**Title: Political Cash Cows: The Profitability of TV Political Advertising and the Florida Senate Race of 2018**

The 2018 Midterm Elections provided opportunities for television stations in battleground states to reap the benefits of heated campaigns. This study looks at the West Palm Beach, Florida DMA and the amount of money spent on political ads at the four network affiliates. Specifically, this study focuses on the Florida Senate race that was won by 1,033 votes at the cost of $213 million dollars.

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**Introduction:**

The 2018 Midterm Elections in the United States resulted in more money being spent on advertising than any other midterm election in US history. Local television stations were bombarded with more money than the amount spent on the 2016 Presidential Election (Axios, 2018). According to Advertising Analytics, approximately $2.7 billion was spent on local broadcast television ads. This study looks at how one local station, from a large news corporation, managed the political transactions from a quantitative and ethnographic perspective.

According to OpenSecrets.org, $5.2 billion dollars was spent on the 2018 Midterm Election. CNN reported $5.7 billion was spent. The discrepancy between the two indicates how difficult it is to accurately account for all the money that was spent.

There are 210 television designated market areas (DMAs) in the United States. New York is the #1 market with 7.2 million houses using television. The smallest is Glendive, California at 3,590. The rates charged in the New York DMA is considerable greater than Glendive, California.

Florida is a swing state.  It is a very important political battleground.  The state consists of eight DMAs.  The state is very diverse from the multicultural city of Miami, to the rural counties of Panama City. Florida was the home of the most expensive Senate race in the United States. Incumbent Senator Bill Nelson was challenged by the former governor Rick Scott, who ran for Senate because his term limit expired. This study looks at West Palm Beach, Florida DMA. The DMA was a strong Nelson area and an area Scott wanted to penetrate. Scott would have spent twice as much money on local TV ads than Nelson. Nelson was helped by political action committees (PACs) and issue groups that bought additional ads at the four TV affiliates.

West Palm Beach has a population of 829,900 houses using television (HUT). It is market #37.

It is considered a mid-size market. Within each DMA, there are typically four network affiliates.  There can be more stations within the designated market area. But there are usually four network affiliates in each market. The networks provide the programming for the station. West Palm Beach, has four network affiliates. WPTV (NBC), WFLX (FOX), WPBF (ABC), and WPEC (CBS).

At the local level, the networks have little say on day to day operations.  The affiliates are owned by separate corporations.  The corporations are now sharing resources and “hug” their work to save money.  E.W. Scripps is the focus of this research. E.W. Scripps consolidates their media buying of political ads.  The buying is completed by a central media buyer and then dispersed to the affiliates.  The affiliates provide a national sales manager to deal with the disbursement. Other corporations have the local affiliate negotiate directly with the media buyers, who are working with candidates.

The Florida Senate Race was the most expensive political race in the United States.  According to OpenSecrets.org, $215,640,470 was spent on the Senate race. The total spent can be divided into two groups, candidate money and political action committee or issue group money. The candidates raised almost $119 million dollars and the ‘outside spending’ was close to $97 million dollars.  Outside spending includes super PACS and “dark money” organizations. The 2018 Florida Senate race raised $96,999,464 dollars in ‘outside spending’.

In the United States, a political candidate can purchase time on any local television station in a market. Candidates will purchase commercial time in as many stations within the designated market area as they can, especially if it is a key battleground area for their campaign. The candidate will designate a media buyer to purchase the commercial spots. The television stations are required by the FCC to sell the spots at the “Lowest unit rate” or LUR.

This study is not an attempt to look at content analysis or persuasion. This study examines how candidates and special interest groups buy commercial time, and what influences and regulations are placed on the marketplace of political advertising.

WPTV-TV Sales Manager, David Griscavage says, “The whole process of political advertising is mind boggling. TV won’t die as long as there are political ads.”

**Literature Review:**

The use of political advertising is a significant method of forming political knowledge. Atkin and Heald (1976) found that political ads help voters identify election issues and recognize the connections between candidates and issue positions. Message repetition in political knowledge is important in retention of ideas and candidate recognition. Studies as far back as 1948 observed that the mass media had a marked effect on presidential elections by redefining issues the voters had no knowledge or interest (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948). The early findings confirmed that the media could shape what people think about in arriving at a decision.

Fernandes (2013) examined how repetition affects evaluation of and information seeking political candidates. The evaluation of the sponsor candidate of a negative political ad will increase until a moderate number of repetitions is presented, after that it decrease. There can be a ‘backlash effect’ when too much repetition of a negative ad. The repetition of negative political advertising can potentially benefit the evaluation of the target candidate. The amount of money spent on ads is directly related to repetition. Message repetition and negative information are an effective tool to enhance the voters’ acceptance about the claims against the candidate.

In 1974, Congress passed amendments to the FEC Act, to limit the contributions and expenditures of campaigns. When you spend money but don’t give it directly to the candidate or the candidate’s campaign it is called expenditure. The idea was that you the giver was spending money to voice your political belief. Limits were placed on how much could be spent to do so (Smith, 2018). These amendments could be applied to any form of expression toward a political candidate.

From the start of broadcast television, it was obvious that the role of local television stations in election campaigns was not a passive exercise. Decisions made by media personnel determined what information becomes available to audiences and what is not (Graber, 1989). Commercial advertisements, regulated by FCC rules, appear to be devoid of agenda setting but the structure and method of purchasing airtime is a “money chase” according to McChesney (2004). The desire to acquire the limited commercial time leads to a race of spending to grab the most spots.

Atkin and Heald (1976) made the correlation between voters’ knowledge of the candidates and their issue positions. The frequency of viewing commercials is directly proportion to the amount of knowledge the voter has of issues and candidates. There is a causal influence in the relationship. Voters who sought out information were more likely to learn from the ads than those who passively watched the ads. McChesney (2000) believes that people are tuning out the ads and that the only way to reach reluctant voters effectively then is to bombard them with ads during entertainment programs and sports events. To reach the most people, the ads must be aired during the most popular programming and therefore, are the costliest ads to buy.

Kaid and Sanders (1978) determined that voters recall more information from image ads than from issue ads. Television’s visual imagery heightens a candidate’s image at the expense of issues.

Atkin and Heald (1976) concluded that a well financed political advertising campaign can serve to (1) increase the electorate’s level of knowledge about the candidate and issue positions, (2) elevate emphasized issues and attributes higher on the voters’ agenda of decisional criteria, (3) stimulate the electorate’s interest in the campaign, (4) produce more positive effect toward the candidate as a person, and (5) intensify polarization of evaluations of the candidate.

Presidential candidate Bill Bradley once remarked, “Today’s political campaigns function as collection agencies for broadcasters. You simply transfer the money from contributors to television stations.” (McChesney, Newman and Scott, 2005). Local television stations and their parent corporations benefit from the profits of the political spending on television.

The foundations of business and capitalism apply to television stations and political campaigns, simply, ‘The more money you have, the more influence you have in the marketplace.’ (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006). Most TV stations adhere to a market model of business. Markets are undemocratic and in the United States it is difficult to temporarily change an undemocratic market into a public interest entity. The FCC stipulates that 45 days before a primary and 60 days before a general election, the television station must adhere to a mandated cultural shift by giving candidates the lowest available rate of commercial spots. Regulating the costs is foreign to any commercial enterprise in the United States.

The FCC rules are strict but somewhat vague. The rules do not inhibit political advertisement but provide an environment for dark money to dictate frequency and exposure of ads. McChesney (2000) claims that early in the FCC’s existence the agency had to assure the profitability of the industry it was regulating before it could make public service demands. In that regard, the FCC viewed the public service demands were limited and easily undermined or squashed by the commercial interests. McChesney views the regulation of the broadcasting industry an abject failure.

McChesney (2000) exasperates that commercial and political interests exercise their power during elections. He views the US electoral process a special interest grab bag. A massive war chest is essential to produce and run TV ads. The dependency on contributions favors candidates who appeal to the richest one-quarter of 1 percent of Americans. The First Amendment, unlike most commercial advertisements, protects the ads. Therefore, any half-truth, decontextualized and misleading fact, or even outright lie can be aired (McChesney, 2000).

The large cache of funding provides political advertising that presents a narrative and characters in a “ritual drama” (Burke, 1973) or what Smith and Golden (1988) called “Soap Opera” anecdotes whereas subsequent airing of commercial spots reinforce the themes. The more the spots are repeated, the more likely the intended narrative becomes thematic. Thematic continuity is an essential for politicians to provide a viable solution to the concerns based on the constructed political reality they create. Walker (1990) utilized the findings of Schramm (1954) and Becker (1978) to support the notion that the individual’s ‘previously accumulated experience with the subject matter, the degree of saturation in the current communication environment, and the individual’s exposure to that media environment are of prime importance in predicting the impact of a message’. Saturation of the message relies on commercial air time. More expenditure of campaign funding will result in greater saturation.

Anonymous donors can be viewed as a challenge to the democratic process. Outside groups not directly affiliated with a candidate or a political party have played a role in general elections (Center for Responsible Politics, 2012; Fowler, 2012. These anonymous organizations have taken advantage of tax laws and Federal Election Commission (FEC) rulings. The organizations can raise unlimited funds. In 2006, 100% of the donors revealed their spending on political ads. By 2010, only two-thirds of the donors came forward (Public Citizen, 2010). Dowling and Wichowsky (2013) revealed that despite the Court’s acceptance of disclosure requirements, some donors have been able to remain anonymous through a combination of regulatory gaps new and complicated financing schemes, and timing lags in when donor information is made public. Television ad spending, witnessed in this study, has loop holes that benefit the issue oriented or donor groups. Television affiliates have an option of revealing the non-candidate spending purchases.

The average citizen may or may not be impacted by the disclosure of the political spending but it may keep the possible motivations of the donor secret, as they are not exposed. Dowling and Wichowsky (2013) believe that despite the Court’s arguments in favored of disclosure and the alarms raised over rising anonymity in group-sponsored appeals, what individuals remember and infer from such ads is unknown.

Young voters are steering away from traditional broadcasting and find most of their political information online. The 2004 Presidential election witnessed a migration to the Internet with 41% of voters saying they got some of their news about the campaign from the Internet (Kaid and Postelnicu, 2005). Young voters appeared to abandon mainstream media in 2004. 40% of voters younger than age 30 identified the Internet as a source of campaign news. Since the 2004 election, the numbers of voters getting their political news from the Internet has risen dramatically. 61% of Millennials report getting political news on Facebook while 60% of Baby Boomers relies on television. Americans still prefer to get their news from television. Television ranks first as the preferred platform. 44% of US Adults prefer TV, while 34% prefer the web to get their news (Pew Research Center, 2018).

The Internet may stimulate interest and involvement in young voters and may provide more opportunities for young people to participate (Delli Carpni, 2000). The 2008 Barack Obama campaign was a transition moment in political media. Voters engaged with the candidate via the Internet. 27% of wired Obama voters went online to learn about or became involved with the presidential transition (Pew Research Center, 2008).

Politicians are moving their campaign strategy toward digital and online spaces. TV advertising expenditure may have plateaued (Fowler, Ridout & Franz, 2016) despite the increase in spending each election cycle. Narrowcasting is becoming popular as candidates are seeking to find voters in unique places and receptive of different messages. Campaigns are attempting to influence news agendas and gain news attention. There is evidence that the digital campaigns mobilize younger voters (Franz, Fowler, Ridout & Wang, 2020). The move toward digital platforms does not seem to impact the television’s ability to reach a large specific audience. Networks and local programming provide identifiable and distinct viewer bases, especially cable television (Lovett & Peress, 2015). The campaign ads reach a much more general, broad audience than ads placed online.

Florida is a contentious election battleground. Non-candidate contributions are significantly higher in Florida than other states. Christenson & Smidt (2014) studied primary spending and found that PACs outspent candidates in Florida by a substantial larger margin than in the other states. If the Super PACs are a complement to the candidate organization, according to Christenson & Smidt (2014), then there should be a positive association between the spending of a candidate’s organization and its associated Super PAC. The Super PACs view their role in the campaign as an organization that enhances or supplements the decisions of the candidate’s organization.

**Methodology:**

This study uses a mixed methods approach. A quantitative study was conducted utilizing the reports filed to the Federal Communications Commission by WPTV-TV, WPEC-TV, WFLX-TV and WPTV. The files are available at publicfiles.fcc.gov. The files are organized by year. This study looked at the 2018 file for each station. Inside that file are files for Federal, State, and Local Elections. This study looked at the Senate race between incumbent Democrat Bill Nelson and former Governor, Republican Rick Scott. The 2018 files included Political Action Committees and political issue organizations.

Data was collected from the files and organized by the numbers and dollars spent at each of the four network affiliates. The independent variables would be the amount of money spent by each candidate, the political party and the political action committee. The television stations commercial inventories are the dependent variables. There are a fixed number of spots for a given period of time. There are 8 minutes of commercial time per half-hour, which would is normally divided into 16 commercial units.

The television stations were required by the FCC to ensure the lowest unit rate of sale was applied to all candidate and party money. The political action committee ads were subject to rate fluctuation based on availability and rates could be randomly applied. All candidate invoices must be filed with the FCC. The candidate is not responsible for the filing, the station is responsible. The files on record are sorted by political race, candidate, party contributions, and political action committees.

The television stations are required to report all the candidate and party campaign sales but they are not required to report issue or political action committee sales. Only one station, WPTV-TV, did not report their political action committee sales. However, it is difficult to determine if all the invoices were reported at the other stations or if some of the political action committee sales were not reported.

Besides the quantitative method, an ethnographic study was conducted at WPTV-TV during the summer of 2017. The study was part of a visiting professorship. The Scripps visiting professorship is intended to train and educate academics about the various sales representatives, their roles and method of selling their air time. The Director of Sales, Cathy Goltz, supervised me as I underwent the Scripps Sales Process training course. The two-week program followed a six-part instruction guide, that included prospecting clients, uncovering needs, developing solutions, presentations, retention and developing. The sales course was not directly tied to political ads, because the political ads were controlled by the national sales manager and not the sales representatives. The research conducted at the station involved participant observation of sales meetings, and sales calls. Extensive time was spent with the national sales manager, Dave Griscavage, when the election period opened. Follow-up interviews continued until after the 2018 mid-term elections.

**RQ1**: Did the candidates outspend each other at one or more of the local TV affiliates?

**RQ2:** Was the PAC/Issue spending greater than the candidate spending at any of the TV affiliates?

**RQ3**: Did one candidate buy more commercials than the other?

**RQ4:** Did one station earn more money in political sales than the others?

**MAKING MONEY and FAIR POLITICS**

In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of corporations and associations who want to promote certain politicians. The Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission case established that contributors to political campaigns are protected under the First Amendment.  Their contribution is determined to be an act of Free Speech and candidates are protected from being exploited and being denied equal treatment by television stations with rules on political advertising rates.  The FCC demands all candidates receive the lowest possible rate for a commercial spot.

Election campaigns in battleground states benefits local television stations. Political revenue is a windfall for TV stations for many reasons. Forty-five days before a primary and sixty days before a general election are periods when the FCC rules that candidates be given political protection and spots are sold at the ‘lowest rate’. The ‘lowest rate’ is not fixed and the purchasing of the airtime is somewhat complicated by a variety of circumstances. Prior to these periods, the candidate is not guaranteed special treatment and would have to negotiate the rate like anyone buying commercial air time.

Local sales representatives dislike the election season because their sales efforts can be disastrous to their monthly quotas and goals. The FCC regulations place priority of political ads, not sold by sales reps, over the ads of station clients and customers. Television stations embrace political advertising because it takes little effort to sell. Spots, even at traditionally difficult time periods, are sold easily. Key races can raise sales revenue expeditiously as issue-based ads are sold at the highest rate.

The FCC puts restrictions on the commercial spot rates for candidates. The candidates are given the lowest rate available at that particular time. The rate for each spot is determined by the time of day, popularity of the particular time due to programming at that time, and the tier at which the spot is sold.

One of the main issues for both the candidates and the television station is the limited inventory that can be sold. Spots bought at lower rates can be preempted (not aired) in favored of someone who paid for a non-pre-emptible spot. There are three criteria for buyers. They are labeled, ‘sections’ or P1, P2 and P3.

Section 1 (P1): fixed non-pre-emptible

Section 2 (P2): pre-emptible with prior notification

Section 3 (P3): immediately pre-emptible

TV stations publish a political rate card that offers three tiers or classes of time based on the likelihood of pre-emption. If a station sells out their advertisement in Section 3, the station can now charge the candidate section 2 rates. If the station has available inventory of spots, the candidate can purchase from the available inventory at the Section 3 rate. The political candidates are entitled to the lowest unit rate in the class of time they are purchasing.

Non-political advertisers can come in and buy ads. If the political candidate bought an ad at section 3 prices, the local car dealer can buy an ad at the section 2 prices and pre-empt the candidate. The station won’t pre-empt the candidate for the same price. It is not a general practice to pre-empt political ads.

Stations are required to accept ads from candidates for Federal campaigns but are not required to accept state or local candidates’ advertising. But, if the station accepts advertising from one local or stateside candidate, they must accept it from the candidate’s opponent.

PACs and party committees are not covered under the lowest unit rate or pre-emptibility rules. Stations will charge as high a rate as possible and their ads can be subject to pre-emptiveness. The PACS and party committee advertising dollars become the ‘cash cows’ for local stations. The inventory of commercial spots is greatly impacted by the competitiveness of the political race. Stations with high ratings have no trouble selling out inventory and raising rates.

Stations, like WPTV-TV make 30-35% profit during election time. The FCC does not allow the station to give out specific earnings reports but when asked how much money WPTV-TV makes during an election cycle compared during a non-election period, WPTV-TV Sales Manager David Griscavage replied, “We make a ton more.”

The amount of money going into the station is transparent. Candidates can monitor what opponents are spending via publicfiles.fcc.gov, a government website. If the candidates find that they paid more than their opponent, the candidate will receive a rebate in the difference of the rates. Candidates can ask for equal time. For instance, if a candidate bought a longer than normal spot, such as a two minutes spot, the opponent can contact the TV station and demand a two-minute spot at the same rate at the same particular time.

E.W. Scripps Corporation owns WPTV-TV. Prior to the election period, E.W. Scripps has 52 television stations in 36 markets. Their reach is 21% of the US TV households. Scripps has an independent research office that deals with political ads. They have a team of representative that receive calls from the media buyers representing candidates or issue campaigns. Many television corporations do not have a team of representatives at the corporate level, and media buyers contact the individual stations directly.

The local sales manager sets the political rate card at the local station. David Griscavage, sales manager at WPTV sets his rate card based on the average cost of spots at specific days, called dayparts, and at specific times during those days. He says that he can look at how much advertisers are spending at specific times of the day. The news periods and prime time usually bring the highest rates.

The rate card usually consists of three levels; at WPTV-TV they create a four-tier level of “Classes of Time.” The rate card they produce cannot be shared with the general public. However, an example of one of their time periods may look like this:

INSERT FIGURE 1

On average, a half-hour of television time results in 22 minutes of content and 8 minutes of advertising. The advertising can be divided up into thirty-second increments, referred to as commercial spots. This results in an average of 16 spots per half-hour. The sales representatives and managers consider the 16 spots as “inventory”. Similar to any retail business, the inventory is sold at different rates based on consumer demand. Popular shows result in higher viewer ratings and ratings determine the sale price of the inventory. Every half-hour of television results in a different “cost per thousand” or CPM.

CPM = Cost of 1 commercial spot (unit of time) x 1000

 Number of homes reached by a given program/time period.

The lower the cost per thousand, the more cost efficient the reach to potential voters. Prime time spots can be the costliest but the audience is much larger than at any other time of the day. The highest fixed rate for a candidate ad during prime time could be $4000 per 30 seconds. Hypothetically, WPTV-TV noon news has a rating of 2.44. If there were 247,000 people watching the news and a commercial spot would cost $250. The CPM would be $250,000/247,000 = $1.012. Compare that to buying a spot in the 11pm news. The audience is larger (400,896) but the spot is more expensive ($900). The CPM would be $2.244. The station with the largest rating will always have a better CPM than a station with a lower rating.

**Findings:**

**H1: The candidate that outspends the other will win the race.**

Political spots are divided into two categories, candidate campaign ads and issue ads.

Issue ads are not just about legalizing marijuana, issue ads are when a PAC produces an ad for a candidate and buys air time.  You can tell an issue ad two ways.   1) The ad must end with an identifier at the end of the video.  The identifier must be 1/120th the size of the screen and 2) has to be on the screen for 4 seconds.  Many times you will see, “Paid for by the FRIENDS OF THE POLITICIAN” and that is the label that tells you the money came from a PAC.

Scott spent twice as much for political advertising than Nelson in the West Palm Beach market.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The individual political parties did not mirror the contribution of the candidates. The Democratic Party spent more money for Nelson’s campaign than the Republican Party spent for Scott.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

The race was closely contest race statewide and Scott won by 1,033 votes. West Palm Beach was a win for Bill Nelson, he won the DMA 58.4% to 41.6%.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

**H2: The PAC/Issue money will be hard to trace and calculate**.

WPTV-TV was the only station to not file any invoices from the political action committees or issue organizations. The lack of invoices makes it difficult to make an accurate account of the total amount of money contributed. The information that is available indicates that the political action committees spent more money on Bill Nelson’s campaign than the candidate.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Two PACs supporting Scott, America Next and New Republican, spent $3,873,550 dollars in the West Palm Beach DMA. WPTV-TV did not report any sales with the two PACs.

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

**H3: One candidate will buy more commercial time than the other.**

The amount of money spent does not relate to the number of commercials spots purchased. The more popular time slots are more expensive. A show with better ratings will result in a higher lower unit rate. Football games were particularly expensive. The highest rate paid was $20,000 for one spot during the Miami vs. New England Football game on CBS. The lowest rate paid was $15. Scott spent more money than Nelson and purchased more commercial time.

INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

INSERT TABLE 7 HERE

The total number of commercials in support for the candidates was nearly equal. The Political Action Committees and Issue Groups balanced out the number of commercial spots for each candidate.

INSERT TABLE 8 HERE

**H4: One station will earn more money in political sales than the others.**

It is difficult to assert that one station earned significantly more money from the political advertising without full disclosure from WPTV-TV. However, the Hearst owned station, WPBF-TV, appears to have earned over nearly $10 million dollars more than any of the other stations. There could be a variety of reasons for this discrepancy. If some of the invoices for the issues ads were not submitted to the FCC, then the numbers would be deflated due to the lack of transparencies.

INSERT TABLE 9 HERE

It does appear that Scott and Nelson campaigns spent roughly the same amount of money. Nelson spent less in candidate money than Scott but the Democratic Political Action Committees spent more money than the Republican Political Action Committees.

**Discussion/Conclusion:**

From Jan 1. Through the Nov. 6 election, political advertising totaled $140 million, an 86% increase over the same result in 2014. According to E.W. Scripps, political ads helped Scripps post profit in the third quarter. The E.W. Scripps Company’s revenue rose 51% to $303 million dollars, with political advertising this year, totally $140 million, up 86% from the previous midterm in 2014. Scripps earned $201 million in 2017 during the same quarter.

Profit for the local stations doubled to $67.4 million from $30.4 million a year prior. The success of the company may have helped the company expand. On October 17, Scripps announced plans to acquire Triton, the leader in digital audio infrastructure and audience measurement for $150 million. On October 29, Scripps announced plans to acquire 15 television stations in 10 local media markets from privately owned Cordillera Communications for $521 million. It may have impacted 3rd quarter local media margins.

Scripps President and CEO Adam Symson, in the third quarter report said, “During a quarter when we delivered terrific operating results across the board – buoyed by record-level mid-term election political revenue, we also took significant action to execute our plan to reposition the company for improved operating performance and long-term growth.”

There is a separation between news and sales, “A separation between church and state,” says Mary Beth Fitzgerald, WPTV-TV account executive.  There is a sense of pride in her voice because she knows that the divide between the two departments is catalyzed by the strength of ratings, sales and money.

In other words, a newsroom that is making money will be left alone to do what they do because it is working.  Skeptics will say that popularity doesn’t reflect quality and they might be right.  However, the traditional #1 station in a market has a legacy and earned their stripes from years of consistent and respected work.

In contrast, go to the newsroom of the lowest rated station in a market and they are more apt to do whatever they can do to sell.  Buyers have an invisible hand in the newsroom.  You could say that in those stations journalism ethics can be easily compromised.  McChesney, Newman and Scott, (2005) identified the potential of ambiguous spending that can lead to the transference of money from contributor to media buyers to the local affiliate. Local television stations and their parent corporations benefit from the profits of the political spending on television. Scripps takes advantage of the FCC stipulation that they do not have to reveal how the issue money is spent.

Broadcasting companies will have stations that are strong #1s and weak #3s.  It isn’t the fault of the company as much as the legacy of the stations or the complexities of the different markets.  Like siblings, the #1s try to help out the #3s, by sharing revenue or sales.  It can get messy and the #1s may feel like they are negotiating with their own people.   Sales people may end up splitting commissions.  In some instances, the #3 staff will take 100% of the commission of digital sales because of the referral.

This study revealed McChesney’s “money chase” during the Senate election. The candidates and political parties found ways to spend money beyond the lowest unit rates via their associated issue groups. Candidates shouldn’t be forced into having deep pockets.  The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) is clear that the lowest unit rate policy provides a candidate the benefit of all discounts offered to commercial advertisers for the same class and amount of time, without regard to the frequency of the candidate’s advertising.

The frequency of ads is a significant amplifier. ‘The more money you have, the more influence you have in the marketplace.’ (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006). It seems that the Florida Senate race verifies that the more money spent will lead to more ads, which can lead to what Atkin and Heald concluded in 1976. A well-financed political advertising campaign can serve to raise the electorate’s level of knowledge about the candidate and issue positions. Walker (1990), Schramm (1954) and Becker (1978) asserted that repetition of political ads leads to reinforcement of knowledge. The number of political spots and airtime corresponds to the amount of money spent. The intention of the politician to form a thematic continuity is dependent on outspending the other candidate to purchase more ads.

Unfortunately, political season impacts the sales department.  The account executives work on 100% commission and this time of the political cycle makes it harder to make deals and sell TV ads.  Clients are being booted out of TV to make way for the political ads.  Digital Sales is a solution.  The clients can be moved over to the OTT.  They can get their ads on HULU, Sony and Crackle.

The 2020 Presidential election will be a lot different than the 2016 election. The 2016 election was not deemed, “normal” because Donald Trump was not advertising. Trump received an enormous amount of media airtime without paying for it. David Griscavage believes 2020 will be a lot different for many reasons. He believes Trump will have to spend much more on advertising dollars and the Democratic candidates will be spending a lot more, especially during the primary season. He believes the profits for WPTV-TV will be 50% more in 2020 than in 2016.

The limitations of relying on a single campaign to draw inferences. It is important that this article does not overstep the generalizability of these findings. The recent and massive changes in campaign finance laws, campaign calendars, modes of fundraising, and collection of candidates necessarily restrict my ability to characterize previous campaigns in this light.