Signals and Screens

Trace how coverage, polling, and advertising shape a local election.

SS24.USG.9 "Explain the role of the media in the political process, including how they shape public opinion. 9a Analyze how public opinion is measured through polling..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two choices by news outlets that could shape what voters consider important, and circle two limits of the poll. Number the television and digital ad strategies 1 and 2 so you can compare them.

The Bellport Bus Debate

1. In the fictional city of Bellport, a mayoral race turns on a proposal to extend late-night bus service. A television station opens its election report with a worker describing a long walk home after the last bus. The report also interviews a shop owner worried that higher fares could reduce customers. By choosing these voices and leading with the worker, the station makes transit feel urgent without telling viewers how to vote. A second outlet leads with fare costs instead. Both reports can be accurate, yet their choices may change which concerns voters discuss and which questions candidates must answer.

2. A Bellport newspaper polls 600 randomly selected registered voters. Asked, 'Would you support extending late-night bus service if it requires a small fare increase?' 49 percent say yes, 46 percent say no, and 5 percent are unsure. The newspaper reports an approximate four-percentage-point margin of sampling error for each percentage. Because the support and opposition ranges overlap, the poll does not establish a clear lead. It also cannot tell whether registered voters will actually turn out. If people who ignore poll invitations differ from respondents, that nonresponse can distort results even when a sample was randomly selected.

3. The campaigns respond differently to the coverage and poll. One buys a television ad shown to a broad local audience, featuring riders who want later buses. The other purchases digital ads aimed at residents who have clicked on stories about fares and asks viewers to donate. Digital targeting can reach a narrower audience, while television can reach many viewers at once. Both choices cost money, and online donations can help pay for additional ads. After the poll circulates, reporters ask candidates about undecided voters. Ad views and clicks show exposure or interest, not proof that the ads changed votes.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How might the two outlets' different opening choices shape discussion of the bus proposal?

2. A campaign claims the poll proves most voters support the proposal. Use the results and one limit of the poll to assess that claim.

3. Why could the poll be misleading even though voters were randomly selected?

4. Compare the campaigns' television and digital ad choices. How could each affect spending, and what can ad clicks not show?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A city council candidate supports opening a public cooling center. Write a 75 to 105 word media plan that includes one television ad, one digital ad, and a responsible way to poll voters. Explain how the ads could affect public opinion or campaign spending, and identify one way poll results or ad metrics might mislead.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.9

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two choices by news outlets that could shape what voters consider important, and circle two limits of the poll. Number the television and digital ad strategies 1 and 2 so you can compare them. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How might the two outlets' different opening choices shape discussion of the bus proposal?	**Leading with the worker may make the need for late-night service seem urgent. Leading with fares may focus discussion on costs.**
2	A campaign claims the poll proves most voters support the proposal. Use the results and one limit of the poll to assess that claim.	**The claim is not supported. Support is 49 percent, not a majority, and the support and opposition ranges overlap. Registered voters surveyed may not turn out.**
3	Why could the poll be misleading even though voters were randomly selected?	**If people who did not respond hold different views from those who did, nonresponse could distort the results.**
4	Compare the campaigns' television and digital ad choices. How could each affect spending, and what can ad clicks not show?	**The television ad reaches a broad audience and costs campaign money. The targeted digital ads also cost money but may bring in donations for more ads. Clicks cannot prove that an ad changed votes.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would buy a television ad showing residents who need cooling and a city official explaining operating costs. The broad broadcast could make heat safety more visible, but airtime would use much of the campaign budget. I would also buy digital ads linking to a detailed funding plan and a donation page, which could finance more outreach. An independent poll would randomly sample eligible city voters and publish its exact question and margin of sampling error. Nonresponse might still skew the results. Clicks would show interest, not that viewers changed their votes.

Accept other well-supported explanations of how coverage affects which issues voters consider. For the plan, look for distinct television and digital strategies, a sound polling method, and a specific caution about interpreting results or metrics.