total variance for Ad1 and 56.29% for Ad2. However, the item 'helpful' was cross-loading on both factors and thus was deleted from further analyses. The two factors 'Cognitive Ad Evaluation' (explaining 31.45% of the variance in Ad1 and 33.97% in Ad2) and 'Affective Ad Evaluation' (explaining 26.41% in Ad1 and 22.32% in Ad2) confirmed the two-factor solution as identified in the literature. The reliability analyses of the identified multi-item scales demonstrated good internal consistency for both ad evaluations with coefficient alphas exceeding .7 for the majority of the scales (Ad1:  $\alpha_{Ad1\_cogn}=.81$ ,  $\alpha_{Ad1\_affect}=.75$ , Ad2:  $\alpha_{Ad2\_cogn}=.80$ ,  $\alpha_{Ad2\_affect}=.70$ ) (see Hair, et al., 2007; Nunnally, 1978). For ease of interpretation and to be consistent with previous research (e.g. Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Robideaux, 2002), construct means were computed for each of the two factors for both ads. In addition, an overall attitude mean score was calculated for both ads including all nine cognitive and affective measures. The reliability is acceptable with coefficient alpha values above .7 ( $\alpha_{Ad1}=.85$  and  $\alpha_{Ad2}=.84$ ). The means and standard deviations, as well as the coefficient alphas for these factors for both Ad1 and Ad2 are shown in Tables 1 and 2.



**Table 1: Summary of Factor Scores and Eigenvalues (Varimax Rotation) for Ad1**

AD 1 Image Attack	Rotated Factor Loadings	Communality	Alpha	Mean (SD)	Variance explained & Eigenvalue
<b><i>Factor 1: Cognitive Ad Evaluation</i></b>			.81	2.86 (.85)	31.45% (2.83)
Informative	.77	.61			
Believable	.74	.63			
Interesting	.68	.48			
Trustworthy	.66	.62			
Persuasive	.70	.55			
<b><i>Factor 2: Affective Ad Evaluation</i></b>			.75	2.72 (.86)	26.41% (2.38)
Good	.75	.64			
Pleasant	.77	.60			
Non-Irritating	.68	.51			
Like	.63	.57			

Note: n=646, Items measured on a scale from 1 (e.g. Uninformative) to 5 (e.g. Informative).

**Table 2: Summary of Factor Scores and Eigenvalues (Varimax Rotation) for Ad2**

AD 2 (Issue Attack)	Rotated Factor Loadings	Communality	Alpha	Mean (SD)	Variance explained & Eigenvalue
<b><i>Factor 1: Cognitive Ad Evaluation</i></b>			.80	2.90 (.86)	33.97% (3.06)
Informative	.69	.51			
Believable	.83	.69			
Interesting	.60	.43			
Trustworthy	.81	.70			
Persuasive	.64	.51			
<b><i>Factor 2: Affective Ad Evaluation</i></b>			.70	2.98 (.79)	22.32% (2.01)
Good	.75	.60			
Pleasant	.51	.44			
Non-Irritating	.77	.60			
Like	.60	.59			

Note: n=646, Items measured on a scale from 1 (e.g. Uninformative) to 5 (e.g. Informative).

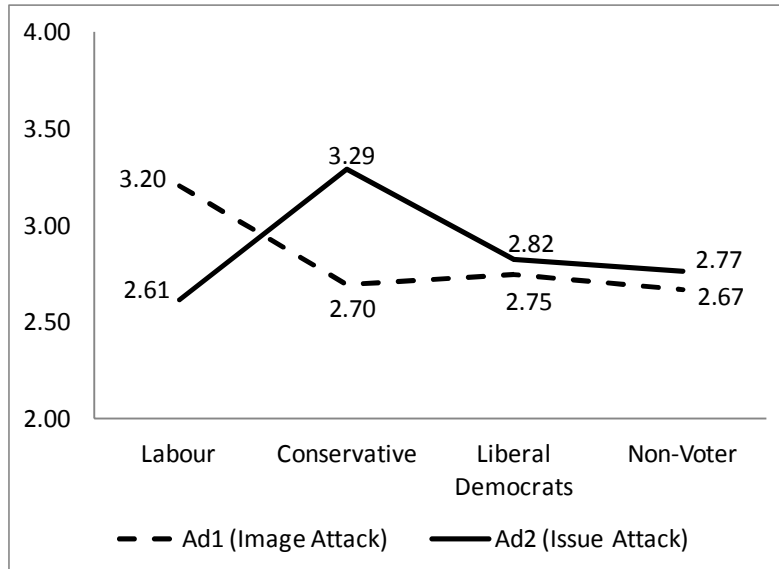
## Results

*H1a* was confirmed as, in contrast to the Conservative partisans, Labour partisans are significantly more positive towards Ad1 (Camera on/off image-attack ad against Conservatives) than the partisans of the party under attack (Conservative), as indicated by their higher mean attitude score ( $M_{Labour}=3.2$ ,  $M_{Conservatives}=2.7$ ;  $F(3,642)=14.83$ ,  $p<.0001$ ). Similarly, *H1b* was supported as the Conservative partisans have a significantly more positive attitude towards Ad2 (Job tax issue-attack ad against Labour) than the Labour

partisans (Conservatives:  $M_{Conservatives}=3.29$ ;  $M_{Labour}$ :  $M=2.61$ ,  $F(3,642)=27.42$ ,  $p<.0001$ ).

This is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Attitudes towards Image and Issue-Attack Ads**



Note: A lower mean indicates more negativity. A higher mean indicates a more positive ad attitude.

Regarding the third party voters, results showed that LibDem partisans have significantly more negative attitudes towards Ad1, than the Labour partisans, thus confirming *H2a* ( $M_{LibDems}=2.75$ ,  $M_{Labour}=3.2$ ;  $p<.0001$ ). A similar picture emerged for *H2b* which is also supported, as LibDem partisans have a significantly lower mean score and thus a more negative attitude towards Ad2 than the Conservative partisans ( $M_{LibDems}=2.82$ ,  $M_{Conservatives}=3.29$ ,  $p<.0001$ ). Comparable results emerged for non-voters who also have significantly more negative attitudes towards Ad1 and Ad2 than Labour and Conservative partisans, thus supporting *H3a* and *H3b* (Ad1:  $M_{Non\_voter}=2.67$ ; Ad2:  $M_{Non\_voter}=M=2.77$ ,  $p<.0001$ ).

Figure 1 also indicates that the LibDem partisans' and non-voters' attitudes towards both ads are similar to those of the party under attack, i.e. Conservative partisans in Ad1 and Labour partisans in Ad2. The results of the Bonferroni post hoc test confirms that there are no

significant differences in the ad evaluation mean scores between LibDem partisans, non-voters and the party under attack ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 3: MANOVA Analysis Summary**

Dependent variable	Partisan	N	Mean	SD	F	df	Sig.
<b>Ad1 Image Attack</b> <i>Cognitive Factor</i>	Labour	113	3.33	.93	16.899	3,642	.000
	Conservative	164	2.78	.76			
	LibDem	147	2.84	.83			
	Non-Voter	222	2.68	.79			
<i>Affective Factor</i>	Labour	113	3.07	.88	8.079	3,642	.000
	Conservative	164	2.61	.86			
	LibDem	147	2.66	.87			
	Non-Voter	222	2.65	.80			
<b>Ad2 Issue Attack</b> <i>Cognitive Factor</i>	Labour	113	2.62	.82	19.442	3,642	.000
	Conservative	164	3.31	.82			
	LibDem	147	2.84	.84			
	Non-Voter	222	2.77	.83			
<i>Affective Factor</i>	Labour	113	2.61	.72	23.234	3,642	.000
	Conservative	164	3.28	.81			
	LibDem	147	2.80	.79			
	Non-Voter	222	2.76	.68			

*Note: A higher mean indicates a more positive attitude towards that particular ad.*

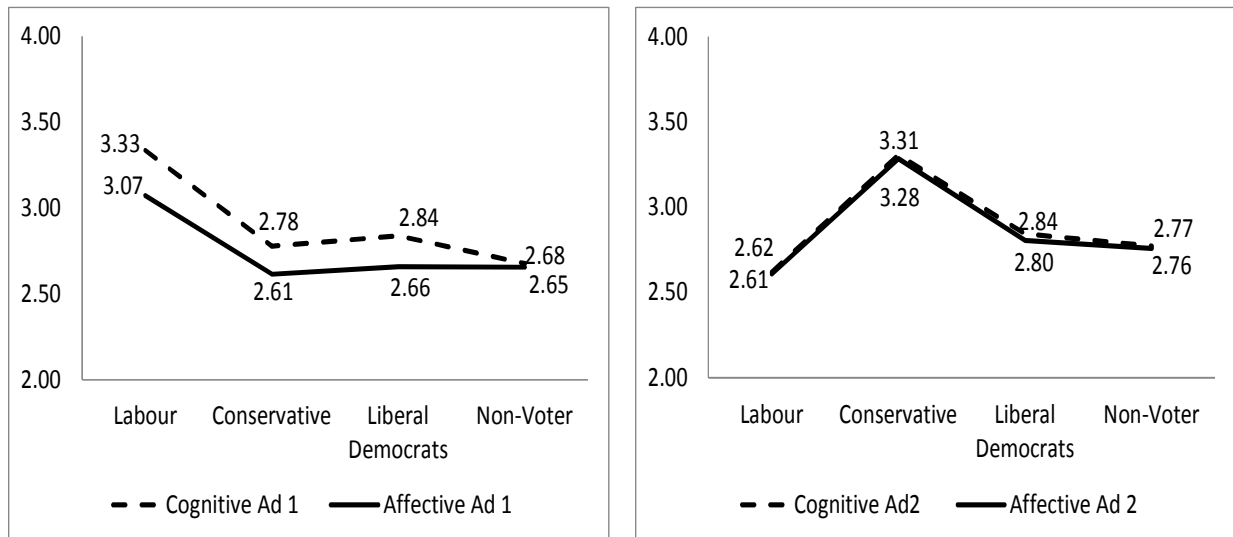
As suggested above, solely examining overall attitude scores might conceal significant differences between cognitive and affective ad evaluations. In order to explore these in more detail, a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed. MANOVA has the ability to examine more than one dependent variable simultaneously (Hair, et al., 2007). The cognitive and affective ad evaluation measures for both ads were the dependent variables, whilst the three main party voters and non-voters were the independent variables (four between-group categories). All assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, linearity, univariate/multivariate outliers and multi-collinearity were tested and no serious violations noted. The homogeneity assumption is satisfied as indicated by the Box's test results (Ad1:  $M=10.65$ ,  $F=1.18$ ,  $p=.31$ ; Ad2:  $M=15.01$ ,  $F=1.66$ ,  $p=.09$ ) (Hair, et al., 2007). The results indicated that the interaction between the three partisan groups and non-voters regarding the attitudes towards the two types of Ads is significant (Ad1:  $F(6,1284)=8.926$ ,  $p<.0001$ , Wilks' Lambda=.921, Ad2:

$F(6,1282)=13.452, p<.0001, \text{Wilks' Lambda}=.885$ ). When the results for the independent variables were examined individually, a statistical significance was found for all dependent variables (see Table 3 and Figure 2), mirroring the results discussed above.

**Figure 2: Cognitive and Affective Attitudes towards Image and Issue Attack Ads**

**Ad 1 (Image-Attack)**

**Ad 2 (Issue-Attack)**



Note: A lower mean indicates more negativity. A higher mean indicates a more positive ad attitude.

*H4a/b* tested whether affective evaluations are significantly more negative than cognitive evaluations. A series of paired samples t-tests were employed (see Table 4) and the results confirm significant differences between affective and cognitive ad evaluations for each partisan group for Ad1 ( $p<.001$ ). This is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows that affective ad evaluations for Ad1 (image-attack) were significantly more negative than cognitive ad evaluations, as indicated by their lower mean scores for each partisan group. However, for non-voters no significant difference was found ( $M_{\text{AffectiveAd1}}=2.65, M_{\text{CognitiveAd1}}=2.68, t=.43, p<.667$ ). Thus *H4a* is partially confirmed. For Ad2 (issue-attack) no significant differences between the mean scores for cognitive and affective ad evaluations were established. Consequently *H4b* is not supported.

**Table 4: Paired-Samples T-Test Results**

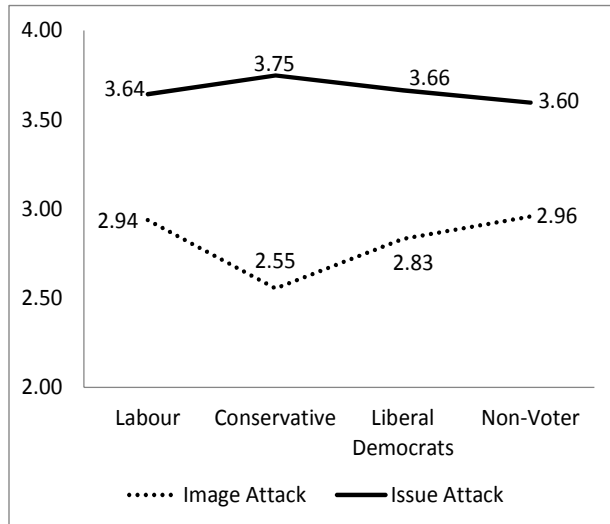
Dependent variable	Partisan	t	df	Sig.
<i>Ad1 Image Attack</i>	Labour	3.49	112	.001*
	Conservative	2.75	163	.007*
	LibDem	3.07	146	.003*
	Non-Voter	.43	221	.667
<i>Ad2 Issue Attack</i>	Labour	.17	112	.863
	Conservative	.42	163	.678
	LibDem	.64	146	.526
	Non-Voter	.24	221	.811

Note: \* denotes significant at  $p < .05$ .

In addition, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they found image and issue attacks acceptable. The results show that only 38.4% found image attack ads acceptable, whilst nearly 69.7% of the respondents found issue attack ads acceptable. *H5* examines in more detail the differences between attitudes towards image attack and issue attack advertising. A paired-samples t-test, including all respondents as one group, indicates that image attack ads are less acceptable than issue attack ads ( $t = -16.005$ ,  $df = 612$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $M_{\text{Image}} = 2.83$ ,  $M_{\text{Issue}} = 3.66$ ). Thus *H5* is supported. Further investigations revealed that Conservative partisans found image-attack ads significantly less acceptable than non-voters (ANOVA,  $F(3,617) = 3.79$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $M_{\text{Conservative}} = 2.55$ ,  $M_{\text{Non-Voter}} = 2.96$ ). However, there were no significant differences between the three partisan groups and non-voters with regards to the issue attack ads ( $F(3,626) = .63$ ,  $p < .59$ ). The results are illustrated in Figure 3.

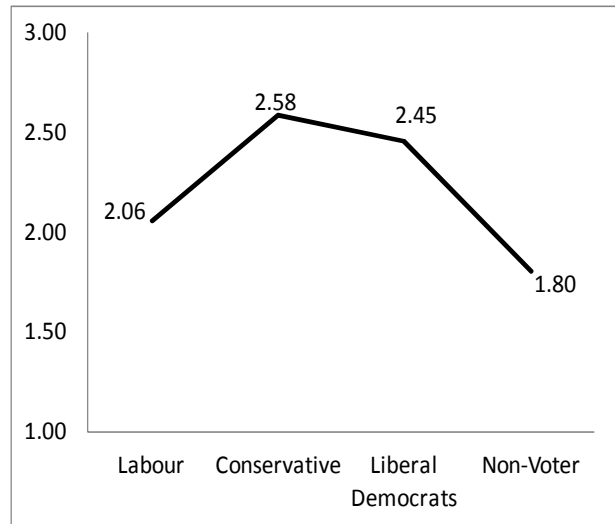
The results shown in Figure 4 indicate a significant difference between two partisan groups and non-voters in their decision to vote. For Conservatives and LibDems – the parties who were not in power at the time – attack ads had a significantly higher influence on their decision to vote ( $M = 2.58$  and  $M = 2.45$ , respectively) than for Labour partisans ( $M = 2.06$ ) and non-voters ( $M = 1.80$ ) ( $F(3,596) = 14.23$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). No significant differences between Labour partisans and non-voters were found with regards to the influence on their decision to vote/not vote. Thus *H6* is partially supported.

**Figure 3: Acceptability of image & issue attack ads**



Note: A lower mean indicates less acceptability. A higher mean indicates more acceptability.

**Figure 4: Influence of attack ads on decision to vote/not vote**



Note: A lower mean indicates lower influence. A higher mean indicates higher influence.

## Discussion

Having presented the findings, we now turn to the discussion. We begin by considering our findings on Labour and Conservative partisans attitudes towards the attack ads employed in the election.

### *The attitudes of Labour and Conservative Partisans towards attack ads (H1a, H1b)*

With respect to young Conservative and Labour partisans, our findings indicate that partisans of the party under attack have a significantly more negative attitude towards the ad attacking their party than partisans from the opposing party. Consequently our young Conservative partisans judged the ad accusing David Cameron of hypocrisy (camera on/off image-attack) more harshly than did Labour partisans. Labour partisans, in turn, evaluated the ad emphasising Labour’s ‘job tax’ (issue-attack) more harshly than the Conservative partisans. Our findings thus concur with previous studies that show evidence of a partisan bias (for example, see Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Goren, 2002; Stevens, et al., 2008; Westen, et al., 2006). Accordingly voters’ party orientation prejudices their responses to election

messages – in this case the attack ads used in the 2010 British general election. Consequently, in line with Einwiller et al (2006) our young partisans bias their processing of information, via ‘motivated reasoning’, in order to reach an emotionally grounded evaluation of the election messages within the advertising, respectively enabling them to reject claims of Cameron’s hypocrisy and Labour’s ‘dubious’ jobs tax employment policy. Therefore, as Goren (2002) observes, it appears that the cues from the advertising may well be being used to facilitate partisans’ sense of evaluating political offerings objectively and rationally (we return to this issue later in our discussion when we consider cognitive and affective attitudes towards the ads). Furthermore, this appraisal bias potentially enables them to reaffirm their sense of identity and belonging to their respective party and their partisan peers – as young Conservatives or young Labourites. Thus, we also see the influence of social identity via their in-groups/out-groups (Duck, et al., 1998; Elder, et al., 2006), as our young partisans portray their party identity through their acceptance of the advertising messages from *their* party, whilst rejecting those of opposing parties (regardless of their merits). Consequently it becomes normalised for Labour partisans to hold more positive attitudes to ads attacking the Conservatives and for Conservative partisans to hold more positive attitudes to ads attacking Labour – as both groups aim to assert their political compliance, loyalty and identity through their message evaluations.

***Third party effect and non-voters’ attitudes towards issue and image-attack ads (H2a, H2b, H3a, H3b)***

With respect to third party voters (LibDem partisans), interestingly they showed similar attitudes towards the ads as the partisans of the party under attack. This supports Stevens et al (2008) who posited that partisans and independents process the same ad differently. This third-party effect is considerably under-researched in political marketing, deeming our

findings of significant merit. Speculating on why LibDems respond in this way, may, in part, reflect the character of LibDem voters and the wider party positioning that has tended not to use attack advertising to the same degree in its election campaigning as either Labour or the Conservatives (a fuller account of this can be found in Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd, 2005; Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd, 2011). This may, perhaps, reflect motivated reasoning that serves to enhance the distinctiveness (in the minds of our young partisans) of a LibDem identity compared with Conservatives and Labour. Their 2010 advertising rhetoric certainly suggested this positioning with their Labour and Conservative ‘broken promises’ narrative (Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd, 2011).

Moving on to consider non-voters’ attitudes towards the ads, non-voters have more negative attitudes towards both ads than the partisan voters not under attack, and their attitudes align themselves with those of partisans of the party under attack in the ad (no significant differences were found between them,  $p > .000$ ). This more negative orientation of our young non-voters may be a reflection of their broader negative attitudes towards electoral politics per se, examined earlier in this paper, for example the issues of low trust, high levels of political cynicism and the irrelevance of electoral politics to their everyday lives. Hence the attack ads serve to confirm and reinforce their negative appraisal of politicians, leaders and parties (Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, Koenig-Lewis, & Zhao, 2013). This is because the ad campaigns portray politicians as not acting in the electorates’ ‘best interests’, which lies at the foundation of building trust. Therefore, image-attack advertising in particular does not serve to cognitively engage non-voters (a justification for its use), but rather to confirm and feed their pre-existing negative political attitudes. Consequently it accords with critics of attack advertising who maintain it discredits political argument and breeds cynicism and political alienation (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Dermody, et al., 2013; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Schenck-Hamlin, et al., 2000; Stevens, 2009). These findings



are thus of specific importance in the youth engagement deliberations of policy makers as well as political marketers.

***Partisans' and non-voters' affective and cognitive evaluations of image and issue-attack ads (H4a, H4b)***

We now examine partisans' and non-voters' attitudes to issue and image-attack ads in more detail, by considering differences between their affective and cognitive ad evaluations. Overall our findings show that the affective evaluation of image-attack advertising is significantly more negative than cognitive evaluation. This effect does not occur for issue-attack advertising. This might reflect the inherently emotive nature of image-attack advertising that serves to denigrate or destroy reputations. It also enhances our partial understanding of how and why attack advertising, through its affective and cognitive foundations, is perceived differently; and, perhaps, why one is more acceptable than the other (an issue we consider further below when we explore the acceptability of issue versus image-attack advertising). Accordingly, with respect to arguments proposing advertising cues aid partisans to objectively and rationally evaluate political offerings (e.g. see Goren, 2002), our findings suggest that while the affective and cognitive blending for issue-attack ads might enable this to occur (with affective responses becoming more cognitive via emotive appraisal),<sup>(7)</sup> this is much more unlikely for image-attack ads. We propose this is because the negative emotions they trigger override efforts to both emotionally and cognitively deliberate on the merits of the message. As Illouz (2009) observes, emotions can limit analytical thinking. Additionally, particularly with strong emotions such as fear, combined with risk, psychological defence mechanisms can be triggered that lead individuals to a state of denial and disempowerment as they refuse to intellectually engage with the messages. There is evidence for this effect in the research of Bohm (2003) and Kollmuss & Agyeman (2002).

The negative emotions triggered by image-attack ads might result in a more pessimistic viewpoint (see for example Nerb & Spada, 2001 on evaluating environmental problems). This scenario is problematic for youth, given their already low levels of trust and higher cynicism; since it adds further credence to the argument that image-attack ads fuel their negative political attitudes, which underlie their sense of political estrangement. Hence once again the cognitive justification for the use of attack advertising in election campaigning is challenged.

We now move on to consider the variation between our partisans' and non-voters' appraisal of attack advertising. With respect to image-attack ads, our results demonstrate significant differences between the affective and cognitive negativity evaluations of all three partisan groups. This difference did not exist for our young non-voters, since their affective and cognitive evaluation strength was essentially the same. Thus, both affect and cognition are equally implicated in non-voters more negative appraisal of image-attack advertising. This again lends credence to critics of attack advertising who claim it undermines political argument and increases youth political cynicism (for example see Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1997; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Dermody, et al., 2013; Yoon, 1995). Dissecting these findings further, most notably it appears that the affective and cognitive evaluation of image-attack advertising is significantly less negative for our young Labour partisans and most negative for our young Conservative partisans. We again see a partisan bias triggering motivated reasoning, with the attack against David Cameron triggering more affective and cognitive outrage from Conservative partisans and greater acceptance from Labour partisans who might have felt there was some decision-making merit in the underlying message. With reference to social identity theory, particularly in/out groups, we may also be seeing Labour partisans portraying their political allegiance bias through their responses to image-attacks against the Conservatives. Finally, interestingly the affective negativity of our LibDem

partisans is close to that of the Conservatives, which perhaps mirrors the third-party effect discussed above.

While there were no significant differences between the affective and cognitive evaluations of our partisans and non-voters with respect to the issue-attack advertising, the negativity appraisals between these groups were significantly different. Our young Labour partisans evaluations were the most negative of all, and our young Conservatives the least negative. Perhaps our Conservative partisans had internalised the norms of Conservative campaigning, which is historically more negative (Lau & Pomper, 2001, 2004). Non-voters' evaluations were also negative, but not to the same degree as our Labour partisans. It is highly likely that Labour partisans were reacting to their party being attacked, whereas for non-voters it was their broader, more impersonalised cynicism emerging.

#### ***Acceptability of issue and image-attack advertising (H5)***

With respect to the acceptability of issue and image-attack ads, our findings confirm that issue-attacks are judged to be far more acceptable than image-attacks. This supports consensus among academics and practitioners that issue-attack advertising is generally considered to be more acceptable, perhaps because it has the potential to be cognitively engaging in line with our earlier synopsis of the attack advertising scholarship. It may well also be more reflective of the perceived adversarial character of elections entailing the battle over policies. This effect gives further ammunition to concerns surrounding the detrimental consequences of attack advertising, particularly those image-attack ads that attack the personalities of candidates. As Kates (1998, p. 1879) observes, “Consistent with prior research, negative advertising which attacks upon personal characteristics was judged by the participants as unacceptable, unethical and unfair play”. As discussed above, combining this with our earlier findings, the scholarship on partisanship and motivated reasoning helps us to

more fully understand why the Conservative partisans judged image-attack ads to be more unacceptable than the Labour/LibDem partisans and non-voters. Reflecting on the Conservative partisans' responses to the 'Camera on/off' ad, perhaps this ad was still very much front-of-mind when they answered "...how acceptable are ads that attack personalities..." It was, after all, their leader's character being attacked. Furthermore, in line with wider opinion polling, they might have expected David Cameron to be the next Prime Minister and thus all personalised attacks against him were unjustified. This concurs with prior studies examining the mediating variable of expectations of the election outcome (Babad & Yacabos, 1993; Ross, et al., 1977).

#### ***The influence of attack ads on (non) voting (H6)***

Finally we consider the influence of attack ads on voting decision-making. We recognise the problems associated with attributing advertising effects directly to behaviour. Thus, even while our findings are statistically significant, we offer them cautiously, with the call for further research.

Interestingly the attack ads had a greater influence on the voting decisions of our young partisans whose party was not in power at the time of the election (Conservative and LibDem) and less influence on our young Labour partisans and non-voters. We can begin to tentatively explain this with reference to the 2010 electoral landscape. Given the well documented unpopularity of Labour and their leader Gordon Brown, Labour partisans found it more difficult to 'process' the ads and thus internalise them as part of their decision-making repertoire; maybe because of their defence mechanisms triggered by their negative emotions. Perhaps they had lost hope in their party and its ability to address the crisis facing the country (recession, debt, unemployment etc). The motivation to win, as challenger parties, gave a stronger motivation to Conservative and LibDem partisans to engage with the ads. Possibly

they had more hope in their respective party to address the economic challenges facing the UK. Certainly, in the run-up to the election, David Cameron (Conservative leader) was reigning high in the opinion polls and Nick Clegg (LibDem leader) had significantly increased the party's popularity following the leader debates to become a serious second challenger party. This could potentially reflect the moderating effect of election outcome expectancy, discussed earlier. Thus, the young Conservative partisans expected their party to win, and the young LibDem partisans expected their party to gain more seats to increase their political voice. This may well have helped to stimulate their motivated reasoning bias.

Overall then, with respect to young partisans, our findings suggest the election advertising is influencing their voting decision-making to some degree, thereby partially supporting American research claiming young voters regard election ads as a legitimate source of electoral information (Kaid, et al., 2007). This legitimacy however might be more applicable to issue-attack than image-attack ad campaigns. This is because our evidence (with other studies) indicates that attack ads that focus on policy issues (issue-attacks) are considered to be more acceptable election messages. Furthermore, issue-attacks are less likely to result in negative emotions; consequently analytical thinking is not compromised. A question mark remains, however, surrounding the consequences of sustained image-attack ad campaigns on youth political cynicism and low trust. This leads us to consider the effects of the attack advertising on non-voters decision-making – their non-voting in contrast to partisans voting decision-making. Our findings show that the attack advertising is having a low influence on their decision not to vote. In many ways this is not surprising given the evidence on young non-voters electoral disengagement. Therefore it would appear that the ads for this group are of limited relevance as an engagement tool; instead serving to reinforce their cynicism towards the ‘damaging’ consequences of politicians and their policies. This might further explain their affective and cognitive negative evaluations of attack advertising

discussed above. Thus we may well be seeing a motivated reasoning effect and an expectations effect for non-voters too, as their cynicism biases their message takeout from the ads. This needs fuller investigation.

## **Conclusions**

Having presented and discussed our findings, we now consider how our study contributes to understanding of electoral attack ad processing. This is followed by a critical appraisal of the relevance of marketing, and specifically attack advertising, to electoral politics.

### ***The contribution of our study***

Our study makes a significant contribution in furthering our understanding of how the British youth electorate process election attack advertising messages both as partisans and non-voters, and how this processing differs between these groups and, to some degree, between ads attacking personalities (image-attacks) and those attacking policies (issue-attacks). Drawing on the theory of motivated reasoning, we have been able to more fully explain how our young first-time voters appraise advertising messages, both cognitively and emotionally, as a result of their political identity and allegiances as partisans and non-voters. Overall our research provides further evidence that young partisans and non-voters do not passively receive information, but are actively involved in motivated reasoning that entails biased information (de)selection and critical appraisal. Thus, partisans' party identification strongly influences their selection, encoding and evaluation of advertising messages in order to defend their social identities. Our study confirms a processing bias whereby partisans seek to maintain their cognitive consistency with their existing attitudes by rating the attack ads generated by their own party as less negative than the partisans under attack.

Furthermore our study adds to knowledge of how third-party partisans and non-voters process attack ads, where currently little research is available. The results demonstrated that third-party voters and non-voters responded significantly more negatively to attack advertising, in a similar way to the partisans under attack. Perhaps third-party voters' and non-voters' cynicism biases their ad message interpretation, but further research is needed to explore these effects in more depth.

The empirical results suggest that partisanship (i.e. social identity with a political party) has to a certain extent an immunising effect against the impact of attack ads generated by their own party. In other words, whilst partisans might in general not agree with attack advertising, such attack ads can result in a defensive reaction entailing a processing bias in order to sustain their loyalty to their in-group. However, partisans' and non-voters' acceptance of image-attack ads was significantly lower than that of issue-attack ads. This provokes the question, at what level of negativity a tipping point is reached at which even partisans cannot accept negative attack ads on the basis of defending their social identities. Thus strengthening critics who are challenging why and whether image-attack advertising should be used in election campaigning, particularly under the guise of an effective tool for electoral involvement and mobilisation.

Consequently our ongoing research in political advertising and youth consumption of electoral politics raises a plethora of questions that facilitate a much needed more critical appraisal of the relevance of marketing theory and practice to electoral politics. This evaluation is becoming increasingly important, with increasing consideration being given to what marketing is doing to politics and, in turn what politics is doing to the reputation of marketing.<sup>(8)</sup> Given the focus of our research, we narrow this question to critically consider the use of attack election advertising as a means of electoral engagement.

### *The relevance of marketing to political campaigning theory and practice*

We begin our critique by considering political marketing consultants, campaign strategists and political leaders' belief that negative attack ad campaigns win elections. The evidence, including our sustained research in political advertising and youth engagement, suggests strongly that this winning mentality is not a universal truth. Accordingly the effects of negative campaigning vary by sociodemographic-psychographic segments and by message type ranging from the less adversarial comparative negative campaigns to the more antagonistic attack ad campaigns, and in particular image-attacks. Consequently politicians and their advisors need to consider who they are attempting to cognitively engage with which types of negative ads, why these ads might disengage some segments, and what the consequences of this might be for liberal democracy.

Negative campaigning is not all the same; neither are its effects, nor the sense-making of different electoral segments. Thus a 'blind belief' in it signals a failure to understand advances in message construction and its communication and audience interactions that characterise contemporary marketing. Consequently the way in which election attack advertising is currently conceived is a misrepresentation of marketing; fundamentally it is a misunderstanding of the philosophy of marketing which is premised on exchange and positive value propositions to gain competitive advantage and market growth.

Building on this 'winning mentality', we now consider politicians' rhetoric on electoral engagement and the potential paradoxes that ensue. Within the UK and other Western democracies, political leaders have stressed the need to rebuild public trust in politicians and the electoral process in order to re-engage them. However their emphasis on winning, which entails a plethora of attack advertising messages that instil fear and anxiety, weaken hope and fuel cynicism and mistrust, undermines any efforts for trust-building (and lends credence to voter demobilisation concerns expressed by critics of attack advertising).



As we have argued previously, winning and engagement are strategically different, albeit politicians may not always want to recognise the distinction. Consequently, unlike marketing per se, which is premised on growing customers/volunteers/members and the marketplace, electoral campaign marketing aims to shrink the voter 'market place'. This is because it is premised on mobilising a parties own partisans, whilst demobilising opposing partisans and tactical voters so they do not vote. This is particularly problematic for a youth electorate predisposed to disengage from the political process. Consequently claims that trust-building is important are paradoxical. The evidence strongly signals marketing strategies to build trust are invisible in election campaigning.<sup>(9)</sup>

Thus, what kind of marketing is political marketing as it is currently theorised and practiced? Is it little more than a collection of tactics designed to fulfil the ambitions of politicians, with disregard for the underlying premises of marketing? If so, then we argue what we are witnessing is political marketing as a hybrid form of propaganda.<sup>(10)</sup> This is very evident within the realms of attack election advertising, and particularly image-attack ads; given the evidence we have presented showing its effects on the political trust and distrust of British youth.<sup>(10)</sup> This raises reputational consequences for both politics and marketing, and concern over the marriage between them. Responsibility is therefore central to the future credibility of political marketing, and this could begin with a serious debate on why political advertising in the UK remains unregulated.

If political marketing is to advance conceptually and professionally, emphasis needs to be given to how it can be used positively to nourish the electorates' engagement with electoral politics, particularly given electoral cynicism. In so doing it has the potential to contribute to the youth engagement deliberations of policy makers as well as political marketing scholars. Consequently as the 2015 British election draws closer, the contribution of marketing to political campaigning should be residing within the strategic formulation of

positive and evidential, information-rich marketing campaigns, pre and during the election period, that utilise the strategies of trust (re)building.

### **Limitations and further research**

A number of limitations of the study should be noted. Firstly, responses to only two stimulus ads were measured in the paper – a Conservative issue-attack ad and a Labour image-attack ad. Thus the findings might not be generalisable across all partisan groups and non-voters. Further research should adopt a more symmetrical approach by randomly assigning respondents to issue and image attack ads from all political parties including the third-party. This would also avoid a potential framing effect with respondents to indicate that the parties only use one type of attack. Secondly, the results revealed a sample self-selection bias, i.e. a higher proportion of students and claimed voters participated in the survey. This makes generalisation to the 18-22 year-old first-time voter population more difficult. Thirdly, we asked our survey respondents directly what influence the two attack ads had on their voting and thus assumed that they are aware of these effects. We do recognise the difficulties involved in isolating the direct effects of advertising. Therefore future research could adopt a third-person technique to capture these influences, thereby decreasing the potential response bias.

Overall our research raises many important issues that provide a rich foundation for further research that can remain focused on youth or be expanded to include older electoral segments and other message platforms. For example, it would also be interesting to examine the effects of motivated reasoning bias on other forms of mediated and unmediated election communication, e.g. social media campaigns, within which the lives of many young people reside. This might also be pertinent as the role of advertising shifts in future election campaigns.

With respect to our youth data, its emerging complexity signals the need for fuller interpretative enquiry to more fully explain the ‘why’ of our findings. For example, we need to more fully understand what it means for young first-time voters to be partisans and non-voters – with respect to their identity(s), message processing, political attitudes and their electoral behaviour in the short, medium and long term. Another fruitful area of research would be to more fully investigate if, like our young partisans, our young non-voters also employ motivated reasoning biases in their message takeout from the ads, and, if so what the foundations of this bias are, for example higher cynicism, low trust. Related to processing bias, it would also be pertinent to examine whether expectations of the election outcome acts as a mediating variable in explaining the evaluations and behaviour of young partisans and non-voters.

We leave you with this final thought from the Economist (2013, p. 11) “Fundamental opinions about society are like bones: they are shaped in youth”.

## Notes

1. Reported turnout & non-voting for 18-24 year olds: 2001 – 39% turnout, 61% non-voting. 2005 - 37% turnout, 63% non-voting. 2010 - 44% turnout, 56% non-voting. (2010). Source: Ipsos MORI statistics (2010); (Electoral Commission, 2001, 2005). While 2010 statistics show an increase in turnout compared with 2001 and 2005, this is still considerably lower than turnout during the 1980s and 1990s (see note 2).
2. Reported turnout & non-voting for 18-24 year olds: 1987 - 66% turnout, 34% non-voting (Swaddle & Heath, 1992). 1992 - 61% turnout, 39% non-voting (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). 1997 - 68% turnout, 32% non-voting (Jowell & Park, 1998).
3. A wealth of multidisciplinary studies has investigated political participation. However, as Tonge and Mycock (2010) observe, many of the disengagement studies conflate the attitudes of broad populations, not youth specifically, and thus their conclusions need to be treated with caution. Accordingly in our appraisal of the disengagement research (appendix 1), we have focused on investigations that concern youth specifically and, where appropriate, extracted the findings pertinent to youth in non-segmented inquiries.
4. Interviewers were instructed to select every fifth individual that they felt would fit the sampling criteria (British citizen, 18-22 years old). Filter questions were used to ensure the individual met these criteria. If they did not, they were rejected and the process began again. Once the interview was complete, the selection process then continued.
5. While official records of voter turnout are not completely accurate, figures from Ipsos MORI (2010) report 33% of the 18-24 year olds voted for Conservatives, 34.1% for Labour and 33% for LibDems in 2010. Consequently, there is slight underrepresentation of Labour voters in our sample. However direct comparison is problematic because the MORI sample is broader than our 18-22 year olds, which means they included older and non-first time voters in their sampling.
6. The difficulty our interviewers experienced in securing completed questionnaires took two forms. Firstly refusals and secondly the level of respondent encouragement needed to complete the questionnaire. 1000 completed questionnaires were sought and 733 were fully completed in the timescale.
7. Emotions have multiple dimensions, one of which is appraisal. Emotive appraisal is the emotional assessment of the merit of the incoming stimulus (message). This enables the receiver to accept or reject the message, for example the image-attack ad, depending on whether it is 'good' or 'bad' for them. For a fuller account please see: (1) Arnold, M.B. (1970). *Feelings and Emotion: The Loyola Symposium*. Academic Press, New York, London. (2) Lazarus, R.S. (1991). *Emotion and Adaptation*. New York: Oxford University Press. (3) Nyer, P. U. (1997). A study of relationships between cognitive appraisals and consumption emotions. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25 (Fall), 296-304
8. For example 'What is Marketing doing to Politics?' was recently the theme of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Political Marketing conference hosted by Stockholm University Business School (September 2013). <http://www.fek.su.se/en/IPMC/>  
It has also been the subject of several books, for example Savigny, H. (2008). *The Problem of Political Marketing*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.
9. A fuller account of this can be found in Dermody, J., & Hanmer-Lloyd, S. (2005). An exploration of the advertising ambitions and strategies of the 2005 British General

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10. This argument was advanced in a keynote address by Professor Nicholas O'Shaughnessy – '*The Dark Side of Political Marketing*' at the 7<sup>th</sup> IPMC (2013). It was also raised and discussed by Dr Janine Dermody in her research presentation and as a member of a special panel on '*What's marketing doing to Politics?*' See note 8.

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## Appendix 1: Youth Electoral Engagement Studies

Youth Political Attitudes and Behaviour	Studies
Turnout at elections is lower for the youth electorate compared with older voters, and the drop in turnout indicates an increasing predisposition amongst this younger age group not to vote in elections.	Abrial et al (2003); Anderson and Goodyear-Grant (2008); Berman (1997); Bromley and Curtice (2002); Curtice and Jowell (1997); EC (2003); Feldmann-Feldmann-Wojtachnia et al (2010); Franklin (2004); Gerber et al (2003); Johnston et al (2006); Mulgan and Wilkinson (1997); Muxel (2001); Niemi and Hepburn (1995); Norris (2003); Nye et al (1997); Park (1999); Paul 2010; Pickel (2002); Pintor and Gratschew (2002); Reinhardt and Tillmann (2002); Russell et al (2002).
Young people are less interested in national political issues than older adults; and they know less about the election process, particularly those from economically and educationally impoverished backgrounds.	Bromley and Curtice (2002); Park (1999); Parry et al (1992); Pintor and Gratschew (2002); Pickel (2002); Pirie and Worcester (1998, 2000); Reinhardt and Tillmann (2002); Russell et al (2002); White et al (2000).
Young people perceive politicians and governments as dishonest, untrustworthy and ineffectual - contributing to their belief that voting is a 'worthless' act, or creating anger resulting in the withholding of their vote.	Bromley and Curtice (2002); Delli Carpini (2000); Dermody et al (2010); Eliasoph (1998); Fieldhouse et al (2007); Mulgan and Wilkinson (1997); Park (1999); Parry et al (1992); Pickel (2002); Pintor and Gratschew (2002); Reinhardt and Tillmann (2002); White et al (2000).
Large proportions of young people feel politically alienated from their society, and are therefore not voting.	Dermody and Scullion (2005); Fieldhouse et al (2007); Halpern (2003); Huggins (2001); Mulgan and Wilkinson (1997); Nye et al (1997); Pintor and Gratschew (2002); Pirie and Worcester (1998, 2000); Putnam (2000); White et al (2000).
Globalisation is undermining the credibility and authority of national governments - destabilizing faith in a nation's elected officials and reinforcing youth electoral apathy, or triggering them to politically engage through protest as political activists – a state of alter-globalisation.	Beck (1997); Bromley et al (2001); Cerny (1999); Crozier et al. (1975); Dermody and Scullion (2005); Muxel (2001); Pleyers (2005, 2010); Touraine (1999).
Electoral civic-mindedness is less strong in young people than it is in older adults, contributing to non-voting behaviour, or more self-centred voting behaviour.	Abrial et al (2003); Anderson and Goodyear-Grant (2008); Bromley and Curtice (2002); Halpern (2003); Mulgan and Wilkinson (1997); Park (1999); Pirie and Worcester (1998, 2000); White et al (2000).

Source: Dermody, J, Hanmer-Lloyd, S., Koenig-Lewis, N. and Zhao, A.L. (2013), *Attack Advertising as an Agent of British Youth Political Disempowerment? A Review of Empirical Evidence from the 2010 British General Election*. In R. Scullion, R. Gerodimos, D. Jackson and D. Lilleker (Eds.), *The Media, Political Participation and Empowerment*, Routledge Research in Political Communication, p. 41.

## Appendix 2: Stimulus ads

Ad1: Image-attack ad Stimulus Poster	Brief Description
<p data-bbox="193 360 411 392"><b>Camera On/Off</b></p>  <p data-bbox="193 775 671 842">Source: Saatchi &amp; Saatchi (used with permission)</p>	<p data-bbox="794 324 1362 938">Ad was designed to show the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of David Cameron – what he said in public and what he thought privately. ‘Saving the NHS’ was a salient, hugely emotive election issue. Two ads attack David Cameron on two issues – the NHS and gay adoption. This ad implies the Tories would cut the ‘right to see a cancer specialist within two weeks’ (which they strongly denied). The ad implies a lack of integrity and vote chasing. It also resonates with accusations of ‘Dave the Chameleon’ – changing his promises (colours) to remain popular with the electorate (and win votes). This has the potential to trigger emotions – appraisal-cognitive deliberation.</p>

Ad2: Issue-attack ad Stimulus Poster	Brief Description
<p data-bbox="193 1120 523 1151"><b>Let’s Cut, Stop, Restore</b></p>  <p data-bbox="193 1476 624 1543">Source: M&amp;C Saatchi (used with permission)</p>	<p data-bbox="794 1084 1362 1662">Launched approx 2 weeks into election campaign (20th April), this collection of 3 ads aimed to refocus attention back on Cameron and his ‘big society’. The job tax ad is the only one to directly reference labour ‘policy’. Attack is more oblique, overlaid with positive message framing entailing very bold copy featuring confident messages on Tory policies on taxes (benefits &amp; discipline). These messages would resonate very strongly with Tory voters. Suggests a ‘hearts and mind’ approach to retain Tory voters and capture floating voters, particularly those thinking of voting LibDem (given this debate at this election).</p>

### Appendix 3: Sample Profile

<b>Demographic Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b> (based on 641 valid responses)	Male	302	47.1
	Female	339	52.9
<b>Age</b> (based on 645 valid responses)	18	90	13.9
	19	124	19.2
	20	143	22.2
	21	143	22.2
	22	145	22.5
<b>Employment status</b> (based on 645 valid responses)	Full-time student	415	64.2
	Employed	167	25.9
	Unemployed	42	6.5
	Other	21	3.3
<b>Party voted for in 2010 British General Election</b>	Conservative	164	25.4
	Labour	113	17.5
	LibDem	147	22.8
	Non-Voters	222	34.4
<b>Split of voters by party</b> (based on 424 voters)	Conservative	164	38.7
	Labour	113	26.7
	LibDem	147	34.7