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YouTube-ification of Political Talk: An Examination of Persuasion Appeals in Viral Video

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Kristin English¹, Kaye D. Sweetser¹,
and Monica Ancu²

Abstract

In 2008, U.S. Internet users watched 14 billion videos on YouTube. During the 2008 presidential campaign, voters rated watching YouTube political videos as one of the top three most popular online political activities. But to what degree are YouTube political videos influential of viewers' perceptions, and to what degree does the source of the video make an impact? Similar to all other new forms of online communication, the effects of YouTube clips on consumers of political information, and the credibility of these messages, have yet to be understood. This study takes a step into that direction through a three-cell posttest-only experimental design that exposed participants to three YouTube clips about health care, each clip containing a different persuasive appeal (source or ethos, logic or logos, and emotion or pathos). Results revealed that the ethos appeal ranked as the most credible appeal, followed by logos and pathos, a somewhat promising finding that users resist being swayed by emotion or hard numbers and pay attention to message source. No relationship was found between the appeals and political information efficacy or the political cynicism of participants.

Keywords

source credibility, logic, emotion, appeal, persuasion, Internet, viral, video, political communication, health care, ethos, pathos, logos

¹University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA

²University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, FL, USA

Corresponding Author:

Kaye D. Sweetser, 0223C Journalism, 120 Hooper St., Athens, GA 30602

Email: sweetser@uga.edu

The 2000 and 2004 presidential elections are described as breakout years for the Internet as a source of political information, with websites and blogs becoming a valid source of information about political campaigns (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2005; Tedesco, 2006). Benoit and Hansen (2004) posited that “new technologies provide alternate sources of information about the presidential campaign that now compete with newspapers and television news” (p. 168). Examples of such new technologies include social network websites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace), video-sharing websites (e.g., YouTube), and user-generated websites (e.g., Change.gov) that provide both politicians and citizens with an outlet for disseminating and consuming political information without mediation from mainstream media. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (hereafter Pew; 2008), the most prominent online political activities during 2008 were watching online political videos, using social network websites, and making political contributions. Overall, consumers of online political information have steadily increased through the years, from 23% of all U.S. Internet users in 2000, to 34% in 2004, to 46% in 2008, and to 50% during 2010 midterms (Pew, 2008; Pew 2010). These numbers indicate that American voters have been supplementing mainstream media as source for political information with online sources, including citizen-produced content available through video-sharing and social network websites.

This study looks at the credibility and effects of such online, citizen-produced political messages. The bulk of research on online political campaigns focusing on candidate-produced content, with only a small percentage of research examining citizen-produced content. Specifically, this study investigates perceptions and reactions to political video messages available on YouTube. Through an experimental design, three groups of participants were exposed to three different types of messages about the health care reform issue. Each message had a different persuasion appeal: expert source, emotion, and humor. This study seeks to contribute to understanding how citizens consume political information and what type of citizen-produced political messages they find appealing and credible. A secondary line of investigation looks at how preexisting political attitudes and behaviors, such as political efficacy, political cynicism, and political involvement, are linked to the consummation and effects of citizen-produced online political messages.

Theoretical Background

YouTube

The YouTube video-sharing website is the most discussed form of emergent technology associated with the 2008 election. The website was launched in December 2005, was pioneered by congressional candidates during the 2006 U.S. midterms, and has become the norm for the distribution of online video content, such as political ads, campaign speeches, or media clippings, during the 2008 primaries. Within a mere six months since launching (by July 2006), YouTube videos accounted for 60% of videos watched

online and maintained approximately 20 million users every month (Reuters, 2006). By 2008, YouTube has claimed hundreds of millions of videos viewed daily, hundreds of thousands of videos uploaded daily, and approximately 10 hours of video uploaded every minute (Google, 2008). It is estimated that U.S. Internet users spend approximately 4 hr on average per month watching YouTube videos (Google, 2008). Musicians, politicians, the Queen of England, and even the Vatican have joined YouTube (Owen, 2009), along with approximately 70 million Internet users worldwide.

Users have the ability to create profiles and upload video content as well as search, watch, and leave comments on other videos and subscribe to the videos of other users. The site also features a tagging system to allow users to categorize their videos by associating words with them (Gueorguieva, 2007). This free distribution channel provides a low-cost alternative for many political candidates to use in their campaigns. In some ways, YouTube can be seen as community television, where anyone can broadcast and anyone can watch all content at any time.

YouTube development, especially during the 2006 midterm elections, has expanded the use of the medium to political campaigns, political organizations, and politically motivated citizens. The 2006 election was a battle between Democrats and Republicans for control of both houses of Congress. A YouTube video is said to have completely changed the landscape of the Virginia Senate race between Republican George Allen and Democrat Tim Kaine. According to Gueorguieva (2007), "Allen was caught on tape calling a college student of Indian descent a 'macaca' and the video was 'tubed,' causing an immediate media scandal and quickly becoming one of YouTube's most viewed" (p. 1). In addition, the Montana race became controversial when a video of Republican Conrad Burns appearing to sleep during a hearing appeared on YouTube (Jalonick, 2006). All this anecdotal evidence suggests that YouTube content has the potential to influence viewers' political attitudes, yet little research has been conducted so far into the factors affecting the persuasiveness and credibility of these videos.

Credibility Research

Decades of credibility research tend to agree that a message's power to persuade is influenced by three categories of factors: the characteristics of the source (ethos), of the message (logos and pathos), and of the audience. Our study investigates the connection between source and message characteristics and the perceived credibility of YouTube political videos. Such research has practical applications to political communicators (i.e., campaigns, other political outlets) interested in bettering communication with their publics.

According to Aristotelian reasoning, message characteristics can fall under either logos (logical arguments) or pathos (emotion, such as humor), and communicator characteristics are referred to as ethos. A large body of work, both qualitative and quantitative, has examined the use of these appeals in political communication.

Selnow (1998) argues that channels are not neutral conduits but rather that they endow messages with certain qualities. When audiences can actually see the source (e.g., video), rather than experience a more highly mediated recounting of the message (e.g., print or Internet text), that message receiver puts more strength in his or her judgments. In essence, Selnow said seeing is believing. The Internet, an increasingly popular channel because of its inherent richness in both video and textual qualities, has been a ripe ground for political communication.

Ethos. Source credibility, or ethos, has been one of the most researched topics in communication. One of the main tenets of source credibility is that the communicator's characteristics influence the degree to which the audience finds the message credible and persuasive (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978). Specifically, the degree of *expertise* (the extent to which the speaker is perceived as being qualified) and *trustworthiness* (the extent to which the speaker's statements are perceived as valid) are the two main components of source credibility (Hovland et al., 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Highly expert and/or trustworthy communicators can influence the audience into changing its attitudes and behaviors toward the issue, product, or person being promoted in the message. Politicians use experts and the source-credibility appeals often in their use of surrogates speaking to an issue in an advertisement, campaign speech, or blog post.

Logos. A common approach to making arguments is using a logical appeal, or logos. By using a logical appeal, an individual provides factual information and arguments to support their position on an issue. This process allows the recipient to evaluate the argument on the basis of that information and decide whether to accept the information as valid. A political example of logical appeals would be a presentation of statistics or a news story based on information in an advertisement attacking an opponent's record. These situations heavily depend on the reliability of the source of the facts, statistics, and so on.

Format is said to influence the reception of messages. For instance, Petty, Wells, and Brock (1976) found that logical arguments benefited from simple and uncluttered presentation. Selnow (1998) attributes this to the audience's being able to recognize the strength of such information. Furthermore, he contends that such logical appeals with statistics are best produced in any medium as long as the presentation is simple.

Pathos. Whereas logical and source-credibility appeals are most often seen in political information, emotional appeals, or pathos, such as humor appeals, are seen in alternative forms of political information. Using emotional appeals adds a different element and/or perspective to information. Humor has been associated with politics in various formats, including late-night talk shows, editorial cartoons, and television dramas.

Most of the previous research deals with how shows presenting political information (real or fake) represent politicians. Entertainment media is one of the ways humor is incorporated into political information. In fact, according to a 2005 Pew survey, 48% of adults regularly or sometimes used entertainment media to get political news. Hollander (2005) also found support that young voters identified and sought entertainment or humor-based programming as a source of political information. Taking into

account that young citizens get information out of entertainment or humor-based programs (Hollander, 2005), this study seeks to analyze the humor appeal in a presentation of the health care issue in the nontraditional YouTube format.

The use of images, particularly, video, to deliver pathos-type appeals is not unique to the age of nontraditional content, be it entertainment or Internet-based messages. For instance, Selnow (1998) provides an example of Ronald Reagan's 1984 "Morning in America" ads, focusing on the warm and glowing shots at dawn and the feelings evoked. Evening though critics argued the ad was misleading, it epitomized Reagan's optimism. According to Selnow, "only television could have delivered the goods for the producers of this spot. There was little interest in 'message content.' . . . Emotions and feelings mattered here. Only the warm visuals could have brought the desired effect" (Selnow, 1998, p. 59).

Just as formatting and delivery of the message matters for logical appeals, the same applies for emotional appeals. In fact, Petty et al. (1976) suggest that in the absence of persuasive statistics or logical appeal, communicators are best served with distractions and emotional appeals, such as humor.

Credibility of Online Political Information Sources

With citizens increasing their use of online sources of political information with each new election campaign (Pew, 2008), there is a need to reflect and analyze how these forms are used and perceived. Several media scholars have been studying the degree of credibility attributed by consumers to online sources of information.

Overall, consumers tend to rate online sources of political information as credible (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2000, 2002). Johnson and Kaye (2000) posited that Internet users "may judge online information as credible because they can get the information they want from a wide variety of places when they want it and without having that information filtered by the media" (p. 874).

There are, however, differences in the degrees of trust given to various sources. For instance, readers of online political information prefer online newspaper and political websites to candidate websites (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Kiouisis (2001) found that people tend to rate online news as more credible than television but less credible than print newspapers. A survey of blog readers reported that these individuals rate blogs significantly higher than all other sources of information and that they are attracted to blogs because of their depth on information (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Most of these findings refer strictly to news websites and ignore other online sources of political information, especially emergent online channels, such as YouTube and social network websites.

Several factors seem to predict the credibility of online sources, and these factors are users' reliance on the Internet, consumption of traditional media sources, demographics, and political attitudes. Viewers of mainstream TV news tend to find online television websites as credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2000). Similarly, those who are familiar with using the Internet in general and read print newspapers tend to rate online newspaper

websites as highly credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2000). At the same time, non-Internet users tend to find online sources significantly less credible than Internet users, indicating that the degree of familiarity with the medium is directly linked to the degree of trust given to that medium (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Lebo, 2000). Johnson and Kaye (2002) also found that consumers of online political information in 2000 were more trusting of online sources compared to Internet users surveyed in 1996, an increase in credibility attributed to consumers' increased familiarity with the medium, among other factors.

Credibility and Political Attitudes

In addition to the factors above, the cognitive processing of political information is linked to a person's own political attitudes—in particular, to his or her degree of political efficacy. An individual's self-efficacy is defined as believing that one is capable of influencing a situation or completing certain goals (Ormrod, 2006). Bimber (1998) and Johnson and Kaye (1998) establish that the Internet allows access to political information, allowing more participation and informed citizens, potentially leading to a greater influence on the political process. Kaye and Johnson (2002b) posited that “the Internet is thought to boost self-efficacy because it allows viewers or listeners the opportunity to hear individuals like themselves articulate their political views” (p. 67). Building on previous research, Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007) advanced the understanding of political information efficacy, positing that an individual's level of political knowledge was central to his or her perception of influencing the political process.

Both political and political information efficacy were found to affect the way individuals consume political information. Web users tend to be more politically knowledgeable than the average citizen. Netizens also tend to score higher on measures for political interest and engagement, are more likely to vote, and are more likely to seek out political information (Johnson & Kaye, 2000).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

As stated previously, this study seeks to examine the appeals used in nontraditional forms of political information. Although the amount of research on credibility and the connection between this concept and political attitudes could allow the formulation of hypotheses, this study is exploratory and descriptive in purpose, and we argue that two general research questions are more appropriate for a first look at YouTube:

Research Question 1: Which credibility factors (ethos, logos or pathos) influence the viewers' perception of online political videos?

Research Question 2: Do political attitudes such as political efficacy and political cynicism affect perceptions of online political videos?

Method

Using a three-cell posttest-only experimental design study sought to understand the credibility of political messages spread through viral video social media outlets, such as YouTube.

Stimulus

Three organic (e.g., already existing on YouTube) videos were selected as stimuli. To ensure consistency among the stimuli and maintain as much control of the content as possible, the researchers selected videos all dealing with same issue (health care). Each video approached the issue from a different perspective, which was based on Aristotle's persuasive appeals of ethos, logos, and pathos. Videos were all similar in length, each being approximately 3 min long.

For ethos, an excerpt of an informal interview with former surgeon general C. Everett Koop was used. In the video, Koop was seated and discussed his views on the state of health care reform in the United States. The video was shot after his service as surgeon general. He was chosen to represent source credibility because, although he served as surgeon general from 1982 through 1989, he is a well-known figure and his visage is easily identified, even among young people used in this demographic. In the video, he is presented as "someone who has spent his entire life in public health" (ethos appeal). He argues that changes must be made to the health care system using a combination of weak logos and pathos statement (such as a lot of people do not have health coverage although they are working, children do not have access to health care). Although this video contains mixed logos and pathos appeals, the focus is on the speaker's expertise on health care. As of January 2009, this video had 296 views on YouTube.

For logos, another homemade video with the same type of shot as the ethos stimulus (waist up) was used. In this video, a minority female spoke to the camera and provided several statistics about the health care issue, such as the increasing number of uninsured Americans and dropping rates of people covered by employer and government insurance programs. She attributes the statistical information to a general source labeled "statisticians." As of January 2009, this video had 242 views on YouTube.

For pathos, a homemade video starring an army specialist dressed in a military uniform was used. The emotion incited in this video was humor. The man sang a humorous song he wrote about health care reform, playing a guitar as accompaniment. The video framed the singing soldier, who was seated, from the guitar up and included his drill instructor-type military hat in the shot. No ethos or logos appeals are present in the video. The song asks, "What are you going to do about health care?" and states that "I am going to war" and "My family does not have health care"—all purely pathos appeals. As of January 2009, this video had 422 views on YouTube.

Procedure

Potential participants were recruited from two states to participate in the study. Participants were sent a link to the institutional review board–approved protocol, which was facilitated exclusively online. The protocol consisted of several pages, including a consent form, the stimulus (randomly assigned), and the posttest. Participants were allowed to complete the protocol at the time and location of their own choosing within a specific window of time. Such an approach encourages a more realistic, organic experience that occurs when watching a YouTube video. Participants were afforded confidentiality, and their identity was stripped from their specific responses during the analysis so that no one could be identified. Use of confidential, rather than anonymous, levels of privacy allowed the researchers to further control the experiment to ensure both random assignment and that a single person did not participate more than once.

Participants

Participants ($N = 233$) were recruited from two large southeastern schools in two states in the months surrounding the 2008 presidential election. Both universities are considered the flagship universities for their respective states. The participants were primarily female (72.5%; $n = 169$), with less than a third being male (27.5%; $n = 64$). As expected from such a population, the average age of the participant was 22 years old ($SD = 2.25$). Although some may find fault with using a university sample, this was specifically done in this case in an effort to understand the prime audience targets of online viral videos and such social sites. In this case, use of a general population would not have generated a valid result, as the researchers here were interested in the effects of such videos on those likely to watch such videos. A small incentive of extra credit for participating classes was afforded to participants at both institutions.

Several demographic questions were asked to assess both the individual's political beliefs and his or her political behavior. The majority of the participants were registered to vote (93.6%; $n = 218$), with only 6.4% ($n = 15$) not having registered. Similarly large numbers of participants said that they either planned to vote or had already voted in the 2008 presidential election (87.6%; $n = 204$). With regard to political party identification, a full third of participants (33.5%; $n = 78$) indicated that they did not align themselves with any political party. Republicans made up 38.2% ($n = 89$) and Democrats made up 23.2% ($n = 54$) of the participants. A small group of participants aligned themselves with other parties (4.7%; $n = 11$), and one did not respond to the question.

Additionally, participants indicated how often they used a list of particular media sources for political information. This series of items was asked as a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *never* (1) to *all the time* (5). The most popular media source for political information for this group was the Internet ($M = 4$, $SD = 0.96$), followed by face-to-face communication ($M = 3.66$; $SD = 1.04$). This validates the use of this sample, as the researchers were interested in those likely to use such social media as

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Cynicism Index ($M = 21.25$, $SD = 3.8$)

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Whether I vote or not has no influence on politics.	2.11	1.09
One never knows what politicians think.	3.2	1.02
People like me don't have any say about what the government does.	2.13	0.97
Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.	2.7	1.11
One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.	4.12	0.75

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Political Information Efficacy Index ($M = 10.61$, $SD = 2.45$)

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.	3.58	0.98
I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.	3.24	1.09
I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.	3.79	0.76

an initial indication of persuasive power. Other online uses were speaking with others online ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.05$) and watching viral video ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.08$). Use of television as a source for political information varies among local television news ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.04$), national television news ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .89$), television talk shows ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.09$), and morning shows ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.19$). Print as a source was measured for campus newspapers ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.19$), general newspapers ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.97$), and magazines ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.03$). Radio was represented by political talk radio ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.02$) and radio in general ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.03$). There were no significant differences on any of these demographics among the three conditions in the study ($n_{1\text{logos}} = 91$, $n_{2\text{ethos}} = 69$, $n_{3\text{pathos}} = 73$).

Instrument

Participants were asked questions to gauge their assessment of the credibility of the source in the watched video. Source credibility items were measured on a 5-point semantic differential scale using both Johnson and Kaye's (2004) and McCrosky's (1966) source credibility operationalizations (see Table 3). Pairs included adjectives such as *strong* and *weak*, *sophisticated* and *unsophisticated*, and *biased* and *unbiased*. There were 19 total semantic pairs. A summative index was made of the 19 adjective pairs (Cronbach's $\alpha = .892$), and items as appropriate were recoded so the higher number indicated a more positive trait for each variable. Overall, participants rated the source to which they were exposed neutrally ($M = 63$, $SD = 11$).

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Characteristics ($M = 21.25$, $SD = 3.8$)

Characteristic	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fair	3.64	1.01
Unbiased	2.44	1.14
Tells the whole story	2.66	1.1
Accurate	3.38	0.88
Respects people's privacy	3.47	0.92
Watches after others' interests	3.55	0.94
Honest	3.78	0.82
Ethical	3.63	0.85
Trustworthy	3.32	0.97
Sincere	3.58	1.02
Concerned	3.93	1.02
Conscientious	3.54	0.89
Likable	3.08	0.95
Good	3.48	0.83
Competent	3.39	0.97
Strong	3.39	0.95
Professional	2.74	1.26
Qualified	3.09	1.17
Sophisticated	2.79	1.17

Political information efficacy, the feeling that one has enough information to make a political decision, was measured with three items. (Kaid et al., 2007). See Table 2. This index was reliable for those surveyed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .821$). Finally, political cynicism was measured with a seven-item, 5-point Likert-type scale where higher numbers indicated a greater level of cynicism (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000; Rosenstone, Kinder, Miller, & the National Election Studies, 1997). See Table 1. Three of these items were adapted from prior scales used in National Election Studies (Rosenstone et al., 1997), and the remainder were developed and used in three previous presidential campaigns to measure levels of political cynicism (Kaid et al., 2000). The alpha for this index was .640. This alpha score is consistent with other uses of this scale.

Results

Research Question 1 asked whether the message appeal (ethos, logos or pathos) is related to perceived credibility of online videos. In other words, was there a difference in the credibility given by participants to the message on the basis of the video watched? As briefly explained in the Method section, credibility was measured with 19 semantic differential attributes compiled into an index. An ANOVA comparing credibility means among the three conditions revealed that on YouTube, not all videos are perceived equal ($F = 38.349$, $p < .01$). The ethos appeal featuring former surgeon

Table 4. Relationship Between Political Attitudes and Credibility of Various YouTube Political Messages

Independent variable	Condition 1: Logos (n = 91)		Condition 2: Ethos (n = 69)		Condition 3: Pathos (n = 73)	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Political efficacy	-.119	.051	.089	.080	-.103	.083
Political cynicism	-.249*	.088	-.042	.108	-.053	.116
Gender	.189*	.097	.074	.138	.157	.142
Ethnicity	-.022	.046	.064	.061	.031	.149
Party affiliation	-.054	.055	-.024	.064	-.075	.72
Ideology	.084*	.039	-.017	.062	.151*	.065
	F = 3.870*, R ² = .217		F = 0.742, R ² = .022		F = 1.657, R ² = .131	

N = 223.

* $p < .05$.

general Dr. C. Everett Koop as the spokesperson received the highest credibility ratings ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.54$), followed by the logos appeal ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.45$), with the pathos or humor appeal receiving the lowest credibility ranking ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.46$).

Research Question 2 asked whether viewers' personal political attitudes, such as political efficacy and political cynicism, affect the degree of credibility attributed to YouTube messages. To answer this question, we conducted a series of linear regression analysis using political efficacy and political cynicism as the predictor factors for the degree of credibility attributed by respondents to each YouTube video (the dependent variable). As discussed below, the regression coefficient shows minimal connections between a viewer's political attitudes and the credibility awarded to YouTube messages.

Political efficacy. Participants in our study reported moderate levels of political efficacy, with a mean of 3.53 (on a scale of 1 to 5; $SD = 0.81$) for the entire sample. There were no significant differences in political efficacy among the three conditions. Political efficacy was not connected to any of the three persuasion appeals (see Table 4).

Political cynicism. Levels of political cynicism among participants were also moderate, with a mean of 3.03 (on a scale of 1 to 5; $SD = 0.54$) for the entire sample. Participants in all three conditions reported comparable levels of political cynicism. According to the data analysis, political cynicism negatively affects the degree of credibility viewers attribute to logos appeals (see Table 4). The higher someone's level of cynicism, the less likely they are to consider logos appeals credible ($B = -.249$, $p < .05$). However, no connection seems to exist between political cynicism and the other two persuasion appeals, ethos and pathos.

Demographics. Although minimal connections were found between persuasion appeals and viewers' political attitudes, there seem to be a significant interplay between credibility and gender and ideology. Women in the logos condition tended to find the video significantly more credible than men ($B = .189, p < .05$), maybe because the speaker in the video was a woman. Also, viewers who declared themselves liberal seemed more likely to rate the logos ($B = .084, p < .05$) and the pathos ($B = .151, p < .05$) videos as more credible than their conservative counterparts.

Discussion

The 2008 presidential election cycle was an excellent opportunity to further explore the various emergent forms of online political information. This study extended previous research into how citizens consume and perceive political information by specifically examining how young citizens evaluate different appeals used to frame a specific issue, in this case, health care. It also explored the relevance of political information efficacy and political cynicism in the process of evaluating issue appeals.

The results reveal that ethos, or source credibility, is the highest-ranked appeal in terms of credibility among the participants in this study. Assessing the videos in this way shows that where, or in this case, from whom, the information comes is still assessed and important to political information processing. It is, however, logical to believe that citizens would consider the source in gathering information about political issues, especially one as vast and complicated as health care. This study also extends Johnson and Kaye's (1998, 2000, 2002) work on the credibility of online sources of political information by providing a rank order of the most credible appeals to the least. It is, however, interesting that the ethos or source-credibility appeal is the highest ranked in credibility because according to Johnson and Kaye (2000), users sought to find information from sources outside of the mainstream media. However, in this study, an expert witness was interviewed, a common tactic of mainstream media.

One of the more interesting findings that came out of this study deals with how participants perceived the health care video that used the humor appeal. Even with the large number of viewers who watch humor-related shows, the information is not seen as credible as that coming from an expert or from a fact-based argument. This finding could be attributable to various reasons, including the perception of humor among participants and the credibility of the citizen featured in the video. For example, the findings might have been different if it were John Stewart or Steven Colbert as the "host" of the video rather than just an everyday man.

When we take into account political information efficacy and political cynicism, the findings revealed no significant relationships. It seems that political information efficacy is not important to any of the persuasion appeals, which could relate to the fact that someone comes into a situation with a certain level of efficacy, and that does not dictate how the user will react to an appeal. Another possible reason for this finding could be that users seek out these particular types of political information, which

provides them with the efficacy of selecting their own sources rather than depending on the choices of others.

In considering political cynicism, there is often a disconnect between citizens and those presenting the news. It is not surprising to find that those higher in political cynicism viewed the video with the logos or logical appeal with a level of skepticism. Inherently, those who have higher levels of political cynicism are less trusting of all aspects of politics, and when a nonpublic figure presents information about an issue, there are bound to be questions about its origin.

As for differences among demographic groups, there were two major findings in this category, addressing political affiliation and gender. The findings revealed that users who designated themselves as liberal were more likely to highly rate the logos and pathos appeals than conservatives. Some may argue this difference is attributable to the perceived affiliation of those featured in the videos. In addition, gender factors revealed that female respondents found the logos appeal more credible than men. A main reason behind this significant difference may be because it was a woman presenting the information.

Overall, the study revealed several interesting points about how citizens perceive videos as a form of online political information. It also established a foundation for future research into evaluating appeals and other issues as new forms of political information emerge.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all studies, there are limitations to this study. One of the major issues when dealing with experimental methods is that there is often a small sample size, which this design suffers from. This problem leads to a limited range and generalizability of the results to a large group of citizens. In addition, the study focuses on southeastern universities, which limits the geographic perspective of participants. Future studies should expand to other regions within the United States as well as to other nations, including Israel, where people heavily used YouTube in that country's 2009 election campaign. It would be interesting to expand this study to encompass various levels and situations of the appeals to see whether there is a most effective form of each. In addition, future research could expand to assess different issues featured prominently on the political agenda.

Conclusion

As new forms of political information develop, understanding of citizens' use and perception of the technology will help campaigns better serve voters. Viral videos are more than just a hot topic or a forward from all of one's friends; they can be effectively used as forms of online political information produced by citizens for other citizens. This study adds to the research about the perception of appeals used in these videos, especially in regard to citizen-produced material.

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Bios

Kristin English earned her PhD in 2011 from the University of Georgia's H. W. Grady School of Journalism and Mass Communication. She earned her master's degree at Virginia Tech in public advocacy research with a concentration on political communication and received her bachelor's from the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey in communication and political science. Her research focuses on campaign communication (political, health, and public relations) with an emphasis on emergent technologies. She also helped to organize the Connect: Public Relations and Social Media Conference in 2008 and 2009 and has provided online public relations consulting for local businesses and University of Georgia departments and centers.

Kaye D. Sweetser is an associate professor at the University of Georgia's H. W. Grady School of Journalism and Mass Communication. She earned her PhD from the University of Florida in 2004. In addition to a rich life in academia, she continues to practice public relations actively. She became an accredited public relations practitioner from the Public Relations Society of America. She is commissioned reserve public affairs officer in the U.S. Navy, where she is currently working with the U.S. Navy on its social media strategy. She was previously a research fellow for the Society of New Communications Research.

Monica Ancu is an assistant professor at the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg. She earned her PhD from the University of Florida in 2006. She studies the role of online technologies, especially online social media, in political campaigns. Within this framework, she investigates how political candidates and voters use social network websites, blogs, podcasts, online advertising, and so on and how these online technologies affect political communication and political behavior. She is also interested in political advertising and media framing of political events.