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ATTACK ADS WORK FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES, UD COMMUNICATION PROFESSOR SAYS

DAYTON, Ohio -- If presidential candidates George Bush and Bill Clinton seem to be adopting more attack tactics in their television ads, it's because media consultants working for them know slinging mud works better than touting a candidate's own record, a University of Dayton professor says.

Communication Professor Kathleen Watters says voters remember the messages of attack ads better than the details of positive, candidate-centered ads.

"They're more memorable. They break through the clutter," Watters says.

Negative ads tend to play on negative emotions: fear, anger and mistrust. Lyndon B. Johnson's famous "Daisy" ad, in which a shot of a little girl romping in a field of daisies dissolved to an image of a nuclear mushroom cloud, was recognized as the most negative ad until Bush's "Willie Horton" ads attacked Dukakis' furlough program, Watters says. Both targeted voters' emotions.

"At the core of negative advertising," Watters says, "is fear."

Watters has watched hundreds of political television commercials, from Eisenhower commercials, from Eisenhower and Stevenson to Bush and Dukakis. Her research has shown that voters are influenced by - more -
television advertisements more than news coverage, a candidate’s printed material and other types of persuasive techniques.

"People don't say they vote because of television advertisements. If you ask them what they remember, what they know about a candidate, you can link that back very clearly to the ads," Watters says. "Newspaper readership has declined, and the ratings for presidential debates are low. We know that sheer exposure to the ads is higher than any other kind of persuasion voters have."

Negative ads have not become substantially more negative, she says, but they're used more often.

And Watters hasn't reached the conclusion that the presidential candidate who hires the better advertising team will win in November. "I don't think we can really say that. Certainly, the candidate who hires the better ad person and production team, and can purchase extensive air time will have commercials that are watched and remembered."

For interviews contact Kathleen Watters at (513) 229-2378.