

**Voter Learning, Campaign Interest and Intention to Vote in the 2008 Presidential Election:
Did the Media Matter?**

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of traditional and new media formats on issue knowledge, campaign interest and intention to vote in the 2008 election. Here, general online news use was a significant predictor of voter learning but more frequent Weblog use was negatively associated with campaign issue knowledge. Increased attention to newspaper and television news significantly increased campaign interest among citizens, as did debate exposure. Media measures were unrelated to respondents' vote intention. Consistent with prior research, the media "mattered" in the 2008 campaign, however, the overall effect of media exposure and attention was rather modest and not decisive.

Jacob Groshek
Assistant Professor
Iowa State University
Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication
116 Hamilton Hall
Ames, IA 50011
jgroshek@iastate.edu
515/294-0485

Daniela Dimitrova
Assistant Professor
Iowa State University
Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication
117 Hamilton Hall
Ames, IA 50011
danielad@iastate.edu
515/294-4435

Key words: media effects, new media, political communication, 2008 presidential election

The authors wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development at Iowa State University for this study.

Voter Learning, Campaign Interest and Intention to Vote in the 2008 Presidential Election:

Did the Media Matter?

The 2008 presidential election was an historic, unique election for many reasons, including ethnic, gender, and financial¹ components as well as an extraordinarily robust Democratic primary contest and the highest turnout rate in 40 years.² There was also a new and increasingly diverse mediascape that included the earnest development of the Internet as a news source and the transformation of Web-based technologies to be more interactive and replete with user-generated content—which was in stark contrast to the diminishing audiences and revenues of traditional media outlets.³

These developments were so remarkable and seemingly interrelated that Sanson noted, “[t]he 2008 cycle marks the first presidential campaign defined by new media”.⁴ The purpose of this study is to empirically analyze such claims by measuring the extent to which media exposure and attention affected issue knowledge, campaign interest and intention to vote among the electorate in the 2008 presidential election. In particular, this study compares the effects of different forms of traditional and new media, including more recently developed Web 2.0⁵ applications of online communication. Importantly, these findings are then considered within the context of similarly replicated studies that have been reported for every national election since 1992.

Related Studies

Despite decades of political communication research, findings regarding the effects of mass media on the American voter remain mixed across time and media type. For instance, Dalton, Beck and Huckfeldt⁶ examined the influence of newspapers in the 1992 presidential campaign and found that editorial content was strongly related to voters’ decision-making processes in

choosing a political candidate. A series of studies pioneered by Drew and Weaver surveyed Indiana voters for every national election since 1988 showed that newspaper attention was a significant predictor of vote intention only in the 1996 and 2000 presidential election.⁷ More recently, a field experiment of newspapers' effects on voters demonstrated that newspaper readership significantly impacted voting behavior in the 2005 Virginia gubernatorial election.⁸

A number of studies have examined the impact of television on political knowledge, interest and behavior. In this line of inquiry the well-known Chaffee studies generally show that television constitutes a significant predictor of issue knowledge.⁹ Drew and Weaver's research of the 2004 presidential election showed that television news attention emerged as a significant predictor of campaign interest while TV debate exposure was significantly related to both issue knowledge and campaign interest.¹⁰ Exposure and attention to television news or debates, however, have never impacted vote intention in any national presidential election from 1992 to 2004.¹¹

Another factor making comparisons across studies difficult is what type of group is being examined. For instance, Nadeau and colleagues concluded that moderately well-informed voters were most likely to be influenced by information about political issues while "those at the top and bottom of the information ladder are similarly unresponsive to new information about issues".¹² Among newly naturalized U.S. citizens, Martinelli and Chaffee found that TV news exposure had a negative effect on knowledge while TV ad recall had a positive effect.¹³

Altogether, prior research on the role of traditional mass media in presidential elections has produced inconsistent results that provide no definitive pattern of influence. It is therefore prudent to summarize the impact of traditional media as seemingly fluctuating from election to

election, especially when considering different media, different dependent variables of interest, and different samples.

The impact of new media technologies on political communication, however, can hardly remain unnoticed. Since the 1996 election, both major political parties have expanded their online presence from simply using email and maintaining candidate and party Web sites¹⁴ to including Weblogs, podcasts, social networking and online video channels as key campaign components.

Some scholars have documented the mobilizing power of the Internet. Tolbert and McNeal, for example, found that Internet access and online election news use increased the likelihood of voting in both the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections.¹⁵ In addition, the Internet has been shown to have a positive effect on civic engagement¹⁶, especially among Generation X.¹⁷ In the 2004 campaign, Drew and Weaver¹⁸ documented a positive impact of Internet news exposure and attention on issue knowledge and campaign interest. More recently, Sanson reported that in the 2008 presidential election, online tools such as Facebook were commonly used for youth mobilization and concluded that:

“Facebook has the power to mobilize, educate and reflect the interests and excitement of its users. Though it cannot be assumed that Facebook is responsible for driving the Millennial generation to the polls, its ability to spread messages from person to person has had an undeniable ability to spark an interest in politics among the previously disenfranchised. At the same time, politicians, through Facebook, can observe and participate in a dialogue with a younger generation like never before.”¹⁹

While some see the Internet as an indispensable political tool that has the power to revitalize American democracy²⁰, others are skeptical about its usefulness and impact. Notably, Bimber²¹ concluded that information technologies’ contribution to democracy is negligible, especially as it relates to political participation. Another related study found that celebrity blogs have significant

effects on the level of political cynicism as well as political information efficacy²². Likewise, Wallsten²³ concluded that blogs may serve as little more than an echo chamber to the established media channels.

Since many of these new communication platforms are still just emerging, their effects have been less studied and are therefore even less certain than the effects of traditional media. The study reported here fills a critical gap by examining what effect new media use—in several different formats—had on voting age adults in this presidential campaign and how those effects compare to the effects of traditional media in this election and over time.

Purpose of this Study

This study was conducted for two primary reasons. The first of these reasons was to continue a research tradition that has analyzed the extent to which the media has mattered in national American elections since 1988. The second reason was to seize the opportunity presented by the rapid development of Web 2.0²⁴ technologies and the historic nature of the 2008 election. By measuring attention and exposure to different news media outlets, including online spaces like Facebook, YouTube, Weblogs, and candidates' Web sites, this study examined the effects of traditional and new media upon prospective voters' campaign knowledge, interest in the campaign, and their intention to vote.

Methods

A telephone survey was conducted to answer the above research questions. This survey comprised 561 adults aged 18 and over from the state of Iowa. Although this is a departure from respondents being sampled during an omnibus survey in the state of Indiana in previous studies,

there are good geographical and cultural reasons to believe these results maintain a fair level of comparability even though generalizability remains limited.

A staff of trained interviewers at a research institute at a large Midwestern University carried out the surveys. The interviews were conducted between October 16th and October 30th, 2008. A sample of residential telephone numbers was generated using a list-assisted method that incorporates unlisted and newly listed numbers in the sample. The average length of time interviewees were on the phone was approximately 8 minutes.

After excluding non-working numbers, business and group lines, respondents who were away or otherwise unreachable, and individuals that were physically or mentally unable to respond, the response rate was 44.35% of eligible subjects that were reached. With a 95% confidence interval, the maximum possible variation due to sampling in the study reported here was an acceptable plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Much like previous studies of this kind²⁵, this survey included questions about the number of days respondents had read a newspaper and watched television news over the course of the previous week. Since the study reported here was generally an updated replication of Drew and Weaver's studies of media use in presidential elections, questions were explicitly reproduced and measured using the same wording and scales when appropriate.

Thus, following the work of Drew and Weaver, this survey included measures of the amount of attention respondents devoted to news about the presidential campaign in newspapers, television news, television talk shows, radio news broadcasts and call-in talk radio shows. Further questions queried the number (out of three) of presidential debates between John McCain and Barack Obama respondents had viewed as well as if they watched the vice-presidential debate between Sarah Palin and Joe Biden. In addition, respondents were asked to gauge how

closely they had paid attention to television-based campaign advertising along with a more general measure of their overall interest level in the 2008 presidential campaign.

When considering attention measures, this survey employed the same four-point attention scale used previously by Drew and Weaver. This scale is as follows: “a lot of attention, some attention, not too much attention, no attention.” The campaign interest measure also followed the three-point metric employed by Drew and Weaver, which ranged from “very interested, somewhat interested, and not very interested.”

The survey used in this study also replicated questions from Drew and Weaver’s²⁶ study regarding how many days during the past week respondents had visited a Web site for news as well as self-reports on how much attention they paid to online information about the presidential campaign. Four new questions were then introduced to build this research model further and to account for the rather drastic changes to the media landscape since the national election of 2004.

These four new questions focused specifically on respondents’ uses of Web 2.0 applications and measured whether respondents got presidential campaign news from social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace, online video sites like YouTube, political Weblogs, and Web sites set up by the candidates themselves. The scales used here were modeled after similar questions from a recent Pew²⁷ study and comprised the following categories: “never, hardly ever, sometimes, regularly.” The inclusion of these new media items introduces another dimension of empirical analysis to this study and to the study of new media effects more generally.

In keeping with the research tradition of Drew and Weaver, four questions were created to assess respondents’ campaign knowledge in terms of the issue positions of the candidates. In this study, respondents were asked to identify whether John McCain or Barack Obama were more likely to support a certain plan of action regarding four issues. The top four issues reported

in a June 2008 Gallup Poll²⁸ to be “extremely important” in choosing a presidential candidate were selected for study here. These issues were energy (including gas prices), the economy, the situation in Iraq, and healthcare.

Specifically, the survey questions covered topics of favoring off-shore drilling as the main strategy of an energy program, instituting a tax cut for lower income senior citizens, maintaining a large military presence in Iraq, and making a national health care plan available to all Americans. We believe these were heavily reported issues where candidates’ positions clearly diverged and they were issues high on the public agenda. As such, it is more likely that higher levels of campaign issue knowledge might be observed.

Answers to these questions were added together to create a scale that summarized campaign issue knowledge. Each correct response was awarded 1 point. Thus, it was possible for each respondent to earn an overall campaign issue knowledge score of “0” (no issue positions questions correct) to “4” (all issue positions correct). Overall, this item had a mean of 2.88, with a median and a mode of 3. Only 15 respondents failed to provide at least one correct answer, which is also reflected by the somewhat negatively skewed (-.76) distribution.

A number of relevant demographic questions were also posed. These items were the same as those reported by Drew and Weaver and included measures of political party affiliation, age, gender, education, income, and employment status. Lastly, respondents were asked to provide their likelihood of voting on election day. The scale used here is identical to that of Drew and Weaver, and has four ordinal choices of “definitely, probably, might, won’t” vote.

As with previous studies on this specific topic, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to identify significant predictors of the three key dependent variables: issue knowledge, campaign interest, and likelihood of voting. Demographic measures comprised the first block

and were entered first to act as a basic control. The remaining blocks were entered in the exact order of Drew and Weaver in order to produce results that were easily comparable to their results from studies of previous campaigns. Campaign interest was therefore entered as the second predictor block of issue knowledge and likelihood of voting. Of course, when campaign interest was set as the dependent variable it was not included among the blocks of predictors.

The next block entered was traditional media variables, which were followed by the block of Internet measures. This new media block included the Internet campaign news exposure/attention variable devised by Drew and Weaver as well as the newly conceived Web 2.0 frequency measures. Exposure to the presidential and vice-presidential debates on television was entered last to not only follow the precedent of previous research but also because these debates were among the most watched in American history (the vice-presidential debate, for example, attracted the second largest audience ever). Thus, it is possible that the debate measure might predict additional variance beyond other media measures as it has in previous inquiries.

For each of the three regression models, F tests measured the significance of each block in addition to standardized Beta tests on the statistical significance of each predictor variable. Prior to modeling the regressions, frequencies were run for every variable to examine potential outliers and blocks of missing data. In all cases but one—income—there were very few missing or unusable responses. The income measure, however, was “Refused” or reported as “Don’t Know” by 100 respondents. Rather than lose this considerable number of otherwise viable responses, the mean income figure was substituted for the missing cases.

In addition, correlations between all independent and dependent variables were checked for evidence of multicollinearity. Most of these correlations were below .20 and a good proportion were less than .10, which indicates that multicollinearity was not a threat to further data analysis.

There was one exception to this finding, where the high correlation (.80) between the days per week respondents went to the Internet for news and the amount of attention they paid to campaign information online was indicative of a potential multicollinearity problem. Thus, these two measures were added together to create an index of Internet new exposure and attention, which was the same corrective process used by Drew and Weaver in their study of the 2004 election.

Following the regressions, multicollinearity diagnostic tests were examined, with particular attention paid to the tolerances of each independent variable in the models. When derived as excluded variables for each block, all instances of tolerance collinearity statistics were .74 or higher, with the notable exception of the debate exposure measure, which demonstrated a tolerance of .62 to .66 in the three regressions. Altogether, these figures follow similar patterns of previous studies and also suggest that the predictor variables tested in this study were unique from one another and not simply a function of one another.

Findings

The respondents who comprised the sample of this survey had an average age of 56.8 years. Political party affiliation was fairly split among this group, where 27.5% reported being affiliated with the Republican Party and 35.7% indicated belonging to the Democratic Party (29.2% reported they were Independents). Males represented a minority (31.2%) of this sample and the average household income was between \$35,000 and \$50,000 per year. On average, respondents had completed some college or post-secondary technical training, and 55.4% reported being gainfully employed. This sample's media use for the 2008 election is summarized in Table 1

where these figures are compared to the media use trends reported by Drew and Weaver for each national election from 1992 to 2004.

--Insert Table 1--

Issue Knowledge

Not surprisingly, the first block of demographic variables demonstrated the strongest relationship (R^2 change = .19) with knowledge of candidates' positions on campaign issues. This finding and the patterns of significant demographic predictors are remarkably consistent with Drew and Weaver's study of the 2004 election. As shown in Table 2, identifying with Democratic Party, having more education, being male, and holding gainful employment were related to being able to correctly answer the four issue questions posed in the survey when controlling for interest and other media factors.

Interestingly, Republican Party affiliation was not a statistically significant predictor of knowing the issue positions of John McCain and Barack Obama as presented in our survey. This also mimics the findings of Drew and Weaver.²⁹ However, there seems to be a less obvious, plausible explanation than the perceived moral values argument that accompanied the 2004 reelection of George Bush since many polls reported the economy as the highest priority for most voters in 2008.³⁰

The second block of predictors included only campaign interest but this block was statistically significant in predicting issue knowledge (R^2 change = .05). This result was consistent with previous studies, as was the lack of statistically significant traditional media predictors of issue knowledge in 2004. Individuals who reported higher levels of radio, newspaper, and television exposure and attention did not demonstrate higher scores on the issue questions than those with lower levels of traditional media exposure and attention.

A general increase in exposure and attention to online news, however, was observed to be related to increased issue knowledge ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .01$). Again, this finding was nearly identical to the 2004 election study by Drew and Weaver that was replicated here except the significant R^2 change is now .02—and one new measure, frequency of Weblog use, actually predicted *lower* levels of issue knowledge ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < .05$). Other forms of new media use, including visiting social networking Web sites, user-posted video Web sites, and candidates Web sites were not significantly related to voter learning of campaign issue positions.

Finally, the regression results show that exposure to televised campaign debates was not related to issue knowledge. The results of the hierarchical regression models for the 2008 election are summarized in Table 2.

--Insert Table 2--

Campaign Interest

As part of this research tradition, campaign interest was also considered as a dependent variable. In this scenario, statistically significant associations were observed in all of the four blocks of predictor variables. When the demographic block was set as the only block in the regression model, affiliation with either political party, higher education levels, and greater household income were all positive predictors of campaign interest (R^2 change = .11). Yet modeling this block as a component with all other blocks resulted in only having more formal education as a statistically significant predictor (see Table 3).

As was the case in the study of the 2004 election³¹, the block of traditional media measures remained the strongest predictor of campaign interest (R^2 change = .15). In the study reported here, attention to radio talk shows such as Rush Limbaugh as well as attention to TV campaign advertisements produced statistically significant relationships until debate exposure was

introduced to the regression model. Other traditional media factors that were statistically significant in all regression models included attention to campaign news in newspapers and attention to campaign news on television.

The new media block of variables was significant only at the $p < .10$ level, and the R^2 change of .01 can only be considered demonstrative of a very weak association. Indeed, exposure and attention to news on the Internet was a statistically significant predictor of campaign interest but only until debate exposure was entered into the regression and it then became non-significant. Debate exposure itself was a statistically significant block that predicted campaign interest, though we do acknowledge the possibility for bi-directional causality between campaign interest and media use measures.

--Insert Table 3--

Likelihood of Voting

As was the case with the majority of the findings reported here, the block of demographic variables was a relatively strong predictor of intention to vote (R^2 change = .07). Political affiliation with either the Republican or Democratic parties, being older, and having a higher education levels were all positive predictors as well. These are the very same predictors observed by Drew and Weaver in their study of the 2004 election, however, only education remained significant when controlling for all other factors introduced by additional blocks of interest and media variables.

In addition, campaign interest was a very strong predictor—in this case the strongest predictor—of respondents' intentions to vote (R^2 change = .11). This was the only other statistically significant block of variables (see Table 4). Unlike Drew and Weaver's study of the 2004 election, the traditional media block did not even demonstrate a weak association with

voting likelihood. Traditional media variables, new media variables, and the debate exposure measure also returned non-significant results. In sum, when controlling for demographics and campaign interest, media attention and use had no significant effects on individuals' voting intentions.

--Insert Table 4--

Discussion

Much has been made of the transformative capacities of Internet applications on political processes³², and this was especially true in the 2008 election, where many credited Barack Obama's use of new media as vital to his success.³³ Nonetheless, little empirical evidence has explicitly linked the use of online resources to positively augmenting political interest, knowledge, or behavior.

It is thus imperative to note that this is the second consecutive election cycle in this series of studies where more frequent exposure to Internet news and more attention to campaign information online was a significant predictor of increased issue knowledge, even when controlling for all other factors. In addition, exposure and attention to Internet-based news also predicted campaign interest after controlling for demographic measures and traditional media use as it did in the study of the 2004 election. This online news factor was not statistically significant, however, when incorporating debate exposure to the data analyzed here.

Though these findings add some promise to the notion that new media might reinvigorate political participation, their overall effect seems rather limited and conditional. Moreover, an increase in one aspect of new media use—frequency of visiting Weblogs—actually predicted *less* campaign issue knowledge. This may be due the fact that bloggers often have strong

partisan positions and tend to disproportionately favor the issue stances of a particular candidate rather than seek out multiple views or sources.³⁴ We consider this finding preliminary evidence of a multilayered frame-bonding phenomenon where individuals' personal views increasingly are reinforced by those of like-minded others. Since this is the first time such Web 2.0 data has been collected in this line of inquiry, however, it is difficult to extrapolate the results with certainty.

What can be stated with some confidence, however, is that newer new media such as social networking Web sites, user-generated online video, Weblogs, and even more interactive candidate Web sites have not drastically reshaped citizens' political action in terms of whether or not individuals would vote in the presidential election. Moreover, this study found no specific evidence that such Web 2.0-type applications themselves, and not just Internet use in general, had any appreciable, positive effect upon voter learning or campaign interest in the 2008 election. This pattern has of course been true of many forms of media that predate the current new media wave, although there have been some variations over the course of five national elections (see Table 5).

In 2008, debate viewing only predicted campaign interest and therefore was less of a prominent factor than it had been in previous elections analyzed by Drew and Weaver. This is a somewhat remarkable result when taking into account that when combined, these presidential and vice-presidential debates were among the most watched of the last 20 years (see Table 6).

--Insert Table 5 and Table 6--

As has been noted over the course of this line of research, the impact of the media has been, at least to some extent, a byproduct of how the campaign interest variable is handled. Historically, this study has relied upon a more conservative measure of media effects by placing the interest block before *any* media measures in regression analyses. This does create the

possibility that some of variance in the dependent variables might have been explained away before media were even considered—and the same is further true of new media variables that were entered in a separate block following traditional media.

That said, we feel it is crucial to follow previous research patterns in order to produce a certain level of comparability and to avoid overstating the effects of new media. This approach is especially important to this study because campaign interest in this election was the highest it has ever been in this series of media and election studies. Campaign interest levels are summarized in Table 7, which also compares these figures from 1992 to 2008.

--Insert Table 7--

Conclusions

Notably, the 2008 election had the highest level of voter campaign interest that has been reported in this series of studies and the highest voter turnout rate since 1968.³⁵ In their analysis of the 2004 election, Drew and Weaver wrote, “We suspect that there is a campaign interest threshold, and when interest is low, there is little opportunity for the media to have much impact”.³⁶ The most recent election can be considered an excellent case study to examine this proposition because it had such a high level of campaign interest, and thus there should exist more opportunity for the media to have had more impact.

Interestingly, however, the impact of the media in this election can best be summarized as modest and relatively consistent with that of previous elections. What this study also makes clear is that certain forms of media seem more likely have an effect on voter learning, campaign interest and voting intention.

Over the course of this line of research, only two forms of media use—debate exposure and Internet exposure and attention—have positively affected issue knowledge during more than one election. Both were related to increased issue knowledge in two elections. Television news exposure was also a statistically significant predictor in two elections—1992 and 2000, respectively—but in the 2000 election, exposure to television news was actually negatively associated with voter learning. This situation has occurred with only one other form of media use, which happened to be with respondents who reported more frequent visits to Weblogs for news during the 2008 election.

The impact of the media is more noticeable when considering campaign interest, where increased attention to television news and debate exposure have both been significant predictor in at least four of the last five elections, including 2008. Until this election, attention to radio news had demonstrated a positive relationship with campaign interest. Attention to newspapers was associated with increased campaign interest in 1996, 2000, and again in 2008. All other media variables have not shown an effect upon campaign interest or have done so during only one election cycle.

A similar pattern of limited, indeed, nearly non-existent media effects upon voting intention has been observed over the last 16 years. There have been only two elections, 1996 and 2000, where the increased exposure or attention to any form of media was related to an increased likelihood to vote. In both of those elections, newspaper attention was a statistically significant predictor of voting intention.

More than anything, the results observed here across five election cycles suggest that it is distinctly possible that the impact of the media and different forms of media use may change during the next election. This might have to do with the candidates, campaigns, and various

external events outside of media use alone. Still, there is good reason to believe that the media, traditional or new, will continue to matter insofar as some forms of media use will almost assuredly contribute to voter learning and campaign interest. It is important, however, not to overstate those effects precisely because more evidence from the study of this election showed that neither traditional nor new media use were the determining factor in how voters came to understand campaign issues or form political opinions and behavioral decisions.

Unraveling the impact of the media on personal-level political processes is a difficult task and there exist many factors that shape political knowledge and decision-making such as interpersonal communication, political efficacy, and the perceived level of campaign competitiveness to name just a few. The findings of this study are somewhat limited in that they do not specifically account for all such measures or the changes that newer forms of media might have on political communication messages and processes themselves. Nonetheless, this study does build upon and update rich research history with findings that contribute to the understanding of the role traditional and new media play in voter learning, campaign interest and intention to vote.

Taken as a whole, our results suggest that it may be increasingly difficult to capture media effects today considering the explosion of information channels and the expansion of new media technologies. As Bennett and Iyengar wrote, such societal changes may be “affecting the composition of audiences, the delivery of information, and the experience of politics itself”.³⁷ We echo their suggestion that a new era of limited effects may be at the doorsteps of political communication research. While the dimensions of that effects paradigm may not be yet clear, it is certain that the Internet and new forms of communication developed online will play increasingly important roles in future presidential campaigns. As before, though, it is evident

that traditional and new media did matter in the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign and the impact of certain forms of media use were more potent than others.

Table 1
Media Use in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 Elections
(Means)

	1992 (N=504)	1996 (N=534)	2000 (N=513)	2004 (N=531)	2008 (N=561)
Newspaper Exposure*	4.45	4.16	4.26	4.62	4.09
Newspaper Attention**	2.94	2.75	2.43	2.94	2.60
TV News Exposure	5.08	4.79	4.47	4.88	5.40
TV News Attention	3.09	2.93	2.84	3.27	3.13
Radio News Exposure	3.37	--- ^a	--- ^a	--- ^a	--- ^a
Radio News Attention	2.39	2.47	2.29	3.47	2.29
Radio Talk Show Attention	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	1.73
TV Ad Attention	2.53	2.26	2.10	2.46	2.40
TV Talk Show Attention	1.78	2.09	1.80	3.66	2.07
Debate Exposure***	2.11	1.12	1.60	2.01	2.42
Internet Exposure	--- ^b	--- ^b	.86	1.47	1.83
Internet Attention	--- ^b	--- ^b	1.30	1.60	1.80
Social Networking Web site Frequency****	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	1.12
User-posted Video Web site Frequency	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	1.19
Weblog Web site Frequency	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	1.20
Candidate Web site Frequency	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	--- ^c	1.28

* Media exposure measures in all surveys use scales from 0 to 7 days.

** Media attention measures in all surveys use scales ranging from 1 “no attention” to 4 “a lot of attention.”

*** Out of three debates in the 1992 election, two in the 1996 election, four in the 2000 election, four in the 2004 election, and four in the 2008 election.

****Frequency of use measures use scales ranging from 1 “never” to 4 “regularly.”

^a Not asked in the 1996, 2000, 2004 or 2008 surveys.

^b Not asked in the 1992 or 1996 surveys.

^c Not asked in the 1992, 1996, 2000 or 2004 surveys.

Table 2
 Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Campaign Issue Knowledge
 (Betas, N=544)

Predictor Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3	Regression 4	Regression 5
Republican	-.05	-.08	-.08	-.08	-.08
Democrat	.23***	.20***	.19***	.19***	.19***
Age	-.01	-.02	-.04	.00	.00
Gender (being male)	.14***	.15***	.15***	.14***	.14***
Education	.22***	.16***	.16***	.15***	.15***
Income	.12**	.09*	.09*	.06	.06
Employment	.11*	.11*	.12*	.11*	.11*
Campaign Interest		.23***	.21***	.19***	.19***
Radio Campaign News Attention			.00	.00	.00
Radio Talk Show Attention			.03	.04	.04
Newspaper Exposure			.03	.03	.03
Newspaper Campaign News Attention			.02	.01	.01
TV News Exposure			.02	.02	.02
TV Campaign News Attention			.01	.00	.00
TV Campaign Ad Attention			.03	.04	.04
TV Talk Show Attention			.01	.00	.00
Internet News Exposure/Attention				.13**	.13**
Social Networking Web site Frequency				.02	.02
User-posted Video Web site Frequency				.04	.04
Weblog Web site Frequency				-.11*	-.11*
Candidate Web site Frequency				.05	.05
Debate Exposure					.00
R ²	.19	.24	.24	.26	.26
Adjusted R ²	.18	.23	.22	.23	.23
R ² Change	.19	.05	.00	.02	.00
Sig. of Change	.000	.000	.93	.03	.96

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p≤.001

Table 3
 Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Campaign Interest
 (Betas, N=544)

Predictor Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3	Regression 4
Republican	.11*	.06	.06	.06
Democrat	.14**	.07	.06	.05
Age	.06	.05	.06	.02
Gender (being male)	-.04	-.04	-.05	-.04
Education	.24***	.19***	.17***	.16***
Income	.13**	.10*	.08	.04
Employment	-.02	-.01	-.03	-.02
Radio Campaign News Attention		.04	.04	.06
Radio Talk Show Attention		.09*	.10*	.06
Newspaper Exposure		-.08	-.07	-.06
Newspaper Campaign News Attention		.19***	.18***	.15**
TV News Exposure		-.03	-.03	-.05
TV Campaign News Attention		.25***	.23***	.15**
TV Campaign Ad Attention		.08*	.09*	.07
TV Talk Show Attention		.03	.03	.01
Internet News Exposure/Attention			.10*	.07
Social Networking Web site Frequency			-.08	-.07
User-posted Video Web site Frequency			.04	.03
Weblog Web site Frequency			-.02	-.03
Candidate Web site Frequency			.04	.02
Debate Exposure				.27***
R ²	.11	.26	.28	.32
Adjusted R ²	.10	.24	.25	.30
R ² Change	.11	.15	.01	.05
Sig. of Change	.000	.000	.088	.000

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p≤.001

Table 4
 Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Likelihood of Voting
 (Betas, N=543)

Predictor Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3	Regression 4	Regression 5
Republican	.10*	.06	.06	.07	.07
Democrat	.13**	.08	.09	.08	.08
Age	.14**	.12**	.09	.10	.10
Gender (being male)	-.05	-.03	-.05	-.05	-.05
Education	.19***	.10*	.11*	.10*	.10*
Income	.08	.03	.03	.01	.00
Employment	.05	.05	.06	.05	.05
Campaign Interest		.36***	.35***	.33***	.32***
Radio Campaign News Attention			.03	.03	.03
Radio Talk Show Attention			.03	.04	.03
Newspaper Exposure			.06	.07	.07
Newspaper Campaign News Attention			-.03	-.04	-.04
TV News Exposure			.06	.06	.06
TV Campaign News Attention			.05	.04	.03
TV Campaign Ad Attention			-.03	-.02	-.02
TV Talk Show Attention			-.07	-.07	-.07
Internet News Exposure/Attention				.07	.07
Social Networking Web site Frequency				-.06	-.06
User-posted Video Web site Frequency				.03	.03
Weblog Web site Frequency				-.01	-.02
Candidate Web site Frequency				.03	.02
Debate Exposure					.05
R ²	.07	.19	.20	.21	.21
Adjusted R ²	.06	.18	.18	.18	.18
R ² Change	.07	.11	.01	.01	.00
Sig. of Change	.000	.000	.389	.441	.241

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p≤.001

Table 5
 Statistically Significant News Media Predictors from 1992 to 2008

	<u>1992</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2008</u>
<u>Knowledge</u>	TV News Exposure	None	TV News Exposure (negative) Debate Exposure* TV News Attention	Debate Exposure Internet Exposure & Attention	Internet Exposure & Attention Weblog Frequency (negative)
<u>Vote Intention</u>	None	Newspaper Attention	Newspaper Attention	None	None
<u>Interest</u>	Radio News Attention Debate Exposure TV News Attention	Radio News Attention Newspaper Attention TV Talk Show Attention	Radio News Attention Newspaper Attention Debate Exposure TV News Attention TV Ad Attention	Radio News Attention Debate Exposure TV News Attention Internet Exposure & Attention	Newspaper Attention TV News Attention Debate Exposure

*p = .056 for R² Change; Beta is not significant to .05 level.

Table 6
National Audiences for Televised Debates, 1988 to 2008^a

Presidential Debates	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008 ³⁸
Number of Debates	2	3	2	3	3	3
Average Rating ^b	40.0 ^d	43.3	27.7 ^e	29.1 ^f	33.9 ^f	38.17 ^f
Average Viewers per Debate	65.5 million	66.4 million	41.2 million	40.6 million	53.5 million	57.4 million
Number of Debates	NA	1	1	1	1	1
Average Rating	NA	35.9	19.7	20.4	28.1	45.0
Average Viewers per Debate	NA	51.2 million	26.6 million	28.5 million	43.6 million	69.9 million

^a Unless otherwise noted, figures represent total ratings for ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN combined.

^b Ratings represent percentages of TV households tuned in.

^c Figure only represents the first Regan-Mondale debate.

^d Figure only represents the first Bush-Dukakis debate.

^e Also includes data from Fox network.

^f Also includes data from Fox network (which broadcast the first 1996 presidential debate) and MSNBC.

Sources: Nielsen Media Research; Broadcasting & Cable, 3 October 2008 and 16 October 2008; Huffington Post, 16 October 2008; The Associated Press; The New York Times, 18 October 2004; Los Angeles Times, 15 October 2004, 29 September 1988, 18 October 1988; Washington Post, 23 October 1984; Broadcasting, 15 October 1984; Broadcasting & Cable; John W. Mashek with Lawrence T. McGill and Adan Clayton Powell III, *Lethargy '96: How the Media Covered a Listless Campaign* (Arlington, VA: The Freedom Forum, 1997), 69.

Table 7
 Degrees of Campaign Interest in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 Elections
 (Percentages and Means)

	1992 ^a	1996 ^b	2000 ^c	2004 ^d	2008
Not Very Interested	7.0%	43.1%	15.7%	10.4%	7.3%
Somewhat Interested	25.2%	36.7%	36.6%	21.8%	21.6%
Very Interested	67.8%	20.2%	47.6%	67.6%	70.9%
Mean ^e	2.61	2.23	2.32	2.57	2.64
N	504	534	515	531	561

^a Source: David Weaver and Dan Drew, "Voter Learning in the 1992 Presidential Election."

^b Source: Dan Drew and David Weaver, "Voter Learning in the 1996 Presidential Election."

^c Source: David Weaver and Dan Drew, "Voter Learning in the 2000 Presidential Election."

^d Source: David Weaver and Dan Drew, "Voter Learning in the 2004 Presidential Election."

^e Scales range from 1 "not very interested" to 3 "very interested."

References

- ¹ Federal Election Commission, “Presidential Campaign Finance” accessed March 30, 2009 at <<http://www.fec.gov/DisclosureSearch/mapApp.do>>
- ² Michael McDonald, *United States Elections Project*, accessed March 29, 2009 from <http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm>
- ³ Annual Report on American Journalism, “Overview” accessed March 29, 2009 at <http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2009/narrative_overview_intro.php?media=1>.
- ⁴ Angela Sanson, “Facebook and youth mobilization in the 2008 presidential election” *gnovis journal* 8 (summer 2008): 162.
- ⁵ Tim O’Reilly, “What is Web 2.0” September 30, 2005, accessed March 28, 2009 at <<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>>.
- ⁶ Russell J. Dalton, Paul A. Beck, and Robert Huckfeldt, “Partisan cues and the media: Information flows in the 1992 Presidential elections” *American Political Science Review*, 92 (spring 1998): 111-126.
- ⁷ Dan Drew and David H. Weaver, “Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential election: Did the media matter?” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75 (summer 1998): 292-301; David H. Weaver and Dan Drew, “Voter learning and interest in the 2000 Presidential election: Did the media matter?” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78 (winter 2001): 787-98.
- ⁸ Alan Gerber, Dean S. Karlan, and Daniel Bergan, (2006), “Does the media matter? A field experiment measuring the effect of newspapers on voting behavior and political opinions.” *Yale Economic Applications and Policy Discussion Working Paper No. 12* accessed March 18, 2009 at <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=903812>>.
- ⁹ Xinshu Zhao and Steven H. Chaffee, “Campaign advertisements versus television as sources of political issue information.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59 (spring 1995): 41-65; Steven H. Chaffee, Xinshu Zhao and Glenn Leshner, “Political knowledge and the campaign media of 1992.” *Communication Research* 21 (summer 1994): 305-24.
- ¹⁰ Dan Drew and David H. Weaver. “Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential election: Did the media matter?” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83 (spring 2006): 25-53.
- ¹¹ Drew and Weaver, “Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential election.”
- ¹² Richard Nadeau, Neil Nevitte, Elisabeth Gidengil, and Andre Blais. “Election campaigns as information campaigns: Who learns what and does it matter?” *Political Communication* 25 (summer 2008): 242.

¹³ Kathleen A. Martinelli and Steven H. Chaffee. "Measuring new-voter learning via three channels of political information" *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 72 (spring 1995): 18-32.

¹⁴ Daniela V. Dimitrova, "New media technologies" In Lynda Lee Kaid & Christina Holtz-Bacha (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008).

¹⁵ Caroline J. Tolbert and Ramona S. McNeal. (2003). "Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation?" *Political Research Quarterly* 56 (summer 2003): 175-185

¹⁶ Lori M. Weber, Alysha Loumakis and James Bergman. "Who Participates and Why? An Analysis of Citizens on the Internet and the Mass Public" *Social Science Computer Review* 21 (spring 2003): 26-42.

¹⁷ Dhavan V. Shah, Nojin Kwak and R. Lance Holbert. "'Connecting' and 'disconnecting' with civic life: Patterns of Internet use and the production of social capital" *Political Communication* 18(summer 2001): 141-162.

¹⁸ Drew and Weaver, "Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential election."

¹⁹ Sanson, "Facebook and youth mobilization", 171-172.

²⁰ Joe Trippi, *The revolution will not be televised: Democracy, the Internet, and the overthrow of everything* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004).

²¹ Bruce A. Bimber "Information and political engagement in America: The search for effects of information technology at the individual level" *Political Research Quarterly* 54 (spring 2001): 53-67.

²² Kaye D. Sweetser and Linda L. Kaid, "Stealth soapboxes: Political information efficacy, cynicism and uses of celebrity blogs among readers" *New Media & Society*, 10 (spring 2008): 67-91.

²³ Kevin J. Wallsten, "Political blogs and the bloggers who blog them: Is the political blogosphere an echo chamber?" (paper presented at the American Political Science Association (APSA) annual meeting, Washington, D.C., 2005)

²⁴ O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0."

²⁵ Dan Drew and David H. Weaver, "Voter learning in the 1988 Presidential election: Did the debates and the media matter?" *Journalism Quarterly*, 68 (spring/summer 1991): 27-37; Drew and Weaver, "Voter learning in the 1996 Presidential election: Drew and Weaver "Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential election"; David H. Weaver and Dan Drew, "Voter learning in the 1992 Presidential election: Did the 'nontraditional' media and debates matter?"

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly 72 (spring 1995): 7-17; Weaver and Drew, "Voter learning in the 2000 Presidential election."

²⁶ Drew and Weaver, "Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential election."

²⁷ Pew Research Center, "Audience segments in a changing news environment: Key news audiences now blend online and traditional sources" *Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey, August 17, 2008*.

²⁸ Gallup, "Obama Has Edge on Key Election Issues" June 24, 2008, accessed September 2, 2008 at <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/108331/Obama-Has-Edge-Key-Election-Issues.aspx>>.

²⁹ Drew and Weaver, "Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential Election".

³⁰ Polling Report, "Problems and Priorities" accessed March 29, 2009 at <<http://www.pollingreport.com/prioriti.htm>>.

³¹ Drew and Weaver, "Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential election."

³² Manuel Castells, "The new public sphere: Global civil society, communication networks and global governance" *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616: 78-93; Andrew P. Williams and John C. Tedesco (Eds.) *The Internet election: Perspectives on the Web's role in Campaign 2004* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

³³ Audrey A. Haynes and Brian Pitts. "Making an impression: New media in the 2008 Presidential nomination campaigns." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42 (January 2009): 53-58.

³⁴ Raquel da Cunha Recuero, "Information flows and social capital in Weblogs: A case study in the Brazilian blogosphere" *Proceedings of the nineteenth ACM conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia*, (2008): 97-106; Wallsten, "Political blogs and the bloggers who blog them".

³⁵ McDonald, *United States Elections Project*.

³⁶ Drew and Weaver, "Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential election", 36.

³⁷ W. Lance Bennett. and Shanto Iyengar. "A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication" *Journal of Communication* 58 (winter 2008): 707.

³⁸ Broadcasting & Cable. "Palin-Biden Debate Draws Record 69.9 Million Viewers" October 3, 2008, accessed March 28, 2009 at <http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/115709-Palin_Biden_Debate_Draws_Record_69_9_Million_Viewers.php>; Broadcasting & Cable. "56.5 Million Watch Final Presidential Debate" October 16, 2008, accessed March 28, 2009 at <http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/115893-56_5_Million_Watch_Final_Presidential_Debate.php>; Huffington Post, "Presidential debate ratings" October 16, 2008, accessed March 17 2009 at <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tag/presidential-debate-ratings>>; For all other figures from

1998 to 2004, see Drew and Weaver, “Voter learning and interest in the 2004 Presidential election”, 35.