

Technology, Political Debates, and Civic Engagement

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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 present and question and visual characteristics. 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 questions of the candidates. The study also found that the videos selected by CNN for broadcast were representative of the videos submitted to and archived on the YouTube website.

## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgments-----  | iii |
| Abstract-----   | iv  |
| 1 Table of Contents -----                                   | v   |
| 2 Technology, Political Debates, and Civic Engagement ----- | 1   |
| 12 Decline of American Civic Engagement -----               | 4   |
| 13 Perceived Reasons for Civic Disengagement-----           | 7   |
| 14 Technology -----   | 11  |
| 15 Timeline of Political Technology Use by Campaigns -----  | 13  |
| 16 Politics and Technology -----                            | 18  |
| 36 Redefining Citizen Participation -----                   | 18  |
| 37 Citizen Mobilization-----                                | 21  |
| 17 CNN-YouTube Debates-----                                 | 24  |
| 18 Summary-----   | 24  |
| 3 Chapter 2-----  | 26  |
| 19 Audience Participation -----                             | 27  |
| 20 Increased Connection Opportunities-----                  | 28  |
| 21 Extension of the Debates -----                           | 29  |
| 22 The Videos -----   | 30  |
| 23 Ratings, Success, and Criticisms -----                   | 31  |
| 24 Research Questions -----                                 | 33  |
| 4 Chapter 3-----  | 38  |
| 25 Sampling Procedure -----                                 | 41  |

|    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
| 26 | Variable Selection                                   | 44  |
| 27 | oding  | 47  |
| 28 | Codebook   | 48  |
| 38 | Demographic Characteristics                          | 49  |
| 39 | Question Characteristics                             | 49  |
| 40 | Video Characteristics                                | 53  |
| 5  | Chapter 4  | 57  |
| 29 | Research Question 1                                  | 57  |
| 41 | Research Question 1a                                 | 60  |
| 30 | Research Question 2                                  | 61  |
| 42 | Research Question 2a                                 | 66  |
| 31 | Research Question 3                                  | 67  |
| 43 | Research Question 3a                                 | 69  |
| 32 | Research Question 4                                  | 70  |
| 44 | Demographic Characteristics of the Broadcast Debates | 72  |
| 45 | Question Characteristics of the Broadcast Debates    | 73  |
| 46 | Visual Characteristics of the Broadcast Debates      | 74  |
| 47 | Research Question 4a                                 | 76  |
| 48 | Research Question 4b                                 | 76  |
| 6  | Chapter 5  | 78  |
| 33 | Addressing CNN-YouTube Debate Criticisms             | 90  |
| 34 | Limitations and Future Research                      | 92  |
| 35 | Conclusion   | 93  |
| 7  | References   | 96  |
| 8  | Appendix A: Video Example #1                         | 111 |

|    |                                    |     |
|----|------------------------------------|-----|
| 9  | Appendix B: Video Example #2-----  | 112 |
| 10 | Appendix C: Video Example #3 ----- | 114 |
| 11 | Appendix D: Codebook -----         | 115 |

## Technology, Political Debates, and Civic Engagement

Although the United States is seen by many as a foundational democracy, America has one of the lowest voter turnouts of any democratic nation. The median U.S. turnout over the last 30 years is 41.4% (Pillsbury, Johannesen, & Arp, 2007); in comparison, Italy averages a 90% voter turnout and Australia averages around 83% (CQ Researcher, 2000). Even the voter turnout of 64% during the 2004 election between Bush and Kerry, the highest rate of participation since 1960, is dramatically lower than that of most democratically elected governments (Holder, 2006). A 2006 article in *Time* magazine provided insight into the current voting trends of the American public. Their survey indicated that only 35% of eligible voters participate in most elections; 20% of eligible voters are registered but do not always vote; 23% of eligible voters vote rarely; and 22% of voting-age adults are not even registered to vote (*Time*, 2006, p. 46).

Although many organizations such as *Rock the Vote* and the ACLU have put a great deal of effort into increasing the registration rate among eligible voters, this effort does not necessarily translate into consistent civic engagement and participation, especially in terms of voting rates (Gans, 2005; McKinney, Kaid, & Bystrom, 2005 ). Perhaps the key to solving the decline of American civic engagement lies in the use of innovative internet technologies that encourage individuals to become civically involved through an alternate form of democratic participation (Culver, 2005; Davis, 2002; Howard, 2006). While Howard Dean's campaign used internet technologies with some



measurable success in 2004 (Hollihan, 2001), political campaigns for 2008 are beginning to tap the potential of internet technologies to help alleviate this decline.

In 1998, Kaid stated that, “when political communication is assessed in the next millennium, maybe only ten years from now, the entire process by which we now define political campaigning will be completely different” (p. 125). There is no doubt that Kaid was alluding to the role that internet technologies would play in the future of politics in the United States. Although we are just now approaching the decade-mark Kaid was speaking of, it is evident that an ever-evolving media environment has changed the ways in which individuals’ discuss and participate in politics. Although many discussions regarding the potential of the internet to revitalize democratic participation are typically guarded and somewhat speculative (i.e., Chadwick, 2005; Davis, 2002; Putnam, 1998), statistics on Web sites such as techpresident.com and technorati.com clearly indicate that the American public is using the internet to discuss and engage in political conversations. In addition, a recent report published by the Pew Internet and American Life project notes that the internet has become a significant source for political news; 24% of Americans regularly access campaign news through internet sources (Kohut, 2008).

There are many attributes that may make internet technologies an appealing medium for those wanting to become civically and politically engaged. Part of the allure may be found in the elements that set the internet apart from more traditional forms of media. The internet (a) increases the speed with which information can be gathered and transmitted, (b) increases the volume of information that is easily accessible, (c) creates greater flexibility for when information is accessed, (d) provides greater opportunity and

mixtures of interactivity, (e) shifts the nature of community from geographic to interest-based, (f) blurs distinctions between types of media, (g) challenges traditional definitions of information gatekeepers and authoritative voices, and (h) challenges traditional definitions of producers and consumers of information (Delli Carpini, 2000). Because of these differences, the online environment may offer options for civic and political engagement that individuals perceived as lacking in more traditional forms of media. Because many internet sites offer opinions that differ significantly from those available via mainstream media outlets, the internet offers expanded levels of information and ways to become politically involved (Hill & Hughes, 1997). In addition, many Web sites facilitate a feeling of community and connectedness that traditional forms of media and more traditional political campaigning do not (Bonner, Carlitz, Gunn, Maak & Ratliff, 2005; Zhang & Chia, 2006; Xenos & Moy, 2007) Thus, internet technologies can provide a degree of connection that many feel has become increasingly rare in physical space (Chadwick, 2005; Davis, 2002).

The user-generated presidential candidate debates sponsored by CNN and YouTube in 2007 provide a unique case from which to assess how individuals are using online technologies to participate in the political environment. Although previous town hall debates have allowed for limited audience participation, the CNN-YouTube debates provided the first opportunity for individuals to question presidential candidates on a national stage; therefore, these debates may indicate a shift in the ways in which people become civically, and ultimately politically, engaged. Hoping to capitalize on the popularity YouTube gained during the 2004 election, YouTube sought to use the creation

of these debates as a method to bring a level of authenticity to a traditionally static political institution by bringing transparency and access to voters (Chadwick, 2005; Deggans, 2007; TechWeb 2007). Although the debates are seen by some as nothing more than a political gimmick, others, such as Andrew Rasiej, founder of techpresident, feel that these debates indicate a transformative moment in American political communication (Dilanian, 2007).

This study seeks to understand whether the debates were indeed “the most earthshaking change in communication technology for presidential politics since the Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960” (*The NY Times*, 2007), a superficial political publicity stunt, or somewhere in between. The study will examine the characteristics and quality of questions asked by submitters, the range and quality of the videos submitted, the demographics of submitters who used the debates as a mode of engagement, and the degree to which CNN’s video selection mirrored the population of videos submitted to the debates online. The following section will discuss the decline of civic engagement in the United States, the potential of online technologies to engage individuals in political discussion, and how the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates provided a new opportunity for political participation.

### *Decline of American Civic Engagement*

Civic engagement, the driving force of democracy, is often characterized by the act of voting. In reality, a citizens’ civic engagement is defined by activities that address public issues or concerns through methods that are not connected to elections or government, for example, volunteering, joining associations, or forming neighborhood

watch organizations (Delli Carpini, 2004; McKinney, Kaid, & Bystrom, 2005). Because definitions of what constitutes civic and political engagement differ across the literature, with some noting that both can be related under the broader term of democratic engagement (Delli Carpini, 2004), it is important to distinguish the differences.

Following Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, political engagement includes 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” (1995, p. 38). While consistent civic engagement may lead to consistent political engagement, for the purposes of the current study, the focus will be on the ways in which the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates allowed citizens a different method through which to become civically engaged.

Since the 1960s, the level of civic involvement in terms of political participation (the only readily available measure of civic participation) amongst the American electorate has declined. During elections between 1960 and 2004 the voter turnout among American voters decreased by an average of 4% per election (Levine & Lopez, 2002). In 1996, only 49% of eligible citizens voted; the voter turnout was the lowest during any presidential election in U.S. history (CQ Researcher, 2000). According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the United States ranks 140<sup>th</sup> among the world’s 163 democratically elected governments in terms of voter turnout (CQ Researcher, 2000). This decline has been framed as a crisis of civic culture and citizenship (Rideout & Mosco, 1997), with some researchers suggesting that there is evidence that people actually work to avoid allowing public issues to contextualize their

lives by avoiding political conversation and participation (Eliasoph, 1997). It is suggested that by almost every measure Americans' direct engagement in politics and government has declined steadily and sharply over the last generation, despite the fact that levels of education – one of the best predictors for political participation – has risen over this same time period (Putnam, 1995, 2000).

While no single, definitive factor explains the decline in political participation, Shearer (2005) attempts to categorize and provide perspective regarding disengaged American voters. Labeled the *Doers*, this group consists of younger individuals that are affluent and follow the campaigns and believe their vote counts, if they choose to vote. The *Unpluggeds*, are also young but not as affluent or connected to their communities as *Doers*; they hold negative views toward politics, see no connection between their life and public life, and feel that politicians do not reflect their views. The *Irritable* are educated, affluent and older, they are connected with what is going on in the world but are dissatisfied with governmental decisions, and do not see value in any candidate. The *Don't Knows*, are the least likely to be registered voters, have little interest in public affairs, and are a complacent group of citizens. Finally, the *Alienated*, are made up of the oldest and poorest group of non-voters; they do not read newspapers or watch televised news and typically hold the most negative view of government. Shearer's categorizations help to further the idea that there is no one reason for civic disengagement by illustrating that there are many different types of disengaged populations. Because of this, it is difficult to find a method to increase civic engagement amongst diversely disengaged populations.

### *Perceived Reasons for Civic Disengagement*

Diminishing civic involvement is a significant concern within American democracy for many evident reasons, such as a decline in representative democracy, limited voter participation, and apathy toward political institutions. Another important reason is that most disengaged populations include those at the bottom end of the income, educational, and age scales (Gans, 2005), populations that typically have the lowest levels of voter turnout. Additionally, because democracy is fostered by civic dialogue, it is important that the reasons for this decline are discussed in order to provide a realistic remedy to an ongoing problem within American politics (Andolina, Jenkins, Keeter, & Zukin, 2002; McKinney, Kaid, & Bystrom, 2005). Perhaps the greatest challenge in overcoming civic disengagement is the variety of reasons attributed to low civic interest.

A significant factor related to declining civic engagement pertains to the political process itself. Individuals report a lack of understanding about political processes, a diminished interest in politics, and limited trust in politics and politicians (Culver, 2005). American voters are disengaged because they feel as if they have been cut off from the system, do not see the relevance of current issues to their own lives, and do not have enough information about the issues (CQ Researcher, 2004). Additionally, the political practice of courting target voters diminishes the electorate and results in elections that appeal to fewer voters (Gans, 2005). Prior to the proliferation of the internet, restricted access to candidates, political debates, and political information were cited as reasons for disinterest in civic life. However, it is also important to note that even now, after significant penetration of internet technologies, some demographic populations still have

limited access to candidates, debates, and political information. A related issue concerns the act of voting itself. Voters have reported experiencing confusion and intimidation regarding the voting process, a lack of knowledge and skill regarding the voting process, and confusion relating to the rights and responsibilities of voters (Culver, 2005).

Changing national and community structures may be other factors in declining civic engagement. Because civic engagement is a learned process, the decline of civic education in public schools, the lack of testing about current events, and the substantial decline in newspaper readership and a reliance on televised news are all factors that may affect civic participation (Gans, 2005). The change in social capital may be another factor affecting civic engagement; individuals with limited social capital may have no inclination toward becoming civically engaged. Therefore, eroding social capital, diminished connectedness with the community, and the decline in structures such as churches and unions that once helped to foster civic participation are seen as other factors facilitating declining civic involvement (Gans, 2005; Putnam, 1995, 2000).

Finally, declining political efficacy, or the feeling that by participating one can have an impact on the political system, is another factor in civic disengagement. Political efficacy is an important factor because it is a good measure of political activity among certain demographics (Ahmed, 2005). Because of declining efficacy, citizens are not paying attention to political advertising or political news, activities which typically translate into other forms of civic engagement (McKinney, Kaid, & Bystrom, 2005). Declining efficacy can stem from civic attitudes and roadblocks to mobilization,

including difficulties encountered in coordinating the involvement and efforts of diverse community institutions (McLeod, Eveland, & Horowitz, 1998).

Finally, voter fatigue can be attributed to three significant issues: political ambivalence, the rise of identity politics, and partisan discourse (Denton & Woodward, 1998). Historically, American's have been known to foster a level of antipathy toward governmental power and authority. Historically American's have been known to foster some misgivings regarding the governmental power and authority embedded within our political system. Now, however, Americans appear to have a deeper ambivalence towards our political system, most notably indicated by the historic decline in voting. Most citizens have only limited knowledge of public issues and do not show signs of a desire to increase their knowledge of matters of public concern. This could be attributed to the fact that there is a general decline in attention to the news, especially in comparison to other media content. Pews studies indicate that typically fewer than half of American adults read the newspaper regularly, just over half (53%) report regularly watching national news coverage, and less than 60% report paying close attention to local news coverage (Pew, 1995, 2002). It is suggested that this disconnect between the nation and its civic life seems to illustrate that more Americans see the political process as something that is, at best, on the margins of their own lives (Denton and Woodward, 1998).

It is argued by Denton and Woodward (1998) that identity politics, where identification with the broad political middle has been partly replaced by interest in the issues of specific groups, may play a role in the fatigue that many American voters feel. The rise of identity politics may undermine the belief that the constituents of the United



States share the same values and goals in terms of the political future of the country. In a time when political parties are divided on many issues such as the war in Iraq and broad social issues, the practice of identity politics to focus on differences and nurture political causes forces opposition and could foster civic and political withdrawal. Issues such as these have the potential to deeply divide Americans and create a sense of winning and losing on a particular issue where winning on a particular issue confers legitimacy and power to some groups (Denton & Woodward, 1998). Because of this sense of winning and losing, two broad divisions have formed in America between those who want American life to reflect its traditional religious and social beliefs and those who favor more progressive changes (Denton & Woodward, 1998). The result of identity politics is not just a country that is divided on issues of social concern, but a country where a sense of generalized fatigue for the larger polity seems to have set in and where the overarching effects of identity politics seems to be alienation (Denton & Woodward, 1998).

Finally, many Americans believe that there is an intensification of patrician and non-conciliatory discourse in politics, that is, political communication that many believe to be shrouded in manipulative context. Political communication is most often understood in the context of suspicion about governmental processes and the fundamental health of the nation's civil affairs (Denton & Woodward, 1998). A century ago, personality was not so intimately associated with a person's public persona; now, meaning in political life comes from the personality of the leader (Denton & Woodward, 1998). Due to technological and media advances, the public now has greater access to political figures and the ability to scrutinize what politicians say, and attribute motives behind the actions

that are taken. With the rise of “entertainer-provocateurs,” radio and television figures who entertain by trashing their subjects, civil affairs have become a part of the celebrity mix that affects media attention (Denton & Woodward, 1998). The overall negativity surrounding politics and politicians that stems from this generation of entertainment news, where suspicion and controversy often take center stage, may lead to public fatigue and cause voters to abstain from participating in democratic processes.

### *Technology*

Citizens’ access to new and emerging forms of media and technology has impacted life in many ways. This change has opened up new avenues of interaction that were not possible before; this same effect has been seen in politics. The internet’s ability to impact and increase civic engagement and democratic conversation could be profound. If correctly utilized, the internet is setup and ready for democratic participation because it contains within it dominant features that are embodied in an ideal democratic environment. These features make it easier to transcend geographic and spatial constraints, to communicate and deliberate with individuals not previously accessible, and to seek out forums to obtain information that allows for equal participation in political conversation (Dahlgren, 2005). The basic notion of a healthy democracy is an environment that allow for the free flow of information and ideas. The internet helps encourage this by providing an atmosphere where rational thinking, argument, and discussion can take place via an “unfettered flow of information and ideas” (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 33). The internet supports the occurrence of this communication by encouraging new forms of citizenship and public life which in turn can create a new class of political

participants (Broeder, 2005). Of course, this potential is also contingent upon how individuals use the Net (Zhang & Chia, 2006).

While there are many arguments advocating for the potential of technology to increase civic engagement, it is also possible that the internet polarizes opinion and reduces civic dialogue. Although the digital environment is not hindered by many elitist characteristics of the traditional mass media, it may also create new cleavages between individuals that do not have command of such communication resources (Brants, 2005). Additionally, the technological transformation privatizes leisure time and could contribute to limited social-capital formation because the community that is being experienced is wider and shallower, limiting the possibility for true connectedness (Putnam, 1995, 2000). Another concern for the proliferation of online politics is for the people that do not have access to internet technologies. It is argued that the digital divide, which separates those that can afford technological access from those that cannot, will force those without access, which typically includes already underrepresented demographics, to become even less engaged (Samoriski, 2002).

Although political information is available through many different online sources, most do not allow for direct communication between candidates and constituents. While the use of websites and blogs have helped to increase the level of communication possible from candidates to citizens, this communication is typically dyadic, one-to-many, or many-to-many forms of communication. While these forms of communication might increase an individual's civic knowledge, the limited interactivity does not allow people to engage in the process. As previously discussed, the level of access and

interactivity are key factors in promoting increased civic dialogue and engagement; no communication method as of yet has been effective in increasing communication from citizens to candidates. The following section will discuss the evolution of technology and politics, the influence of technology on political participation and discuss why the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates offer citizens the ability to directly impact the American political process.

#### *Timeline of Political Technology Use by Campaigns*

There are many technologies that have had an impact on the dissemination of political information; the first modern form of which was the fax machine. In the 1986 election, political parties successfully used the fax machine to distribute campaign information to the political press; although the fax machine was in use prior to this election, this was the first election to significantly utilize the capabilities of the fax (Howard, 2006). By the 1990 election, email had become an accessible and viable communication tool. Email was seen as an empowering technological tool that would allow the citizen-activist to become more active (Ganly, 1991). In addition to email, online discussion groups allowed the possibility to connect with people across socioeconomic boundaries, to share grievances, and to encourage participation in civic life (Wittig & Schmitz, 1996). By the 1992 campaign, campaigns had begun keeping email lists and bulletin boards for members. However, candidates did not really incorporate these elements into their campaign strategies; instead they focused their attention on the ability to use satellite technology to transmit political messages into local

markets (Howard, 2006). In 1994, Senator Dianne Feinstein became the first candidate to construct a website for her constituency office (Hollihan, 2001; Howard, 2006).

The 1996 election marked the first contest in which internet technologies were integrated into campaign strategies. The widespread use of candidate websites, which would be considered very basic by today's standards, provided a place where voters could gain information about the candidates and search for details relevant to their voting decision (Hollihan, 2001). The candidates also realized the role the internet could play in media control. Campaigns could now, at least to some extent, control the ways in which the media portrayed them, articulate the campaign's messages directly to reporters, political action committees, and opinion leaders, and raise questions regarding arguments made by opposing candidates (Hollihan, 2001). Additionally, both presidential campaigns used the internet to send the press point-by-point rebuttals to claims made by the opposing party during the debates in an attempt to control the flow of news and influence the ways in which debate outcomes were reported (Hollihan, 2001). The election also marked the first time that national political organizations began actively contacting voters through the internet (Howard, 2006).

Also during this election, analysis of how people, beyond activists, used the internet began to emerge. The discussions that occurred at this early juncture of internet research were much the same as current discussions regarding the internet. Questions regarding how political deliberation online differed from political deliberation offline emerged and researchers attempted to provide a tangible, measureable link between online political interaction and more tangible forms of political engagement and activity,

such as voting (Hauben, 1997; Hill & Hughes, 1997). While it was argued that the internet functioned as a tool for organizing public opinion, other arguments asserted that online participation in politics was symbolic of nothing more than engaging with a popular new medium and not a substantive commitment to civic engagement (Howard, 2003, 2005).

In 1998, over two-thirds of candidates for congress had established websites for their campaigns; however, online technologies were still used in limited capacity (Howard, 2006). During the 1998 elections the internet was also useful for mobilizing voters and raising campaign funds. The internet served a very central role in Jesse Ventura's successful gubernatorial bid (Fineman, 1999). Ventura's campaign raised two-thirds of its fund-raising pledges online and organized the campaign's biggest event, a 72-hour final drive through the state, coordinated entirely via e-mail (Beiler, 1999). Senator Barbara Boxer also had success raising campaign funds online during the 1998 election. While not to be compared to the online fund-raising successes of today's candidates, Boxer was able to raise \$25,000 for her Senatorial campaign through online pledges.

In 2000, internet technologies began to play a more significant role in campaign strategies; new media became essential coordinating tools within campaigns and were used for publicity (Howard, 2006). Campaigns began to devote significant resources to the content available on their websites and sites began to vary by degree of informational breadth, depth, interactivity, readability, and negativity (Benoit & Benoit, 2000). The new media environment saw an increase in the number of people that were going online

to research candidates, understand policy, and read political news (Rice & Katz, 2003). By 2002, America Online had reported that over 30-million individuals had accessed online political content (Howard, 2006).

The 2004 election saw dramatic changes in the availability of new media options and in the ways in which political hypermedia were used. By the 2004 election, the internet had become a relevant source of information as one-fourth of adults reported the internet being “somewhat” or “very important” in their voting decision (Howard, 2006). While email lists were still heavily used, such lists were now used to spin daily news for supporters and no longer simply for information dissemination. Campaigns relied on the internet to organize volunteers and used candidate websites to provide basic issue positions. Although campaigns used websites, the sites avoided direct and indirect forms of dialogue with constituents and the quality and quantity of information on the sites only increased as the intensity of the campaign grew (Stromer-Galley, 2000; Xenos & Foot, 2005).

The 2004 election also saw an increase in the use of two other significant forms of technology that would impact online political engagement: open-source software and blogs. Open-source software allowed for sites such as Meetup.com to lay the groundwork for today’s social networking sites. Sites such as these allowed people to establish a political community online while blogs permitted people to convey their thoughts about politics, politicians, and the elections (Howard, 2006). Between 2004 and 2006, the number of blogs in existence skyrocketed from 4.2 million to 35.3 million (Technorati.com, 2006). While not many of the blogs were political in nature, blogs

continued to be a major avenue of online political engagement during the 2006 election. Blogs had opened up new channels of political communication and information dissemination, and quickly became sophisticated listening posts of modern democracy (Coleman, 2005). These political hypermedia outlets were especially attractive to younger individuals who were more comfortable with technology and who were less likely to use traditional mass media for political news (Delli Carpini, 2000). Overall, those seeking political information through the internet were found to be significantly younger than those getting political information through other forms of mass media (Shogren, 2000).

Organizations not connected with candidates or campaigns also used new media technologies to their advantage. During the 2004 election, the internet offered many resources, both partisan and bipartisan, aimed at informing and civically engaging individuals. Sites such as the Brennan Center for Justice (<http://www.brennancenter.org/>), ACLU (<http://www.aclu.org/>), and Rock the Vote (<http://www.rockthevote.org/>) served as important assets for those needing to register to vote, having registration difficulties, or needing other information or assistance. Sites such as these offered non-partisan information with the aim of helping voters become more democratically engaged. Partisan organizations hosted sites that offered individuals a way to become politically engaged while toeing the party line. Organizations such as Run Against Bush (<http://www.runagainstbush.com>) and Bull Moose Republicans (<http://www.bullmoosemeetup.com>) sponsored sites where the main objective was



political engagement, but the sites also provided partisan opinions of the candidates and attacks on opponents.

### *Politics and Technology*

New media technologies have played important roles in extending and promoting political communication and information dissemination and in extending and promoting political communication. Although empirical evidence is still somewhat limited, internet technologies have potential for increasing political engagement (Howard, 2006). For many, the internet serves as an agent for democracy and purposefully designed technologies can result in institutional transparency, public deliberation, and increased engagement (Bainbridge, 2003; Howard, 2006). Across the literature, the position can be drawn that the internet allows for two significant processes to take place: the redefinition of citizen participation and citizen mobilization, both of which have the potential to encourage citizens to become civically engaged.

#### *Redefining Citizen Participation*

The internet functions as an extension of the more traditional formats of mass media that people rely on for their political information. While sources such as political talk radio, television talk shows, and television news magazines exert considerable impact on individual's perception of politics (Pfau, Cho, & Chong, 2001), the internet allows for a level of selectivity and interactivity that is limited or restricted through the use of most mass media formats. The traditional media format is a system of one-to-many communication; messages are created by one entity and distributed to many audiences.

Websites, while online, still function primarily as one-to-many communication structures because the information on the site is posted by an organization for consumption by many audience members. Although websites can reframe the one-to-many structure slightly by offering minimal possibilities for audience interaction, for example through discussion boards, for the most part, websites are a static form of communication.

Through extending this communication to a many-to-many format, internet technologies such as blogging, social networking, and video-sharing websites allow for increased levels of participation as well as extended possibilities for communication and deliberation. In addition, the internet expands traditional political margins and hierarchies by offering access to opinions that fall outside of the traditional thoughts and allowing audience members to seek out and probe for different and deeper types of information (Hill & Hughes, 1997). Because of this, the internet allows for citizens to redefine what it means to be civically; allowing individuals to participate through a medium that is convenient, accessible, and comfortable for them.

The move toward e-democracy has the potential to redefine the foundations of active citizenship, to reinvigorate the democratic process and to positively (re)engage citizens in civic and political life (McCullagh, 2003). With internet access, individuals have a medium through which they can communicate their messages to large audiences – it is through this process that the internet redefines communication as well ways in which individuals can become civically involved (Katz, 1996). By providing greater access to information and organizations, internet technologies allow democracy becomes more accessible and more accentuated (Dahlgren, 2005). This environment encourages debate

and deliberations because, unlike more traditional forms of political communication, the internet does not operate on the basis of a passive audience, rather the Web allows audience members to become active gatherers and creators of information (McCullagh, 2003). Through the creation of blogs, personal campaign sites, position videos, and other forms of content creation, individuals are afforded a level of control that allows them to redefine their notion of what it means to be civically engaged.

These technological evolutions, specifically in the realm of politics, have resulted in many more and more complex definitions of citizenship. Following this evolutionary process, notions such as ecological citizenship, net citizenship, transnational citizenship, or denationalized citizenship have begun to emerge (Sassen, 2002; Van Steenbergen 1994). The internet also provides for the facilitation of interactive engagement and permits citizens to participate on a global level through public forums, citizen juries, referendums, and discussion mailing lists (Mandelson, 1998). This interactivity allows for a transnational democracy to not only exist but also to thrive (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove, 2005). New interactive media environments also encourage networking, organization, the generation of new spaces, and the emergence of new types of communities, all of which provide forums where the public can participate in different roles and methods to become involved in governance (Greenwood, 1997). A significant factor cited in the declining civic engagement of the American populace is that a lost sense of community in the United States contributes to citizens' feelings of detachment from their environment (CQ Researcher, 2000). However the increased capacity for individuals to freely move between communicative spaces could transform previous

feelings of alienation into a healthy democracy predicated on the interactions between citizens (Dahlgren, 2001; Hill & Hughes, 1997).

All of the above mentioned possibilities allow for increased access to information and more effective communication, which can be powerful forces in opening up closed societies, or closed sociological practices (Wilhelm, 1990). In addition, these possibilities are attractive to those wanting to become civically involved because these technologies allow extensive interactivity with the formalized political system, the political parties, and the elected officials, a factor that could be vital in increasing civic engagement (Hill & Hughes, 1997).

#### *Citizen Mobilization*

In addition to redefining citizenship, internet technologies have the potential to mobilize voters in unprecedented ways. Because it is much less expensive to reach voters via computers than through other forms of media, such as television or direct mail, it is now increasingly possible to reach and mobilize specific sets of voters based on salient issues (“So Where’s the Campaign?” 1998). Databases of potential voters enable campaigns to maintain information about citizens more effectively and rapidly access data regarding voters based on demographics, location, and issues that may be important to those voters (Hollihan, 2001). Campaigns can also use computerized databases to cross-reference polling and census data to send key voters, typically swing voters, messages relating to issues most likely to win their votes (Sabato & Beiler, 1988). Additionally, viral campaigning allows organizations to send mass and chain e-mails informing voters about particular issues or policies which serve not only to inform, but

mobilize citizens (Delli Carpini, 2000). Campaigns have also begun to take steps to make candidate websites more useful for constituents. Through candidate sites, online visitors can volunteer their time, contribute funds, engage in discussions with other citizens, respond to polls, and in the case of Barack Obama's website, involve themselves in a social networking site. All of these website attributes may help a voter to feel more connected to the political system and therefore more likely to participate (Fineman, 1999).

Other internet technologies, such as blogs and social networking sites, are becoming increasingly useful in political mobilization. Ready access to internet based technologies, instant text messages, and other cheap, populist technological tools are providing ways for citizens to become more informed, involved, and engaged (Pape, Bailey & Radcliffe, 2004). An interesting example that helps to put this power into perspective occurred in March of 2006. A high school student in Texas sent a message to his 100 friends on MySpace encouraging a walk-out to protest immigration policy. From his original message, other students began to email and text-message people in their network; by the end of the day students up to 20 miles away reported having received an average of 12 messages from their networks about the walk-out (Harrison & Solis, 2006). Although there was never an official count of how many students actually participated in the walk-out, it is evident from the spread of one simple message that internet technologies can be a force in political socialization and mobilization. While there is no doubt that more often than not social networking sites are not used for political gain, these networks are emerging as arenas for political discussion and activation. These

networks connect “people together like a tree with millions of tiny branches, they [the sites] could be used more and more to mobilize masses of people,” providing the basis for increased civic engagement (Harrison & Solis, 2006).

Blogs have also opened up new channels of political communication and information dissemination and have become a viable part of our political tapestry. Blogs allow individuals to stay in touch with peers and also to reach out to others with similar political opinions. In addition, effective uses of blogging have already been demonstrated and emerging applications of this technological tool could pave the way for future campaign communication (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005).

While it is difficult to empirically track whether online political participation translates into other types of civic engagement, there is evidence that people are at the very least using online media to pay attention to politics, which may be key in taking the next step to becoming involved in politics. According to the website [techpresident.com](http://techpresident.com), which tracks how people are using online technologies in regard to political candidates, candidates for the 2008 presidential election are receiving a great deal of attention online. Presidential candidates have between 1,352 and 320,250 MySpace friends, between 991 and 690,441 friends on Facebook, and are mentioned in the blogosphere between 6 and 4,332 times each day, depending on the day’s news, and candidates’ videos are watched between 3 and 27 million times each day on YouTube (TechPresident, 2008). In addition, 2% of individuals specifically named YouTube as the site they use for campaign news and 41% of individuals under 30 years-old and 20% of those over 30 report having

watched some type of campaign related video (speeches, interviews, commercials, or debates) (Kohut, 2008).

### *CNN-YouTube Debates*

The CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates provide an interesting case from which the notions of both redefined citizenship and voter mobilization may be examined. The creators of these debates encouraged the public to submit creative and thoughtful videos containing a question that they would like to see a presidential candidate answer on national television. While town hall debates have previously allowed the public to question political candidates, the CNN-YouTube debates provided the first opportunity for the public to engage in a credentialed form of mass media that has not been previously possible. The ways in which the debates may have provided for increased civic engagement and conversation will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

### *Summary*

Historically, there has been a decline in the civic participation amongst the American populace. The United States records low percentages of voter turnout when compared with other democratically elected nations and some research suggests that Americans actually keep the political system from contextualizing their lives. While there are many perceived reasons for the decline in civic engagement, there are also many possibilities that could help reverse the pattern of American disengagement. Solutions presented by many researchers include the use of internet technologies to reach out to

citizens and make them feel more educated about and more welcome to participate in the nation's political system. In short, technology has the ability to impact and increase political participation. The CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates provided the public with the first opportunity to directly question a potential presidential candidate on the biggest national stage, broadcast television. Because this is the first time that debates such as these have occurred, this study will provide an overview of how individuals elected to use these debates to become politically and civically engaged. The following chapters will discuss how the CNN-YouTube debates were enacted, and the methodology, results, and discussion of the current study; all chapters will be aimed at describing how individuals chose to use these debates to engage themselves in the political conversation of the 2008 presidential elections.



## Chapter 2

### CNN-YouTube Presidential Candidate Debates

In June of 2007 executives from CNN and founders of the video sharing website, YouTube, made an announcement that they hoped would change the face of presidential debates. A joint press release announced that CNN and YouTube would collectively create and host a set of televised presidential candidate debates. These debates would mark the first time in history where candidates would answer video questions developed by the American public and submitted to YouTube in a live candidate forum on broadcast television (YouTube Press Release, 2007). Internet technologies, such as blogs, have previously allowed for interactive and dynamic citizen-to-citizen political communication. However, the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates allowed for an increased opportunity to communicate with people that have differing political ideologies. With the advent of these debates, online politics moved from being relatively static to include interactive, dynamic communication. It marked a shift from the use of websites to disseminate information to a venue where citizens could directly question candidates and involve themselves in national political conversation. In addition, the debates created an opportunity for individuals to become civically engaged on a national scale. Most civic activities, such as volunteering at a soup kitchen, take place within the community in which one lives; the CNN-YouTube debates allowed an opportunity for individuals to establish a civic connection with others across the country. Acknowledging the vast and varied populations that use YouTube, the creators felt that this debate format

would “engage more viewers – and potential voters – than ever before” (YouTube Press Release, 2007). The creators also acknowledged the potential political power of the Internet by noting that “these debates take a bold step of embracing the ever-increasing role of the Internet in politics” (YouTube Press Release, 2007).

### *Audience Participation*

The CNN-YouTube debates allowed the American public, for the first time, the opportunity to become instrumentally involved in the creation of the debates. Although some previous debate formats have allowed for minimal audience participation, in general debates do not allow for audience contribution (i.e., Blimes, 1999; Commission on Presidential Debates, 2000, 2002, 2004; Seltz & Yoakam, 1976, 1960). Most research contends that debates are only created for an audience in that candidates construct arguments in order to impact a particular segment of the audience and that the audience is simply a passive recipient of information (Blimes, 1999). In fact, during the introduction of most debates, it is noted that the audience serves no role in the debate itself. Moderator Jim Lehrer stated at the beginning of the September 2004 presidential debates that, “there is an audience here in the hall, but they will remain absolutely silent for the next 90 minutes, except for now, when they join me in welcoming President Bush and Senator Kerry” (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2004). During other debates, moderators have said things such as “there is an audience here in the hall, but they have been instructed to remain silent throughout” and “they are not here to participate, only to listen” (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2004).

Although not all debate formats completely restrict audience participation, traditional debates have stringently limited audience members' ability to participate in this political process. The CNN-YouTube debate allowed individuals the opportunity to not only connect with the political process by submitting a question to the debates, but also to embed aspects of their own personality into creating debate questions that were personally important.

### *Increased Connection Opportunities*

The CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates provided an increased opportunity for individuals to become engaged in an important civic process. A significant factor in civic disengagement is rooted in the inability to become involved in the democratic process. Through these debates, CNN and YouTube created a forum where interested individuals had the ability to connect, communicate, and become informed. By creating a multi-faceted online platform, where many different aspects relating to the candidates were available, the *You Choose '08* (<http://youtube.com/youchoose>) site allowed individuals to use community-building features to generate political conversation.

Through harnessing the power of online collectives, YouTube and CNN provided an opportunity for users to watch, share, and comment on all of the videos submitted for the debates. In addition to having unlimited access to the submissions, users also had access to archives of the candidates' answers to each question. This allowed users an opportunity to discuss the answers given and to further engage in political discussion. Although Web sites and blogs have provided opportunities for online political

connectedness, the YouTube format provided for increased dynamic communication and allowed users to post written commentary and also video-clip responses.

These and other elements of these debates provided opportunities for individuals to feel more connected to the debate process. First, prior to each debate, users had access to special coverage including behind-the-scenes reporting, podcasts and on-demand video. Second, submitters were given the unprecedented opportunity to create a question that would be directly posed to the candidates. Although Anderson Cooper did host the event, he was there only as a host, and did not ask questions that initiated new topics. This helped to foster a more direct connection between the electorate and the candidates. Using candidate-created introduction videos in lieu of traditional opening statements was another change that may have helped individuals feel more connected to the candidates. Most of the videos were self-mocking and humorous, factors that may have added a level of humility lacking in more formalized debate settings. Finally, Google maps were used during the debate broadcasts to pinpoint where questioners were from which may have offered a final element of connectedness. Through the use of the maps, it was possible for viewers to see that they may share similar concerns with an individual from across the country.

### *Extension of the Debates*

As previously mentioned, citizens need to feel as if they have access to political information in order to feel informed and engaged. With traditional debate formats, an individual who does not watch the broadcast is only able to learn about the debate through subsequent mediated commentary. A key benefit to online debates is the ability

to extend the life of the debate beyond the broadcast event. CNN ensured that the debates appeared on all of the network's platforms and all events were simulcast on CNN.com, CNN International, CNN en Espanol, CNN radio, and CNN Airport Network. Additionally, through the CNN election site, it was possible to stream and download full versions of both debates. By allowing full access to the debates online, CNN and YouTube took a step toward providing broader access to presidential debate information.

Additionally, YouTube created a subsection of *You Choose '08* dedicated to the candidates' positions on national issues called *Face the Candidates*. This section of the site contained videos from all candidates regarding their position on significant national issues such as Iraq, education, healthcare, immigration, and the economy. Similar to the debate submissions, individuals could comment on, rate, and share the candidates' position videos which allowed for an additional opportunity for greater political connectedness and conversation.

### *The Videos*

Perhaps the most significant shift to the debate landscape was the inclusion of user-generated video questions. Visual elements play an important role in communication and enhance textual and oral messages. It is argued that technology delivers our world in visual terms (Rose, 2001) and noted that new technologies for creating the visual have surpassed the written text as the "richest, most fascinating modality for conveying ideas" (Stafford, 1996, p. 4). New and emerging technologies allow for the construction of new types of social categorization. It is through the visual that social categories can now be

further constructed and that individuals begin to associate certain elements of observed behavior with specific populations (Rose, 2001).

In regard to the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates, individuals had the opportunity to ask questions in ways that were both textually and visually representative and were challenged by CNN and YouTube to be creative and provocative in the creation of their videos. The inclusion of the visual into these debates may have helped to produce a more dynamic mode of political communication by allowing individuals to feel more connected to the political conversation. Watching videos asking important political questions that were created by other Americans may help to foster a sense of citizen participation that may not be possible by watching a professional moderator question political candidates.

#### *Ratings, Success, and Criticisms*

There is no question that this debate generated a great deal of buzz throughout the political and media worlds. If the success or failure of such a venture is dictated by ratings, then the CNN-YouTube debates could be considered successful. The debate between Democratic candidates in July 2007 brought in 2.6 million viewers, just shy of the 2.8 million that watched the New Hampshire Democratic debate in June (Toff, 2007). In addition, over 400,000 viewers were members of the much sought-after 18-34 year-old voter segment. Overall, the Democratic debate was the second-most watched debate ever aired on a cable network at the time (Raby, 2007). The Republican debate, on November 28, 2007, brought in 4.49 million viewers which made the debate the most watched debate in cable news history thus far (Crupi, 2007). Around 516,000 viewers for the

Republican debate were from the 18-34 year-old voter segment and an estimated 1.3 million viewers were between 18 and 49 years old (Crupi, 2007).

In addition to ratings, the attitudes displayed by both the creators of the debates and the candidates were positive, helping add to the air of success (McCarthy, 2007; Seelye, 2007). Both CNN and YouTube were enthusiastic toward the format change and felt that the debates provided an important step in including citizens in campaign dialogue. Additionally, most candidates responded positively to participating in the debates, having realized early on in the campaign the need to successfully integrate internet-based activities into their campaigns (McCarthy, 2007). The debate formats were also seen as successful by other media outlets because organizations such as Yahoo, the Huffington Post, and Slate magazine all have plans to produce debates that take place exclusively online (Raby, 2007).

The debates also faced some significant criticisms. First, the debates were chastised by many as being flashy political stunts that contained little to no substance and did nothing to further American democratic understanding or participation (Levy, 2007). Another criticism was that citizens, unlike journalists, would be unable to construct debate-worthy questions that would significantly contribute to the nation's political conversation. Because YouTube is typically associated as an internet site used only by kids and college students, concerns for the choice of venue for video collection were also voiced (Vargas, 2007). Another criticism was that the debates focused too much on the videos and therefore allowed the candidates to answer with standard talking points offering no substantive answers (Healy & Zeleny, 2007). The inclusivity of the debates

was another criticism. While the format allowed for an increased number of individuals to participate, it was not necessarily the all-inclusive format that was advertised. As with any communication technology, individuals had to be savvy enough to use the technology in order to fully participate in the discourse. Although it was noted by CNN and YouTube that minimal technological knowledge was needed, access to a video recorder and broadband Internet access were required. Because portions of the populations with the lowest levels of civic engagement are also those with minimal technological access, these requirements, while minimal, may have excluded some populations from participation. Finally, although CNN and YouTube touted the debates as completely user-generated, which would empower the average citizen, the selection of videos for broadcast was made by staff at CNN. This prompted significant criticism because YouTube provides an environment free of editorial control and allowing CNN staff to select the videos resulted in the ultimate form of media control (Baldwin, 2007; Levy, 2007).

### *Research Questions*

It is discussions such as these that lead to the research questions for this study. Overall, this study is interested in describing the individuals that chose to use the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates to become engaged with the American political process and how they chose to do so. The following four research questions will begin to provide an understanding into how individuals used the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates as a form of civic engagement.



Across the literature several themes emerge from which the following research questions were derived. Civic engagement, which is most identifiable by voter turnout, has become a problem in the United States. Internet technologies, which may play a role in decreasing disengagement, provide another medium through which citizens can learn more about political candidates and campaigns, and potentially, become more involved in political conversations. However, 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 civic engagement? Or does the internet reaffirm traditional political and demographic divisions in the electorate? Thus, this research is primarily concerned with the ways in which, when a publicized and accessible opportunity is available, citizens choose to incorporate themselves into national political discussion. To answer this overarching question, it is first necessary to look at the demographic populations that had/took the opportunity to participate in the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates to see if this population represents traditionally disengaged populations. Thus, the research question is:

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 archived debates?

As previous discussion demonstrates, the degree to which citizens are allowed to participate in political debates has historically been strictly limited. One strong criticism of the CNN-YouTube debates was that citizens would not be able to ask politically relevant debate-worthy questions. One goal of this project is to assess the relevance and quality of their questions. It is equally important to understand how, when given the opportunity for direct citizen participation, individuals chose to incorporate themselves into political conversation. Understanding what topics submitters found salient and examining the political relevance and complexity of the questions submitted may allow for an understanding of how people chose to become civically engaged. Of equal importance is the quality of the question and question complexity in terms of contribution to political conversation because these elements may allude to the amount of time that the submitter put into the construction of their question and therefore their desire to participate. The research question is:

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 archived sample of the Democratic and Republican debates?

One of the advantages of internet technology is its ability to allow for both textual and visual communication. In relation to the CNN-YouTube debates, submitters had the opportunity to take advantage of the visual environment and use it to enhance their video questions. As Rose (2001) suggests, the world is now delivered in visual terms and the debates allowed a unique opportunity for submitters to ask their questions both verbally

and visually. Through the use of video-based questions, submitters had the opportunity to include elements within their video that may have enhanced the presentation of the question or made the question more engaging. In addition, the inclusion of such visual elements may help to combat feelings of political fatigue that Denton and Woodward (1998) suggest plague Americans by indicating that it is no longer possible to discuss politics in the usual methods and through traditional channels. Because of this, the CNN-YouTube debates provided an interesting opportunity from which to investigate how, when given the chance to visually represent themselves, participants chose to do so. Thus, the third research question is concerned with how citizens used this opportunity. The research question is:

RQ3: What visual characteristics are present in the videos submitted for the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?

RQ3a: Do the visual characteristics of the archived sample differ between the Democratic and Republican debates?

Despite allowing the public the opportunity to create and upload questions for the Democratic and Republican debates, CNN retained editorial control over the video selection process for the broadcast debates. This control has been a point of significant criticism of the CNN-YouTube debates. While some argue that editorial control is necessary to retain the dignity and rigor of presidential candidate debates; others argue that CNN's exercise of editorial control contradicts the nature of the internet in general and specifically the YouTube environment, a fact which ultimately would constrict participation. Thus, the question is:

RQ4: What were the characteristics (demographic population, question, visual) of the videos selected by CNN for airing on the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?

RQ4a: Do these video characteristics differ between the broadcast versions of the Democratic and Republican debates?

RQ4b: Do these video characteristics differ between the broadcast and archived debate videos?

## Chapter 3 Method

Presidential debates have always supplied ample fodder for those studying political communication. Debates have been examined scientifically by social scientists and textually by rhetoricians. They have been reviewed and commented on by mainstream media columnists, examined as events by historians, and discussed in depth by politicians, political experts, journalists, and sponsors. Because of the various methods employed, published debate research can be found in a variety of books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and forums for postelection analyses. Debate research has also encompassed a wide array of topics. Some of the more prevalent include: voter effects; debate formats, legal and political aspects of debates, political socialization through debates, polls and pollsters, and public policy considerations (Krauss, 1999).

Content analysis has been a common method for studying presidential debates. For instance, Ellsworth (1965) used content analysis to examine if candidates made clear statements of their positions and offered reasoning and evidence during debates. Lanoue and Schrott (1989) used content analysis to triangulate candidates' ability to address issues that constituent surveys indicated were of concern. Benoit, Pier, Brazeal, McHale, Klyukovski, and Airne (2002) employed content analysis to analyze acclaims, attacks, and defenses used by candidates during presidential primary debates. These few examples provide evidence of the history and scope of content analyses in debate research.

Although debate research has a substantial scope, there are two distinct areas of debate research that are lacking: research on the questions asked during debates and research on the audience's role in televised debates. This project will seek to address both of these issues through a systematic evaluation of both the content of the questions submitted to the CNN-YouTube presidential debates and the demographic characteristics of the individuals that participated in the debates.

The first documented quantitative review of a body of texts, which provided the foundations for content analysis research, occurred in 18<sup>th</sup> century Sweden (Krippendorf, 2004). In this study, scholars sought to determine if a collection of songs harbored social ideals that were undermining the clergy of the Swedish state church. The next publicized use of content analysis occurred through the creations of a classification scheme for analyzing the "inner structure of content" of newspapers (Krippendorf, 2004, p. 4). Studies, such as these provide the bases for creating a formulaic classification scheme from which descriptive data can be drawn. These analyses were used to determine the social outcomes and functions performed by specific texts, key elements that more recent content analyses also seek to determine.

In addition to providing descriptive information, content analyses are used to provide generalizations about populations of texts, images or symbolic matters in relation to the wider cultural context of which they are a part (Krippendorf, 2004; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2006). The method allows researchers to look at separate yet connected elements of messages within a text or body of text. This allows for a systematic way for tracking what is represented in the message pool and provides an appropriate way to

assess reliability (Neuendorf, 2002). A researcher using content analysis can examine both manifest (explicit) and latent (implicit) messages within a text to uncover any potential implications contained within that text. Content analysis allows for explicit and implicit categorizations of particular classes of people, actions, roles, and stations presented in media-circulated content (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2006). Additionally, content analysis permits a researcher to make inferences and generalizations about particular texts without having undue influence upon the interpretation of the data. Through the creation and application of an operationalized coding scheme, it is possible to systematically examine a set of texts and make inferences that are both valid and reliable. The systematic nature of content analysis also helps to eliminate potential bias regarding the text(s). As a technique, content analysis allows for replicable and valid inferences between data and context (Krippendorff, 1980, 2004).

In relation to the population of the current study, content analysis is a beneficial method because it allows for a systematic review of large bodies of texts with relative ease. Because of this, content analysis allows for greater sample sizes and interpretive comparisons between similar genres of texts. Content analysis, therefore, provides for empirically reliable results that could overwhelm other methods with the bulk of material being investigated (Lutz & Collins, 1993; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2006).

Although the process of effectively creating a study that uses content analysis can be a challenging and time consuming process, it is not without reward. If the coding scheme is effectively constructed, studies using content analysis can yield a vast amount of data, which may allow for subsequent research to build off of the original data set. The

use of pilot studies and coder training and reliability provides a framework which allows for consistent interpretation of a body of text. The inherent rigor of the method comes from the development of categories from which it is possible to describe what is present in selected text (Slater, 1998).

Finally, content analysis has the ability to look at both texts (written or spoken) and visual elements present within a text or as stand-alone features. This factor plays a significant role in the current study because all of the videos that were submitted to the CNN-YouTube debates had elements of both the textual and the visual. Although content analysis is frequently used to analyze written text, some would argue that in order to truly understand the text it is also necessary to understand the associated visual elements. For example, when examining what a television character says, visual elements like the physical characteristics of the character can come into play. In fact, it is noted that image portrayal of characters on television shows must use elements of visual coding in order to provide a full description of the character (Ray & Donahew, 1990). In many instances the visual plays a vital role in the interpretation of a text, so much so that sometimes the visual and the textual are inseparable when and can be seen as one indivisible unit of analysis (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2006).

### *Sampling Procedure*

The population for the study consisted of all of the videos that were submitted to YouTube for use during the televised CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates that aired June 23, 2007 (Democratic) and November 28, 2007 (Republican); the total population was 7,916 videos. From this population, a systematic random sample was



used to determine the appropriate number of videos to include in the final sample. Since many individuals submitted multiple videos, this sampling method ensured not only that a representative number of videos were selected but helped to eliminate any potential order bias. A sampling frame was constructed containing the submission number of each video in the sample indicating which videos were to be analyzed by which coder. The final samples, as per Krejci and Morgan (1970), called for 341 videos at a 95% confidence level for the Democratic debate sample of 2,989 videos and 357 videos at a 95% confidence level for the Republican debate sample of 4,927 videos (see Appendix A, B, and C for examples of the archived videos).

YouTube has included a special section dedicated to the 2008 presidential race on its website. This section archived all videos from each CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debate under separate URLs from which the respective samples could be accessed. The videos for the Democratic debate were archived at: <http://www.youtube.com/contest/DemocraticDebate>. The videos for the Republican debate could be retrieved from: <http://www.youtube.com/republicandebate>. Because each video was assigned an individual submission number, the coders could easily use the search function to find the correct video for analysis. Once the submission number was entered, the video would appear on the screen where coders could then watch the video and view any additional information that the submitter chose to include. Most submissions included the submitters user name and the name of the video, some individuals also included additional text related to the video.

The original study design planned to control for any potential bias created by watching the videos by party by downloading all of the videos onto DVDs for the coders. To accomplish this, each video in the sample was downloaded by using a YouTube video downloading tool created by and accessible through the TechCrunch website (<http://www.techcrunch.com/get-youtube-movie/>). However, during the pilot study, it was discovered that the resolution requirements put in place by the YouTube website resulted in the downloaded videos being of very poor quality. As a result of this, it was not possible to hear many of the questions being asked; further assessment of the video characteristics was impaired. The decision was then made that each coder would need to view their respective sample on the YouTube website. To facilitate this, each coder was given a sampling frame to direct them to the videos sampled for inclusion in the study. An additional challenge with respect to sampling was the large number of video URLs that were no longer active. The YouTube technical support staff suggested a variety of reasons that some videos had inactive URLs. These reasons included issues related to firewalls, security settings, or alternate streaming applications, such as Quicktime, fighting for the Internet stream. It was also suggested that some videos were marked as “private” by their owners and viewers would have to be a logged in member of the user’s shared list in order to view the video. When this occurred, the coders were instructed to skip to the next video; additional videos were then added to the end of the sampling frame to ensure the necessary number of videos were coded.

### *Variable Selection*

In order to ensure that the variables selected would yield results that would help answer the research questions, it was important to look at the literature in order to create a coding scheme that would effectively address all of the research questions. To address the first research question, “What percentages of traditionally politically underrepresented/disengaged populations are present in the videos submitted to the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?”, variables relating to demographic characteristics were captured. In order to ascertain if underrepresented populations, namely young voters and minorities, were present in the video, basic demographic characteristics that could be inferred from the videos were captured, including age, sex, race, and sexual orientation. These are the typical demographic characteristics often captured in research on political communication and public administration (Carlin & McKinney, 1994; Wright & Davies, 2004).

To answer the second research question, “What are the characteristics of the questions submitted to the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?”, literature on interviewing provided a basis from which to identify central characteristics in the questions. Due to the criticism that average people would not be capable of asking the types of questions that trained journalist or moderators can, the variables analyzed to answer the second research question will give insight into the types of questions asked, the complexity of the questions, and the political relevance of the questions submitted. In addition, since this was the first national debate in which individuals had the opportunity to question presidential candidates, understanding the characteristics of the questions that

were asked is important in assessing how individuals involved themselves in these debates. Research from both Dillon (1983) and Mischler, (1991) help to clarify what elements are necessary to construct a clear and appropriate question as well as clarifying the different level of complexities found within questions. This information will make it possible to understand the overall level of complexity in the submitted questions. The variables used to address the second research question include whether the submission was a statement or a question, if the question was an open or closed question, if the question was simple or complex question, the type of question being asked (e.g., who, what, when, where, why, how, do), type of setup used in the submission, if a counter-argument was requested, the type of answer requested, if specific alternatives were given, which candidate the submission was directed to, and the question's relevance to politics (Dillon, 1983; Mischler, 1991). These variables will also help to determine the level of complexity of the questions asked, address the overall quality of the questions asked and ascertain if the questions asked contributed positively to public political discussion. Because criticisms were waged over the average person's ability to ask well-constructed, debate-worthy questions (Baldwin, 2007), it is important to ascertain specific characteristics of the questions asked in order to evaluate whether or not the submitters for the CNN-YouTube debates asked questions that may have been asked by professional moderators. In addition, these variables may help to understand how, when given the opportunity to directly question candidates, individuals chose to do so.

To answer the third research question, "What visual characteristics are present in the videos submitted for the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?", basic

production information was captured from the videos, including delivery style, production quality, special effects, and context of the video. These are visual characteristics that are common throughout television production literature (filmsite.org, 2007; Millerson, 1999; Zettl, 2005). Although these variables may not necessarily provide insight into the meaning of the text (or the questions), they will provide a basis from which to discuss how individuals chose to use the visual medium to participate in the debates. Following Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2006), accounting for visual elements is important because the visual plays a vital role in the interpretation of the text and can change the context of the question through the inclusion of engaging or powerful visual images. In addition, it is argued that the text and the visual are indivisible characteristics (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2006), therefore, it is necessary to catalogue the visual characteristics present in the video submissions.

Another significant criticism that the debates faced related to issues of editorial control. It was noted by critics that CNN's use of a selection committee to determine the final broadcast videos resulted in a level of control not typically present on the Web in general and YouTube specifically. Therefore, to address the fourth research question, "What were the characteristics (demographic population, question, visual) of the videos selected by CNN for airing on the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?" the three categories of variables discussed above were used. To ascertain if there was a significant difference in the population of videos selected for broadcast and the videos not selected, it was necessary to compare the two samples of videos.

Through consistent application of the developed coding scheme, these variables helped to address the issue of civic engagement, discussed in the previous chapters, by addressing the populations that participated in the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates and examining the ways in which individuals chose to engage themselves in national political discussion.

### *Coding*

The author and two other individuals coded the videos included in the sample. The coding team included two females and one male in order to avoid a gender biased evaluation of content; however, all coders were Caucasian between 26 and 30 years old and were college educated. Because each video was limited to 30-seconds in length, the video served as the unit of analysis. As a pilot study, the coders viewed a random sample of 70 videos in order to ensure that the coding scheme could be effectively applied. Because many of the coding categories were emergent, it was important to thoroughly train the coders to control for any potential discrepancies or misunderstandings. During this initial training period, coders examined the videos and compared notes to discover any discrepancies, disagreements were then discussed and if applicable, changes were made to the codebook. The final codebook was then examined by all coders to ensure that it included categories that were mutually exclusive, exhaustive and equivalent. Following the training session and pursuant with acceptable standards for content analysis, each coder then independently coded 10% of the sample in order to calculate intercoder reliability. Due to the nature of the data, calculating reliability using Scott's pi as an index for reliability was not always possible. Many of the variables contained only two

categories and typically resulted in one category having a very high percentage and the other category a very low percentage violating the assumptions of the test. As a result of this disproportion, calculating reliability for variables with only two categories resulted in a negative reliability. For example, when attempting to calculate reliability for the question vs. statement variable, a majority of the videos were questions which caused the calculated reliability to come out negative. For variables with only two categories, it was necessary to measure the coefficient of reliability in order to ensure reliability. Following the initial test for reliability, reliability was again calculated after the coders had finished examining 1/3 of their assigned videos. Because of the large sample, reassessing reliability helped to ensure that coder drift was not occurring; both reliabilities are reported below for each variable. The videos used in the training were incorporated back into the final sample.

### *Codebook*

The coding instrument was developed using prior studies of question construction, political debates, television production, and civic engagement (using the literature previously discussed); emergent codes were included when the a priori coding scheme failed to be exhaustive. From this research and the extensive coder training sessions, three primary coding variables, each containing multiple subcategories, were established: Person, Question, and Production Value and Visual elements (please see appendix D for the complete codebook). During coding, each category of each variable was coded as being absent or present from each video.

### *Demographic Characteristics*

To answer the first research question, the first variable examined the demographic characteristics of the agents present in the video submissions. Because traditionally politically underrepresented demographic populations include minority and individuals under the age of 30, the following variables were used in order to ascertain if the CNN-YouTube debates provided a forum through which these populations chose to become engaged. The first variable, age, was broken down into five categories, under 18, 18-25, 26-40, 41-55, and over 55. (pilot reliability .90; coder drift reliability .92). The sex of the primary speaker was coded as male, female, and cannot determine (pilot reliability .99; coder drift reliability .99). The codes for race were adapted from a debate study conducted by the AARP in 2004; the codes were American Indian/Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, White, and Other (pilot reliability .96; coder drift reliability .95). The coding categories for sexual orientation included heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. It is important to note that individuals were only coded as being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual if they specifically stated their orientation in the video; if no declaration of orientation was made, orientation was coded as *cannot determine* (pilot reliability .99; coder drift reliability .98). Finally, this category asked coders to identify the number of agents present in the video, the number of agents speaking in the video, the agents' profession and religion if mentioned, and the topic of the question.

### *Question Characteristics*

To address the second research question, the second variable examined the characteristics of the questions in the YouTube video submissions. In order to fully



examine the questions, understand what issues are salient to the American public, and establish if the public was in fact capable of asking relevant, complex, and appropriate debate questions this category included several subcategories. First, due to the fact that some of the videos were actually statements to the candidates and not questions for the candidates, it was necessary to establish if the submission was a statement or a question (pilot reliability .98; coder drift reliability .97). Next, the videos were assessed as containing an open or closed question. Open questions allowed the candidate(s) to use their own words when answering the question. For example: How do you feel about global warming? Closed questions asked for a specific piece of information to be included in the answers, such as: When do you expect troop withdrawal from Iraq? (pilot reliability .97; coder drift reliability .97). The questions were also coded as being simple, asking a direct question, or complex, asking more than one question at the same time (pilot reliability .96; coder drift reliability .97). An example of a simple question may be: How can we lessen our nation's oil dependency? An example of a complex question may be: What are your feelings on Iran and how would you proceed with political discussions with the country?

The questions were analyzed for the type of question being asked (who, what, when, where, why, how, or do). An example of a *who* question is: Who do you think is best equipped to deal with the crisis in the Middle East? An example of a *what* question is: What do you plan to do to about rising gas prices? An example of a *when* question is: When will there be a timeline for exiting Iraq? An example of a *where* question may be: Where do you plan on getting the funding to support Bill 357? An example of a *why*

question is: Why has the Democratic Party not made progress on X? Examples of *how* questions may be: How will you address the health care issue in our country? or How will your administration address the situation differently? Examples of *do* questions included variant terms within the questions such as: Do you have a plan?, Are we better off?, Do you believe?, and Would you agree? Videos asking multiple questions include submissions that asked two distinctly different types of questions. These were coded separately from the variables mentioned above because it was difficult for the coders to decide specifically what type of question the submitter was asking and which question type was to be coded. An example of a question that included multiple question types is: *Is Iraq better off and how can we move forward with foreign policy?* In cases where the submitter made a statement or where it was not possible to determine the question type, questions were coded as having no question type (pilot reliability for question type .95; coder drift reliability .96). Coding the types of questions asked helped to ascertain the level of complexity of the questions. Dillon (1983) indicates that different types of questions contain within them different levels of complexity, therefore, recording the types of questions submitted helped to determine the public's ability to ask questions.

Videos were coded for whether or not there was a setup before the question. Setups included only providing a name and hometown, providing a narrative or autobiographical introduction, or providing a situational or informational introduction. Narrative or autobiographical introductions examples include: "Living in New Orleans post Katrina is very difficult . . ." and "My daughter has been suffering from cancer. . ."

Examples of situational or informational introductions include: “There are millions of Americans without health insurance. . .” and “Given the rising rate of crime in America. . .” (pilot reliability .95; coder drift reliability .95). The question setup helped to add a level of complexity to the submissions; some of the setups also helped to add a level of emotion or sophistication to the submissions. For instance, a woman setting up her question about health care with a narrative about her young daughter that is suffering from cancer may change the way in which this question received due to the emotional impact that is not usually present in presidential debates. In addition, an individual that sets up a question about crime by giving the information about the rising crime statistics in his neighborhood indicates that the submitter took the time to think through the question and gather research on the topic prior to submission. The inclusion of narrative or informational setups may also indicate that a level of forethought and prior preparation went into the creation of the videos. These examples may further the notion the American public is ready to change the ways in which politics topics are discussed.

Questions were also analyzed for requests for a counter-argument. An example of a counter argument is: “Some people think X, some people think not X, what do you think?” (pilot reliability .95; coder drift reliability .95). Questions were analyzed for the type of answer the question sought; neutral, took a stand, or balanced. Neutral requests did not ask the candidates to take a stance on either side of the issue. For example, “There is an issue in our country...” An example of an answer requesting the candidate to take a stand include: “I will lower taxes by doing X.” A request for a balanced answer may include questions such as: “What are our options for social security?” (pilot reliability.90;

coder drift reliability .91). Requesting different types of answers indicates that submitters sought specific answers from candidates regarding salient issues. Videos were also examined for whether or not the question provided specific alternatives. Question providing specific alternatives provided alternatives for the candidates to choose from in their answers, such as: “Is the war in Iraq OR rising oil prices the bigger concern?” Questions not providing specific alternatives included questions that leave the question open such as: “Are you in favor of stem cell research?” (pilot reliability .92; coder drift reliability .94).

Questions were assessed for whether they were directed to a single candidate, multiple candidates, or all candidates (pilot reliability .98; coder drift reliability .97). Finally, questions were examined for their perceived political relevance. An example of a question irrelevant to politics may be: “Who do you think is going to win the SEC championship?” (pilot reliability 1.0; coder drift reliability .99). The topic of each question was also recorded in an effort to determine the salience of issues to the American populace; since there was a wide variety of question topics, coders were asked to fill in the question topic and specific topic codes were not established.

#### *Video Characteristics*

To answer the third research question, the third variable examined the production value and visual elements of the video submissions. As with the first category, multiple subcategories were necessary. The first subcategory addressed the delivery style used in the videos. Delivery styles included an extreme wide shot, a wide shot, a mid shot, a close-up, an extreme close-up, a point-of-view shot, and follow-shots (adapted from

Wavelength Media, 2007) (pilot reliability .98; coder drift reliability .98). Extreme wide shots were wide background shots where the agent speaking was barely visible or not visible in the shot. Wide shots were wide background shots where the full length of the agent could be seen; in these shots a significant portion of the background is visible. Mid shots showed the subject from the mid-section up; in these shots it was not possible to see the waist, but a good portion of the chest was visible. In close-up shots, the agent could only be seen from the shoulders up, very little if any chest was visible. Extreme close-up shots showed only the face of the agent, backgrounds and shoulders were not visible. Point-of-view shots showed the video from the agent's perspective, for example, looking down at a keyboard. In follow-shots, the camera followed the action of the agent in the video, for example, walking along a street. Determining the types of shots that individuals used in their submissions helped, in some instances, to add context to the videos. For example, close up shots provide less context for the viewer than a wider shot and submissions with symbolic elements in them would not be as powerful or emotional if the background elements were not visible.

Next, the overall production quality of the video was examined. Videos were coded as being of professional quality, or having good, or average, or poor overall quality (pilot reliability .91; coder drift reliability .95). Videos categorized as having professional quality were clear, well lit, and the camera did not shake. In videos with good quality the picture was clear and there was no shaking of the camera. Average quality videos had some parts that were not clear and/or minor shaking of the camera. Videos with poor quality were fuzzy, out of focus, and/or had excessive camera shaking. Production quality

was an important assessment because it was likely a factor in determining which videos were selected for broadcast; it is reasonable to believe that videos with very poor qualities would not be selected for national broadcast. In addition, the level of clarity in the videos may also be an indication of how thoughtful the submitters were in the creation of their videos.

The use of special effects was also addressed within this category. Effects included the use of panning, zooming, tracking, floating text, music, foreign language, costumes, and cutaways (effects definitions were adapted from [www.filmsite.org](http://www.filmsite.org), 2007) (pilot reliability .99; coder drift reliability .99). Panning is horizontal camera movement where the camera moves left and right on a central axis. Zooming is the magnifying of a certain part of the image. Tracking is movement that runs parallel to the action being recorded. Videos using floating text incorporated text that floats across some part of the screen during the shot. Cutaways included shots that changed from one point of action to something else during the shot. Including visual effects into the submissions may indicate the amount of time and sophistication that were dedicated to the video creation; both of these are indicative of the desire to participate in a creative and thoughtful manner. In addition, individuals may have added effects that were engaging and unique in an effort to draw attention to their submission and increase the chances of selection and dialogue.

The use of animated features was the next subcategory the videos were coded for. This category consisted mainly of emergent codes because the use of animated features has not appeared in any previous debate research. Animated features included the use of inanimate objects, such as a talking brown-paper bag; the use of animals, such as talking

dogs; the use of computer programs (such as PowerPoint) to ask the question; the use of signs; the use of animation or illustration; and the use of videos and photography (pilot reliability .98; coder drift reliability .98). As previously stated, the use of alternate features in the submissions may have been used in an effort to increase the attention paid to specific videos. The use of animated features and effects may also have been linked to people attempting to create a visual identification (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2006) with other audience members through the use of selected features.

Finally, this category examined the context, or location, in which the video was produced. Locations included professional settings, such as a doctor's office, the home, outside, at a school, or near a symbolic object, such as the U.S./Mexico border (pilot reliability .97; coder drift reliability .98). Thinking about the location in which the submissions were recorded indicates that the individual thought about the ways in which to engage and control the overall perception of the submission.

## Chapter 4 Results

### *Research Question 1*

The first research question asked “What percentages of traditionally politically underrepresented/disengaged populations are present in the videos submitted to the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?” The populations that are typically characterized as being unengaged include young voters and minorities. The data allow us to see that these populations were represented in the archived sample of the CNN-YouTube debates, however, perhaps not to a significant extent. For example, individuals in the archived video sample that were characterized as Black, Hispanic, and Asian had higher levels of participation in the debates rate than the populations did during the 2004 presidential election (CNN, 2004). While becoming civically engaged through the use of the CNN-YouTube debates is not the same as electoral participation, voting statistics are the most publicized method of political engagement from which to compare the data for this study. However, in terms of the demographics of internet users compiled by Pew, these populations participated at a rate much lower than internet penetration would expect them to. According to the Pew data, 56% of Blacks and 79% of Hispanics have internet access (no statistics are provided for Asians); however, Blacks made up only 13.2% and Hispanics only 11.6% of the total archived sample population for this study. In terms of age, young voters were present in a significant proportion of the videos, accounting for 41.3% of the archived sample. This indicates that young voters, a segment of the



population that has been heavily courted by politicians and political organizations (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Galston, 2004; Sherrod, 2003), were in fact represented in the CNN-YouTube debates. While adults over the age of 55 were not highly represented in the debates, only accounting for 10.7% of the sample, these individuals vote at a much higher rate than those of the aforementioned populations and therefore have not been the target of citizen participation campaigns.

Other demographic information related to the archived sample can be found below. Most of the videos (89.3%,  $N = 623$ ) had only one agent present. Two agents were present in 5.6% ( $N = 39$ ) of the videos, 1.3% ( $N = 9$ ) had four agents, 1.1% ( $N = 8$ ) had three agents, 0.4% ( $N = 3$ ) had five agents, 0.4% ( $N = 3$ ) had 20 or more agents, and 0.1% ( $N = 1$ ) had nine agents. No agent was present in 1.6% ( $N = 11$ ) of the videos. Not all humans or their substitutions had speaking roles. A vast majority of the archived videos (95.8%,  $N = 669$ ) had only one speaker. Two speakers were present in 2.1% ( $N = 15$ ) of the videos, three speakers in 0.9% ( $N = 6$ ), nine speakers in 0.1% ( $N = 1$ ), and ten speakers in 0.1% ( $N = 1$ ). There was no speaker in 0.9% ( $N = 6$ ) of the videos.

The most represented age group in the archived sample are individuals 26-40 years-old (28.9%,  $N = 202$ ). A similar proportion of participants were 18-25 years old (27.5%,  $N = 192$ ). Individuals in the 41-55 age group represented 14.6% ( $N = 102$ ); individuals under the age of 18 represented 14.3% ( $N = 100$ ) of the sample, and individuals over the age of 55 represented 10.7% ( $N = 75$ ). It was not possible to determine the age of the primary speaker in 3.9 % ( $N = 27$ ) of the videos. There was a

significant difference amongst the ages represented in the archived videos  $\chi^2(4, N = 671) = 1.02, p < .001$ , as individuals 18 to 40 represented nearly one-half of participants.

Males represented over half (64%,  $N = 447$ ) of the speakers in the videos; women were the primary speakers in 28.5% ( $N = 199$ ) of the videos. It was not possible to determine the speaker's sex in 5.6% ( $N = 39$ ) of the videos and in 0.02% ( $N = 13$ ) there was no apparent speaker. The difference between the number of male and female speakers  $\chi^2(1, N = 645) = 94.59, p < .001$ , was statistically significant. In terms of race, speakers categorized as White were the predominant race (61.1%,  $N = 426$ ). Speakers characterized as Black were present in 13.2% ( $N = 92$ ) of the videos, Hispanics in 11.6% ( $N = 81$ ), and Asian/Pacific Islanders in 4.4% ( $N = 31$ ). Individuals of other racial categories were represented in 4.0% ( $N = 28$ ) and American Indian/Alaskan were present in 1.9% ( $N = 13$ ). It was not possible to distinguish the racial characteristics of 3.9% ( $N = 27$ ) of the speakers. A significant difference existed between the race of the primary speakers,  $\chi^2(5, N = 669) = 1.09, p < .001$ , as the majority of speakers were categorized as White. Compared with U.S. Census data, Whites, which make up 67.3% of the United States population participated at a rate lower than expected; 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; Asians, which account 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 Bureau, 2007).

Finally, it was not possible to determine the sexual orientation of a large majority (82.8%,  $N = 578$ ) of the speakers in the archived videos. Individuals claiming

heterosexual orientation were present in 14.5% ( $N = 101$ ) of the videos; those claiming homosexual orientation were present in 2.6% ( $N = 18$ ), and those claiming bisexual orientation were in 0.1% ( $N = 1$ ).

### *Research Question 1a*

Research question 1a asked if “the representation of traditionally politically underrepresented/disengaged populations differed between the Democratic and Republican debates.” Chi square tests were run to see if statistically significant difference existed between the demographic representations in the archived sample of the two debates. The data allow us to see that a significant difference in the demographic makeup between the two debates existed for two of the four demographic variables: age and sexual orientation.

Significant differences by party existed for two of the four demographic categories. There was a significant difference in the age of the speakers,  $\chi^2(5, N = 698) = 18.24, p = .003$ . More individuals in the Democratic sample were in the 26-40 and 41-55 age group, whereas more individuals in the Republican sample either under the age of 18, or in the 19-25 age category. A significant difference in the sexual orientation of the speakers also differed between the Democratic and Republican debates,  $\chi^2(3, N = 698) = 20.60, p < .001$ . More individuals in the Democratic sample claimed heterosexual orientation (20.5%,  $N = 70$ ), while more individuals in the Republican sample claimed homosexual (2.8%,  $N = 10$ ) orientation. It was not possible to determine the sexual orientation of speakers in a higher percentage of the Republican sample (88.2%,  $N =$

315). No significant difference existed between the Democratic and Republican debates in relation to either the sex or race of the primary speaker.

### *Research Question 2*

The second research question asked “what are the characteristics of the questions submitted to the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?” The data allow us to see that participants asked primarily open ended (allowing candidates to use their own words when answering) and simple questions (asking only one question at a time). The most frequent type of questions asked were *what* questions (e.g., “What would each of you do to help the United States and China get together to begin in a MEANINGFUL way, to solve this rather pressing global problem of climate change?”). Most often, participants used only their name and hometown (e.g., “Hi, my name is Ron and I am from Bethesda, Maryland”) as their setup prior to asking the question. Counter arguments were not heavily used in the archived sample nor were alternatives provided in a majority of the questions. Finally, a large percentage of the questions asked the candidates to take a stand on an issue (e.g., “Do you believe that we are facing a global warming crisis?”).

Specific statistics relating to the variables looked in regard to the characteristics of questions asked in the archived sample can be found below. Of the archived sample, 87.1% ( $N = 608$ ) asked questions and 12.9% ( $N = 90$ ) made statements to the candidates. A significant difference existed between whether or not a question was asked in the videos,  $\chi^2(1, N = 698) = 384.4, p < .001$ . In 76.2% of the videos ( $N = 532$ ) individuals asked open ended questions, in 23.2% ( $N = 162$ ) of the videos the questions were close ended or statements. A significant difference in the use of open ended and closed ended

questions existed,  $\chi^2(2, N = 698) = 631.3, p < .001$ , with open ended questions being asked more frequently. The question could not be determined as open or closed in a small percentage (0.6%,  $N = 4$ ) of the videos. Simple questions were asked in a majority (67.9%,  $N = 472$ ) of the videos, complex questions in 31.5% ( $N = 220$ ) of the videos, and question complexity could not be determined in 0.6% ( $N = 4$ ) of the videos. A significant difference existed in regards to question complexity,  $\chi^2(1, N = 694) = 92.96, p < .001$ , as a majority of the questions asked were simply stated.

When the videos presented questions, questions were categorized as to their type. As discussed above, open ended questions predominated with *What* questions (e.g., “What would you say to those who claim America would cease [cease] to function without Mexican immigration?” and “What would you do to lower the murder/crime rate?”) being asked the most frequently (44.1%,  $N = 308$ ). *How* questions (e.g., “How will your administration fund all types of schools for success?”) followed with 7.3% ( $N = 51$ ). *Why* questions (e.g., “Why do politicians get free health insurance?” ; “Why do politicians feel the need to legislate video games?”) were the next most prominent (4.6%,  $N = 32$ ). *Where* questions (e.g., “Where do you stand on Roe vs. Wade?”) were the type of open ended question asked the most infrequently (3.2%,  $N = 22$ ).

Closed ended questions were asked in fewer videos, such as *do* (e.g., “Do you believe that prejudice shall be used against you in the 2008 elections and your possible presidency?” ; “Do you have a comprehensive health care plan?”) were asked in 7.4% of videos ( $N = 52$ ). *When* questions (e.g., “When will we hear the candidates’ real platform, rather than what they want us to hear?”) were asked in 6.2% ( $N = 43$ ) of the videos.

Multiple question types, many a combination of open and close ended questions (e.g., “When [will] the U.S. will help to finally end the inhumane genocides in Darfur. Why haven't we yet?”), were asked in 10.7% ( $N = 75$ ) of the videos. Other types of questions (e.g., “Would you support a significantly increased budget for NASA to further space exploration?”) were present in 2.1% ( $N = 15$ ) of the archived sample. It was not possible to determine the question type or there was no question in 13.6% ( $N = 95$ ) of the videos (90 videos in the sample were statements). A significant difference existed in the type of questions asked,  $\chi^2(18, N = 698) = 1.09, p < .001$ . As for open ended questions, the majority of questions ( $N = 262$ ) were *what* questions. Close ended questions tended to be asked in terms of *what* ( $N = 45$ ) or *do* ( $N = 32$ ).

Question setups, which served to add a level of complexity to the submissions, were used in most of the archived sample. While the mentioning a name and hometown, the most common type of question setup (44.7%,  $N = 312$ ), did not increase the complexity of a large sample of questions, other types of setups did. For instance, narrative or autobiographical setups, which provided personal reference to the question being asked (e.g., “It is very difficult living in post-Katrina New Orleans. . .”) were present in 20.5% ( $N = 143$ ) of the videos. Situational or informational setups, which set the stage for the question (e.g., “the health care crisis in the United States effects millions of people . . .”) were used in 18.8% ( $N = 131$ ) of the videos. No setup was present in 16% ( $N = 112$ ) of the sampled 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.

Counter arguments, which also served to increase the complexity of the questions (e.g., “I think rising gas prices are the most significant factor impacting America’s economy, what do you think?”) were present in less than half (44.3%,  $N = 309$ ) of the videos. Counter arguments were not present in 55.7% ( $N = 389$ ) of the videos, making these questions less complex and more simple to address. Significantly more questions did not include counter arguments,  $\chi^2(2, N = 698) = 3.59, p < .001$ .

Potentially adding to the complexity of the answer, and therefore also impacting the significance of the questions, the majority (65.5%,  $N = 457$ ) of submitters requested candidates to take a stand in their answers (e.g., what do you think is the single most important factor facing the future of America’s children). Neutral answers, which may have allowed candidates to stick to their standard talking points, were requested in 26.2% ( $N = 183$ ) of videos. Balanced answers, in which the candidates were asked to examine both sides of an issue helped add to the feeling of authenticity envisioned by the debate’s creators, were requested in 5.2% ( $N = 36$ ) of videos. The requested answer type could not be determined in 3.2% ( $N = 36$ ) of the videos. There was a significant difference in the type of answers requested,  $\chi^2(3, N = 698) = 700.96, p < .001$ , with questions that requested the candidate to take a stand being the asked the most frequently.

Some questioners included alternative answers for the candidates to choose from. Giving alternatives may have provided a way for the questioner to insert their opinion and keep the candidates from relying on standard talking points when giving their answers. Alternatives were provided to the candidates in 28.1% ( $N = 196$ ) of the submissions. A significant difference existed,  $\chi^2(2, N = 698) = 545.92, p < .001$ , as most

of the questions did not provide specific alternatives. Finally, a majority, (69.1%,  $N = 482$ ), of the questions were directed to all candidates, 22.6% ( $N = 158$ ) to multiple candidates, and specific candidates in 8.3% ( $N = 58$ ) of the videos. The difference between the categories was significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 698) = 422.3, p < .001$ , as a bulk of the questions were directed to all candidates. A vast majority, (84.8%,  $N = 592$ ), of the questions submitted were determined by the coders to be politically relevant.

In terms of the salience of political issues, the five most prominent types of questions related to national or domestic issues (e.g., What will you do as President to ensure the safety of kids all across America; What are you going to do to level the playing field between the haves and the have-nots?), education (e.g., What type of incentives are you willing to offer to teachers in hard to staff areas; What will you do as president to make our schools less about testing and more about learning?), Iraq (e.g., How can we trust Obama to get us out of Iraq in light of his dalliance with the CFR [campaign finance reform]; 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?”; “What role will the for-profit health insurance companies play in each of their healthcare plans?”), and political qualification questions (e.g., “This is a question regarding the responsibility of the elected to uphold, protect and preserve the Constitution”; “Question for the candidates about the theory of Unitary Executive”; “What can the GOP do to stop this problem [the power of the government] from spiraling out of control?”). Other frequent topics were related to international policy, energy independence, and the



environment. Questions such as these indicate that most individuals took the opportunity provided to the by the CNN-YouTube debates productively participate in civic discussion.

Examples of questions that did not help further political discussion, which were only found in the archived sample, include “Has Mitt Romney profited off of pornography?”, “Which team is your favorite, Mets or Yanks!?”, and “What are your thoughts on colonizing the moon?” In addition, the majority of submitters asked open-ended questions that were directed to all of the candidates, which may indicate the desire to hear the all of the candidates’ positions on important political issues.

#### *Research Question 2a*

Research question 2a asked “Do the characteristics of the questions asked differ between the archived sample of the Democratic and Republican debates?” Chi square tests were used to determine if significant differences were present in the characteristics of the questions between the archived sample of the Democratic and Republican debates. The data indicates that a significant difference existed in the relevance of questions asked in the video submissions,  $\chi^2(1, N = 698) = 15.71, p < .001$ . The Republican (20.4%,  $N = 73$ ) submissions contained almost twice as many irrelevant questions than the Democratic (9.7%,  $N = 33$ ) submissions. No significant differences existed regarding any of the other variables: question or statement, open or closed questions, simple vs. complex questions, question type, setup type, use of counter arguments, requested answer, use of alternatives, and whom the question was directed to.

### *Research Question 3*

The third research question asked “What visual characteristics are present in the videos submitted for the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?” To address this research question, the following variable categories were examined: delivery style, production quality, special effects, animated features, and the videos’ context. A mid-shot style of delivery, in which the speaker could be seen from approximately the waist up and where the speaker took up a majority of the frame with little background, was the most prominent delivery style used in the archived sample. Close-up shots were also used in a large percentage of the videos. Most of the videos had average production quality; meaning that for the most part, the videos were clear, had adequate lighting, and the camera did not shake or move around excessively. Most of the videos in the archived sample did not use special effects; however, when effects were present, cutaways and music were the most prominent type of effect used. Unfortunately, due to the limited background of many of the videos, it was not possible to determine the context, or location in which the video was produced, in a majority of the videos. However, when it was possible to determine the context of the videos, the predominant location of development was a home setting. Finally, although the use of animated features was not very prominent, they did appear in some of the videos. PowerPoint-type presentations and the use of inanimate objects were the most used type of animated feature.

Specific statistics relating to the variables looked in regard to the characteristics of questions asked in the archived sample follow. The delivery style used most frequently in the archived videos was a mid-shot (34.4%,  $N = 240$ ) that captured the agent from the

waist up. Close-up shots, which captured agents from the shoulders up, were used in 28.1% ( $N = 196$ ) of the videos, wide shots, in which the full length of the agent could be seen, in 14.9% ( $N = 104$ ), extreme close ups, which captured only the agent's head (face), in 8.2% ( $N = 57$ ) extreme wide shots, which captured wide background shots where the agent was barely visible, were present in 5.0% ( $N = 35$ ) of the videos. Just under 5% of videos (4.7%,  $N = 33$ ) used multiple shot types, 2.4% used a point-of-view style of delivery and follow-shots were present in 1.7% ( $N = 12$ ) of the videos. The delivery style could not be determined in 0.6% ( $N = 4$ ) of the archived videos. A significant difference existed in the chosen delivery style of the videos,  $\chi^2(8, N = 698) = 757.01, p < .001$ , as single shots at the extreme close up or mid range were most frequent.

A majority of the videos had average production quality (54.3%,  $N = 379$ ), 26.4% ( $N = 184$ ) had good quality, 11.6% ( $N = 81$ ) had poor quality, and 7.7% ( $N = 54$ ) appeared to be of professional quality. A significant difference in the production quality of the videos existed,  $\chi^2(3, N = 698) = 3.74, p < .001$ , with more than half of the videos having average production quality.

Very few special effects were present in the archived videos with cutaways as the most prominent effect (10.5%,  $N = 73$ ). Music was used in 7.2% ( $N = 50$ ) of the videos, zooming (5.4%,  $N = 38$ ), tracking (3.2%,  $N = 22$ ), floating text (3.2%,  $N = 22$ ), and panning (2.4%,  $N = 24$ ). Costumes were worn in 2.1% ( $N = 15$ ) of the videos. A variety of other types of special effects were used in 5.0% ( $N = 35$ ) of the archived sample.

It was not possible to determine the context in which a majority (38%,  $N = 265$ ) of the videos were recorded. That is, the context was ambiguous or too general to be

discernible. When the context could be determined, the most prominent location was a home setting (31.4%,  $N = 219$ ), followed by professional settings (6.6%,  $N = 46$ ), symbolic locations (6.3%,  $N = 44$ ), outside (6.2%,  $N = 43$ ), and schools (5.9%,  $N = 41$ ). Multiple locations were used in 3.6% ( $N = 25$ ) of the videos and other locations were present in 2.1% ( $N = 15$ ) of the sample. There was a significant difference in the context in which the videos were recorded,  $\chi^2(7, N = 698) = 7.53, p < .001$ , with a home setting be used in a majority of the videos.

A majority of the videos (79.1%,  $N = 552$ ), did not include the use of animated features. Of the videos that did include animated features, PowerPoint-type presentations were the most prominent appearing in 5.3% ( $N = 37$ ) of the videos. Inanimate objects were used in 4.3% ( $N = 30$ ) of the videos, and video clips and photography in 3.7% ( $N = 26$ ). Animals were present in 2.1% ( $N = 15$ ) of the videos, animation was used in 1.9% ( $N = 13$ ), and signs in 0.1% ( $N = 1$ ) of the videos. More than one type of animation was used in 2.0% ( $N = 14$ ), other types of animation were used in 0.4% ( $N = 3$ ). It was not possible to determine the type of animation used in 1.0% ( $N = 7$ ) of the videos because some videos were simply a black screen with narration.

### *Research Question 3a*

Research question 3a asked “Do the visual characteristics of the archived sample differ between the Democratic and Republican debates?” Chi square tests were used to determine if significant differences were present in the visual characteristics of the videos between the archived sample of the Democratic and Republican debates. The data

indicates that submissions between the debates were very similar; no significant difference was present amongst any of the visual characteristic variables.

#### *Research Question 4*

Research question four asked “ What were the characteristics (demographic population, question, visual) of the videos selected by CNN for airing on the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates?” Specifically, the research question examined the demographic populations present, the characteristics of the questions asked, and the visual characteristics of the videos in the selected videos. Of the 72 videos selected by CNN for broadcast, 38 were selected from the Democratic debate submissions and 34 were selected from the Republican debate submissions. In order to address the fourth research question, the videos from the broadcast debates were first examined collectively to provide an understanding of the characteristics broadcast to the public, the two debates were then analyzed separately in order to understand the differences between the debates. Individuals categorized as being between the ages of 18 and 40 asked over 70% of the broadcast questions ( $N = 51$ ). There were no videos broadcast involving speakers under the age of 18 because, as Anderson Cooper stated during the Democratic debate broadcast, “there were a lot [of videos] of kids asking questions, which was great, but parents were using kids to “ask adult questions; does a five year old really care about social security?” (CNN, 2007). Similar to the archived sample, individuals that were characterized as Black, Hispanic and Other were represented in the broadcast sample at a rate higher than that of participation in the 2004 presidential election (CNN, 2004). However, no speakers categorized as Asian were found in the broadcast sample, contrary

to the rate of participation in 2004. The sexual orientation of a majority of the speakers was not disclosed in the broadcast sample.

In terms of question characteristics, few of the videos broadcast were statements to the candidates and not questions; however, when questions were asked, the majority of the questions were open-ended questions, with *what* questions being the most predominant question type. Similar to the archived sample, the most common type of setup used in the broadcast videos was the use of a name and hometown (e.g., “Hi, my name is Ron and I am from Bethesda, Maryland”); situational or informational setups and narrative or biographical setups were present in 33.4% of the broadcast videos. In a majority of the videos, questioners included a counter argument in their question and requested the candidates to take a stand on the topic of the video. Questioners included alternatives for the candidates to choose from in 25 of the broadcast videos.

As in the archived sample, the majority of the broadcast videos used a mid-shot delivery style, with close up shots being the next most prominent type of delivery. A majority of the videos also had average production quality, meaning that the videos were clear and understandable; a very small percentage of the broadcast videos had professional production qualities. Special effects did not appear in many of the broadcast videos; however, when effects were present music and cutaways were the most predominant effect. Similar to the archived sample, it was not possible to determine the context, or location, of a majority of the videos for the broadcast debates. When it was possible to determine, the majority of the videos were categorized as being recorded in a home setting. Animated features were not used in a majority of the broadcast videos. This

may be attributed to Anderson Cooper noting, again during the opening of the Democratic debate, that videos using animated features were limited because this was not necessarily the best way to have the question taken seriously and these features could be distracting to the audience (CNN, 2007). However, when animated features were present, inanimate objects and PowerPoint-type presentations were the most common animated feature.

The broadcast debates were examined for all of the same variables as the archived sample, specific statistics regarding the demographic, question, and visual characteristics of the broadcast debates follow.

#### *Demographic Characteristics of the Broadcast Debates*

Individuals categorized as being members of the 26-40 year-old group asked the most questions (43.1%,  $N = 31$ ). The 18-25 year-old age group asked 27.8% ( $N = 20$ ) of the questions, those under 18 years-old asked 11.1% ( $N = 8$ ). Individuals 41-55 asked 8.3% ( $N = 6$ ), and those over 55 asked 8.3% ( $N = 6$ ). The age of 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ) of the questioners could not be determined. A significant difference existed between the age categories represented during the broadcasts,  $\chi^2(4, N = 71) = 34.42, p < .001$ , as those in the 26-40 year-old age group asked nearly half of the questions.

Males asked a majority of the questions (68.1%;  $N = 49$ ) and women asked 26.4% ( $N = 19$ ). In 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ) there was no speaker and in 4.2% ( $N = 3$ ) of the videos the sex of the speaker could not be determined. A significant difference existed amongst the sex of the primary speaker(s),  $\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 13.24, p < .001$ , as a majority of the speakers were male. A bulk of the speakers (61.1%,  $N = 44$ ) were categorized as White.

Speakers characterized as Black were represented in 16.7% ( $N = 12$ ) of the videos, Hispanics 11.1% ( $N = 8$ ), American Indian/Alaskan 2.8% ( $N = 2$ ), and individuals of other racial categories were represented in 2.8% ( $N = 2$ ). A significant difference existed in the racial demographics represented in the broadcast videos,  $\chi^2(5, N = 72) = 1.09, p < .001$ , as most of the speakers were categorized as White. It was not possible to determine the sexual orientation of 81.9% ( $N = 59$ ) of questioners. Heterosexual individuals made up 13.9% ( $N = 10$ ) of speakers and homosexual questioners represented 4.2% ( $N = 3$ ) of speakers. A significant difference between the sexual orientations of the speakers existed,  $\chi^2(2, N = 72) = 77.58, p < .001$ , as the sexual orientation of a majority of the speakers could not be determined.

#### *Question Characteristics of the Broadcast Debates*

Of the videos broadcasted during the debates, 95.8% ( $N = 69$ ) were questions to the candidates, whereas 4.2% ( $N = 3$ ) were statements to the candidates. A majority of the questions, 73.6% ( $N = 53$ ) were open-ended questions and 26.4% ( $N = 19$ ) were close-ended questions. A large portion, 65.3% ( $N = 47$ ) of the questions were simple questions and 34.7% ( $N = 25$ ) were complex. Most of the questions asked were *what* questions, 48.6% ( $N = 35$ ); questions asking *when* something would take place were the next most prevalent 9.7% ( $N = 7$ ). Questions asking *how* and *why* were each asked in 8.3% ( $N = 6$ ) of the videos, *where* questions were asked in 4.2% ( $N = 3$ ) of the videos and *do* questions were present in 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ) of the videos. In 15.3% ( $N = 11$ ) of the videos, speakers asked multiple types of questions. Because 4.2% ( $N = 3$ ) of the videos were statements it was not possible to assign a question type. There was a statistically significant difference



in the types of questions asked during the broadcast debates,  $\chi^2(7, N = 72) = 93.11, p < .001$ , as open-ended and questions asking *what* predominated.

Most individuals prefaced their question with a set-up. The most prominent type of set-up was the use of the questioners name and hometown, which occurred in 47.2% ( $N = 34$ ) of the videos. Situational or informational set-ups were used in 16.7% ( $N = 12$ ) and narrative or autobiographical set-ups were present in 16.7% ( $N = 12$ ). There was no set-up in 13.9% ( $N = 10$ ) of the videos. There was a statistical significance in the type of setups used in the debates,  $\chi^2(3, N = 72) = 20, p < .001$ , as question submitters favored a simple setup of identifying themselves or their hometown. A majority of the videos included a counter argument, 70.8% ( $N = 51$ ). The questioner requested the candidates to take a stand in 58.3% ( $N = 42$ ) of the videos while 41.7% ( $N = 30$ ) requested a neutral answer. Alternatives to the candidates were provided in 34.7% ( $N = 25$ ) of the videos. Most of the questions 68.1% ( $N = 49$ ) were directed to all of the candidates, 25.0% ( $N = 18$ ) of the videos were directed to multiple candidates, and 6.9% ( $N = 5$ ) were directed to a specific candidate. A majority of the questions, 86.1% ( $N = 62$ ) broadcast were relevant to politics.

#### *Visual Characteristics of the Broadcast Debates*

The broadcast videos primarily, (38.9%,  $N = 28$ ), used a mid shot delivery style. The next predominant style of delivery was a close up shot (25%,  $N = 18$ ), followed by wide shots (13.9%,  $N = 10$ ). Extreme close ups were used in 12.5% ( $N = 9$ ) of the videos, extreme wide shots in 5.6% ( $N = 4$ ), point-of-view shots in 2.8% ( $N = 2$ ), and follow-shots in 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ). Most of the videos, (66.7%,  $N = 48$ ), had average production

quality, 16.7% ( $N = 12$ ) had good production quality, 12.5% ( $N = 9$ ) had poor production quality, and 4.2% ( $N = 3$ ) were of professional quality. There was a significant difference amongst the quality of the videos,  $\chi^2(3, N = 72) = 69, p < .001$ , as a majority of the videos had an average production quality.

Special effects were not used in a majority of the videos. When effects were present, music was the most predominant effect (8.3%,  $N = 6$ ). Other effects included cutaways (6.9%,  $N = 5$ ), zooming (2.8%,  $N = 2$ ), panning (1.4%,  $N = 1$ ), and tracking (1.4%,  $N = 1$ ). Neither floating text nor costumes were present in any of the broadcast videos.

A majority of the videos, (34.7%,  $N = 25$ ), were categorized as being recorded in a home setting. Professional settings were used in 6.9% ( $N = 5$ ) of videos, such as an office, symbolic settings in 5.6% ( $N = 4$ ), outside in 5.6% ( $N = 4$ ), and in school settings 2.8% ( $N = 2$ ). A small percentage (2.8% ( $N = 2$ ), were categorized as being recorded in multiple locations and 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ) of the videos were shot in other locations. It was not possible to determine the location that the video were recorded in for 40.3% ( $N = 29$ ) of the videos. A statistical difference was found between the context of the videos,  $\chi^2(7, N = 72) = 98.22, p < .001$ , with a large percentage of the videos being recorded in a home setting.

Animated features were not used in a majority (79.2%;  $N = 57$ ) of the videos. However, animation was present in some of the videos. Inanimate objects were used in 9.7% ( $N = 7$ ) of the broadcast videos, PowerPoint style presentations were used in 5.6% ( $N = 4$ ) of the videos, animals were present in 2.8% ( $N = 2$ ) of videos, video and

photography was present in 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ), and in 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ) of the videos used more than one type of animated feature. In a large majority, 91.7% ( $N = 66$ ), of the videos only one agent was present in the video; 5.6% ( $N = 4$ ) of the videos had two agents, and 2.8% ( $N = 2$ ) had three agents present. Similarly, the majority, 97.2% ( $N = 70$ ), of videos had only one speaker, 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ) had two speakers, and 1.4% ( $N = 1$ ) included three speakers. A significant difference in the type(s) of animation used in the videos existed,  $\chi^2(5, N = 72) = 204.67, p < .001$ , with inanimate objects being used more than other types of animation.

#### *Research Question 4a*

Research question 4a asked “Do these video characteristics differ between the broadcast versions of the Democratic and Republican debates?” Chi square tests were used to determine if significant differences were present in the characteristics of the videos between the broadcast sample of the CNN-YouTube Democratic and Republican presidential candidate debates. The data indicate that submissions between the debates were very similar; no significant difference was present amongst any of the variables for demographic, question, or visual characteristics.

#### *Research Question 4b*

Research question 4b asked “Do these video characteristics differ between the broadcast and archived debate videos?” Chi square tests were used to determine if significant differences were present between the video characteristics of the archived and broadcast videos for the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates. The data

indicates that the selection committee of CNN picked a sample representative of the archived sample for the broadcast of the Democratic and Republican presidential candidate debates. In regard to demographic variables, age, sex, race, and sexual orientation, no significant differences existed between the archived sample and the sample selected for broadcast. Three significant differences did exist in regard to question characteristics, the use of a question or statement, the use of counter arguments, and the type of answer requested. Significantly more videos ( $N = 90$ ) in the archived sample asked questions than the broadcast sample,  $\chi^2(1, N = 770) = 4.7, p = .030$ . A significant difference existed in the use of counter arguments,  $\chi^2(1, N = 770) = 18.5, p < .001$ , with more counter arguments being used in the broadcast debates ( $N = 51$ ). Additionally, there was 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 answers that were balanced.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

This study sought to examine how individuals used the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates as a method for citizen participation. The internet has become a significant factor in how individuals discuss and participate in politics in the United States. Ken Winneg, managing director of the National Annenberg Election Survey stated,

In 2008, the internet has become an integral part of the campaign. Prior to 2004, many of the activities associated with participation—such as discussing politics, persuading other people to support a candidate, watching political advertising and learning about the candidates—predominantly occurred offline. Now these activities can be done online. (National Annenberg Election Survey, 2008, paragraph 5)

Through the 2007 CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates, CNN and YouTube provided an opportunity for all of the activities mentioned by Winneg to occur online and for some of these activities to be broadcast during two nationally televised debates.

The level of civic engagement and political participation throughout the American electorate has been declining for many years. Many reasons have been attributed to this decline and steps have been taken by many agencies to help reverse this decline. There is a collection of literature that suggests that because of the nature of new and emerging technologies, the internet may provide a way to reverse this decline and reengage the American public in political discussion. CNN and YouTube created two presidential candidate debates with the aim of bringing a level of authenticity to the

political debate process in the hopes of allowing citizens an opportunity to become more directly engaged in political discussion and debate.

This study examined the ways in which individuals used the debates to participate in national political communication. To address the debates' potential for increasing civic engagement, the study asked four research questions. The first research looked at the percentages of traditionally politically underrepresented/disengaged populations that were present in the videos submitted to the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debate. According to 2004 presidential election turnout statistics, White voters accounted for 77% of turnout totals, Blacks for 11%, Hispanics for 8%, Asians for 2% and Others 2% (CNN, 2004). In the population of videos analyzed from the CNN-YouTube debates (all 770 videos that were either archived or broadcast) participants categorized as White accounted for 64% of submitters, Blacks for 13%, Hispanics for 11%, Asians for 4.5% and Others for 4% (American Indian/Alaskan statistics were not reported in the election calculations). These results suggest that the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates provided an opportunity for minority populations to become civically engaged and participate in political conversation. The statistics indicate that underrepresented and marginalized groups have bridged the digital divide, a factor frequently discussed as significantly relevant to the civic disenfranchisement of minority populations. Despite increased participation amongst disengaged demographics, internet penetration among minorities, especially Hispanics, is significantly higher than participation in these debates would suggest. This indicates that while participation did increase from the 2004 election, levels of overall participation in these groups was relatively limited in relation to the

levels of internet penetration. According to demographic data compiled by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2007), minority populations participated in a rate much lower than internet penetration may suggest they would. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 56% of Blacks and 79% of Hispanics have internet access (no statistics are provided for Asians); however, Blacks made up only 14.9% and Hispanics only 12.8% of this study's total sample.

Statistics also indicated that more females (54%) than males (46%) voted in the 2004 election (CNN, 2004). In contrast, the current study indicates to a significant extent that women were less involved in this debate format, accounting for only 27% of the sample versus 62% of the sample being male. In the 2004 election, women participated at a rate 3% higher than males (McDonald, 2005), yet in the CNN-YouTube debates women participated at a rate 35.5% less than men. The fact that women participated in these debates at a significantly lower rate than men could be attributed to a digital divide between internet adoption rates between sexes (Bimber, 2000). Specifically, the divide may be the result of socioeconomic differences between men and women, especially in cases of single women and single mothers (Bimber, 2000). In addition, others speculate that the technology is itself a product of social relations and that because of this, the dispersion of innovative technologies will favor certain populations or social groups, such as men (Wajcman, 1995).

In 2004, a measurable difference existed between the ages of the voters. Voters under 30 accounted for 17% of the total, individuals 30-44 made up 29%, those 45-59 accounted for 30%, and those over 60 made up 24% of voters. The current study

indicates that more voters in younger demographics participated in the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates. Voters under 25 accounted for 27%, voters 25-40 for 29%, voters 41-55 for 13.5%, and voters over 55 for 10%. While the age categories do not follow the exact same breakdown, it is possible to note that voters under the age of 40 used this format as a way to become civically engaged, accounting for 56% of total participants. Recent research indicates a 30-point gap between the voting habits of those voters under the age of 30 and over the age of 30 (Pillsbury, Johannesen, & Arp, 2007), a gap which is not found in the results for this study. The aforementioned results all indicate that the CNN-YouTube debates provided an avenue for some members of disenfranchised populations to become more civically engaged. While demographics including women and older individuals were not highly represented in the debates, these populations are not typically the target of citizen engagement campaigns because of adequate levels of civic participation and voter turnout.

The demographic data collected for this study indicate that the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates reached a representative population as well as demographics that typically have lower levels of democratic participation. In addition, the data indicate that CNN and YouTube were successful in reaching members of their typical target demographics. Considering the average YouTube user is 27 years-old (Kelvin, 2006), and a member of the highly sought after young voter, the data suggest that the CNN-YouTube debates provided an appropriate venue through which to reach this population of individuals. In addition, CNN's target demographic includes individuals between the ages of 25 and 54, an age range that accounted for a significant



portion of the participants in the CNN-YouTube debates. Although the uniqueness of this debate format eliminates the possibility of comparing participation to similar debates, the fact that typically unengaged populations participated at significant levels indicates that the debates provided a successful opportunity for civic engagement.

Research question two addressed the characteristics of the questions asked in the debate submissions. The results indicate that a majority of the questions were open ended in nature, did not include alternatives from which the candidates were to choose, and were addressed to all of the candidates. Additionally, the majority of the question types were *what*, *how*, and *where* questions. The use of open-ended questions alludes to a desire from the public to allow the candidates to answer questions using their own words and perhaps move the candidates away from their standard talking points. In addition, the use of such questions in conjunction with the fact that most questions were posed to all candidates suggests that the public wanted to hear the thoughts and opinions of multiple candidates. The inclusion of setups that were situational, informational, narrative, or autobiographical setups seem to indicate that individuals did some level of research before submitting their questions in order to ask questions that were not only politically relevant but couched in pertinent information. The types of questions asked and the complexity of the sample refutes the criticism that journalists and moderators are the only ones capable of asking relevant, thoughtful questions of presidential candidates. While certain question topics were submitted more frequently than others, the wide variety of topics posed throughout the sample indicates that, at least in these debates, the internet was not a polarizing factor as there were many different questions across a broad

spectrum of issues. In addition, the fact that there were only few significant differences between the question characteristics submitted for the Democratic and Republican debates indicates that a polarization of opinion was not evident across party line either. In fact, the similarity between the samples seems to illustrate that individuals had the same types of questions for candidates of both parties and were interested in hearing opinions on similar topics from both parties.

The third research question addressed the visual characteristics present in the video submissions. The inclusion of the visual provided a significant change to the political debate landscape and submitters used this opportunity to further express their individual points of view. The use of visual elements, especially comical visual elements, may allude to a level of playfulness amongst the American electorate that is missing from more static forms of political discussion. The inclusion of visual elements, such as animation and inanimate objects, indicates that the YouTube was an appropriate venue for the use of playful elements in civic conversation. However, the decision by CNN to not include videos in the broadcast that used some of these elements, such as costumes and puppets, indicates that while YouTube may be an appropriate venue for playfulness in politics, CNN, perhaps, is not.

According to the visual communication literature, the use of visual elements in the videos might have provided a way for individuals to feel more connected to populations. Unfortunately, it was not possible to make this determination through the coding scheme used to analyze the video sample. Although the current study cannot provide a correlation between the elements of visual communication and feelings of political connectedness, it

is possible that simply being able to see the face and nonverbal communication of other submitters may have provided a way for individuals to feel more connected, included, and welcome in civic conversation. When special effects were present, they were quite simple in nature, appearing in the form of music or other simple effects. Given the nature of YouTube, it was surprising how few special effects were used to enhance the videos and when effects were used how basic they were. The limited use of special effects may be indicative of either a limited ability on the part of the submitter to create the effects or fear that the inclusion of special effects would have kept CNN from selecting the submission for broadcast. The limited number of videos including effects that were selected by CNN for broadcast may give credence to the notion that foregoing special effects and graphics in the submissions increased the chance of being selected for the broadcast debates.

The high percentage of submissions with average (or above average) production quality indicates that most of the submitters took the time to create clear and understandable videos. The fact that creating videos with clear audio and appropriate lighting took some time indicates that individuals were conscious of the quality of their submissions and produced videos that would be acceptable for national broadcast. In addition, the context in which many of the videos were recorded suggests that submitters were conscious of the settings in which they chose and used such settings to further emphasize the importance of their message. This is important because it suggests that submitters took the time to think about not only the types of questions they were asking but also the most appropriate context from which to ask the question.

The fourth research question addressed the criticism that CNN's editorial control over the videos selected for broadcast undermined the nature of the YouTube and internet environment. Interestingly, the data indicate that the sample of videos selected by CNN for broadcast was very representative of the submitted population. No significant differences existed in relation to any demographic variable (age, sex, race, sexual orientation). A few significant differences did exist in regard to the characteristics of the questions. Whether the submission was a statement or a question, whether the submission included a counter argument, and the type of answer the submission requested all differed between the archived and broadcast samples. No significant differences existed in regard to any of the variables examined relating to the visual characteristics of the videos. While a few significant differences did exist, overall, there were very few identifiable differences between the submissions selected for broadcast and the archived videos. This indicates that although CNN retained editorial control, the video selection committee chose a representative sample of submissions for inclusion in the broadcast debates. The results also speak to the relationship between amateur questioners and professionals, helping to refute the notion that the public is not as capable of asking questions as professional moderators may be. The results suggest that professionals (i.e., the CNN selection committee) thought the public did well enough that the selection committee did not have to pick and chose videos that provided a distorted view of the submissions or that put a more professional spin on the debate submissions.

Overall, these results suggest that while the CNN-YouTube debates were probably not the "most earthshaking change in communication technology for

presidential debates since the Kennedy-Nixon debates” (*The NY Times*, 2007), the debates were also not simply a political publicity stunt. The debates were successful in opening lines of political discussion and provided a new opportunity to become civically engaged. Through the use of the interactive YouTube format, individuals had the opportunity to connect with others and discuss significant issues facing the American public. Although the debates did not allow for traditional exercises of civic engagement, such as volunteering, to occur, the debates did allow for increased community (in the sense of a national community) dialogue to happen. The CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates were effective in reaching underrepresented or disengaged populations, namely minorities and young individuals. In addition, the substantial number of videos submitted for the debates indicates that the debate format was successful in engaging Americans in political conversation. The large number of videos submitted also suggests that the Web does not diminish opportunities for civic engagement, as suggested by some researchers, rather, at least through participation in these debates, civic engagement is increased.

Of significant concern in this study was the use of the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates to help alleviate some factors of civic disengagement and open up a new channel for political discussion. The CNN-YouTube debates allowed for citizens to redefine the ways in which they become civically engaged and also mobilized many individuals to participate, two factors which are positive for encouraging higher levels of civic engagement. While it is not possible to determine if these debates will translate into voter mobilization in the 2008 presidential debates, the fact that people are

actually engaging in a format where they can talk about politics and national issues bodes well for both the future of civic and political engagement.

Most often, individuals must rely on the mass media to provide them with information, thus allowing the media to provide them with constructed political perspectives (Mutz, 2007). Rarely, does the general citizenry have the opportunity to engage in political debates with presidential candidates. The CNN-YouTube debates allowed individuals the first opportunity to use a mass mediated forum to embed themselves into an important political practice; therefore effectively redefining the ways in which citizens can participate in politics.

The debates provided a forum through which some significant issues impacting civic disengagement could be addressed. The debates offered an increased opportunity for civic engagement, a necessity for a well-functioning democracy. By allowing individuals to become involved by submitting questions, commenting on other submissions, posting comments about other submissions, and posting comments regarding the candidates' answer to the broadcast questions, the debates took an important step in fostering increased civic dialogue. Additionally, the debates provided individuals with an open forum through which to participate, brought many individuals into political conversation, and allowed individuals to discuss political issues and concerns in a voice that was unique to them and not filtered through media institutions – all elements which are necessary in addressing the civic disengagement in American culture.

The CNN-YouTube debates may have also increased the level of interest in American politics, another perceived reason for the decline of civic engagement. The International Association for the Wireless Telecommunications Industry estimates that over 256 million people in the U.S. have cell phone access (CTIA, 2008), with cell phone penetration expected to reach a rate of 76% in the United States by 2009 (Rosen, 2004). In addition, broadband penetration has increased from 12% of 49% since 2002, an increase of 300% (E & P, 2008). In 2004, in a record high year for voter turnout, only 126 million citizens participated (Holder, 2006). While there is a difference between the Voting Age Population (VAP), which is an estimate of the number of persons age 18 and older, and the Voting-Eligible Population (VEP), an estimate of the number of persons eligible to vote (does not include non-citizens and ineligible felons) (McDonald, 2008), which may skew overall ideals regarding voter turnout, it is evident that many more people have access to communication technologies than voted in 2004. This may indicate that providing individuals the ability to become civically engaged, through means which they may already have access to, could have increased interest and therefore participation. While the use of digital cameras and cell phones is obviously an atypical method for political engagement, the data would suggest that it was an effective method for increasing civic engagement amongst the American populace. However, it is possible, that individuals that were not CNN viewers or YouTube participants may have not been aware of the opportunity to participate. Although CNN and YouTube did reach a broad spectrum of demographics and political ideologies, the demographics breakdown of those

that participated suggests that knowledge of the process may not have spread through particular populations.

The large number of people that watched the debates is another factor indicating increased interest and citizen engagement. The Democratic debate, which aired in July 2007, brought in 2.6 million viewers (Gough, 2007) and the Republican debate that aired in November 2007 brought in, at that time, a record breaking 4.49 million viewers (Crupi, 2007). These viewership data indicate that individuals still engaged in the debates by watching them on television in record numbers, even if they did not participate by submitting a video for submission. While these numbers do not compare to the average number of viewers for presidential debates, which have averaged between 80.6 and 40.6 million viewers, the debates did bring a substantial number of viewers into early discussion about presidential politics (ABC News, 2000) when the presidential candidate fields offered more choices. In addition, the more relaxed structure of the YouTube environment and the fact that the questions asked came from regular people, not politicians or journalists, may have attracted people that were interested in hearing others questions and concerns.

A level of distrust and disconnect also exists between the electorate and politicians. It is possible that by participating in the CNN-YouTube debates, candidates may have helped to bridge this gap by seeming more accessible to the public, both through their participation in the debates and the creation of issue-related videos posted to YouTube. Because the debate format was designed to invite more spontaneity and get candidates to move away from rehearsed answers, candidates may have been perceived



as being more honest and straightforward in their answers because were not able to anticipate questions or rehearse answers (Charles, 2007). In addition, the variation in questions helped to force candidates from giving standard responses, a fact which could have made the candidates appear more genuine in their answers (Charles, 2007).

Another often cited reason for civic disengagement is the idea that politicians only court the specific populations of voters that can get them elected (Denton & Woodward, 1998). Because of the wide variety of questions submitted to the debates, the candidates were forced to move away from their standard talking points, points that are typically constructed to reach specifically targeted populations (Levy, 2007). Finally, the CNN-YouTube debates tapped into changing national and community structures and utilized the collective function of the internet to increase connectedness and bring people to a central location for political discussion and debate. Even if individuals did not watch or participate in the debates, there may have been a secondary effect as information regarding the debates was available through many sources. A Google search about the debates generated 336,000 hits; a Lexis/Nexis search generated 229 publication hits (204 newspaper articles, 16 magazine/journal articles, 13 trade magazine articles, 4 aggregate news sources, 3 newsletters, 2 scientific publications, and 2 web-based publications); and a search on CNN and You Tube generated 10 pages of results.

#### *Addressing CNN-YouTube Debate Criticisms*

There were many criticisms waged against the CNN-YouTube debates; the most glaring of which is that the debates were flashy political stunts void of substance and added nothing significant to American political discussion. While there is no doubt that

some of the fanfare surrounding the debates may have indeed come across as political showmanship, the fact that many individuals chose to use this forum (as both submitters and as viewers) as a way to ask important political questions regarding the future of American democracy minimizes this criticism.

Critics suggested that average citizens would not be able to produce the same level of thought-provoking and relevant political questions as would journalists (Vargas, 2007). Although some of the questions did push the boundaries of good taste, a vast majority of the questions were politically relevant and addressed significant issues facing the American public. While the topics of the videos was not specifically addressed by the research questions, it is interesting to note that question topics ran the gamut of typical debate questions (although some did push into absurdity). Discussing the topics of the questions asked is relevant to the question characteristics because the topics relate to the complexity of the questions asked and also help to address whether or not the questions asked in the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates help to contribute to productive political conversation.

It was suggested that using YouTube as the vehicle through which the online videos would be submitted would not provide a welcome environment for participation, because only kids and college students use YouTube. However, the results of this study demonstrate otherwise, as a majority of the individuals that submitted videos were members of the 26-40 year-old population. In addition, one-fourth of submissions came from those over the age of 41 years-old. Although individuals over the age of 55 were not

highly represented in the debate, individuals characterized in this age group did represent a respectable 11.6% of the population.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

Perhaps the most significant limitation to this study is the fact that this is the first time that an event such as the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates has occurred. Thus, the citizen participation component of the debates was not comparable to previous presidential candidate debates. Further, there was no previous research from which to draw on to help construct the code book. A limitation posed by this is the fact that perhaps all of the elements that could have been coded for the study were not included in the final codebook, despite all attempts to make the codebook exhaustive. While some research has been conducted concerning political uses of YouTube, these studies typically revolve around the candidates' use of YouTube as a medium for engagement. For example, Kaid and Williams (2007) examined the spread of political advertising on YouTube. In addition, it is not possible to know if this is the only opportunity the participants have taken or will take to become politically engaged and if participation in the debates will translate into participation through voting. Finally, content analysis does not allow one to get at issues of why certain populations chose to become included and others did not, why individuals chose to ask the questions that they did, or why certain individuals chose to include visual effects and others did not.

The best way to gauge if participation in the CNN-YouTube debates will translate into future civic engagement would be to contact the individuals from the sample to see if they are otherwise civically engaged and if their participation in the debates has or will

translate into other forms of engagement. It may also be possible to use the current study as a benchmark from which to examine other types of online debates as they emerge. For instance, elements from the codebook developed for this study could be used to examine the characteristics of the questions submitted online to NPR for the Democratic candidate debate which aired on December 4, 2007.

Through this it may be possible to assess if types of questions submitted for a debate broadcast on the radio mirror those that were asked during the CNN-YouTube debates, or if the difference in medium translated into different question characteristics. If other media outlets, such as Yahoo and the Huffington Post, create online candidate debates, these events may also provide a basis from which to compare the CNN-YouTube debates. Additionally, Senator Hillary Clinton announced has recently announced plans to address the concerns of North Carolinians by answering political questions they post online. This may be an indication that Senator Clinton felt that the CNN-YouTube debate format was successful and may also provide another forum against which the data gathered in the current study could be measured. Finally, further investigation into the role that visual elements played in the debates would help answer questions raised in visual communication literature relating to the construction of social categories and the ability to discern observable behavior within specific populations.

### *Conclusion*

It is evident by examining the video questions submitted by individuals and selected for air during the CNN-YouTube presidential candidate debates that these debates provided a successful avenue through which individuals could become more

civically engaged. Although these debates did not directly impact policy or select individuals to enact policy, they did provide a method through which individuals could participate in civically-based dialogue in a unique and unprecedented way. It is evident from the results that the debates allowed for both a redefinition of the ways in which individuals participate in citizenship and for the mobilization of the electorate to occur. Individuals were able to redefine the manner in which they participated in national political conversation and the number of videos submitted suggests somewhat significant citizen mobilization. The participants represented a diverse population, one that was more diverse than the populace at large and more diverse than the population that participated in the 2004 presidential debates. Because a section of civic engagement research suggests that minority and young populations are the most difficult to reach and engage civically, the fact that many individuals from these populations were represented is the most significant finding of this study. Further, the time submitters took in planning, producing, and uploading their submissions indicates that individuals were receptive and eager to participate in a new method of civic engagement. Another significant finding is the fact that no differences existed between the sample of videos submitted to the debates and the sample of videos that CNN selected for the national broadcast. Because CNN and YouTube were criticized for allowing CNN final editorial control, it was refreshing to find that the creators did in fact select a broadcast sample that mirrored the entire population of videos. While some significant differences did exist between the Democratic and Republican broadcasts, there were very few differences between the broadcast and archived debates. Despite any differences, the CNN-YouTube presidential

candidate debates reached a large population of both submitters and viewers and allowed individuals a new way in which to becoming civically engaged. While television is still the dominant way in which people gather political information, the internet is becoming increasingly important in the creation and dissemination of political information.

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## Appendix A: Video Example #1

*Title:* Question #13: CNN/YouTube Republican Debate

*User Name:* freedomanddemocracy

*Additional Text* (appearing with the archived submission): Massimo, Hoboken (NJ)  
WMDs

*Link:* <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=x2DEqjh6yyg>

*Question:*

“Hi, presidential candidates. Talking about weapons of mass destructions, the U.S. has more than 9,000 of them, Russia 8,000, Israel 400, then U.K, France, India, China”

You want to put sanctions on Iran and North Korea but, who’s going to put sanctions on us and all these countries

Why we don’t dismantle our arsenals first giving the example? Crazy people are everywhere in the world and they could push the button anyway.”

*Visual:*

This video clip is an animated female that may be categorized as Black. Due to the animated format, distinguishing an age is not possible. The character is situated to the right of the screen in front of the background for the CNN-YouTube Debates’ homepage. To the left of the character there is a large American flag and text at the top of the screen asks “What will you ask the presidential candidates?”

question #13: CNN/YouTube Republican debate Sept. 17



## Appendix B: Video Example #2

*Title:* End gendercide in America

*User Name:* cathanimator

*Additional Text* (appearing with the archived submission): This video was submitted for the CNN presidential candidate debates - both of them. What a surprise -- CNN didn't use it! I'm leaving it posted anyway for others to ponder...

US statistics regarding the abuse and murder of women are appalling. Remember Jessie Davis, who was murdered by her former (male) lover in 2007. Every time a woman is murdered her death is reported as though it were an isolated incident. In reality, to be a girl or women in America is to belong to a group that is regularly targeted by men for abuse, violence and murder. Girls and women of every age are in danger in the US. This, however, does not seem to be an issue for any of the candidates.

Noam Chomsky says a failed state is one that cannot protect its citizens. The US certainly fits that requirement!

*Link:* <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZGmhmO-FM8>

*Question:*

“Hi, my name is Cathy, behind me is the concentration camp.... Buchenwald in Weimar Germany thousands of people were murdered here simply for belonging to groups considered undesirable.

In America, we also have a disproportionate group of innocent people dying, that group is women. As candidates, you should know that the leading cause of death for pregnant women in the U.S. is murder; homicide is the leading killer for young women. This is genocide based on gender.

My question to all of the candidates is when are you going to stop the Gendercide in America?”

*Visual:*

This video clip pictures a female categorized as White in the 26-40 age category. She is standing to the left of the screen and a portion of the concentration camp Buchenwald (i.e., a symbolic structure), including a razor wire fence, can be seen behind her. She is seen in a wide shot view, meaning that you can see the full length of the speaker as well as a significant portion of the background. The production quality of the video is good, the picture is clear, the camera is steady, and the sound quality is good. The video uses no special effects.

**End gendercide in America**





## Appendix C: Video Example #3

*Title:* Medicare Donut Hole

*User Name:* charsan11

*Additional Text* (appearing with the archived submission): Senior Citizen, Mt. Gilead, Ohio. Question concerning Medicare Donut Hole for Presidential Candidates.

*Link:* <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=qry3GTXXSPA>

*Question:*

“I am a senior citizen who has just hit the Medicare Donut Hole. One antibiotic, on which I rely, will now cost me \$508 for a ten-day supply.

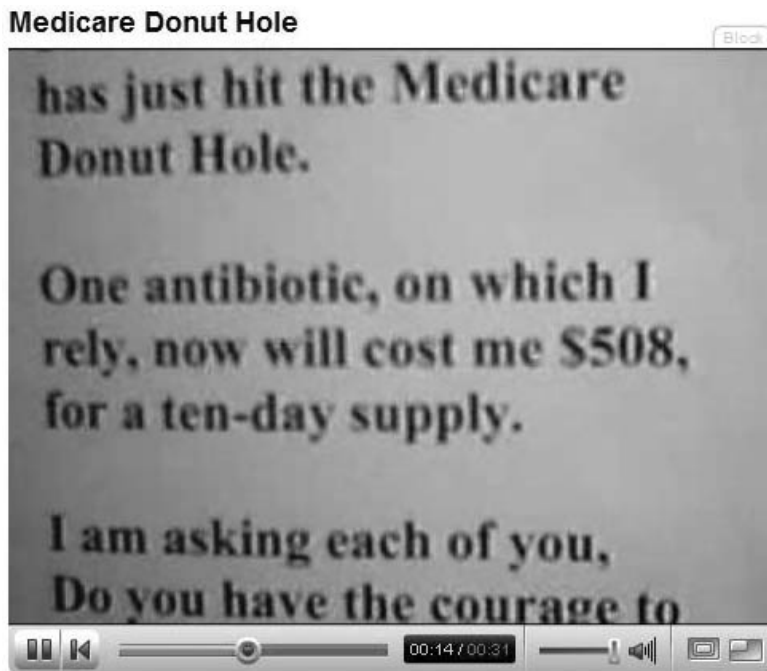
I am asking each of you, do you have the courage to stand up to the lobbyist and correct this Donut Hole problem. Thank You.”

*Visual:*

This video clip is of a female categorized as White in the over 55 age category. To ask her question, she uses a series of still photo shots. The first photo shot is a picture of her, the second and third shots contains the text of her question.

Because the video uses a series of photo shots, it is not possible to determine the context in which the video was recorded. The quality of the video is average;

the video is a little fuzzy and there is minor shaking of the camera, the sound is clear. The video utilizes tracking and the animated feature of using photography in the video.



## Appendix D: Codebook

### TOPIC

#### A. Coder

#### B. Unit

#### C. Statement vs. Question

0. Cannot Determine
1. Question
2. Statement

#### D. 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?”

#### E. 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? ”

#### F. 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

**G. 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...”

**H. 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

**I. 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?”

**J. 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?”

**K. 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”

**L. 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?”

## **PRODUCTION VALUE**

### **M. Delivery Style**

1. Extreme Wide Shot
  - i. Wide background shot where the subject speaking is barely or not at all visible
2. Wide Shot
  - ii. A wide background shot where the FULL LENGTH of the subject can be seen.
  - iii. In a wide shot you can see a significant portion of the background – you can tell what the background is.
3. Mid Shot
  - iv. Shows the subject from the MID SECTION – includes shots where you cannot see the waist but a good portion of the CHEST. Mid-chest and higher
4. Close up
  - v. Shows the subject from the SHOULDERS UP – VERY LITTLE if any CHEST
5. Extreme Close up
  - i. Shows ONLY THE FACE – no shoulders, no background
6. Point of view shot
  - vi. Shows a view from the subject's perspective – for instance looking down at a keyboard
7. Follow Shot
  - vii. The camera is following the subject in action.
8. Multiple Shot Types
  - vii. Video uses more than one shot type

### **N. Production Quality**

1. Professional Quality
  - i. Video looks as if professionally made; clear, well lit
2. Good:
  - i. Clear Picture, no shaking of the camera
3. Average:
  - ii. Some of the video is not clear, some shaking of the camera
4. Poor:
  - iii. Fuzzy, out of focus, a lot of camera shaking

## EFFECTS

- O. Panning: Yes: [1] No: [2]
  - 0. A *pan* is a horizontal camera movement in which the camera moves left and right about a central axis.
- P. Zooming: Yes: [1] No: [2]
  - 0. Zooming is effectively magnifying a part of the image, while moving the camera creates a difference in perspective — background objects appear to change in relation to foreground objects.
- Q. Tracking: Yes: [1] No: [2]
  - 0. Tracking is often more narrowly defined as movement parallel to the action, or at least at a constant distance
- R. Floating Text: Yes: [1] No: [2]
  - 0. Incorporates text that floats across some part of the screen during the shot
- S. Music: Yes: [1] No: [2]
  - 0. Is there music playing in the video?
- T. Use of a Foreign Language: Yes [1] No: [2]
  - 0. Does the agent speak in a foreign language during the video?
- U. Costumes: Yes: [1] No: [2]
  - 0. Are any of the agents dressed in costume?
- V. Cut-Away: Yes [1] No: [2]
  - 0. A shot that changes from the current action to something else
- W. Other: Yes: [1] No: [2]
  - 0. Any other effects?

## VISUALS

- X. **Context [Location of the Video]**
  - 0. Cannot Determine
    - i. If there are no distinguishing characteristics [i.e. in front of a white wall]
  - 1. Professional Setting
    - i. Doctor's Office – somewhere obviously professional [not a home office]
  - 2. Home
    - i. Could be a home office
    - ii. Need to be able to tell it is a home, i.e. doorframes, pictures, etc.
  - 3. Outside

4. School
5. In front of something symbolic:
  - i. In front of the capitol building, in a playground
6. Multiple locations:
  - i. The video is shot in more than one location
7. Other

## **PERSON**

### **Y. Age**

0. Cannot Determine
1. <18
2. 18-25
3. 26-40
4. 41-55
5. +55

### **Z. Sex [of primary speaker]**

0. Cannot Determine
1. Male
2. Female
3. No speaker in the video

### **AA. Race**

0. Cannot Determine
1. American Indian / Alaskan
2. Asian / Pacific Islander
3. Black
4. Hispanic
5. White
6. Other [i.e. Middle Eastern]

### **BB. Sexual Orientation**

0. Cannot Determine
1. Heterosexual
2. Homosexual
3. Bisexual

**CC. Use of Human Substitution**

0. None
1. Inanimate Objects:
  - i. Using objects, such as a brown paper bag or snowman to replace or add to a speaker
2. Animals:
  - i. Talking through the perspective of an animal
3. PowerPoint Videos:
  - i. The use of PowerPoint type videos
  - ii. Any type of slide show
4. Signs:
  - i. Using handwritten signs to supplement or replace speaking
5. Animation/Illustration
  - i. Cartoons
6. Videos/Photography:
  - i. Uses video clips or photography in the video
7. Use of more than one substitution
8. Cannot Determine [video uses something but I cannot tell what]
9. Other

**DD. Number of agents in the video**

- Fill in the number of people present in the shot

**EE. Number of agents speaking in the video**

- Fill in the number of people that speak in the video

**FF. Profession**

0. If no profession is mentioned use zero
- Fill in if one is mentioned

**GG. Religion**

0. If no religion is mentioned use zero
- Fill in if one is mentioned

**HH. What is the question topic?**

- Fill in Question Topic



