

**A New Opportunity for Democratic Engagement:
The CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates**

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Abstract

The 2007 CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates provide a unique opportunity for the American populace to become engaged in national political discussion through the submission of video questions to YouTube for inclusion in two nationally broadcast debates (Democratic and Republican) on CNN. By using content analysis, a sample of the 7,916 videos submitted was examined for the demographic populations represented and characteristics of submitted questions in an effort to ascertain if the debates were a viable method for increasing citizen mobilization and redefining democratic participation. The study found that traditionally politically disengaged populations (specifically minorities and young voters) were present in a significant proportion of the videos and that individuals used the debates as an opportunity to ask politically relevant and substantive questions of the candidates.

In June of 2007 CNN and YouTube made a collective announcement that they forecasted may usher in a new era of political debates. The creation of the CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates was an attempt to “take a bold step of embracing the ever-increasing role of the Internet in politics” and “engage more viewers – and potential voters – than ever before” (YouTube Press Release, 2007). The debates marked a historical shift, where, for the first time candidates answered video questions developed by the American public and submitted to YouTube in a live candidate forum on broadcast television (YouTube Press Release, 2007). The debates also provided the first opportunity for the American public to engage candidates on a national stage.

By moving away from Web sites that simply disseminate information to a venue where citizens could use Internet technologies to directly question candidates, these debates moved online politics from being relatively static to include dynamic forms of political interaction. Although some Internet technologies, such as blogs, previously allowed for interactive citizen-to-citizen political dialogue, these debates promoted two processes important for the development and sustainment of national democratic engagement: increased citizen mobilization and a redefinition of political participation.

Prior to the debates, some advocated that they would be, “the most earthshaking change in communication technology for presidential politics since the Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960” (The NY Times, 2007) and others argued that they were simply flashy political stunts. While taking a stance on this would be tenuous at best, it is possible, through an exploratory examination of the video submissions to gain a descriptive understanding of the debate contents. Although traditional debate studies may focus more specifically on question analysis, this study was interested in what demographic populations chose to use this format as a means of democratic engagement and how, when given the chance, the American public would choose to question potential political leaders.

Increasing Citizen Mobilization

A great deal of research has been conducted regarding diminishing levels of civic engagement amongst the American populous, or the perception thereof. Prior to discussing some of these reasons however, it is first imperative to operationalize this study’s interpretation of engagement. Although civic engagement, argued by some to be the driving force of democracy, is frequently characterized simply by the act of voting, it is in reality defined by activities that address public issues or concerns through methods that are not necessarily connected to elections or government, such as volunteering and joining associations (Delli Carpini, 2004; McKinney, Kaid, & Bystrom, 2005). Conversely, political engagement is more directly related to voting and is characterized by activities that have “the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 38). The conundrum, however, lies in the fact that although voting statistics cannot completely contextualize American democratic engagement, they are the only readily available measure of national political participation. Because definitions of what constitutes civic and political engagement differ across the literature, this study will follow Delli Carpini’s (2004)

ideal that both can be related under the broader term of democratic engagement; encompassing, therefore, voting statistics as a discussion point for increased engagement.

The collectively low turnout level of the voting-age population in American presidential elections has been the focus of a great deal of concern over democratic engagement. Prior to the beginning of the 21st century, political participation declined on average by 4% in every election after 1960, with only 49% of eligible citizens voting in 1996, the lowest level of voter turnout in any presidential election (Levine & Lopez, 2002). Although the elections in the 21st century have seen an overall increase in voting turnouts, the 56.8% turnout in 2008 was still markedly lower than turnout percentages in the 1960s and still serves to rank the United States far behind many of the world's democratically elected governments in terms of political participation.

The historic decline and notions of ambivalent civic attitudes has been framed as a crisis of civic culture and citizenship (Rideout & Mosco, 1997), with some suggesting that people intentionally avoid allowing public issues to contextualize their lives by avoiding political conversation and participation (Eliasoph, 1997). Diminishing trust in the political system, fostered by confusing voting practices, feelings of political alienation, the rise of identity politics, and partisan discourse, have also served to limit citizen's democratic engagement (Culver, 2005; Denton & Woodward, 1998; Gans, 2005). Changing national and community structures, such as the decline in civic education and newspaper reading, as well as an eroding social capital and diminished community connectedness, have also led to a limited understanding of the American political system, resulting in limited democratic participation and declining political efficacy (Ahmed, 2005; Gans, 2005; McLeod, Eveland, & Horowitz, 1998; McKinney, Kaid, & Bystrom, 2005; Putnam, 1995, 2000).

Because democracy is fostered by democratic dialogue and engagement, it is vital that viable solutions to increase individual's feelings of efficacy and increase democratic engagement are discussed and investigated (Andolina, Jenkins, Keeter, & Zukin, 2002; McKinney, Kaid, & Bystrom, 2005). Perhaps one key to sustainably increasing democratic engagement can be found in the use of innovative Internet technologies, such as YouTube, that encourage participation and mobilization through alternative forms of democratic engagement (Culver, 2005; Davis, 2002; Howard, 2006). Because the Internet allows individuals to move past the confines imposed by traditional media and traditional political campaigning, the ability to increase citizen mobilization is a realistic and attainable goal (Bonner, Carlitz, Gunn, Maak & Ratliff, 2005; Chadwick, 2005; Davis, 2002; Delli Carpini, 2000; Hill & Hughes, 1997; Xenos & Moy, 2007; Zhang & Chia, 2006).

Redefining Political Participation

The use of Internet technologies also allows for a redefinition of what it means for an individual to be democratically engaged. It is assumed that, if correctly utilized, the Internet can provide an arena for significant democratic discussion and engagement to occur. The implementation of Internet technologies can facilitate interactive engagement, permitting individuals to become democratically engaged on a global level (Mandelson, 1998). It is also inexpensive to reach individuals through Internet-based technologies and increasingly possible to mobilize citizens through the use of such technologies ("So Where's the Campaign?" 1998). The Internet's interactivity allows for transnational democracy to thrive and encourages networking,

the generation of new spaces, and the emergence of new types of communities, all of which may help individuals to redefine what it means to be democratically engaged (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove, 2005; Greenwood, 1997). The use of the multifaceted platforms increase opportunities for democratic connectedness to occur and the implementation of dynamic communication tools, such as forums and video responses, foster the use of community-building features that are important in generating democratic engagement and potentially mobilization.

The creation of the CNN-YouTube debates allowed for three distinct politically redefining processes to occur: increased audience participation, increased connection opportunities, and extending the debates beyond the broadcast. All of these processes were important steps in not only increasing access to political information, but also in encouraging democratic discussion, which can be a powerful force in opening up closed societies, or closed sociological practices (Wilhelm, 1990) as well as redefining communication and the ways in which individuals can become democratically involved (Katz, 1996).

Audience Participation

For the first time in the history of national political debate, the public could become instrumentally involved in the creation and dissemination of debate content; redefining not only participation, but redefining a political institution as well. Although few debate formats have allowed for minimal audience involvement, for the most part, audience participation is strictly restricted (Blimes, 1999; Commission on Presidential Debates, 2004; Seltz & Yoakam, 1960). Most debates begin with statements such as “there is an audience here in the hall, but they have been instructed to remain silent throughout” and “they [the audience] are not here to participate, only to listen” (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2004), making it clear that public participation in debate proceedings is not welcome. In contrast, the CNN-YouTube debates welcomed the public into a static political process by expanding traditional political margins and hierarchies, providing for a redefined notion of participation and, possibly, increased notions of personal political efficacy, both of which could be significant factors in future mobilization.

Increased Connection Opportunities

Increasing opportunities for connectedness with other individuals is another element that makes Internet-based technologies ideal for redefining political participation. While many elements on political Web sites appear to foster democratic engagement, in reality most are simply extensions of the one-to-many communication format indicative of traditional media. The CNN-YouTube debates harnessed the power online collectives and provided a forum through which interested individuals could connect, communicate, and become informed through the use of a dedicated, comprehensive campaign Web site (You Choose '08: <http://youtube.com/youchoose>). In contrast to many Web sites that provide partisan information, the You Choose '08 site provided a space where all manners of campaign information could be located and discussed.

Debate Extensions

Traditionally, political debates are broadcast at certain times, on certain networks with specific, mediated follow-up – resulting in relatively static events that are quite contrary to the robust political discussion they are touted to be. Moving the CNN-YouTube debates online allowed for the life of the debates to be extended far beyond the broadcast events. This move toward sustainable e-democracy took a vital step forward in redefining the foundations of active citizenship, reinvigorating the democratic process, and positively (re)engaging citizens in democratic life (McCullagh, 2003). By ensuring that all debate submissions, candidate answers, forum discussions and both debates, in their entirety, were available online, for free, CNN and YouTube were able to guarantee greater and broader access to debate material than ever before; thus, taking a significant step forward in redefining abilities for political information gathering.

Research Questions

By providing opportunities for audience participation, increasing connections between the public and presidential candidates, and inviting the public into a traditionally static political institution, the CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates provide a good case from which to examine the potential of Internet-based technologies to address issues of increased citizen participation and redefined opportunities for democratic engagement.

The following research questions were used to examine which demographic populations used the debates as a vehicle for democratic engagement and how, when given the opportunity, the public would choose to question presidential candidates.

RQ1: What percentages of traditionally politically underrepresented/disengaged populations (minorities and younger voters) are present in the videos submitted to the CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates?

RQ1a: Do the representations of traditionally politically underrepresented/disengaged populations differ between the Democratic and Republican debates?

RQ1b: Do the representations of traditionally politically underrepresented/disengaged populations differ between the online population of videos and those selected for broadcast on CNN?

RQ2: What are the characteristics of the questions submitted to the CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates?

RQ2a: Do the characteristics of the questions asked differ between the Democratic and Republican debates?

Method

In order to ascertain which demographic populations participated in the debates and elucidate the debate question characteristics, content analysis provided a logical framework for a descriptive analysis of the CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate debates.

In an effort to establish if the debates provided avenues for both increased civic mobilization and redefining participation, the entire population of videos submitted for potential debate inclusion, amounting to 7,916 (2,989 Democratic and 4,927 Republican) videos, was examined. Employing a systematic random sampling method, which helped control for any potential order bias stemming from multiple submissions by the same individual, resulted in a final sample of 698 videos (341 from the Democratic submissions, 357 from the Republican), at a 95% confidence level (following Krejci & Morgan, 1970). In order to provide an accurate comparison between the populations of videos submitted and those broadcast on CNN, all 72 broadcasted videos (38 Democratic and 34 Republican) were also examined. Because YouTube archived all submissions in a section dedicated to the debates, it was easy for coders to access the videos they were to analyze as outlined by the sample frame.

Coding

Coding was completed by the author and two other individuals. In an attempt to avoid a gender-biased analysis, the team consisted of two females and one male; however, all coders were Caucasian, between the ages of 26 and 30, and college educated. The pilot study examined a random sample of 70 videos (35 from each debate) to establish an exhaustive coding scheme; these videos were then incorporated back into the final sample. The nature of the data led to many emergent coding categories, requiring extensive training to control for potential discrepancies. In order to calculate intercoder reliability, each coder independently examined 10% of the sample. However, because the nature of the data violated the assumptions of Scott's pi, the most common method for assessing reliability in content analyses, the coefficient of reliability was used to ensure consistency amongst coders. To control for coder drift due to the large sample size, reliability was assessed again after completion of 1/3 of the videos. Both initial and coder drift reliabilities are reported below.

The final coding instrument included collaborative opinions from the coding team to ensure that categories were mutually exclusive, exhaustive and equivalent. It was developed using prior studies of political debates and question construction; emergent codes were included when the a priori coding scheme were not exhaustive. Two primary coding categories, each containing multiple subcategories, were established in order to determine the population that participated in the debates and the characteristics of the debate questions they asked (See Appendix A for the complete codebook).

Demographic Characteristics

Basic demographic characteristics that are typically ascertained in political communication research (Carlin & McKinney, 1994; Wright & Davies, 2004) and that could be inferred from the videos were captured. These characteristics include the age (reliability .90; drift reliability .92), sex (reliability .99; drift reliability .99), race (reliability .96; drift reliability .95), and sexual orientation (reliability .99; drift reliability .98) of the video's primary speakers. It is important to note that sexual orientation was only recorded when specifically stated in the video.

Question Characteristics

Because these debates offered the first opportunity for the American public to directly question presidential candidates, without their questions being moderated or modified, it was important to determine how, when given the chance, the public would question presidential candidates. Examining characteristics such as the use of question set-ups and question complexity may serve to provide an understanding of fit the public is to question future leaders.

The following categories were used to determine the characteristics of the questions asked of the presidential candidates. Literature on question construction was consulted to ascertain elements necessary for appropriate question construction and elucidating levels of complexity found within questions (Dillon, 1983; Mischler, 1991).

It was first necessary to determine if submitters were in fact asking the candidates questions, or simply making a statement (reliability .98; drift reliability .97). Question characteristics included whether the question was open or closed (reliability .97; drift reliability .97), simple or complex (reliability .96; drift reliability .97), the question type (reliability .95; drift reliability .96), the type of question setup (reliability .95; drift reliability .95), the use of counter arguments (reliability .95; drift reliability .95), type of answer requested (reliability .90; drift reliability .91), the inclusion of specific alternatives (reliability .92; drift reliability .94), to whom the question was directed (reliability .98; drift reliability .97), and if the question was politically relevant (reliability 1.0; drift reliability .99). Question topics were recorded in order to determine issue salience; because of the wide variety of question topics, it was not possible to construct an exhaustive coding scheme, so coders wrote in the question topic.

Results

Demographic Analysis of Video Participants

The first research question examined participants' demographic characteristics; demographic analysis helped determine if members of traditionally underrepresented or disengaged populations participated in the debates. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of debate participants. The results indicate that 26-40 year-old age range was the most represented, followed closely by those in the 18-25 year-old range. This accounts for a significant difference amongst the ages represented in the online video population $\chi^2(4, N = 671) = 1.02, p < .001$, as individuals 18-40 represented nearly one-half of participants. A significant difference in regard to sex existed, $\chi^2(1, N = 645) = 94.59, p < .001$, with males representing a majority of the participants. A significant racial difference also existed, $\chi^2(5, N = 669) = 1.09, p < .001$, as the majority of speakers were categorized as White.

Demographic differences between debates

Demographic analysis was used to determine if a statistically significant difference existed between demographic representations in the Democratic and Republican debates. Results indicate differences in two of the four demographic variables: age and sexual orientation. Speakers in the Democratic sample were predominately in the 26-40 and 41-55 age groups,

whereas more individuals in the Republican sample were either under the age of 18, or in the 19-25 age categories. These differences account for a significant difference in the ages of the speakers, $\chi^2(5, N = 698) = 18.24, p = .003$.

Table 1: Primary Speakers' Demographics

Age Range	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Under 18	100	14.33%	14.33%
18-25	192	27.51%	41.84%
26-40	202	28.94%	70.78%
41-55	102	14.61%	85.39%
Over 55	75	10.71%	96.10%
Not Possible to Determine	27	3.90%	100.00%
Total	698		
Sex	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Male	447	64%	64.00%
Female	199	28.50%	92.50%
No Apparent Speaker	13	1.90%	94.00%
Not Possible to Determine	39	5.60%	100.00%
Total	698		
Race	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
White	426	61%	61.00%
Black	92	13.20%	74.20%
Hispanic	81	11.60%	85.80%
Asian/Pacific Islander	31	4.40%	90.20%
Other	28	4.00%	94.20%
American Indian / Alaskan	13	1.90%	96.10%
Not Possible to Determine	27	3.90%	100.00%
Total	698		

Demographic differences between online population and broadcast videos

Finally, the demographic populations of online video sample and the videos chosen for broadcast were compared to discover if significant differences between these two populations existed which could help determine if CNN's use of a selection violated the assumptions of user generated content YouTube is known for through the selected of a skewed sample. Interestingly, the data indicate that no significant demographic differences existed between the two samples.

Characteristics of Questions Asked

The second research question examined the characteristics of the questions asked in order to ascertain, how, when given the chance, the public would choose to question political candidates. The data indicate that most submitters, 87.1% ($N = 608$) actually did ask questions, versus using the forum to make statements to the candidates and a majority (84.8%, $N = 592$) of the questions would be considered politically relevant. A majority of the questions (76.2%, $N = 532$) were open-ended and framed simply (67.9%, $N = 472$). A significant difference existed in regard to question complexity, $\chi^2(1, N = 694) = 92.96, p < .001$, with a majority of the questions being simply stated.

Table 2 illustrates the how frequently certain question characteristics were employed by video submitters. The most common type of questions were "what" questions followed by "do" questions; A significant difference existed between the types of question asked in the online submissions, $\chi^2(9, N = 698) = 998.65, p < .001$, with *what* questions predominating. Set-ups were used in a majority of the videos; the choice of setups differed significantly, $\chi^2(3, N = 698) = 1.47, p < .001$, with mentioning a name and hometown accounting for roughly half of the setups. A significant difference existed in the use of counter arguments, $\chi^2(2, N = 698) = 3.59, p < .001$, with fewer than half (44.3%, $N = 309$) of the videos using them. Most submitters (65.5%, $N = 457$) wanted the candidates to take an issue stance in their answer and most questions (71.9%, $N = 502$) did not provide the candidates with specific alternatives from which to choose. A significant difference existed with regard of whom the questions were directed to, $\chi^2(2, N = 698) = 422.3, p < .001$, with a majority of the questions being directed to all candidates.

Topic Salience

The results indicate that five most prominent question topics related to domestic concerns (e.g., "What will you do as President to ensure the safety of America?"); education (e.g., "What will you do as president to make our schools less about testing and more about learning?"); Iraq (e.g., "What sacrifices have the candidates made for the War in Iraq like the ones they are asking of American families?"); healthcare (e.g., "Our healthcare currently ranks at #37 but how will we rank after 8 years of your presidency?"); and political qualification questions (e.g., "What do you regard as your responsibility to protect and preserve the Constitution?").

Question differences between debates

The research was also interested in determining if a statistically significant difference in question characteristics existed between the Democratic and Republican debates. It is indicated

by the data that the only variable with a significant difference was in question relevance, $\chi^2(1, N = 698) = 15.71, p < .001$, with the Republican submissions containing almost twice as many (20.4%, $N = 73$) questions deemed irrelevant than the Democratic (9.7%, $N = 33$) submissions. No significant differences existed regarding any of the other question characteristic variables.

Table 2: Question Characteristics

Question Type	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
"What"	318	45.58%	45.80%
Multiple Question Types	75	10.70%	56.28%
"Do"	54	7.74%	64.02%
"How"	52	7.45%	71.47%
"When"	45	6.45%	77.92%
"Why"	34	4.87%	82.79%
"Where"	24	3.44%	86.23%
Not possible to determine	6	0.86%	87.1%
No question / statement	90	12.90%	100%
Total	698		
Set-Up Type	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Name/Hometown	312	44.70%	44.70%
Narrative/Autobiographical	143	20.50%	65.2%
Situational/Informative	131	18.80%	84.0%
No Set Up	112	16.00%	100%
Total	698	100.00%	
Answer Requested	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Take a Stand	457	65.40%	65.40%
Neutral	183	26.20%	91.60%
Balanced	36	5.20%	96.80%
Not possible to determine	36	3.20%	100%
Total	698	100.0%	
Directed To	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
All Candidates	482	69.10%	69.10%
Multiple Candidates	158	22.60%	91.7%
Specific Candidates	58	8.30%	100%
Total	698	100.0%	

Question differences between online population and broadcast videos

Finally, question characteristics between the online video population and the videos chosen for broadcast were compared to discover if significant differences between these two populations existed. Two significant differences between the populations were uncovered.

Videos chosen for broadcast included a significantly higher use of counter arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 770) = 18.5, p < .001, (N = 51)$ and there was also a significant difference in the answer type requested, $\chi^2(1, N = 770) = 12.13, p = .007$, with more videos in the archived sample ($N = 36$) requesting balanced answers.

Discussion

This study was interested the CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates' potential to mobilize citizens and offer a redefined method of political participation. The debates were successful in engaging a large number of people, evidenced both by the submission of nearly 8,000 videos for debate inclusion and the significant viewership¹ generated by the broadcasts – two factors that may play vital roles in the future mobilization of the American electorate.

Increasing Citizen Mobilization

Many factors indicate that the CNN-YouTube debates were a successful vehicle for increasing citizen mobilization. Not only did large numbers of people submit questions and tune in to watch the debates, but the demographic analysis indicates that the debates were successful in engaging traditionally politically underrepresented or disengaged populations.

Although, as previously discussed, using alternative methods of engagement is not the same as voting, voting statistics offer a point of comparison through which to examine the data for the current study. A measurable difference, in terms of age, existed between voters in the 2004 election, with voters under 30 accounting for only roughly 17% of total voters (CNN, 2004). While the age categories for the current study are not precisely aligned, the data indicates that a voters under the age of 30 accounted for roughly 41.3% of participants; indicating that the debates were successful in mobilizing young voters, a population heavily courted by politicians and political organizations (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Galston, 2004).

The results also indicate elevated engagement by racial minorities. In 2004, 11% of voters were Black, 8% were Hispanic, 2% were Asian, and 2% were other racial categories (CNN, 2004). The results for the current study indicate a that 13.2% of participants were Black, 11.6% were Hispanic, 4.4% were Asian and 4% were from other racial categories – indicating that minority populations had higher levels of participation than in the 2004 election. When comparing this data with U.S. Census data, it can be argued that Blacks, which account for 12.2% of the population participated at a higher rate; Hispanics, which make up 14.2% of the population participated at a lower rate than may be expected; Asians, accounting for 4.2% of the population participated at an expected rate; American Indians, which account for 0.8% of the population participated at a higher rate (U.S. Census, 2007); suggesting that the CNN-YouTube debates provided an opportunity to democratically engage minority populations.

¹ The Democratic debate in July 2007 had 2.6 million viewers, 400,000 of which were from the sought after 18-34 year-old voter demographic. The Republican debate in November, 2007 had 4.49 million viewers, 516,000 from the 18-34 year-old demographic, making it the most watched debate in cable news history (Crupi, 2007; Raby, 2007; Toff, 2007).

Potential impact of the digital divide

While these results are promising, the results also indicate that the digital divide may still be a factor in online democratic engagement. In the 2004 election, women participated at a rate 8% higher than males (McDonald, 2005), yet in the CNN-YouTube debates women participated at a rate 35.5% less than men. Lower female participation may be attributed to differences in Internet adoption rates between sexes, to socioeconomic differences between sexes, especially in cases of single women/mothers (Bimber, 2000). In regard to race, Internet penetration among minorities, as compiled by the Pew Internet and American Life Project would suggest that minority participation should be higher than the debate participation would suggest. For example, Pew statistics show that 56% of Blacks and 79% of Hispanics have Internet access; however, Blacks made up only 14.9% and Hispanics only 12.8% of this study's total sample. This may indicate that while participation levels did increase from 2004, overall, minority participation may still be limited; perhaps supporting the argument that that technology itself is a product of social relations, therefore, the dispersion of innovative technologies will favor certain populations or social groups, such as Whites and men (Wajcman, 1995).

Redefining Participation

The simple nature of the CNN-YouTube debates provided an alternative method for individuals to become engaged in political discourse, and therefore, perhaps, also offered a redefinition of what it means to become democratically engaged. By providing a venue through which the public could personally address presidential candidates, the CNN-YouTube debates gave the public a voice in a venue where historically those voices have been silenced.

Examining the characteristics of the questions asked during the debates, provides some insight into how the public would question candidates, what issues were salient to the public, and allow for the refutation of one of the most significant criticisms waged prior to the debates.

The results indicate that although most of the questions were simply phrased, they were politically relevant, open-ended, and requested the candidates take a stand on the issues being discussed; these factors indicate a consciousness of salient political issues, a desire candidates to move away from standard political talking points. In addition, asking questions of all candidates, instead of select few, shows a desire to hear the opinions and plans of multiple candidates.

Participants' use of question set-ups often added a level of narration and emotion typically not seen in traditional debate formats. For example, a woman prefacing a health care question with a narrative about how her young daughter suffering from cancer does not have access to proper medical care because of insurance restraints alters the questions' reception. The ability to transform personal experience into a politically relevant debate question provided for a clear redefinition of political discourse and democratic engagement.

Refuting criticism

Capturing the characteristics of the debate questions also allows this study to refute one of the most significant criticisms waged at this debate format: the assumption that the public, because of limited knowledge and skill, would be unable to ask questions that would provide for substantial democratic discussion (Vargas, 2007). The results clearly indicate that the public was

more than capable of asking substantive, relevant, and well-thought out questions using the CNN-YouTube debates as a vehicle for increasing democratic engagement and for redefining what it means to be involved in national political conversation.

Summary

Collectively, the research findings, number of submissions, and broadcast ratings indicate that the format of the CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates successfully engaged a large number of Americans in democratic discussion. The limited differences between the characteristics of the online video population and those selected for broadcast signifies that CNN and YouTube provided the public with broadcast events that allowed traditionally underrepresented voices to be heard. The inclusion of these voices into public political conversation will open new avenues for future democratic engagement.

Future Research

While the uniqueness of this debate format precluded the possibility of comparing demographic participation with that of similar debates to see if the findings for these debates were distinctive, this uniqueness also opens up many possibilities for future research. One possible future research option would be to compare the questions of the CNN-YouTube debates to that of the 2008 presidential debates to see if the question characteristics differ significantly between the online and more traditional debate formats. In addition, President Obama's recent announcement to answer video questions constructed by the public may also provide an interesting opportunity for comparative research both in terms of demographic participation and question characteristics.

Conclusion

The newness and evolving nature of Internet technologies and the manner of technological distribution creates both significant opportunities and challenges. This complexity brings up questions such as: Do Internet technologies create more opportunities for democratic engagement? or Does the Internet reaffirm traditional political and demographic divisions in the electorate? Unfortunately, these are questions that must wait on technological evolutions before the answers can be fully fleshed out, and it is possible that these questions will never be completely answered due to the ever-changing Internet environment. While the direction in which the future of political technology will take us is uncertain, it is realistic to assume given that during the 2008 presidential election candidates' videos on YouTube were watched between 3 and 27 million times each day (TechPresident, 2008), that 2% of individuals specifically named YouTube as the site they used for campaign news, and 41% of individuals under 30 years-old and 20% of those over 30 reported using YouTube to view campaign related videos (Kohut, 2008), YouTube will continue to play a critical role in the development and the future of online politics.

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Appendix A

Codebook

- A. **Coder**
- B. **Unit**

Demographics

- C. **Age**
 - 0. Cannot Determine
 - 1. <18
 - 2. 18-25
 - 3. 26-40
 - 4. 41-55
 - 5. +55
- D. **Sex [of primary speaker]**
 - 0. Cannot Determine
 - 1. Male
 - 2. Female
 - 3. No speaker in the video
- E. **Race**
 - 0. Cannot Determine
 - 1. American Indian / Alaskan
 - 2. Asian / Pacific Islander
 - 3. Black
 - 4. Hispanic
 - 5. White
 - 6. Other [i.e. Middle Eastern]
- F. **Sexual Orientation**
 - 0. Cannot Determine
 - 1. Heterosexual
 - 2. Homosexual
 - 3. Bisexual

Question Characteristics

- G. **Statement vs. Question**
 - 0. Cannot Determine
 - 1. Question
 - 2. Statement
- H. **Open vs. Closed Question**
 - 0. Cannot Determine
 - 1. Open:
 - i. Questions that allow the respondent to use their own words/ideas to respond to the question
 - ii. “What do you look for on the Web?”
 - iii. “How do you feel about global warming?”
 - 2. Closed:
 - iv. Questions that ask for a specific piece of information, specific ideas or requests specific words from the respondents
 - v. “Are you in favor of policy X?”
 - vi. “When will our troops be out of Iraq?”
- I. **Simple or Complex**
 - 0. Cannot Determine.

1. Simple:
 - i. Asks a direct question
 - ii. “Do you believe we should withdraw troops from Iraq?”
 - iii. “Are you in favor of X?”
2. Complex:
 - i. Asking two questions at the same time
 - ii. “What are your feelings on the war in Iraq **AND** what do you plan to do about it?”
 - iii. “Are you in favor of X? Why or why not? ”

J. What type of question it is?

0. None/Cannot Determine/ Statement
1. Who?
 - i. “Who do you think is best equipped to deal with the crisis in the Middle East?”
2. What?
 - i. “What do you plan to do to about rising gas prices?”
3. When?
 - i. “When will there be a plan for exiting Iraq?”
4. Where?
 - i. “Where do you plan to get the funding for future Social Security?”
5. Why?
 - i. “Why has the Democratic party not made progress on X?”
 - ii. NOT WHY OR WHY NOT.
6. How?
 - i. “How will you address the health care issue in our country?”
 - ii. “How will this be different and why?” [this is a how question because without the how there is no why]
7. Do?
 - i. “Do you have a plan?”
 - ii. “Are we better off?”
 - iii. “Would you agree?”
8. Multiple Question types
 - i. **Is** Iraq better off and **how** can we move forward [asking two distinctly different types of questions.
9. Other

K. Is there a setup for the question? [the setup must come before the question is asked]

0. None
 - i. Goes right into the question
1. Only Name and Hometown
 - i. “I’m Bob from Arkansas”
2. Narrative /Autobiographical
 - i. “Living in New Orleans post Katrina is very difficult...”
 - ii. “My daughter has been suffering...”
 - iii. “History has shown...”
3. Situational / Informational
 - i. “The health care crisis...”
 - ii. “Crime is on the rise in America...”
 - iii. Gives statistics regarding a certain problem
 - iv. “There are millions of Americans without health insurance...”

L. Does the question request a counter-argument?

- i.e., Some people think X, Some people think not X, what do you think?
 i.e., “I think X, what do you think?”
1. Yes
 2. No

M. What type of answer is the question asking for?

1. Neutral
 - i. Does not take a stance on either side
 - ii. “There is an issue in our country...”
2. Take a Stand
 - iii. “I will lower taxes by doing X “
 - iv. “Our president has suggested a constitutional amendment, where do you stand on this?”
3. Balanced
 - v. “There are options on both sides, X and Y”
 - vi. “What are our options for social security?”

N. Does the question provide specific alternatives?

1. Yes
 - i. Provides alternatives for the candidate to choose from
 - ii. “Is the war in Iraq OR rising oil prices the bigger concern?”
 - iii. “Why or why not?” [this added to a question asks for alternatives]
 - iv. “Is or Is not...”
2. No
 - v. Provides no alternatives, leaves question open
 - vi. “Are you in favor of policy X?”

O. Who is the question directed to?

1. A specific candidate
 - i. “This question is addressed to Hillary Clinton”
2. Multiple candidates
 - ii. “This question is for Senators Obama and Clinton”
3. All candidates
 - iii. “This question is open to all candidates”

P. Is the question relevant to politics?

1. Relevant
 - i. Question related to political issues
2. Irrelevant
 - ii. “Who is going to win the SEC championship?”

Q. What is the question topic?

- Fill in Question Topic