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**Campaigning on YouTube:
Messaging and Online Communication in the 2016
Presidential Nomination Process**

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Honors Thesis
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Abstract

The Internet has become an important media environment in the context of political campaigns. This research examines YouTube, the most popular website for video content, in order to understand how the platform fits into the broader media landscape and analyzes the messaging content of leading candidates seeking the 2016 nomination. It tests several hypotheses about the YouTube content posted by the campaigns of Donald Trump, Marco Rubio, Bernie Sanders, and Hillary Clinton, during the period from the announcement of their candidacies through February 10, 2016. The research finds that campaigns upload varying amounts and types of content and that they experience substantially differing levels of popularity. It finds that some campaigns primarily upload news coverage of their candidates, while others primarily post content produced specifically for the Internet. YouTube content highlights many policy realms, but among this sample, foreign policy and economic topics are the most popular. Campaigns utilize YouTube in varying ways and this investigation leads to a broader question: how relevant is YouTube in the age of competing video platforms such as Facebook?

Introduction

Much is said regarding the impact of the Internet on American electoral politics. It offers the potential to connect vast constituencies, including younger voters, and to change how candidates pursue higher office. Candidates have succeeded in raising substantial sums of money online, data analysis has changed how many campaign operatives approach their work, online advertising is on track to become a larger expense than television advertisements, and online videos have become ubiquitous. YouTube, the world's largest

video-sharing website, first went online in 2005 and has since become a prominent part of online campaign communications strategies.

This research project examines the way that leading Republican and Democratic candidates pursuing the 2016 nomination utilize YouTube to share messages. It examines how YouTube functions within the modern political media environment, evaluates the current relevance of YouTube to campaign communications, and puts forward a comprehensive understanding of how the website operates alongside other online and offline components of the media landscape. Candidates must grapple with increasing numbers of voters “cutting the cord” and spending less time in front of television sets. As communication technology changes, campaigns in turn adapt their communications methods to reach those who are unavailable on television. YouTube provides such an option while also changing the financial calculations of video messaging due to its almost nonexistent broadcast cost. It is also an important platform as YouTube viewers are a very different audience than television viewers. Compared to television audiences, YouTube represents an audience of younger, more partisan, highly educated, and wealthy viewers (Salmond, 2012, p.4). I conducted this research project to understand how campaigns approach such an audience.

I ground my study on existing research on campaign advertising, which indicates the themes, and topics that have been prevalent over the last half-century. YouTube is obviously an entirely different platform, but the type of content on YouTube, videos, is similar in nature to contemporary television advertising. I explore the history of political advertising, and the similarities and differences with online video content. I find that campaigns utilize YouTube as part of a large collection of available communications media.

I also find that there does not appear to be a “best practice” for utilizing YouTube among the leading campaigns of the 2016 nomination contest. Different campaigns uploaded very different types of content; some infrequently use the platform while others upload large quantities of videos. YouTube messaging differs, but it does not appear to differ to a large degree from the messaging that takes place on other platforms. I find that there is a large amount of variability regarding YouTube content and popularity, and due to the multitude of ways that Internet users can navigate to videos, it is essentially impossible to explain the popularity of specific videos. However I also discover important trends in the use of YouTube among the 2016 nomination campaigns and conclude that different campaigns utilize YouTube in very different ways. Furthermore in light of Facebook, it is unclear if YouTube is still the most important platform for the sharing of campaign videos on the Internet. Nonetheless, these findings provide a valuable perspective on how presidential nominations are currently using one of the most prominent video-sharing technologies on the Internet.

History of Advertising

Campaign advertising is a necessity in the United States of America. The population of eligible voters in presidential competitions stretches across a massive geographic area extending from Alaska and Hawaii to Florida. These distances and the country’s large population necessitate the adoption of technology to allow campaigns to communicate with voters. Savvy candidates have been quick to utilize new technologies to increase the strength of their bully pulpits. YouTube is vastly different from a seemingly primitive medium such as radio. Understanding how observers perceived new technologies in the

past helps us avoid making naïve assumptions about communications tools such as YouTube today.

Campaign advertising in America is as old as the electoral system. In the 1828 election, the supporters of John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson each distributed a variety of negative handbills and circulars accusing Adams of “driving off with a horsewhip, a crippled old soldier” and Jackson of “massacring...and hanging three Indians” (West, 200, p.2). Candidates continued to utilize techniques throughout the 1800s that were essentially advertising. Travelling songsters conveyed the messages of candidates to voters around the country as advertising physical imagery of candidates became a ubiquitous part of the electoral process. Some of these images proved very memorable: we still remember Theodore Roosevelt’s teddy bear. Enthusiasts of American history still understand Abraham Lincoln to have been the “rail candidate” based on advertising featuring the candidate splitting rails (Jamieson, 1984, p.12).

In the twentieth century, campaigns took advantage of advances in media technology to vastly improve their message delivery strategies. Radios came of age America in the 1920s and citizens rapidly adopted the technology: the number of radios in the country increased from 3 million in 1928 to over 30 million in 1935. Politicians were quick to recognize that “radio audiences of a size unimaginable in an era of stump speeches were now available in an instant” (Jamieson, 1984, p.19). Some believed that the technology would have a democratizing influence and would change the way that politicians operated. One observer noted in the *The New York Times* that, “radio hook-up has destroyed the politician’s old game of promising in each locality the things which that locality wishes” (Jamieson, 1984, p.20). Observers felt that connecting the entire country to candidates

would be a fundamentally democratic process. The Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee each spent \$160,000 on radio broadcasts in 1924, a year in which an hour-long nationwide radio broadcast cost \$4,000 (Jamieson, 1984, p.24).

Campaigns were airing short dramatic advertisements by the 1940s and adopted the medium to share their own messages. Some citizens hoped that radio might offer regular citizens around the country the potential to broadcast their political ideas in order to counter the dominance of campaign messaging. However campaigns also leveraged their substantial financial resources to utilize the medium and share tailored radio advertising. Many voters eventually felt that such advertisements turned campaigns into sloganeering competitions, but “the age of radio passed so quickly that its impact on political life had hardly been considered when the ‘new age of television’ arrived” (Lang and Lang, 2002, p.16).

Political television advertisements arrived as Dwight Eisenhower defeated Adlai Stevenson II in 1952. Both campaigns released a series of advertisements, but Stevenson’s primarily released 30-minute slots while Eisenhower’s campaign spent heavily on short spot advertisements that played during popular programming such as “I Love Lucy”. Eisenhower, the most popular living American, went on to defeat Stevenson who later remarked, “The idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process” (The Living Room Candidate: Home, 2012). Stevenson may have deplored the infusion of Madison Avenue advertising executives into political campaigns, but social science research conducted after the election demonstrated that advertising had little to do with his defeat. A popular war hero, Eisenhower enjoyed extremely high popularity levels in pre-campaign polling and would

have easily won the contest without running a single television advertisement. (Lang and Lang, 2002, p.12).

Television advertising may have done little to help Eisenhower win and retain office but it quickly became an important and memorable part of political campaigns. Voters still remember spots such as “The Bear,” in which Ronald Reagan’s campaign played on Cold War fears. Advertisements become iconic political images and campaigns continue to invest in them. The messaging in political advertisements contains a wide variety of tones and themes.

Messaging has changed dramatically in some regards since the 1950s while remaining relatively similar in other areas. Many advertisements in the 1950s highlighted the party affiliation of candidates, but this trend dropped dramatically over the rest of the 20th century, as independent candidates became more popular and party loyalties declined (West, 2012, p.55). Primary nomination messaging has also changed in light of the post-1968 reforms. The nomination processes were historically determined by party elites. Post-1968 voters now select party nominees and candidates must invest in technologies, such as advertising, to reach voters directly.

Television advertising continues to function as a critical component of presidential campaigns, often consuming the majority of their budgets. Researchers were and are split regarding the impacts of such advertising. Some feel that advertising, especially negative advertising, is useless or even has a negative impact on voter turnout. Other analysts argue that negative advertising can have a “mobilizing” effect on voters (Goldstein & Freedman, 2002, p.722). However regardless of their effectiveness, advertisements and the political campaign staff and political consultants that create and air such products are important

strategic components of presidential campaigns. Many advertisements are also cultural icons: many fondly remember Ronald Reagan's 1984 "Prouder, Stronger, Better" advertisement.



A Screenshot from "Prouder, Stronger, Better"

This advertisement begins with the line, "It's morning in America again", and shows a variety of everyday American scenes such as a harbor, people going to work, families buying houses, and young people getting married. As the video plays, the narrator explains how under President Reagan, the United States has made economic progress and is now "prouder, and stronger, and better". The video ends with the question, "why would we ever want to return to where we were, less than four short years ago?" This video is a classic. Countless voters still remember it, and campaigns such as Marco Rubio's have released homages to it in attempts to connect his own candidacy to Ronald Reagan, a fabled conservative hero.

Broadcast and cable television advertising are based on relatively old technology. New technologies have changed the ways that campaigns purchase advertising slots.

President Obama's 2012 campaign created a new technology called The Optimizer that revolutionized how they purchased advertising slots. Campaigns previously relied on broad ratings from companies such as Nielsen to guess which shows their target voters were watching, but this method was far from precise. The Optimizer utilized data from cable TV set-top boxes to match television viewers with voters in the campaign's database which allowed the campaign to determine what channels their target voters were watching and when they were tuned in. The campaign used this system to inform about half of its television-advertising budget (Rutenberg 2013). Mitt Romney's campaign utilized traditional advertising buying strategies. Consequently, the Optimizer data led the Obama campaign to advertise on a wider variety of niche channels while Romney's campaign prioritized purchasing volume. Obama's campaign officials estimated that The Optimizer increased the efficiency of their advertising purchases by about 10 to 20 percent (Farnam 2012). By combining modern analytical tools with the macro targeting, as advertisers must buy slots in entire media markets, offered by television, a team of engineers was able to revolutionize thinking regarding the purchasing of political advertising slots. Such advertisement buying technology is now more widely available and it is likely that multiple campaigns will utilize it in 2016.

As advanced as these technologies are, television advertising is not the apex of political communications technology. Just as radio advertising eclipsed physical advertisements and television ultimately eclipsed radio advertising, a new era of political advertising and communications arrived with the widespread adoption of the Internet, first by Howard Dean's campaign in 2004, and now by all campaigns. The entire topic of campaign use of the Internet is broad and tangentially related to this project, which is an

analysis of campaign messaging strategies, so I will only provide a brief history of YouTube, the Internet platform that I examine in this research.

YouTube first emerged as an important force in electoral politics in 2006. Senator George Allen, of Virginia, was addressing supporters at a campaign event when he noticed S.R. Sidarth, an Indian-American volunteer working for his opponent's campaign as a tracker. Allen addressed Sidarth, while the young volunteer was filming the Senator, as a "macaca", a racial slur, and Jim Webb's campaign promptly posted the video to YouTube. The video went viral, both online and mainstream media outlets shared the story, and Jim Webb won the election. "Gotcha" moments such as this one demonstrated the utility of YouTube. Campaigns took to the platform in order to post a variety of video content including speeches, policy proposals, attacks on opponents, and clips from political debates (Ricke, 2014, p.13).

YouTube stepped up its capacity to facilitate political engagement in 2007 by introducing You Choose '08, a hub where video content producers such as media outlets and campaigns could share content with voters. Over 39 percent of 2008 voters reported having watched at least one online political video; YouTube's efforts to establish itself as a serious source of political content and information were a success. Both Barack Obama and John McCain's campaigns utilized the platform, but Barack Obama's campaign demonstrated the possibilities provided by online video, uploading about 2,000 videos over the course of the campaign and receiving 14 million hours of views from over 50 million viewers (Ricke, 2014, p.15). Barack Obama's reelection campaign in 2012 outperformed Mitt Romney's YouTube operations, receiving 300 individual views compared to Romney's 30 million individual views. YouTube has clearly established itself

as an important source of campaign content. I will proceed to analyze the YouTube channels of leading nomination campaigns in 2016 to understand how they use the platform, what types of content they upload, and how popular they are.

Existing Theory on TV and YouTube

Research on television informs my discussion of online video. Much of the contemporary research on YouTube is relatively unhelpful writing that I describe as “possible utopianism”, in which authors claim that YouTube has the potential to create an ultra-modern constituency and bring people into the political process. Existing literature documents historical trends in the messaging of nomination campaign television advertisements. Although this is not YouTube content, it is a fair assumption that online videos will be relatively similar to paid television content. An analysis of nomination campaign advertisement content between 1952 and 2008 shows that 43 percent of advertisements focus on personal qualities; while 28% focus on specific domestic policies and only 5% focus on specific international policies (West, 2012, p.58). Advertisements are clearly not a policy-focused medium, and I initially hypothesize that YouTube will be similar. As they are competing among candidates running for the same party’s tickets, candidates in nomination campaigns are generally differentiated by personal issues rather than concrete policy stances. A critical early priority for campaigns is introducing or reintroducing candidates to the electorate.

There is limited research on the use of YouTube by political campaigns, but existing research suggests that it is a relatively positive space. Videos posted by Barack Obama and John McCain during the 2008 election were significantly less negative than the content that their respective campaigns used in television commercials. In addition, when compared to

television advertisements, a significantly higher percentage of YouTube videos attack opponents based on their policy positions rather than personal qualities (Salmond, 2012, p.3). Polling confirms that voters dislike negativity, so it makes sense that campaigns primarily upload positive content to YouTube, a platform where voters must actively navigate, through links or searches, to content. Television advertisement viewers are a captive audience; YouTube viewers are not. Television viewers have little say in what content they consume during advertising breaks, and they must manually change the television channel to avoid advertisements. However internet users only view videos after navigating their internet browsers to the specific webpage.

It is important to note that there are limits to extrapolating research on television advertisements to web videos. “The audience for YouTube advertisements is younger, richer, more educated, more politically interested, and more partisan than the population at large” (Salmond, 2012, p.4). This means that they likely have different interests and preferences in political videos than the average voter. YouTube also allows the sharing of more video formats, as television advertisements are generally limited to 30 second and 60 second slots. Research also suggests that candidates adapt their videos to the YouTube medium (Church, 2010, p.138). Campaigns are aware of the dynamics of the medium, which means it is likely contemporary YouTube channels reflect attention to such strategic details. This interest suggests that YouTube viewers prefer videos with a positive tone and a focus on specific policy topics.

Relevant 2016 Dynamics

The specific dynamics of the 2016 race are relevant to this topic, as they will likely impact the materials uploaded by candidates and the materials that online viewers prefer to watch. Senator Bernie Sanders' campaign has generated an impressive amount of online support, raising record sums of money and enjoying grassroots support. The leading Republican candidate, Donald Trump, has shown a disregard for many of the conventions of campaigning and is also well-liked on the internet. Senator Hillary Clinton's campaign has invested heavily in campaign staff and online operations, and Senator Marco Rubio was widely viewed as the likely Republican nominee. There is a strong "anti-establishment" attitude running through both candidates and the electorate.

Research Design

I performed a content analysis of campaign YouTube materials in order to understand the type of videos that campaigns post to the platform, the types of videos that receive the most views, and the content and tone of video messaging on YouTube. The process involved selecting four campaigns for analysis, creating samples of their videos from their YouTube channels, watching and coding their videos, and then conducting analysis of their materials.

The selected candidates are stratified by party affiliation and I picked the two "leading" Democrats and two "leading" Republican campaigns for this project. Research was conducted before the allocation of large amounts of delegates so there was no way to determine objectively who was "leading" in the campaign. I could have utilized a variety of variables such as money raised or polling data to select my candidates but I opted to select candidates based on their standings in betting markets. The political betting markets used

in this study allow people to buy and sell “Yes” or “No” votes for different candidates while prices fluctuate based on perceptions of the market as a whole. Some evidence suggests that betting markets have a good track record at predicting elections, but more importantly, they essentially synthesize a variety of important indicators such as endorsements, the tone media coverage, polling data, and fundraising results. I selected candidates on February 10, the day after the New Hampshire Primary. Based on market data, I selected Senator Marco Rubio and businessman Donald Trump from the Republican candidates and Secretary Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders among the small group of Democratic candidates.

I then proceeded to create a systematic random sample of videos representing each of the candidates’ YouTube channel except for Donald Trump. Donald Trump’s campaign had only uploaded 24 videos by February 9 so I was able to watch and code each of the videos. The remaining populations of videos ranged in size from 24 to 794 so I numbered each video using a selection of random numbers and created a simple random sample of videos for Clinton, Sanders, and Rubio. I then proceeded to watch each of my selected videos while coding for content using a system inspired by the coding system of the Wesleyan Media Project, an academic project that tracks and codes political advertisements on television. My coding variables are listed below.

- *Personal Qualities or Policy:* Some videos focus on the personal qualities of the candidate while others focus on a policy issue. Examples of videos emphasizing personal qualities include “Thank You from a Student Parent Raising Children while in College”, a short video praising Hillary Clinton for her commitment to college students with children. An example of a policy-focused video is “Bernie Welcomes Friends of the

Earth's Endorsement", in which Bernie Sanders outlines a series of proposed environmental policies. Some videos are both.

- *Policy Issue/Focus*: For the videos that highlight a certain policy, I code them based on the issue mentioned. Issues include "Economics/Jobs", "Healthcare", "Military/Security", and "Immigration". Some videos mention multiple policies.
- *Domestic or International Policy*: For the videos with one or more specific policy mentions, I code based on if they reference an international policy issue or a domestic one. Some are both.
- *Type of Video*: There are a variety of types of videos on campaign YouTube channels. Some are simple television advertisements, some are excerpts or entire speeches, and some videos show television coverage of candidates, including their performances at debates. Others are fun "day in the life on the campaign trail" videos while some videos are instructional materials showing how to caucus, and many of the videos are extended form videos that are made specifically for the Internet. Television advertisements are identifiable based on disclosure requirements and running time.
- *Tone*: Some videos are positive, some videos are negative, and some seek to contrast the personal characteristics or policy preferences of candidates.
- *Number of Views*: The number of views the video had as of February 10, 2016.

I conducted a simple analysis of my coded YouTube videos in order to answer my research questions. Much of the analysis was conducted in Excel using pivot tables and I also made some calculations and visualizations using Stata. This analysis primarily consists of summary counting categorical data in order to determine what types of videos are

posted. I also utilize a single quantitative variable, views, to see which campaigns generate the most YouTube traction and what types of content receive the most views.

Hypotheses

- *Is YouTube messaging more or less negative than television advertising?* I hypothesize that YouTube messaging will be more positive than television advertising. Voters prefer to watch positive content and have the option to stop watching a video when online. YouTube audiences are also more likely to already support a candidate, making negative content designed to influence votes unnecessary.
- *Does YouTube messaging highlight the personal qualities of a candidate or their policies?* I believe that online content will focus more on the personal qualities of candidates than their experience, especially on the channels of Republican candidates. Historically, television commercials have prioritized personal qualities and this is the year of the anti-establishment candidate.
- *What policy issues will be the most popular?* I hypothesize that the topics of security and foreign policy, usually considered unimportant during nomination contests, will be popular in nomination messaging, especially among Republican candidates. The recent attacks in Paris and San Bernardino occurred closer to the election than previous national security events. Security will remain on the minds of voters, especially Republicans, and candidates will likely produce more security-related content than they have in previous election cycles. I also expect that many videos will highlight economic issues, as the perceived state of the economy is important in presidential voting.

- *What types of candidates will receive the most support on YouTube?* The campaigns of anti-establishment/populist candidates such as Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump will generate the most online engagement, as “dark horse” candidates tend to receive high amounts of *support on the Internet*. However it is also possible that leading candidates will receive the most media coverage, thus driving traffic to their YouTube content.

Bias Disclaimer

The author acknowledges that he makes relatively subjective coding decisions regarding some of the videos. The author supports one of the candidates and has volunteered for their campaign. Other coders were not available so he was unable to compute an intercoder reliability score, but the researcher made every effort to code the YouTube content objectively.

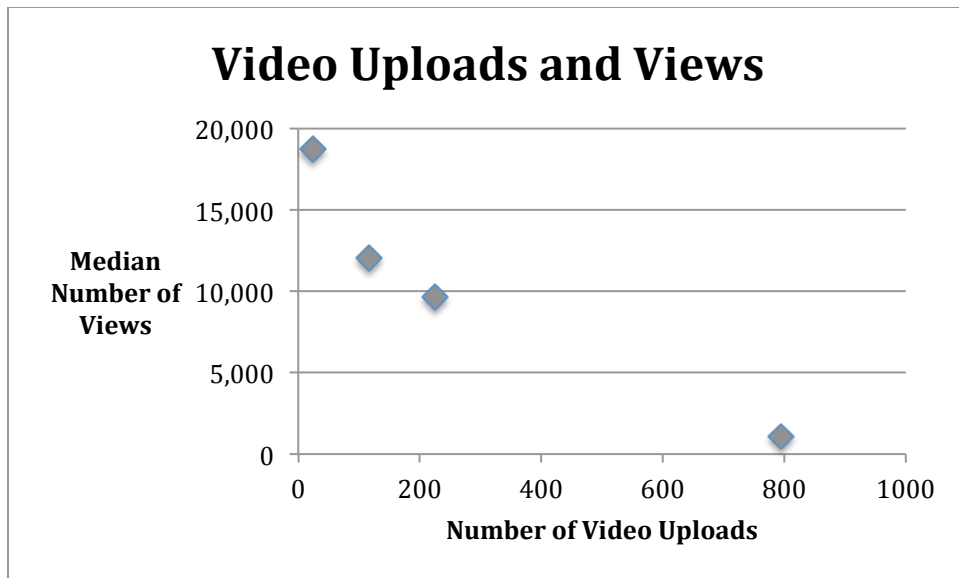
Results and Discussion

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Observations</i>	<i>Total Uploads</i>	<i>Mean Views</i>	<i>Median Views</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum Views</i>	<i>Maximum Views</i>
<i>Hillary Clinton</i>	31	116	37,934	12,042	51,176	2,111	208,264
<i>Bernie Sanders</i>	45	225	48,083	9,672	119,933	1,863	704,369
<i>Marco Rubio</i>	64	795	2,533	1,100	4,266	201	15,161
<i>Donald Trump</i>	24	24	114,745	18,761	366,674	3,419	1,777,636

Summary Statistics of Campaign Use of YouTube

The most fundamental difference regarding campaign use of YouTube is the massive degree of variance, in both uploads and views, between each campaign. Donald Trump’s campaign hardly even used YouTube, uploading only 24 videos before the first primary.

Marco Rubio's campaign uploaded almost 33 times as many videos between announcing his candidacy and the beginning of primaries and caucuses. The campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton are both in the middle, having respectively uploaded 225 and 116 videos. This degree of variance indicates that the different campaigns have different views of how to effectively use YouTube. The different YouTube channels also experience varying degrees of popularity. Donald Trump's videos received a mean view count of 18,761 while Marco Rubio's videos received a mean view count of 1,100, the lowest count in this sample. Again, the Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders campaigns are in the middle of the sample. The campaigns that uploaded more content received fewer views per video, as shown by the chart below. The sample size is too small to hypothesize about the existence of a negative relationship between the two variables, but this sample demonstrates that uploading more content to YouTube does not necessarily mean that videos will receive more views. There was also a large degree of variance in the popularity of videos, as indicated by the large standard deviations. Several campaigns had a handful of videos that received millions of views, but only two of these outliers, uploaded by Trump and Sanders, were included in this random sample.

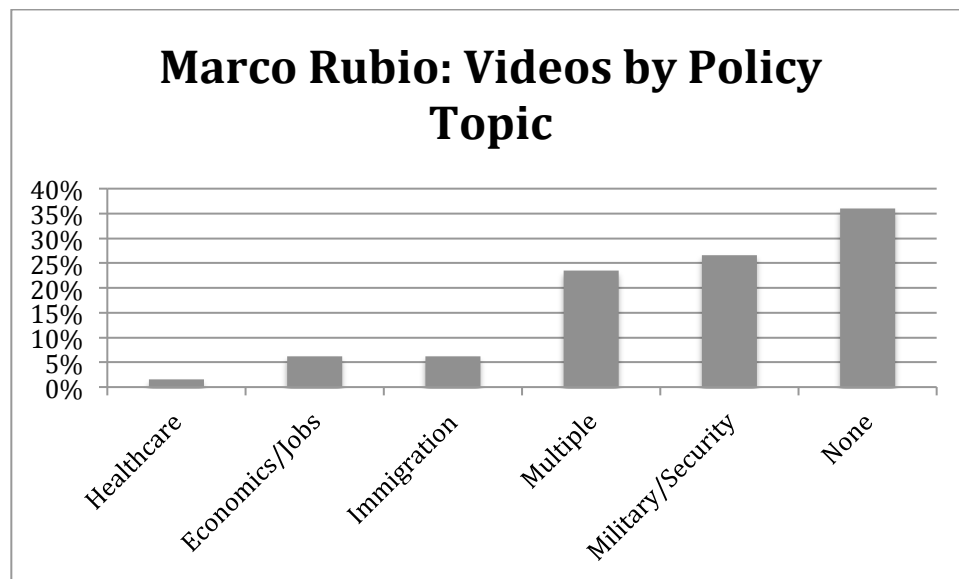
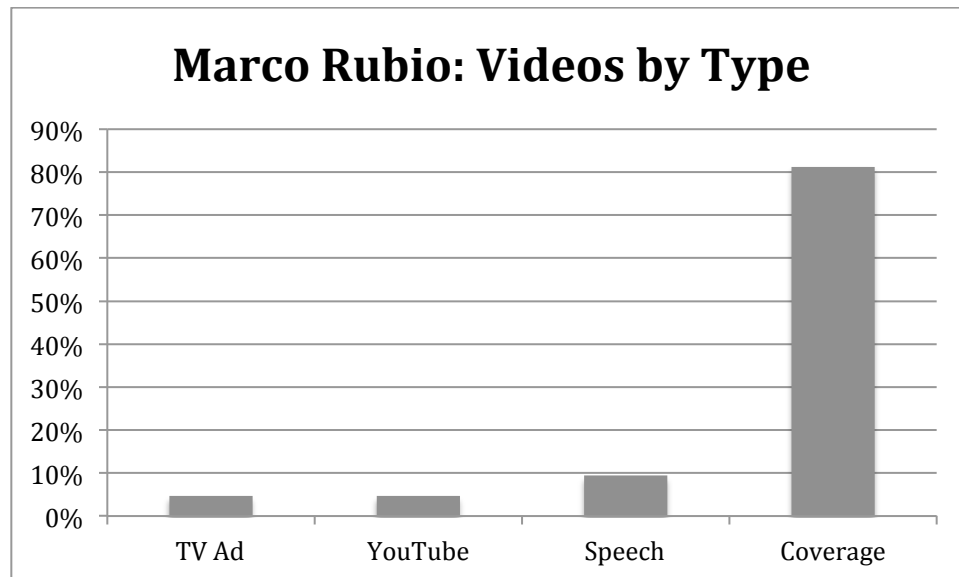


There was a great variation in popularity, as noted by the standard deviation of 161,224 views. The data are extremely skewed to the right, with a mean that is over six times the size of the median. Most videos received a small number of views but campaigns lucked out with several videos that received massive numbers of views. As discussed below, different candidates experienced varying degrees of success at attracting the eyes of YouTube users, something I attribute to their different candidacy styles and approaches towards utilizing the platform.

Marco Rubio

Marco Rubio's campaign uploaded 794 videos to YouTube between the announcement of his candidacy and February 10. This was well beyond the number of videos uploaded by each of the other campaigns, and his videos were also the least popular, with a median of only 1099.5 views. Videos uploaded by Rubio's campaign addressed a small variety of policy topics, with the majority of his content highlighting military and national security topics. This is in line with his campaign messaging, as Rubio attempted to

position himself as the Republican candidate with the most foreign policy expertise. Many videos address multiple topics, and the other highlighted topics are immigration and economics and job-related policies.



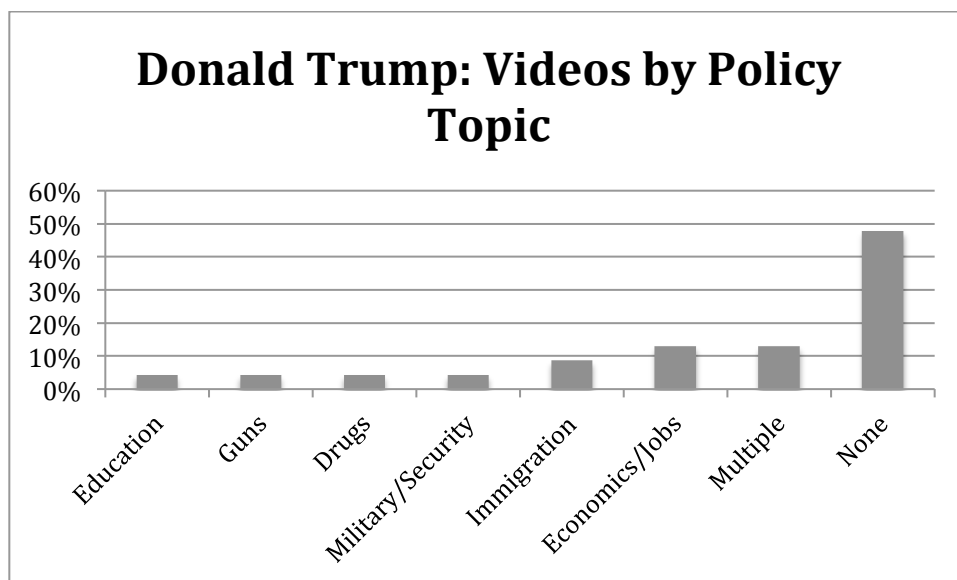
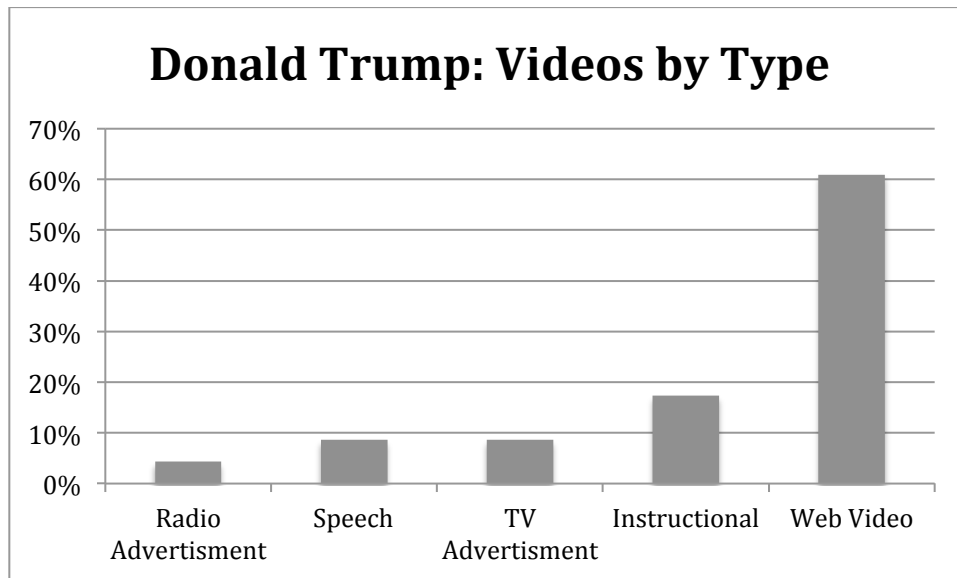
Rubio's campaign primarily uploaded media coverage, including debate footage and television news coverage and appearances. Such coverage makes up 81 percent of the content in this sample, with videos of speeches making up 9 percent of the content and

television advertisements and web videos each making up 5 percent of this sample. The types of news coverage that the campaign uploaded varied; some clips were extensive interviews while many others were short clips of a talking head saying something positive regarding an attribute of Rubio's campaign, usually relating to a debate performance. The large number of videos on his page is less impressive when one considers the resources required to produce this type of content. Downloading, cutting, and uploading polished news footage is a simple task, and very few of the videos on his channel indicate a significant allocation of resources towards producing Internet video content. However such a strategy is not without its own advantages. First and foremost, it was likely cheap and simple for Rubio's campaign to execute. Secondly, having independent media outlets speak positively of Marco Rubio likely increased the perceived legitimacy of the messages, as they do not come directly from his campaign.

Donald Trump

Donald Trump's campaign takes a very different approach towards utilizing YouTube than other campaigns. It only uploaded 24 videos between the campaign announcement and February 10th. This small population size facilitated the coding of his entire YouTube channel. The vast majority, 61%, of these videos are videos made specifically for the Internet. Remaining videos included television advertisements, footage of Trump speaking at rallies, instructional videos, and even the audio from a radio commercial. The tiny pool of videos stands out when compared to the channels of the other three candidates, but Donald Trump is far from a conventional candidate. His campaign, especially before the allocation of delegates, primarily relied on earned media coverage.

Rather than investing resources in making and sharing Internet videos, it took advantage of independent media outlets that covered Trump more than the other candidates. Such campaigning requires little resources and yields a large exposure, so there was little reason to invest many resources into YouTube.



The web videos that make up the majority of his content take the form of Trump sitting at his desk explaining his perspective on a certain issue, ranging from campaign finance to education and political correctness. Each is aesthetically identical and likely filmed during the same recording session. All of these videos also include the same dramatic music score in the background. An example is included below.



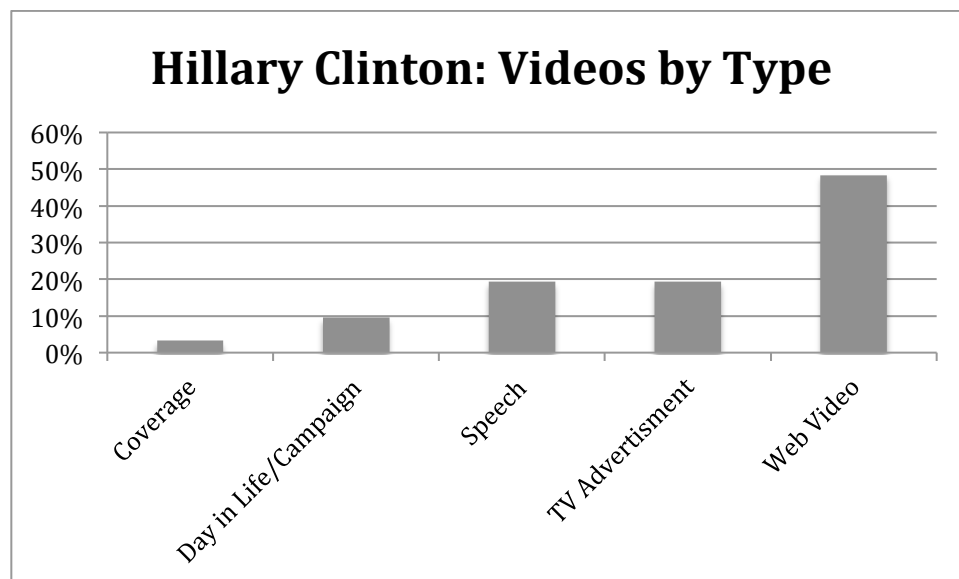
Screenshot from "Illegal Immigration"

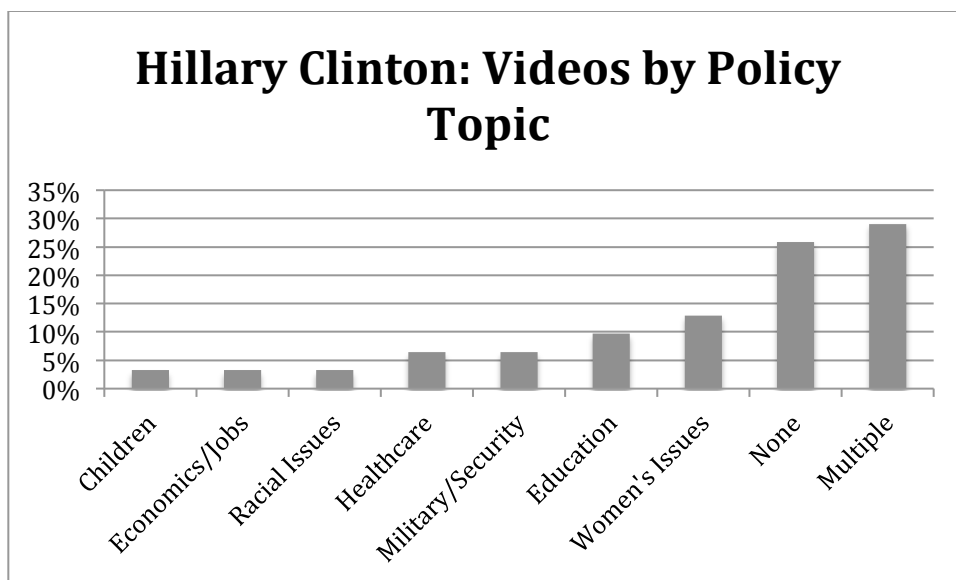
Specific policies are addressed in 44 percent of Trump's videos while the majority, 57 percent, reference personal qualities of Donald Trump. These include references to his career as a businessman and the nature of his "self-funded" campaign. Several are instructive videos demonstrating how to caucus in Iowa. Two videos, "Get Out To Vote – New Hampshire" and "Ivanka Trump - Find Your Iowa Caucus Location - Donald J. Trump for President" do not reference policies or personal qualities. Compared with the channels of other campaigns, Trump's YouTube channel does not demonstrate as much effort by the campaign. However these videos also receive more views than those of the other campaigns. The lack of effort reflects the unconventional nature of Donald Trump's

campaign. It has operated very differently from conventional campaigns for the presidency, so its disregard for YouTube is unsurprising.

Hillary Clinton

Hillary Clinton's campaign uploaded the second most popular individual pieces of content to YouTube. Her videos received a median number of views of 12,042. Although Clinton's campaign utilized its YouTube channel to a more significant degree, it still uploaded relatively little content compared to Marco Rubio. The campaign uploaded 116 videos between announcing Clinton's candidacy on April 12th, 2015, including an elaborately high production value YouTube video titled "Getting Started" and February 10th, 2016. Although not part of my sample of videos, this video was extremely popular, receiving 4.9 million views.





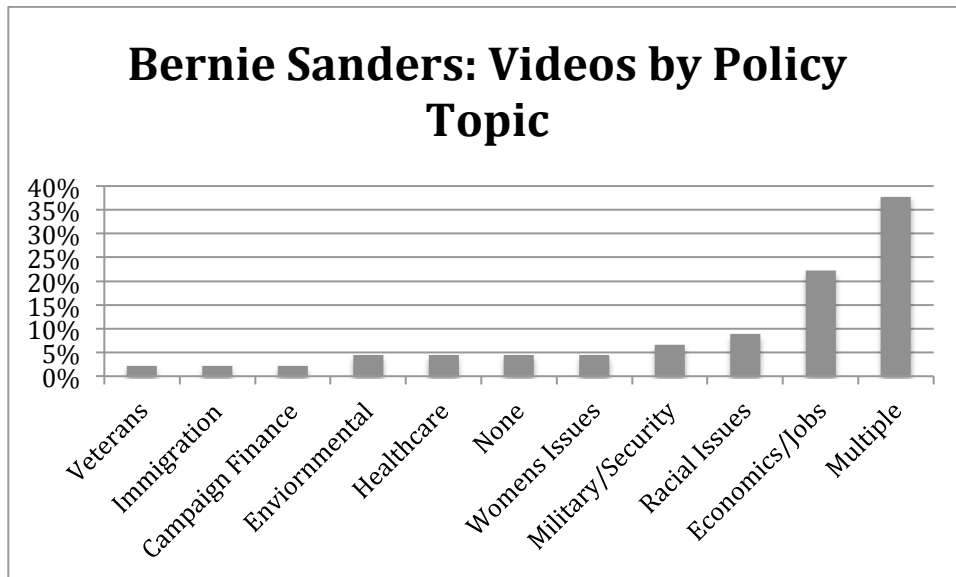
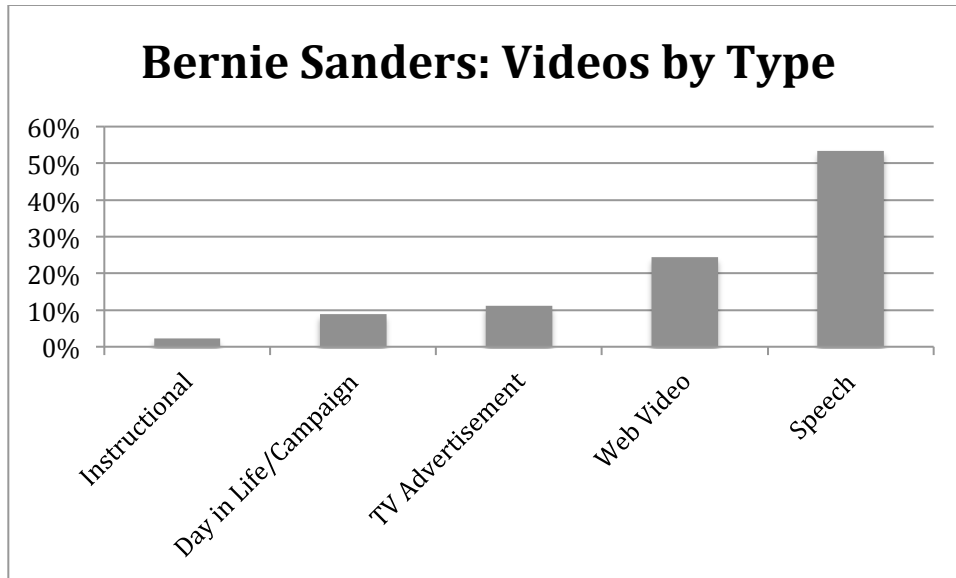
Most of Hillary Clinton's videos mention specific policy topics, and most of the policy-focused videos specifically address multiple topics. Of the videos that focus on specific policy topics, women's issues and education are the most common policy themes. This is unsurprising as Hillary Clinton's campaign messaging has emphasized her potential to be the first female president. Education and college affordability are also critical family topics, which fit into the candidate's positioning as a "fighter" for everyday Americans and their families. Only around a quarter of her videos fail to mention policy topics, which contradicts my assumption that nomination campaigns would focus on personal qualities rather than policy. This possibly reflects the fact that she is a well-known public figure, but her campaign also spent much of the early months of the nomination process attempting to re-introduce Clinton as a softer and less hawkish candidate than she was in 2008.

Almost half of Hillary Clinton's videos, 48, are specifically produced for the Internet. Unlike the almost visually identical videos uploaded by Donald Trump's campaign, there is a great amount of variety in the topics and imagery of these web videos. These likely took

much more time and effort to produce compared to the sparse content on Donald Trump's YouTube page and the recorded television coverage that dominates Marco Rubio's YouTube channel. Hillary Clinton's campaign uploaded very little media coverage, making up the majority of the remaining content with television advertisements and recordings of speeches. It appears that this campaign chose to emphasize the quality and production value of YouTube content rather than the quantity of videos. These web videos require the largest degree of resources to produce prior to uploading, and they serve to make Hillary Clinton's internet space feel like a discrete media environment rather than as a repository for other content.

Bernie Sanders

Although his videos received fewer views than both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders' campaign uploaded a much greater number of videos to the online platform. The majority of these videos, 53 percent of this sample, were excerpts from or entire speeches delivered by the candidate or his surrogates while campaigning. Videos produced for the Internet constitute 24 percent of the sample, and Bernie Sanders' campaign also uploaded television advertisements, instructional videos such as "How to Caucus in Iowa", and videos documenting short unscripted moments on the campaign trail.



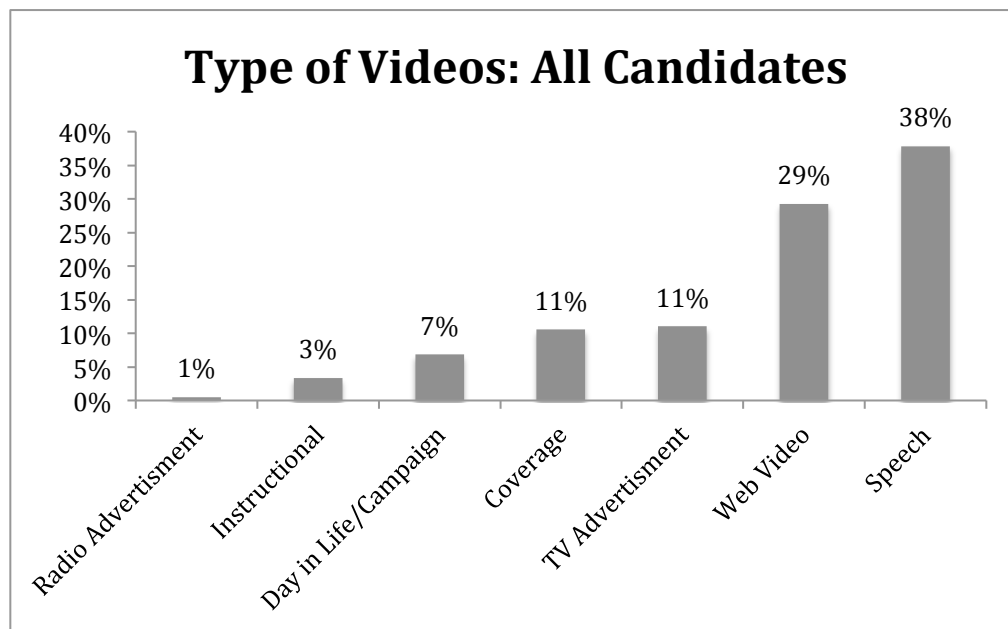
His campaign uploaded videos addressing a wide variety of policies compared to the videos uploaded by Marco Rubio and Donald Trump. Compared to the other candidates, very few of Bernie Sanders' videos, 4 percent of this sample, address no policies. The majority of the content addresses multiple policy issues and among videos that address specific issues, videos addressing economic and employment issues are the most popular, making up 22 percent of this total sample. This finding is in line with the rhetoric and

messaging of the campaign. Bernie Sanders frequently emphasizes a populist message regarding America's "rigged" economy so it is unsurprising that many of his videos highlight economic policy concerns. However, the remainder of the policy topics addressed on his YouTube channel are diverse, ranging from racial issues and environmental concerns such as climate change to immigration and security policies. Just as Marco Rubio prioritizes discussion of a specific topic, America's military and international security, Bernie Sanders' campaign emphasizes economic and employment related policy topics on his YouTube platform. The YouTube channel of the Sanders campaign, like Clinton's campaign, reflects a significant investment in the production and sharing of Internet videos.

Video Taxonomy and Policies Discussion

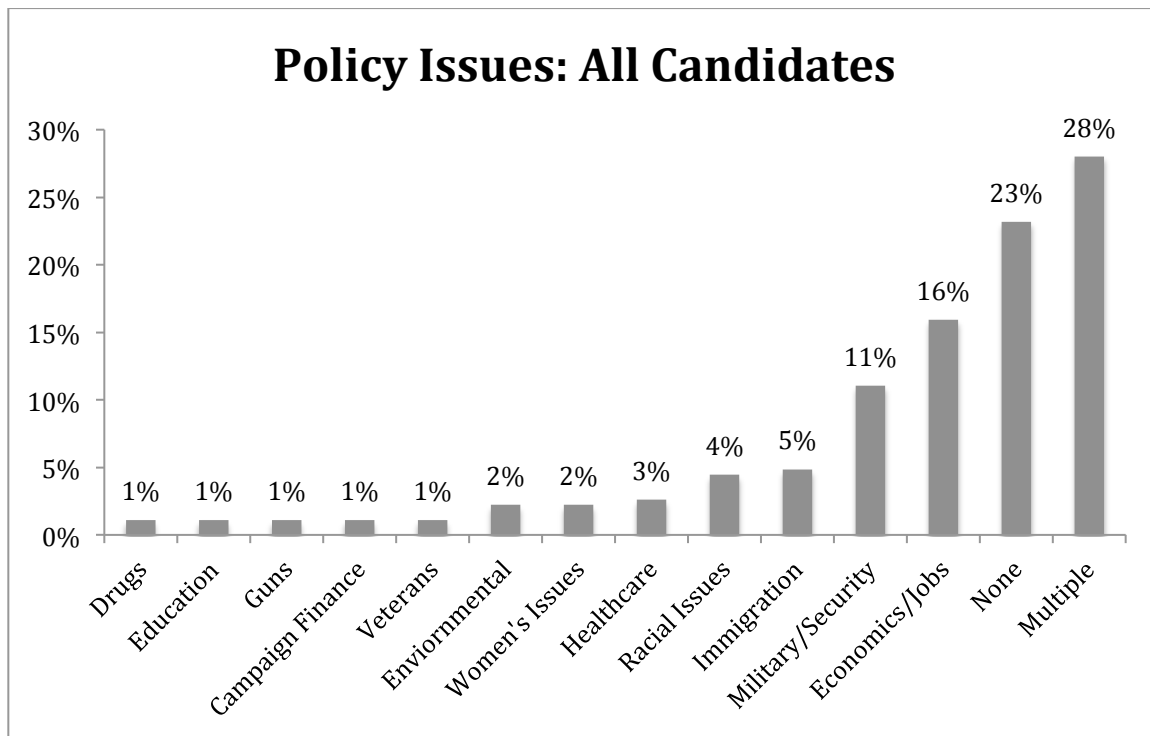
Each of the campaigns uploaded a variety of different types of YouTube videos including day in the life/campaign trail footage, instructional videos, speeches, television advertisements, specialized web videos, and radio advertisements. The campaigns each uploaded different numbers of different mixtures of types of videos, suggesting that there is not an established "best practice" on how to upload video content for nomination campaigns. However as shown below, when each campaign is weighted equally, 34 percent of the sampled videos are web-specific videos, 24 percent are speech footage, 20 percent are news coverage including debate footage, and the rest are television advertisements, instructional videos, radio advertisements, and candidate campaign trail footage. The preponderance of web videos suggests that rather than viewing YouTube as a public

repository for campaign commercials and other available materials, campaigns actively create content for unpaid online platforms such as YouTube.



I also computed similarly weighted averages of the policy issues addressed by the four campaigns in this research project. The majority of videos addressed multiple topics while 21 percent mention no policy topics. The most commonly referenced individual policy areas are economics and employment, making up 16 percent, and military and security policies, making up 12 percent of the videos. This is an unsurprising finding. Economic issues and perceptions of the economy are generally the most important factor in Presidential campaigns. The unofficial slogan of Bill Clinton's campaign was "it's the economy, stupid", polling suggests that American voters agree, and campaign messaging on YouTube appears to focus on economic issues. The prevalence of military and security policy related content also makes sense given the context of this race. Threats such as Iran and terror groups are popular throughout American political discourse and campaigns are

clearly attempting to convey the message that their candidate is a qualified leader in this regard. This evidence appears to support my hypothesis, that security related videos and economic topics will dominate my sample.



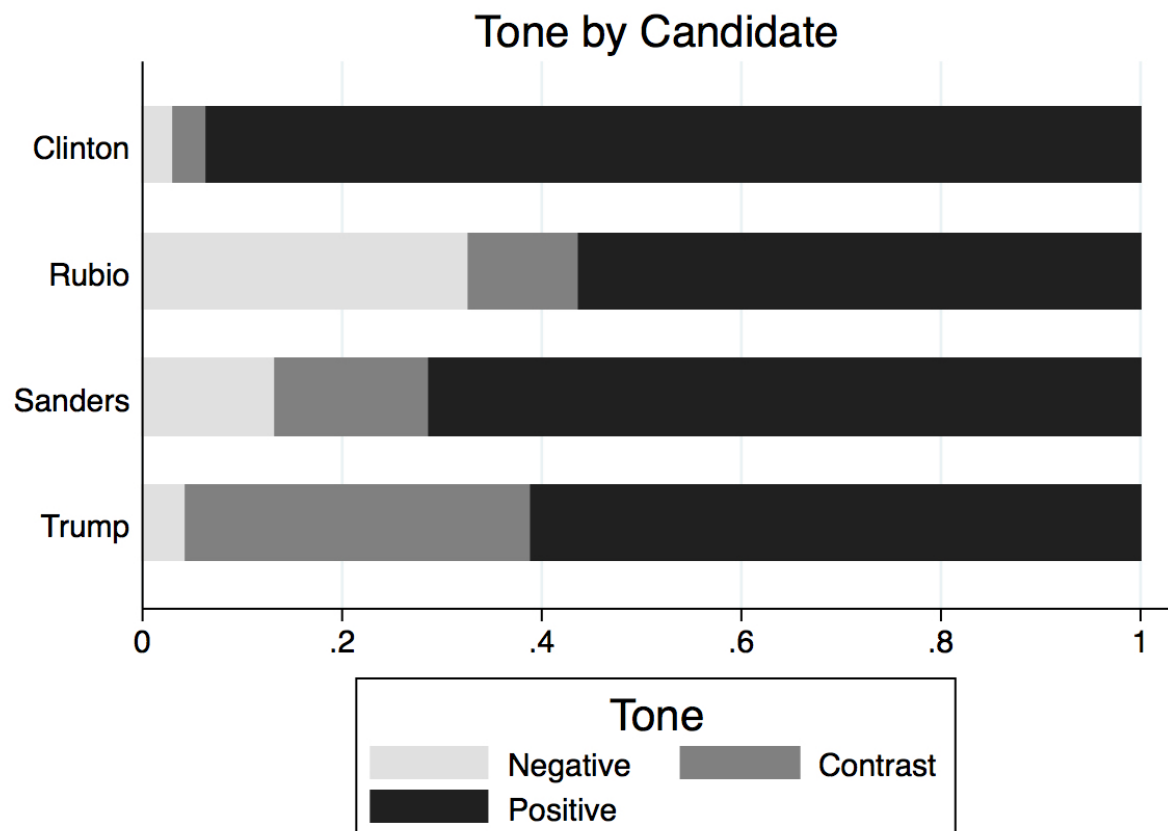
Another hypothesis relates to the ratio of policy-focused videos to personal-quality related videos. I hypothesized that due to the anti-establishment nature of this election, personal-quality focused videos will outnumber policy-focused content. This hypothesis is wrong. As shown by the above chart, only 21 percent of the videos mentioned no specific policies and the remaining videos mentioned at least one specific policy. In fact, the proportion of videos mentioning multiple policies, 28 percent, was significantly higher than the proportion mentioning none at all. Donald Trump is the most unconventional candidate among this group and his utilization of YouTube comes the closest to confirming this hypothesis. Almost half of his campaign's videos mention no specific policies, the highest

proportion in this study. This is unsurprising as he is running a campaign that is relatively unconcerned with specific policies. A t-test confirms that result is statistically significant at a .01 level of significance.

This finding makes sense given the survey data that confirms, “the audience for YouTube advertisements is younger, richer, more educated, more politically interested, and more partisan than the population at large”(Salmond, 2012, p.4). Such viewers are likely familiar with the candidates and are probably knowledgeable regarding specific policies due to their higher level of political interest and partisan-nature. These higher information voters likely prefer policy-focused videos.

I also hypothesized that “dark-horse” candidates such as Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump would receive the most online engagement with their videos. I am measuring engagement with the number of views, and the data I collected does little to support or deny this hypothesis. Donald Trump’s videos were indeed the most popular, receiving a median of 18,761 views. However Hillary Clinton’s campaign came in second place, receiving a median of 12,042 views, well above my sample of Bernie Sanders videos. This suggests that while Donald Trump, a “dark horse” candidate, received the most views, “dark horse” candidates do not necessarily receive more attention on YouTube. It is likely that other factors play a larger role in determining the popularity of content. Research on non-political YouTube videos suggests that popularity is determined by a number of factors and that the most successful videos become popular because they are shared by a large number of “attractive seeding partners” that share the link with their own follows (Mohr, 2014, p.44). Hillary Clinton’s campaign uploaded relatively little content when compared to Senator Bernie Sanders; perhaps third party news outlets drive much of the traffic when

they cover her campaign's operations. It is also possible that campaigns uploading large amounts of content receive fewer views. This idea is supported by the nonlinear, but strongly negative, relationship between the number of videos uploaded by a campaign and the median number of views per YouTube channel.



Stacked Bar Chart of the Tone of Each Candidate's YouTube Messaging

I also hypothesized that the YouTube content would be overwhelmingly positive, more so than primary election advertisements have historically been on television. This appears to be true, as a majority of recent primary advertisements have been negative, while 68 percent of the YouTube content in this sample is positive. This finding supports my hypothesis. YouTube viewers are not a captive audience. They actively and

intentionally click links or visit the channel of a candidate and select the content they want to watch based on the title and video thumbnail image. Polling research suggests that television viewers prefer not to see negative advertising content and there is no reason to assume that YouTube viewers substantially differ in their tone preferences (Brooks, 2000). Without the ability to force viewers to watch negative messaging, YouTube channel managers must upload content that viewers actively want to consume. The positive tilt of YouTube messaging also makes sense in regards to the types of viewers that campaigns communicate with using the online platform. Negative advertisements are designed to persuade “on the fence” voters that a campaign’s opponent is unworthy of their vote. However Internet users who actively visit the social media platforms, such as YouTube, of candidates likely support them. This means that one of YouTube’s primary utilities is likely reinforcing positive feelings among existing supporters.

However while YouTube content as a whole appears to be positive, there were substantial variations in tone among the campaigns in my sample. Hillary Clinton’s campaign uploaded positive messaging, with only a handful of negative or contrast videos. The videos that featured negative and contrast messaging either spoke poorly of Republicans or compared Hillary Clinton to conservative politicians. Bernie Sanders’ campaign also maintained a very positive channel, although it featured significantly more negative and contrast videos than Hillary Clinton’s. Again, many of these videos emphasize Republican policies and how Bernie Sanders’ ideas differ. Some, such as a video that juxtaposes Hillary Clinton’s hypocritical remarks regarding health care reform in 2008 to her contemporary rhetoric, are directly critical of his Democratic opponent.

Each of the Republican candidates in this sample uploaded a smaller proportion of positive videos. 39 percent of Donald Trump's videos feature either contrast or negative messaging. Examples of this type of content include "Voters Speak: Donald J. Trump for President", a television commercial in which Donald Trump describes "an assault on everything that we stand for" and "The Economy- Donald J. Trump for President", a web video, in which Donald Trump describes how "unfair" the national debt is to young people. Each video includes a slight degree of positive rhetoric relating to Donald Trump, but the negative messaging outweighs the positive messaging and neither has an explicit or specific enough comparison to be classified as a contrast advertisement. Marco Rubio also uploaded a relatively smaller proportion of positive videos, but his channel contains far more contrast videos than negative ones. Examples of contrast include "Marco Talks Russia and Syria on the Kelly File | Marco Rubio for President", which is footage of the candidate on Fox News comparing his understanding of Russia's involvement in Syria and Donald Trump's understanding. However surprisingly, many of these videos do not contrast Marco Rubio with other Republican candidates. Rather, many of them contrast Marco Rubio with Barack Obama. An example of this is "Marco: When I'm President, We Will Keep America Safe | Marco Rubio for President", a video from a Republican debate in which Rubio compares his understanding of foreign policy with that of both Rand Paul and Barack Obama. Such messaging makes sense given the context of America's polarized politics and the deep resentment of Barack Obama held by many members of the Republican electorate.

Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders both uploaded more positive videos than the Republican candidates, with Hillary Clinton uploading a substantially more positive collection of videos than Bernie Sanders. This difference makes sense in light of the

differing ways that the two campaigns market their candidates. Hillary Clinton's campaign is a relatively straightforward one, arguing that she is a well-qualified and talented replacement for Barack Obama who will continue and expand his policies and leadership. Such messaging requires limited negative messaging. Interestingly, her YouTube channel includes videos addressing negative topics, but the tone remains positive. "Mindy | Hillary Clinton", a short television commercial describing wage inequity, exemplifies this type of video. It features Hillary Clinton's narration and says, "Mindy will work 179 shifts to make what the average top CEO makes in a single day. Join the fight for higher incomes. Join the fight for Mindy." Such a script could easily be negative, but the narration is purposeful and hopeful, the colors are bright and positive, and the video comes across as more inspiring than negative. Bernie Sanders' YouTube channel is also overwhelming positive, but it includes more negative and contrast videos, which makes sense given that he is running a more populist campaign. Again, much of both Bernie Sanders' and Hillary Clinton's negative messaging is aimed at Republicans, not other contestants in the race.

There are two possible reasons that negative YouTube rhetoric during this time period tended to target members of the other party rather than the actual candidates that campaigns were running against. First, primary voters do not necessarily have the same dislike of candidates opposing their chosen candidate that many general election voters hold. Relative to the cross-party gap, most candidates competing for a party's nomination have relatively similar values and espouse relatively similar policies. This means YouTube viewers will not necessarily enjoy negative attacks on competing candidates whom they likely agree with on many issues. For example, a progressive internet user viewing videos uploaded by the Bernie Sanders campaign will likely enjoy content criticizing Republican

healthcare ideas rather than content criticizing how Hillary Clinton approaches healthcare. Ridout and Holland's research on nomination campaign advertising supports this claim. They find that leading candidates are generally more likely to launch attacks across party lines via advertising and attribute this tendency due to the fear of creating a backlash effect among voters in their party (Ridout & Holland, 2010, p. 622). There is little risk in antagonizing voters in the other nomination contest. I selected the two "leading" candidates from each nomination contest for this study so it is unsurprising that these four campaigns uploaded limited negative content to YouTube.

A second reason is that many videos were uploaded during the early part of the campaign, before any votes had been cast. Wide open races mean that many supporters will eventually select a new candidate after their first choice drops out and it is unlikely that such voters will support candidates who spent the previous several months publishing such negative materials. Ridout and Holland recognize that "candidates run different campaigns four months before an election day than the day before" and find that attacks are more common later in the campaign (2010, p.622). Just as in previous years, both fields were initially crowded with candidates. The primary objectives of a campaign in such a situation are the development of the candidates' identity and building trust, both of which are achieved through positive messaging (Damore, 2002, p. 680). These claims are all based on research on television advertising, but they make sense when considered in the context of YouTube, where messaging is generally more positive.

Popularity: A Missing Discussion?

One seemingly obvious analysis that I did not perform was a cross tabulation of views and other variables such as policy focus or tone. Although potentially interesting, there are simply not enough data available on YouTube to perform such an analysis. Research suggests that the popularity of Internet videos is a function of many factors (Mohr, 2014, p,45). These include blog reposting, news outlets posting content to their websites, and social media links. Some of these factors are dependent on the video itself while others might simply depend on how slow the news day is at an organization such as the *New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*. It is also challenging to determine if any of the views were paid views. Campaigns and other organizations frequently run paid advertisement campaigns to promote content and it is very possible that some of these campaigns lead people to YouTube videos. The campaigns managing YouTube videos have access to much of the information regarding how viewers get to their videos but researchers do not. Without this level of information, I avoid making connections between popularity and the content of YouTube videos.

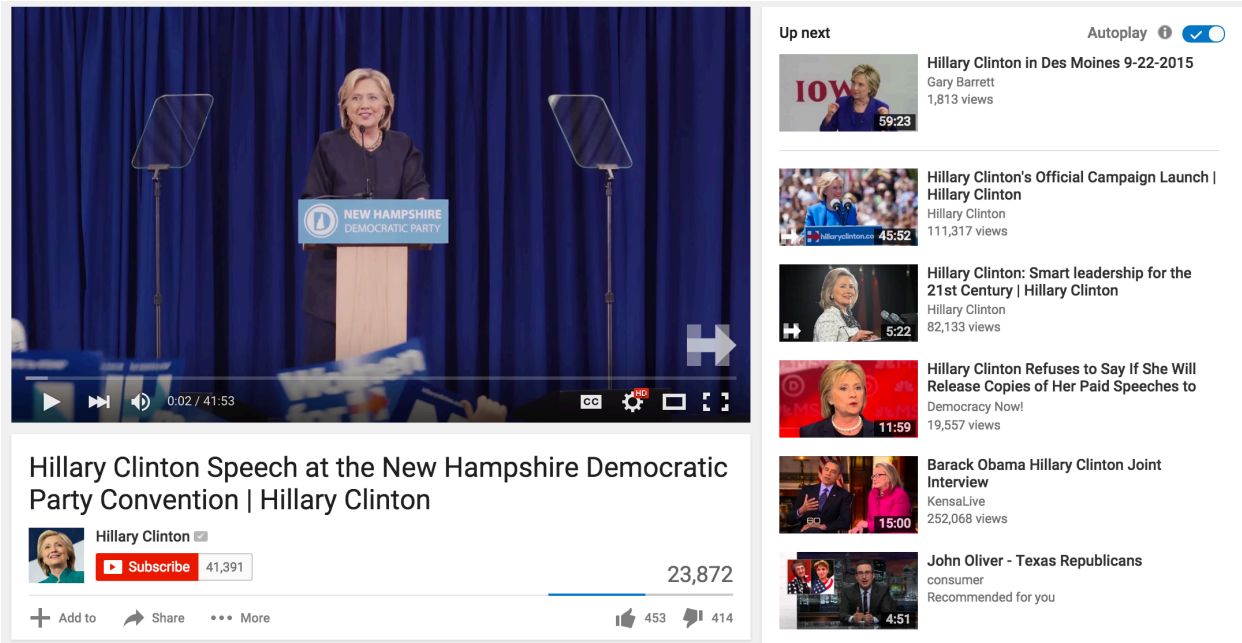
Discussion: Is YouTube Relevant?

An important question exists regardless of the content on YouTube: is this platform actually relevant? This topic is important because while some videos such as Hillary Clinton's, "Getting Started" and Bernie Sanders' "America" accumulate millions of views on YouTube, many other videos exist in relative obscurity. Assuming that my samples were representative, none of these campaigns were able to reach a median of over 20,000 views on their content before the primaries began. This number is almost insignificant compared

to the reach of paid television and digital advertising. Many campaigns, especially Rubio's, uploaded much less popular content. The surprising lack of popularity yields two possible explanations: that except for the few that do go "viral", the majority of campaign-produced web videos are unpopular or that web videos matter, but that YouTube is no longer the preeminent platform for campaign-produced materials.

Like YouTube, Facebook also provides view counts for videos uploaded directly to the social media platform, and campaigns upload much of the same material to the platform. An example of this is the "Mindy" video mentioned earlier. This video received just under 12,000 views between being uploaded and March 13th, and it has received over 95,000 views during the same time period on Facebook. Over 750 people have shared it directly to their own networks by sharing it through their own Facebook accounts and thousands more have liked and commented on it. By the same date, "Getting Started" had just fewer than three million views. As of March 13, "Every Child", a television advertisement discussing healthcare and children, had just over 91,000 views on YouTube and about 131,000 views on Facebook. Donald Trump's campaign also appears to be far more successful on Facebook. His advertisement, "Voters Speak", which received 15,000 views on YouTube as of March 13, has been viewed just under 3.4 million times on Facebook. Several of his videos sampled in the initial research project have millions of views on Facebook and the campaign has uploaded far more content to the Facebook platform. I do not perform a comprehensive analysis, but this observed trend appears to stand on both Marco Rubio's and Bernie Sanders' Facebook pages as well. Marco Rubio has fewer video views on Facebook than the other candidates, but even many of his videos are also more popular than their counterparts on his YouTube channel.

From the perspective of a campaign's digital operations, Facebook is likely a more appealing medium for posting videos. Campaigns generally maintain popular pages: Each of the studied candidates has millions of followers. Sharing videos from these pages allows campaigns to broadcast the materials directly to their followers, which are more numerous than the number of followers that each campaign maintains on YouTube. Rather than waste efforts driving traffic to YouTube pages, it simply makes sense for campaigns to upload materials to a more accessible space that allows followers to effectively share them with their own social networks.



Screenshot from Hillary Clinton's YouTube Channel

Another important advantage is that campaigns are able to control the context of the videos on Facebook while YouTube provides a host of automated suggestions for other videos directly next to the main content. For candidates with strong grassroots followings, such as Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, this can be advantageous as many independent

actors post additional positive materials on YouTube, which are displayed next to the official campaign content. However this is a major weakness for campaigns with more controversial candidates, such as Hillary Clinton. An example is displayed above, where YouTube's algorithms have displayed a video titled "Hillary Clinton Refuses to Say if She Will Release Copies of Her Paid Speeches to Goldman Sachs." This is not positive coverage of the candidate, and the campaign is unable to avoid its display next to their materials on YouTube. Uploading content to Facebook does not come with such a risk. Just as campaigns prioritized advertising on television as the new broadcast medium demonstrated clear advantages over radio advertising, perhaps digital strategists already find Facebook to be preferable to YouTube. A complex examination of the difference between native video on Facebook and YouTube, while intriguing, is beyond the scope of this research project.

Another important, and subjective, question is whether the types of YouTube content posted by the campaigns are good for the American electoral process. Based on the assumption that increased political engagement and access to political information is beneficial, the adoption of YouTube appears to be a positive force. Many writers and observers share this sentiment and view YouTube as a democratizing technology. However it also presents a possible negative effect. Media scholars argue that the contemporary media landscape presents the possibility of selective exposure, the "motivated selection of pro-attitudinal messages and the motivated avoidance of counter attitudinal messages"(Stroud & Muddiman, 2013, p.6). Such scholars generally focus on television news, an environment in which there is a notable correlation between the political views of citizens and their preferred news programming. The selective exposure hypothesis stipulates that such voters prefer to consume media that affirms their own beliefs and

assumptions, and that such behavior results in them failing to be exposed to information that challenges their own beliefs. This hypothesis is certainly applicable to YouTube, as video viewers select the channels that they watch. While YouTube offers the potential to broadcast important political information to citizens, their experience is determined by their existing perspectives. As described earlier, this selective exposure dynamic certainly plays a role in campaign-created YouTube videos. It is likely one of the factors that drives campaigns to prioritize sharing positive content, as their viewers generally hold favorable views of the candidate. Scholars who study this issue on a larger scale find that selective exposure is related to increased political polarization, but normative concerns regarding this issue are beyond the scope of online campaign communications (Stroud, 2010, p.557). Campaigns attempt to target much of their messaging and advertising towards specific audiences so the way that they do so on YouTube is of limited concern in regards to this hypothesis.

Conclusion

I completed this research project to develop an understanding of the importance of YouTube in the 2016 contest and to understand how campaigns utilize the platform. I selected this topic because while there is enough existing research to ground my own questions, this topic is still relatively unexplored. YouTube is a relatively new medium, and there have only been several election cycles in which scholars were able to examine the topic. The 2016 cycle holds two open nominating contests, one for each party, which makes it a more analytically exciting event than 2012. The Republican contest, led by Donald Trump, has turned out to be an unpredictable and unconventional affair, as the candidate's

lack of interest in advertising apparently also applies to YouTube. While the way that the Donald Trump campaign uses YouTube might not be generalizable to other campaigns, it underscores the variety of approaches that the four campaigns take in using the video sharing website.

I examined four main research questions. I hypothesized that YouTube messaging is overwhelmingly positive, that security and economic policy-related topics are the most popular, that YouTube messaging focuses on personal qualities over policies, and that the campaigns of insurgent “dark horse” candidates receive the most YouTube engagement. My hypotheses regarding the positivity of YouTube messaging and the policy topics were supported by the data. This selection of official campaign YouTube videos posted during the early nomination contest is overwhelmingly positive. This is unsurprising as early-nomination contest content is usually positive. Viewers, who must actively seek out YouTube content, prefer positive videos. It also finds that security and economics are the most popular policy topics on YouTube. This is unsurprising as this hypothesis was supported by previous research and a simple observation of the contemporary rhetoric in the 2016 race.

The hypotheses that insurgent “dark horse” candidates upload the most popular videos and that videos primarily focus on personal qualities are not supported by the data. Hillary Clinton, who has been active in Democratic politics for decades, received a higher median number of views than Bernie Sanders. However this hypothesis proved true on the Republican side, with Donald Trump proving far more popular than Marco Rubio. There was a strong negative relationship between the number of videos uploaded by a campaign and the median number of views, but evidence does not support the assertion that “dark

horse” candidates are the most popular. Official YouTube content among these four campaigns is also surprisingly policy-focused. It is possible that this is a reflection of efforts to communicate with the educated and high-information voters that make up YouTube viewers.

YouTube represents another era of the evolution of campaign messaging technologies. Since YouTube was the first way to share online videos and campaigns immediately adopted the platform. However this research suggests that there is still not a “best practice” for how to utilize the website. Different campaigns upload different types of content in varied quantities. At the same time, most campaign YouTube videos appear to be less popular than their counterparts uploaded directly to platforms such as Facebook. Posting content to YouTube requires little effort so it is unsurprising that campaigns utilize it even though other platforms appear more appropriate due to their larger audience. It might have a very specific audience and using as many Internet platforms as possible is likely the best way to increase the viewership of videos. Internet videos are still a relatively new political technology and the way that campaigns utilize the platform in the next several cycles might well determine its relevance in the future. YouTube might well offer citizens the democratizing ability to upload potentially viral content, but it does not appear to be a critical component of a campaign messaging strategy. It is also clear that studying YouTube as a proxy for “internet videos” is inappropriate in the context of presidential campaigns because voters now engage with online videos using other platforms.

I recommend that future researchers examine Internet videos as a broad concept rather than simply looking at a singular platform such as YouTube. In focusing on YouTube, this research clearly missed the importance of other platforms such as Facebook. It is

unclear if my findings can be generalized to other platforms, so research comparing the two platforms would also be a valuable contribution to the literature on electoral campaigns and online videos. A project examining videos posted throughout the entirety of the nomination campaign, as well as the general election, would also be valuable, as this project only sheds light on how campaigns use the platform during the early stages of the nomination process.

These findings are informative regarding how leading campaigns utilized YouTube during the early stages of the 2016 nominations contest. They posted overwhelmingly positive messages, frequently addressed specific policies or policy arenas, and posted a variety of different types of content, ranging from radio commercials to caucusing instructions. However, each of the campaigns adopted radically different approaches towards using the website. Marco Rubio's campaign prioritized the uploading of news coverage and uploaded a huge number of clips while Donald Trump's campaign produced videos for the Internet and only uploaded a handful of clips. Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders' campaigns each uploaded a greater variety of content, although Hillary Clinton's campaign prioritized sharing web videos while Bernie Sanders' campaign shared a large number of speeches. The variety of different ways in which different campaigns use the platform is the most important finding of this research project. Campaigns might no longer consider YouTube the most important online video platform. They are clearly continuing to experiment with the medium, uploading varying quantities of different content in pursuit of the right message to connect with voters, rally support, and ultimately secure the nomination.

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