The Media Impact on Benedict College Student Voting Behavior in the 2008 Presidential Election

A Senior Thesis Presented

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

by

Langford Carlile Wiggins III

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CERTIFICATE OF ACCEPTANCE

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Has been accepted by the Faculty of English, Foreign Language, and Mass Communication

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Introduction

“At approximately 10:00 p.m. Central Time, when giant television screens on the lawn displayed CNN’s report of Obama’s apparent win over Republican rival John McCain, the crowd roared” (Jackson, Dorton, &Heindl, 2010 p. 40). This was the result of the long running, strategic campaign using the media as Obama’s main tactic for reaching youth voters. Based on the media outlets used by Barrack Obama in the 2008 Presidential Election, the most impacting media outlet used by Benedict College student Seniors will be determined through critical research, allowing the public to grasp a better understanding of how to obtain the youth vote.

Students in college today are known for being heavily involved in new digital technology, such as social networking, the Internet, and cell phones; however, they are not known for going to the polls. Barrack Obama noticed this trend and targeted this group by combining their love for new digital technology and his desire to become the first African American President of the United States.

Other studies have been conducted to gather information on the impact media has on voters. A study entitled “Effect of Media on Voting behavior and Political Opinions in the United States” conducts two survey to identify the impact media has on voting behaviors and political opinions. The researchers sends a survey to 3,347 households in Virginia prior to the Gubernatorial election in November 2005. This survey questioned the respondents’ use of the Washington Post and Times.

 After discovering that 3,347 respondents did not receive either newspaper, the researchers disseminated one the two newspapers to the households for ten weeks. One week post election the researchers surveyed the households asking the respondent if they voted in the November 2005 election, and which candidate they selected or preferred (Bergan, D., Gerber, A., Karlan, D. 2008).

Upon reviewing the data, the researchers concluded that there was no effect on knowledge of political events after receipt of the newspapers. However, there was a significant increase of support for the Democratic candidate resulting in a 7% increase in the chances a individual would vote for the Democratic candidate (Bergan et al,.2008).

 This study proves that media does not affect the knowledge of political events but instead the voting behavior. With this knowledge one could ask, how do I use media to reach the college voter? In the 2008 Presidential election all forms of media was used to campaign for each candidate. Obama understood the use of media and was determined to use media to reach the masses, in doing so he was able to reach the college voter.

Literature Review

College students today “use technology as a device to define them, draw them together, bond them…, in part because they are constantly connected to their friends and family through digital media” (Jackson et al., 2010 p. 43). With this knowledge, Obama’s campaign platform discussed changes, and during a time of change within technology, he found his strategy to reach the masses. “During a transition, he vowed to tap new technologies to communicate with the masses, and his staff dreamed of using the Internet and video to bypass the press and speak directly to the American people” (Lee 2008). After vowing to reach the American people, by way of technology, the college student voter has become the target audience.

Obama’s use of new media was most effective when he decided to announce, via text message, Joe Biden as his running mate (Jackson et al., 2010 p. 43). With the help of his staff, he was able to apply the use of mass text messaging, which created a personal bond between Obama and the people.

The use of the my.barackobama.com was another form of media used in the campaign. This website was used as a facilitator for local activist to raise money, plan events, and canvass neighborhoods. The campaign used this website as the primary means of connecting to its supporters (Jackson et al., 2010, p. 43).

The Washington Post crowned Obama “The King of Social Media”. With Obama having 844,927 friends on MySpace and 118,107 followers on Twitter (Lardinois 2008), compared to the other candidates, there was no questioning the title.

In an article titled “Surveys, Surveys and More Surveys,” Lynne M. Connelly, PhD, RN discusses the considerations in conducting surveys. “She explains her concerns on several points related to surveys, including data collection methods, identifying the things needed from the audience, writing meaningful items that address only one idea per item, and using clear and unambiguous language and avoiding technical terms and jargon” (Connelly 2011). This article provides a detailed outline of the needs of a successful survey. With the use of this source and the use of a survey, the media preference will be determined among college voters.

In conducting a survey, one must have knowledge of the information needed from a particular audience, according to Connelly’s basic principles of good survey design (Connelly 2011). To determine the information needed from the audience one must have an understanding of the purpose. The purpose of this research is to identify the media preference among Benedict College Students in regards to the 2011 Presidential Election. With the information found by conducting secondary research one can determine the media outlets used during the 2011 Presidential Election by President Obama, such as the Internet, cell phones, social networks, and television and radio. This information will be used to generate questions for the survey as the primary research, to determine the overall opinion of the audience.

The information gathered from the audience will depict the overall findings and conclusion of the research. The information gathered from the audience must be of a precise collection of data. Writing meaningful items that address only one idea per item is a useful technique used to generate question for a precise collection of data. For example, the response to an item “Are you currently enrolled at Benedict College and are you a Senior?” would not elicit a clear response. The answer would refer to the respondent’s enrollment status at Benedict College or classification. To prevent misunderstandings in the collection of data process, one must present questions that are meaningful and address one idea per item. Instead of asking “Are you currently enrolled at Benedict College and are you a Senior?” one should ask the two questions in two separate items, allowing the respondent the ability to provide a meaningful response that can be utilized in the data collection.

The language used in the survey must be clear and unambiguous in regards to the interpretation of the questions. The data collected from the survey must derive from one clear idea and purpose of the research. If information collected from a group is based off of multiple interpretations of one question, the data collected will not support the overall purpose of the research being conducted. The use of professional jargon and technical terms not used by the general audience will also hinder ones research due to the lack of comprehension by the audience. Questions may be misconstrued due to unclear language and the use of unfamiliar technical jargon, which result in inaccurate answers and, therefore, an unsound conclusion.

Methodology

Journals, articles and websites were used to create the Literature Review to gain an understanding of President Obama’s campaign. The information gained was helpful in developing a survey with useful questions that would determine, among a sample, the impact media has on college student voting. Survey questions were developed with the guidance of professors to ensure that the questions were valid and unbiased. The college students that will be responding to the survey consist of a random sample of senior students at Benedict College. This age group of students was selected because they were the only students present and eligible to vote during the 2008 Presidential Election. The sample of students recruited to respond to the survey was found in classes offered only to Senior students, for example, Senior Seminar and Research Methods.

A survey used of a convenience sample was constructed to explore the impact and the use of media among a small group of students at a large HBCU.

The following information details a brief rationale for reach survey question.

Question 1:

 Are you currently a Benedict College Senior?

In order to show the media outlets impact on college student voters, the student must have been enrolled in college in 2008 during the 2008 Presidential Election. If enrolled at Benedict College during 2008 the respondent would be currently a Senior.

 Question 2:

 Did you vote in the 2008 Presidential Election?

In order to show the significant impact of media outlets it would be necessary for the respondent to have voted in the 2008 election.

Question 3:

 Which of the following media outlets are you familiar?

Social Networking Internet Cell phones Television/Radio

The respondent’s familiarity

 Question 4:

 Do you recall any of the following media outlets being used in the 2008 Presidential Election?

This questions shows what media were recalled by the respondent. If the respondent does not recall any media outlets being used, they are unable to complete the survey because the media outlets have no impact on their voting.

 Question 5:

 How often do you recall seeing the following media outlets being used in the 2008 presidential Election?

If a respondent was able to vote and recalled the media outlets being used in the election, they would be able to recall how often they saw the media outlets being used in the campaign.

Question 6:

 Rank the media outlets from 1 to 4, with 1 being the most impacting and 4 being the least.

This question will show the most and least impacting of the media outlets mentioned. The response to the question will represent the student body of Benedict College.

Question 7:

Did the media outlets mentioned above persuade you to vote?

This question will determine if the student body feels that media outlets have the capabilities to persuade a college voter.

A few factors placed restrictions on how the sample was qualified. The most important factor is the students qualifying to vote in the 2008 Presidential Election. This factor limited the amount of respondents to the survey.

Survey distributed among Benedict College Students

|  |
| --- |
| Circle all that apply.  |
| Sex:  **Male Female**  |
| Age: **18-20 21-25 26+** |
| Race:  |
| 1. Are you currently a Benedict College Senior? **Yes No** |
| 2. Did you vote in the 2008 Presidential Election? **Yes No** |
| 3. Which of the following media outlets are you familiar?Social Networking Internet Cell Phones Television/Radio |
| 4. Do you recall any of the following media outlets being used in the 2008 Presidential Election?Social Networking Internet Cell Phones Television/Radio |
| 5. How often do you recall seeing the following media outlets being used in the 2008 presidential Election?**Social Networking**Never Sometimes Most of the time Always**Internet**Never Sometimes Most of the time Always**Cell Phones**Never Sometimes Most of the time Always**Television/Radio**Never Sometimes Most of the time Always |
| 6. Rank the media outlets in order from 1 to 4, with 1 being the most impacting and 4 being the least impacting. **Social Networking\_\_\_\_\_Internet\_\_\_\_Cell Phones\_\_\_\_Television/Radio\_\_\_\_** |
| 7. Did the media outlets mentioned above persuade you to vote? **Yes No**  |

Data Collection

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Respondents | SexM or F | Age | Race | Q1Y or N | Q2Yes or No | Q3Social NetworkingInternetCell phones T.V. | Q4 Social NetworkingInternetCell phones Television | Q7Y or N |
| R1 | M | 21-25 | African American  | Y | Y | ALL | INTERNET TELEVISION | Y |
| R2 | F | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | INTERNET TELEVISION | N |
| R3 | F | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET TELEVISION | Y |
| R4 | M | 21-25 | African American | y | Y | ALL | ALL | Y |
| R5 | F | 2y1-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET TELEVISION | Y |
| R6 | F | 26+ | African American | Y | Y | CELLPHONES | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET TELEVISION | N |
| R7 | F | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | ALL | Y |
| R8 | F | 18-20 | African American | Y | Y | CELLPHONES | SOCIAL NETWORK | N |
| R9 | F | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | TELEVISION | Y |
| R10 | F | 21-25 | African American  | Y | Y | SOCIAL NETWORKING | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET  | Y |
| R11 | F | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | INTERNET AND TELEVISION/RADIO | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET TELEVISION | Y |
| R12 | F | 21-25 | African American | y | Y | INTERNET CELLPHONES AND TELEVISION/RADIO | ALL | Y |
| R13 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET TELEVISION | Y |
| R14 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | INTERNET | SOCIAL | Y |
| R15 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | ALL | N |
| R16 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | ALL | Y |
| R17 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | ALL | Y |
| R18 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | SOCIAL INTERNET | Y |
| R19 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | SOCIAL NETWORKS INTERNET | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET CELLPHONES | N |
| R20 | M | 26+ | African American | Y | Y | ALL | SOCIAL NETWORK | Y |
| R21 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | INTERNET | ALL | Y |
| R22 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET TELEVISION | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET CELLPHONE | N |
| R23 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | N | n/a | INTERNET | n/a |
| R24 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | ALL | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET  | N |
| R25 | M | 21-25 | African American | Y | Y | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET CELLPHONES | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET TELEVISION | Y |
| R26 | F | 21-25 | African American | N | N | n/a | SOCIAL NETWORK INTERNET TELEVISION | n/a |
| R27 | F | 21-25 | African American | Y | N | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| R28 | F | 26+ | African American | Y | N | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| R29 | F | 21-25 | African American | Y | N | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| R30 | M | 26+ | African American | Y | N | n/a | n/a | n/a |

Data Analysis

How often do you recall seeing the following media outlets being used in the 2008 Presidential Election?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Social Network | Internet | Cell Phones | Television/Radio |
| Never | 1 | 0 | 6 | 1 |
| Sometimes | 8 | 6 | 14 | 1 |
| Most of the time | 7 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Always | 8 | 16 | 3 | 17 |

Rank the media outlets from in order from 1 to 4, with 1 being the most impacting and 4 being the least impacting.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Social Network | 5 | 6 | 11 | 3 |
| Internet | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 |
| Cell Phones | 3 | 3 | 4 | 15 |
| Television | 12 | 1 | 5 | 6 |

With careful research and the use of a survey one is able to determine results which impacts college student voting. Impacting factors that were used by President Barrack Obama in the 2008 Presidential election include; Social Networking, Internet, Cell phones, and Television and/or Radio. These media outlets happen to be most frequently used by college students as a form of mass communicating. The data analyzed will show the respondents voting status in the 2008 Presidential Election, students' relationship to the media, and the media outlet that is most and least impacting and recalled in result of the 2008 Campaign.

According to the survey conducted among Benedict College Students, one would conclude that most Benedict College Students voted during the 2008 Presidential Election. The survey shows that 80% of the respondents voted during this particular Presidential Election. With the 2008 Presidential Election being the first election for most of the students to participate, due to their eligibility, this survey shows the desire to vote among new college students is above 50%. 47% of the students surveyed were female students and 53% were male students. Out of the female students 78% voted and of the male students 82% voted, which express that within both sexes, the majority of the respondents voted in the 2008 Presidential Election.

The purpose of the survey is to find the impact media has on the Benedict College Student. In order to discover the impact the media has on the student there must be some knowledge of the relationship between the two. In the survey, one of the questions asks, "Which of the following media outlets are you familiar with?” The choices include Social Networking, Internet, Cell phones, and Television and/or Radio. The results show that at least 50% of the respondents are familiar with all of the media outlets with the Internet being the most familiar.

Another question asks, "Do you recall any of the following media outlets being used in the 2008 Presidential Election?” The results show that 77% of the respondents recall at least two of the four media outlets being used in the 2008 Presidential Election. This statistic shows that majority of the media outlets used by President Obama were seen and may have played a part in college student voting. The results also show that most female students recall the use of Social Networking and the Internet the most during the Campaign of President Obama, suggesting a female students' high usage of the Internet in general.

The most impacting media outlet used compared to the most recalled media outlet do not differ in this case. According to the respondents, Television/Radio happens to be the most impacting in voting and the most recalled during the campaign process of President Obama. 70% of the respondent recall "Always" seeing information on the 2008 Presidential Election via Television/Radio and 50% of the respondents find Television/Radio to be the most impacting.

However, with Television/Radio being the most recalled and the most impacting, the least preferred and recalled are also the same media outlets. 58% of the respondents recall Cell phones being "Sometimes" involved in the 2008 Presidential Election. Also, 66% of the respondents found Cell phones to be the least impacting of the four media outlets, despite President Obama's efforts to send mass text messages to his supporters.

President Obama used several media outlets to persuade college voters. As a result many media outlets were impacting for the Benedict College Students. It is possible that President Obama may not have targeted this audience in hopes of gaining new prospective voters, but with their support in certain Social Networks such as Twitter and Facebook, he was able to reach more and more daily.

Conclusion, Limitations and Implications for Future Research

When asking "what impacts the college student voter", one must have a general knowledge of what is used to generate voters. In the 2008 Presidential Election President Barrack used Social Networking, Internet, Cell phones, and Television and/or Radio to target youth voters. In order to determine the impact of the media outlets used in the 2008 Presidential Election, a survey was created to question the Benedict College Students. Some of the questions asked were designed to mainly gain an understanding of which media outlets were mostly used.

Based on the information gained from students of Benedict College, one was able to discover the most impacting media outlet used by President Obama. 70% of the respondent always recalled information being given via Television/Radio. With Television/Radio being the oldest form of media outlets being used in elections compared to the Internet, Social Networking and Cell phones it is expected to be the most commonly used and impacting. With news channels such as, ABC, CNN, and Fox, being openly involved in candidate debates, advertising and personal commentating, one has unlimited access to information and different views of the 2008 Presidential Election. Television's role in the 2008 Presidential Election was heavily impacting for the Benedict College Student and therefore a key component for electing President Obama.

Many limitations surfaced in my pursuit of primary research. I had a difficult time determining the main question I wanted to ask the audience. In the beginning I wanted to know the media preferences of the Benedict College Students, and I hoped this information would help me to discover the reason why most college students do not vote. I realized that this information would not pinpoint the overall reasoning behind student’s lack of voting but more so showed their personal liking to certain media outlets. Instead of asking for the media preference, I asked for the most impacting media used by President Obama during the 2008 Presidential Election.

Another limitation I faced was making sure the respondents carefully read each question on the survey. Many respondents looked over certain parts of the survey or misread different questions.

I recommend for anyone who would like to survey Benedict College students to carefully word the question as simple as possible. I would recommend one asks students to respond to their survey when the student has time and is not in a rush. Many of the respondents were in a rush to other classes and were not able to effectively respond to the survey.

Work Cited

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