

## Reaching the young and uninvolved: YouTube as a tool to reach first-time voters

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Every election cycle there is a struggle for politicians to reach politically low involved citizens. Yet, for years, politicians have been optimistic about the ability to reach more potential voters with the rise of the Internet as an information tool, including those who are not highly engaged in the political process. Last year, all candidates intended to expose all citizens, but young adults in particular, to campaign videos posted on YouTube.

There is no clear picture yet which political audiences are most attracted by YouTube and for what reasons they access the site. The objective of this study is to examine whether the level of election interest explains why some young adults were accessing election videos on YouTube more often than others. Many variables are involved in whether individuals adopt a mass medium, for instance the World Wide Web, and which particular Internet sites or specific sections of those sites are visited to acquire information. The 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign offered an opportunity to study how young adults used YouTube based on their political involvement.

A survey of 224 students at a Midwestern college demonstrates that by putting election clips on YouTube a large majority of young adults in college can be reached. Overall, most participants watched at least one YouTube video related to the 2008 presidential election. Still, 28 students, or 12.5 percent, reported that they had not watched any of those videos.

Participants reported the use of YouTube on a four-point scale. Subsequently, based on their level of political involvement, the students were ranked in four groups. YouTube use was analyzed in a one-way between subjects analysis of variance based on levels of involvement in the 2008 U.S. presidential election cycle. The results showed a significant effect for political involvement,  $F(3,219) = 10.093$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ . Young adults with the highest level of political involvement ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .886$ ) were more likely to watch political videos than the low involvement group ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = .863$ ).

Similar results were obtained for the questions whether students actively searched for election clips on YouTube and whether they watched clips on blogs and news media Web sites. This was also the case for watching clips from broadcast news shows and fragments of entertainment programs dedicated to the elections and related political topics.

Importantly, there was no statistical difference between any of the involvement groups for watching campaign advertisements. This was the case for official ads authorized by either John McCain or Barack Obama as well as for advertisements from interest groups pertaining to any of the two presidential election candidates or other social causes.

Overall, the results present a picture that a highly involved audience of young adults watched more YouTube videos about issues related to the 2008 presidential election than

lower involved students. In most of the comparisons the differences between the highest and the lowest group are rather large. On the other hand, there is not much difference between the groups other than the highest involvement unit. In other words, the high involvement group is driving the main effects found for election involvement on YouTube use. Although election campaign teams fruitfully can use YouTube to reach voters occasionally, they still need to explore how to attract larger viewership for online advertisements. Future research should determine why young adults are less interested in campaign ads than other election content.