The Ad Decision

How media choices shape voter messages and campaign costs

SS24.USG.9b "Analyze the influence of television and digital media on elections and campaign spending."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two possible effects on voters, circle two spending decisions or costs, and write 1 beside a television trade-off and 2 beside a digital media trade-off.

One Race, Many Screens

1. In a fictional House race, candidate Elena Ruiz has enough money for one week of television ads during the district's evening news. Her team buys the spots because many likely voters watch the same broadcast, and the station must make its political ad purchases publicly available. The ad repeats an argument about a factory closure, so viewers may link Ruiz's opponent to lost jobs. Yet the broadcast also reaches people who cannot vote in the district. Production and airtime costs may leave less money for canvassing, while repeated exposure can make a candidate's name familiar.

2. Ruiz's opponent, Marcus Lee, puts much of his budget into short videos on a social media platform. His campaign can test messages, see which clips draw responses, and pay to show different ads to groups defined by location or interests. That flexibility can help him reach younger voters who rarely watch evening news, sometimes at a lower cost per impression than television. But a click does not prove a changed vote, and narrow audiences may never see the claims shown to other groups. Staff must spend time making and monitoring many versions, while ad prices can rise as campaigns compete.

3. Outside the campaigns, a political committee pays for its own video criticizing Ruiz. If it spends independently, it cannot coordinate that ad with Lee's campaign; the purchase can still shape what voters hear. Federal rules require qualifying independent spending to be reported, although viewers may not easily identify every original donor behind some groups. Television stations maintain public political advertising files, while online ad transparency varies by platform and applicable rules. As each side answers attacks with new ads, media choices can drive up spending without proving that any particular ad determined the result. Voters need to ask who paid, who saw each message, and what evidence supports it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How might Ruiz's television purchase influence voters while limiting another campaign activity?

2. Why might Lee spend on several targeted videos instead of one broadcast ad, and why would clicks alone be weak evidence of success?

3. How can the committee's spending affect the race without coordinating with Lee, and what might voters still struggle to learn?

4. How could competing television and online ads raise spending without proving that either side's ads decided the election?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A mayoral candidate has $12,000 for ads and wants to reach older voters who regularly watch local television news and younger voters who mostly use social media. Divide the budget between television and digital ads, then explain how your choices could affect voters, one spending trade-off, and one limit on what the ads can prove about the election.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.9b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two possible effects on voters, circle two spending decisions or costs, and write 1 beside a television trade-off and 2 beside a digital media trade-off. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How might Ruiz's television purchase influence voters while limiting another campaign activity?	**Repeated ads may make Ruiz familiar or link Lee to lost jobs, but production and airtime costs may leave less money for canvassing.**
2	Why might Lee spend on several targeted videos instead of one broadcast ad, and why would clicks alone be weak evidence of success?	**Targeted videos can reach younger voters who rarely watch the news and may cost less per impression. Clicks do not show whether anyone changed a vote.**
3	How can the committee's spending affect the race without coordinating with Lee, and what might voters still struggle to learn?	**Its independent ad can influence what voters hear about Ruiz, but voters may struggle to identify every original donor behind the committee.**
4	How could competing television and online ads raise spending without proving that either side's ads decided the election?	**Each side may pay for new ads to answer the other's attacks, increasing costs. The passage says no particular ad can be shown to have determined the result.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would spend $5,000 on television spots and $7,000 on social media ads. Television could reach older news viewers, while digital ads could reach younger voters who might miss the broadcast. Paying for television leaves less money for canvassing, and making several digital ads takes staff time. Views and clicks may show that people encountered an ad, but they cannot prove that it changed votes or decided the election.

Accept different allocations that total $12,000 if the student explains a plausible voter effect, a spending trade-off, and a valid limit on claims about election results.