

# PAID MEDIA IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS – DOWN BUT NOT OUT

BY JEFF BRINDLE | 10/06/16 8:44am

Political advertising on network T.V. is down from 2012, according to the Wall Street Journal.

The Journal stated that Kantar Media, CMAG, a top ad tracking agency, reported that the outlook for 2016 is that \$2.8 billion will be spent on broadcast political advertising.

Broadcast, or network T.V. is distinguished from cable or satellite outlets. Thus, these figures do not include spending on cable or satellite television advertising.

Nevertheless, if correct, this year's outlays on broadcast television political advertising will be about \$300 million less than in the presidential election year 2012.

This figure is about \$500 million less than Kantar Media estimated would be spent this year.

Much of this year's decrease in broadcast advertising can be laid at the feet of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

He is spending far less than candidates of the recent past.

So far, Trump and his Super PAC supporters have spent \$78 million on broadcast television ads. Through election day 2012, Mitt Romney and his backers spent \$550 million on broadcast advertising.

According to the Journal, Trump is planning "to air \$100 million on T.V. ads before election day." That's over \$370 million less than was spent by Romney four years ago.

As shown in the Wall Street Journal, Trump's spending pales in comparison to that of his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton.

Clinton and her Super PAC allies have spent \$325 million on broadcast television advertising compared to the \$78 million spent by Trump.

The question becomes: is this the beginning of a trend or an anomaly due to the extraordinary ability of Trump to gain free media coverage and to draw attention to his campaign through social media.

My guess is that it is an anomaly and that at least for the foreseeable future campaigns, both national and state, will be run in the more conventional fashion using the tried and true methods of paid mass advertising and get-out-the vote efforts.

There are reasons for this. There are not many candidates, if any, that can match Trump's singular personality and P.R. instincts; the anti-establishment mood will not last forever; and the inclination to substitute social media for more traditional media will not consume the entire population for at least a few years to come.

For example, New Jersey will hold its gubernatorial election next year. For all intents and purposes that campaign has already begun, earlier than ever.

While social media will be used more extensively than in gubernatorial campaigns of the past, it will in no way approximate methods of messaging undertaken through cable T.V., radio, and direct mail.

In the general election of 2013 almost 80 percent of all spending by the two gubernatorial candidates went for mass communications. This percentage consisted mainly of television and radio and to a lesser extent print media, including direct mail.

Very little, if at all, went for social media advertising. Moreover, given the fact that New Jersey lies between the New York and Philadelphia media markets, the opportunity for candidates to obtain free media coverage is negligible.

Therefore, next year's gubernatorial election will be conducted in the traditional manner, with spending on television and other traditional means of mass advertising to rise.

In fact, as noted above, the campaign for governor is off to a fast start, and that includes spending.

Independent groups supporting potential candidates have already raised \$22 million and spent \$8 million, and it's not even 2017- the actual election year. If the trend in spending by 501c groups and Super PACs continues, New Jersey can expect spending by outside groups to far and away exceed the \$41 million spent by these groups in 2013.

Of course, this spending is in addition to that which will be done by the candidates themselves. Fortunately, New Jersey supports a Gubernatorial Public Financing Program that is considered the gold standard for such programs throughout the nation.

With independent groups becoming so dominant in state elections the public financing program is needed more than ever. In providing matching funds to candidates it allows them to retain control over their messages without having to surrender their campaigns to these often anonymous groups.

Moreover, the program further assures that the public will again be subject to a traditional campaign with an emphasis on the important issues facing the state.

This year's election cycle is out of the norm. Next year will be different, though, with a return to normalcy.

There is one downside, however. Independent group activity holds the potential for totally dominating the gubernatorial campaign and drowning the messages of the candidates in a sea of issues driven by outside groups.

The gubernatorial program will help to offset this influence. Reform legislation as introduced by Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick and Democratic Assemblyman Troy Singleton will also have a positive influence over the campaign.

Let's hope these reform measures are enacted, and soon.

*Jeff Brindle is the Executive Director of the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission.*