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THE ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

POLITICAL SNAPSHOTS: THE UNDECIDED VOTER'S PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNET
BASED IMAGERY DURING THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

By

JOSEPH KUNZ

A paper submitted
in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree
in Communication & Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:

Winter Quarter, 20072

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Dedication

There have been many who have helped me throughout the course of my educational career. But while it would be impossible to thank them all here, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the entire staff within the Communication & Media Technologies department.

To my family: You stood by me through thick and thin. Every step of the way I always knew I had you to fall back on. I would not have become the person I am today without you.

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Abstract

In the 2004 election, public perceptions of President George W. Bush and Democratic nominee John Kerry were shaped through a new medium: the Internet. A survey of 124 registered voters in Monroe County of New York State found a contingent of undecided voters to be significantly smaller than previously thought and that 4.5% of the sample reported being influenced by still imagery viewed on the Internet. Negative images had a greater influence on the respondents than positive images, although the source of the image played a significant role in determining whether an image was deemed positive or negative.

American politics has gone through many different phases in its relatively short lifespan. From the formation of a governmental body in the latter half of the 18th century, to the incorporation of technology as a means of communication, political tactics employed by politicians to get elected have evolved to a point where images are more often used to sway voters than the written message (West, 2001). While communications media such as television have played a key role in this image-based revolution, the current dissemination of politically-charged imagery within the cyber-connected world of the Internet has reached an unprecedented level. Many, according to Campbell (2003), view this transition between television and the Internet as a dramatic crossroad between old world communication and instantaneous information.

The 2004 presidential race offered the American public a new perspective on the image-based world of political media. An image has the potential to transmit a vast amount of information to a viewer with just a single glance (Barry, 1997), and politicians have begun to influence voters with images designed to evoke a specific feeling or response. Using imagery as a political tactic is by no means a new phenomenon, however, and can be traced back to the late 1800's with the introduction of the *New York Sun*, "the nation's first mass medium" which eliminated the need for pamphlets and journals for a consistent source of public information (Flammang, Gordon, Lukes, & Smorsten, 1990, p. 47). The introduction of the Internet and incorporation of "real time" technologies have made it possible for the media-oriented politician to transfer vast amounts of political imagery to the American public with little or no delay. Thus the new medium has distinguished itself from television and other, older forms of media.

The image of George W. Bush standing on an aircraft carrier under a banner reading “Mission Accomplished” on May 1st, 2003 is an example of political imagery used to instill a



Figure 1.1

specific feeling (fig. 1.1). As visual imagery in general, according to Coleman and Wasike (2004), “is the primary way that emotion is communicated” (p. 459), political photographs have the power to extract an emotionally-based judgment of a candidate’s persona (Dillard & Meijenders, 2002).

While the Bush administration was not responsible for taking the photograph, it was, nonetheless, responsible for staging the photo-opportunity. Power, strength, and commitment were perhaps only a few of the feelings the Bush administration had hoped to gain through this “political snapshot.” But, as the death toll in the Iraqi war continued to mount, the image was often, in hindsight, construed as a misrepresentation of the facts (Toobin, 2006). As the Bush campaign discovered, the interpretation of an image depends largely in part upon the context in which it is delivered (Barry, 1997). As both sides of the political spectrum continued to argue back and forth as to the meaning of this particular image, the effects of the image combined with other forms of political imagery helped solidify the presence of the “undecided” voter during the 2004 election (Dionne, 2004).

During the 20th century two distinct voter categories arose: the “hardcore” voters and the “undecided” voters. During the 2004 election, the “hardcore” voter was defined as anyone unwilling to change his or her mind with regard to their intention to vote for John Kerry or

George W. Bush; the “undecided” voter was anyone who had yet to decide between either of the two candidates prior to the election. Both candidates acknowledged aiming their political imagery toward the key demographic of the undecided voter. In short, these undecided voters had the potential to influence the outcome of the election in either candidate’s favor. E. J. Dionne Jr. of the *Washington Post* reported that Republican pollster David Winston argued that “up to 30%” of the total number of voters were “in play” for the 2004 presidential election (Dionne, 2004).

Previous research has shown the importance of the Internet upon the voting public. Cornfield and Rainie (2003) reported that more and more people use the Internet to gather political information about a particular candidate. Similarly, Fallows and Rainie (2004) have shown that more and more people turn to the Internet for images and news that is unavailable in other media. Be that as it may, however, there is still insufficient evidence to determine the overall effects of political imagery upon the voting public at large, especially with regard to the undecided voter via the medium of the Internet. This study is an attempt to remedy that by investigating the influence of political imagery on undecided voters in the 2004 election.

Research Questions

- RQ1 To what extent did undecided voters report their vote was influenced by still imagery viewed on the Internet during the 2004 presidential election campaign?
- RQ2 To what extent did self-reported voter perception of negative imagery affect the decision of the “undecided” voter regarding the 2004 presidential election?
- RQ3 To what extent did self-reported voter perception of positive imagery affect the decision of the “undecided” voter regarding the 2004 presidential election?

RQ4 To what extent is a “heavy” Internet user’s perception of a political candidate different from that of a “heavy” newspaper reader’s perception of a candidate?

RQ5 To what extent does the source of an image influence voter perception of the image?

Project Rationale

The social contribution of this project is to attempt to address the lack of knowledge concerning the affects of the Internet on the voting public and the role of imagery. In 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 84.5% of the country lacked a four-year college education. As researchers have found, the higher an individual’s level of education, the greater the likelihood of that individual questioning the validity of pictorial information (Barry, 1997). Likewise, according to Faler (2005) of the *Washington Post*, “those with bachelor's degrees or an advanced degree voted at much higher rates (80 percent) than those with high school degrees (56 percent) and those without a diploma or its equivalent (40 percent.),” (para. 6). Since the likelihood of voter participation increases as the level of education increases, it follows that the chance of political imagery having an uncritical response from an individual increases as the level of education decreases (Kellough, 2007). This project is designed to provide further insight into the layperson’s perception of the Internet as a communications medium while striving to increase awareness of the layperson’s own political orientation.

Serving as an educational tool to help stimulate public interest in politically-oriented imagery associated with future presidential election campaigns, the present study aims to increase understanding of the effects of political advertising and campaigning via the Internet. By focusing on respondents’ personal biases towards various misrepresentations, the study

attempts to increase general awareness regarding political imagery and produce useful findings associated with political communication and the undecided voter.

While a great deal of scholarly data exist regarding political imagery associated with such media as television and newspapers, relatively little has been collected relating specifically to the Internet. As political campaigning over the World Wide Web (on a presidential scale) has been in effect since the 2000 presidential election campaign, contributions to scholarly literature have been slim. This lack of scholarly research accentuates the need for an in-depth study of this new medium. This research follows previous studies on mediated political imagery and extends those findings to the 2004 presidential campaign by including Internet imagery.

Personally, I feel that political media have been less than honest with the American public, particularly in their use of imagery. I believe it is necessary to promote a more informed opinion by exposing the partisan goals of political imagery and to highlight the discrepancies between the intended use of an image and the perceived meaning of that image. Consequently, the overall goal of this study is to assess the undecided voter's perception of political imagery associated with the Internet so as to produce a greater understanding of the effects of this "new" medium.

Literature Review

The use of the Internet for political purposes is a relatively new phenomenon. First introduced during the 2000 presidential campaign, research has been limited. However, investigation of imagery via television and its effects on the mass public, especially with regard to advertising, has been abundant. Hofstetter (1978) examined the 1972 presidential campaign via a national survey to determine "the effects of television exposure on viewer perceptions of

candidate imagery, personality, issue position and proximity and political information” (p. 562). The study helped to lay the ground work for further research suggesting that political advertising may intensify “pre-existing images, issue positions and candidate perceptions” (p. 565).

As is the case with any closely contested election, the 2004 presidential campaign saw the rise of a group of individuals who had the ability to swing the election in one direction or another. This group of individuals, known as “undecided voters” not only created a buzz within the journalistic community (Dionne, 2004) but were targeted for a tremendous amount of political imagery aimed directly toward their specific demographic. *The Pew Internet and American Life Project* produced three projects specifically addressing politics and the Internet: “Presidential Campaign Advertising on the Internet” (Cornfield, 2004) “The Internet as a Unique News Source” (Fallows & Rainie, 2004), “Election 2006 Online” (Rainie & Horrigan, 2007).

Fallows and Rainie (2004) presented dramatic conclusions regarding the spread of news on the Internet. Finding that a significant number of Americans are looking toward the Internet for coverage of news and images not found in other mainstream areas the survey reported that 72% (or 92 million) of adult Internet users receive news-related content through the Internet, and “on any given day, about 27% of online Americans are gathering news on the Internet” (p. 2). While there is a strong relationship between the Internet and television, still pictures constitute most of the imagery associated with the Internet. Therefore, the “snapshot,” or single-frame perceptions related to photojournalism begins to play a more prominent role. While single-framed images are often accompanied by text-based information, photojournalists attempt to tell a story with their images resulting in interpretations from a single frame. In contrast, television interpretation comes from many frames strung together.

Photojournalism as defined by Newton (2001) as “a descriptive term for reporting visual information via various media” (p. 5). This definition, however, is somewhat vague considering the current forms of media available. Photojournalistic tendencies reported by various online news outlets such as CNN and BBC reflect a different context in photojournalism than the one Newton defines. The Internet is a far less restrictive medium regarding graphic or disturbing images than newspapers or televised news broadcasting (Fallows & Rainie, 2004). According to Fallows and Rainie (2004) “significant numbers of Americans are turning to the Internet for news coverage and images they cannot find in the mainstream media” (p. 2). As such, the images associated with photojournalism within the context defined by Fallows and Rainie are often used in political campaigning on the Internet. While political imagery and political advertising are two separate categories, images taken by photojournalists are often used by politicians and interest groups alike to “advertise” their positions (e.g. the “Mission Accomplished” banner) on the Internet (Fallows & Rainie, 2004).

Michael Cornfield, however, has reported that “the presidential campaigns have virtually ignored the Internet as an advertising medium” (p. 1). But while he reports that campaigns have only spent \$2.66 million in 2004 on Internet banner ads, resulting in “less than 1% of the buy for television ads in the top 100 markets” (p. 1), he fails to account for the fact that Internet advertising is far less expensive than television advertising. For example, according to the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), the average price for a 30-second television advertisement in 2003 cost \$372,000; the average price of an Internet banner ad, on the other hand, according to the AAAA, cost on average of \$100 per 10,000 banner impressions (“Advertiser’s Impact,” 2004). Regardless of the effectiveness of each medium, a dollar-to-dollar

comparison is too ambiguous to reveal any reliable data. This limitation leads readers to believe that Internet advertising is ineffective, and therefore, ignored by politicians. While the effectiveness of the Internet as a political advertising tool remains to be seen, comparing television spending to Internet spending is unfair. Instead of comparing dollars to dollars, Cornfield should have compared the total amount of advertising in each medium to draw a more accurate comparison.

Though presidential campaigns have increased their advertising budgets since the 2000 elections, candidates have only just begun to tap into the many features the Internet has to offer (Cornfield, 2004). Both parties, according to Cornfield (2004), have amassed information regarding personal traits of voters, consumer preferences, and behaviors of over a 100 million citizens. Advertisements have the power to “reach new, undecided, and wavering voters in the demographic and geographic niches where they are thought to reside” (Cornfield, 2004, p. 3). Cornfield’s analysis of more than 137 online political advertisements found that advertisements mostly consisted of graphics and slogans and were most notable in what the messages did not contain. For example, there were no political endorsements, no invitations to events, but some were found to be “clear forms of persuasion” as advertisements often linked one to short commercial-like endorsements.

As the findings of the Cornfield study are based almost entirely upon statistical analysis, there remains little room for interpretation relating to voter tendencies. Fallows and Rainie (2004), however, uses other means of data collection. Survey research conducted through telephone questionnaires found that Americans are turning to the Internet to receive various forms of news and imagery that are not found in mainstream sources. In contrast, the proposed

study asks if, how, and why the undecided voter was influenced by Internet-specific imagery. Focusing almost entirely upon war-related imagery, Fallows and Rainie (2004) suggest that most Americans show discomfort when viewing war related imagery; which, in turn, suggests that these images are having a direct effect upon the viewer's perception of the war in Iraq.

Research conducted by Coleman and Wasike suggest that when a picture attracts a reader it is better remembered than verbal information and allows for elaboration in cognition (p. 461). While the study focuses upon visuals in public journalism during the 2000 election between Al Gore and George W. Bush, the relationship between the Internet and imagery based campaigning remains strong in that, according to Wasike and Coleman (2004) "visual and verbal information can be pooled together" (p. 456) to achieve a greater understanding. Public journalism, as defined by the authors is "an approach designed to address issues that readers say are important rather than only those issues identified by expert journalists" (p. 458). Therefore, this research between traditional journalism and public journalism creates an interesting comparison between newspapers and television with the Internet. The Internet has largely been viewed as a forum of individuals who are able to move freely between issues that are of importance to them. Sources like newspapers and television, however, do not have this ease of movement. Subscribers are limited to reading only what journalists deem newsworthy.

A content analysis that examined the visual elements in public journalism conducted by Coleman and Wasike (2004) promotes Paivio's dual coding theory which explains how visual and verbal information can be combined together. Furthermore, the study uses Yankelovich's theory of public opinion to suggest a more thorough theory of public opinion regarding visual information. The findings suggest, "visual variables can be used to explain differences between

traditional and public journalism” (Coleman & Wasike, 2004, p. 471). The study also found that “public journalism newspapers...used more graphic elements to convey issues...than did traditional journalism” (p. 467). Visuals, however, can also be associated and analyzed alongside other media, such as imagery on the Internet compared to imagery in newspapers. As such, the proposed study will further extend the research of Coleman and Wasike by investigating the relationship between a heavy newspaper reader and a heavy Internet user.

Vreese (2004) studied the effects of frames in political news coverage on television to see if frames “affect our perception of issues and generate specific evaluations about politics” (p. 36). The news “frame,” or framing devices as defined by Vreese consist of the “headline, introduction, and lead-outs” (p. 37). The study found that television frames in news coverage have the ability to “direct viewer’s thoughts when conceiving of a contemporary political issue” (Vreese, 2004, p. 45). As visual imagery covered on televised news broadcasts is most often placed on Websites associated with the station, the findings of Vreese can be allocated to include Internet imagery.

While research associated with television can have enormous benefits, research concerning the effects of the Internet in political participation has other, more specific benefits. Stanley and Weare’s (2004) study for example, helped to “clarify the relationship between Internet use and political participation” (p. 503). By examining an online discussion forum, the authors found that Web-based discussions promoted decision-making qualities concerning political interest within participants. As the current study relates to the undecided voter and the various influences of the Web upon them, the study shows a relationship between Web users and

their ability to allow Internet-based media to affect their behavior, just as this study seeks to relate the effects of the political imagery to the undecided voter.

Stromer-Galley and Foot (2002) empirically tested U.S. citizens ability to distinguish between “the media and human interaction components of the Internet” (paragraph 1). They also explore the role that the Internet plays in the campaign process and to what extent the American citizens play a part in the interactive, online campaigning process. Focus groups found that participants viewed candidate Websites as offering citizens more opportunities to participate in the campaigns than with any other form of media.

The present study attempts to determine which kind of voters, decided or undecided, use these aforementioned opportunities to participate. It will allow for an assessment to be made regarding the power of the Internet upon the American citizen. Candidates control what information is seen through their Websites and according to Stromer-Galley and Foot (2002), “campaigns have the power to determine the level and the kinds of interaction citizens hold with them” (paragraph 63). This observation, however, underscores the importance of a systematic study upon the effects of the imagery on Internet users.

Research conducted by Cornfield and Rainie (2003) gathered data via questionnaires distributed to managers and communications directors of campaigns in closely contested races and content analyzed campaign information as it appeared on the Internet portal home pages of AOL, MSN, and Yahoo. Also, 102 candidate Web sites were content analyzed alongside a study from the Institute for Politics and Democracy on the Internet (IPDI) which monitored online campaign activity for newsworthy developments. An appendix with an empirical analysis of

online voting behavior with a “typology of online political information seekers” was also included (p. 3).

According to this study, “campaigners have always tried to reach voters in order to win elections” (Cornfield & Rainie, 2003), p. 3) and the evidence has shown that the world of political cyberspace has been populated by “tentative campaigners and wandering citizens” (p. 3), although these classifications remained highly ambiguous. The report found that candidates in the 2002 elections who are in closely contended races have succeeded in using various aspects of the Internet to conduct research and to communicate with news sources. The online campaign, however, missed the chance to, according to “build public confidence about the role of money in their campaigns by leaving it to others to package their financial disclosure data” (Cornfield & Rainie, 2003, p. 10). While the study found that the financial disclosure of the candidates played a small role in helping undecided voters make their decisions, the authors estimate that 46 million Americans received political news online - an increase of 13 million from 2000 to 2002. Similarly, a study conducted by Rainie and Horrigan (2007) found the following:

The number of Americans who got most of their information about the 2006 campaign on the Internet doubled from the most recent mid-term election in 2002 and rivaled the number from the 2004 presidential election year. In all, 15% of all American adults say the Internet was the primary source for campaign news during the election, up from 7% in the mid-term election of 2002 and close to the 18% of Americans who said they relied on the internet during the presidential campaign cycle in 2004. (p. 1)

This study, as well as the previous one, shows that Americans are increasingly going to the Internet to find political news information and the following chart shows the growth of the Internet on the American public (Table 1) (Rainie and Horrigan, 2007, p. 2).

Table 1

Americans Relying on Internet for Political News*

Primary Sources	1992	1996	2000***	2002	2004	2006
Television**	82%	72%	70%	66%	78%	69%
Newspapers	57%	60%	39%	33%	39%	34%
Radio	12%	19%	15%	13%	17%	17%
Internet	NA	3%	11%	7%	18%	15%
Magazines	11%	11%	4%	1%	3%	2%

* Respondents were allowed to give two responses.

** Numbers do not add up to 100% because of rounding and multiple answers.

*** The 2000 results are based on registered voters only.

Source: Joint post-election survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project and the Pew Center for the People & the Press. November 2006. N=2562. Margin of error is $\pm 2\%$

While the Cornfield and Horrigan articles clearly showed the increase in Internet usage within a political spectrum, the effects of this increased usage are not readily apparent. A survey analysis highlighted two distinct developments in politics conducted online. The first was email and its importance in political communication (Cornfield & Rainie, 2003). The study reported that 66% of politically-engaged Internet users sent or received email related to the 2002 election campaign. The second development was that about three-quarters of those using the Internet for political purposes used interest group Web sites to access material relating to voting decisions.

The Cornfield and Rainie article is important for its findings regarding the importance of online activity on the voting public. When asked “whether any of the information...received online about the 2002 mid-term elections made [the voter] decide to vote for or against a particular candidate” (p. 23), 25% of respondents said they were influenced. The study fails, however, to accurately explain which online factors led to the respondents being influenced. This leads back to the proposed study. It is important to determine which factors of Internet usage contributed to the “influences” described.

The aforementioned research allows comparisons to be drawn between media, such as television and newspapers, and the Internet. While at first glance the effects of television on the mass public may be seen as comparable to the Internet, there still remain many distinct differences between the two media. These differences make an accurate comparison difficult, especially since no existing data accurately explain the effects of Internet imagery upon the undecided voter. It is increasingly important to find which factors, if any, lead undecided voters to cast their vote for a particular candidate. This study is designed to find out if Internet imagery may be one such factor.

Method

Participants

This study employed a mail survey distributed to registered voters in Monroe County, New York in March of 2006. Voter registration records were obtained in Monroe County and a random sample of the population was taken by assigning each voter a number and then using a random number table to determine the sample. Questionnaires were personalized by individual name and distributed through a mass mailing and followed up (if no response) by a non-personalized reminder one week later and then two additional personalized mailings two and four weeks later. Each of these latter mailings included an additional copy of the questionnaire. As of November 2nd, 2004 (election day), according to the Monroe County Election Office, there were a total of 433,210 registered voters in Monroe County. In an attempt to stay within a 95% confidence level at a four-point margin of error, a sample size of 600 registered voters was drawn. The *Creative Research System* (2003) formula to determine sample size ($\text{Sample size} = Z^2(p)(1-p)/C^2$) was used. Voters who registered to vote after November 2nd, 2004 were eliminated from the population.

Demographic Analysis

As the purpose of the study was to analyze data reported by registered voters who voted in the 2004 election, sample size was proportional to the total population of registered voters--not to the voters who voted in the 2004 election. The collected sample data should mimic the 79% of the Monroe County population (344,860 voters) who voted in the 2004 election. Participants were given an identification number that allowed them to be checked off a list when the survey was returned; this helped to avoid sending an additional survey to someone who had

already returned one. Also, all return envelopes were shredded to further eliminate the chance of participant identification. Non-response concerning the mailed questionnaires may produce known biases in survey-derived estimations. As a result, participants may vary demographically concerning subgroups within the population. These biases were compensated by weighing the demographical data collected in the surveys (questions 14, 16, and 29 through 33) to known demographics collected of the population through the United States Census Bureau as well as the Monroe County Census Bureau/Board of Elections. This was an attempt to limit population biases such as inappropriate sample sizes of race, age and voter alignment (i.e. Democrat or Republican) from the survey data.

Research Question 1

Variable 1: Self-Reported Undecided Voters

Survey questions 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18 were used to determine whether the participants were self-proclaimed undecided voters by asking them, both directly and indirectly, if they considered themselves to be within that particular category. Cross analysis between question 13 (which directly asks respondents if they considered themselves undecided prior to the election) and questions 15 through 18 were conducted to compare voters who admitted outright to being undecided voters with those who acknowledged a willingness to vote outside their registered party. Any response to question 15 other than number 7 (“I was never unsure as to whom to vote for.”) classified the respondent as an undecided voter.

Variable 2: Influence of Still Imagery Seen on the Internet

The influence of the vote by still imagery viewed on the Internet was operationally defined by survey questions 8, 10, and 26. Survey questions 8 and 10 used a 10-point scale to

determine the level of influence of positive and negative imagery. Response levels 1 through 4 were coded as an insubstantial influence, a response level of 5 as an undetermined influence, and a response level of 6 through 10 as a strong influence. Unlike questions 8 and 10, question 26 directly asked respondents if imagery viewed on the Internet influenced their voting decision. For the sake of clarity, “still imagery” was defined as any image found on the Internet and/or newspaper not directly associated with video footage.

Research Question 2

Variable 1: Self-Reported Perception of Negative Imagery

In the second research question: “To what extent did self-reported voter perception of negative imagery influence the decision of the undecided voter with regard to the 2004 presidential election,” the “negative perception” of imagery was operationally defined as any form of imagery personally associated with a negative connotation. Survey questions 7 and 8 asked respondents on a 1 to 10 scale what extent negative imagery influenced their voting decision. Response levels 1 through 4 were coded as an insubstantial influence, a response level of 5 as an undetermined influence, and a response level of 6 through 10 as a strong influence and therefore, a voting influence.

Variable 2: Voting Decision

The voting decision of the undecided voter was operationally defined by survey questions 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18 (see RQ1, variable 1).

Research Question 3

Variable 1: Self-Reported Perception of Positive Imagery

In the third research question: “To what extent did self-reported voter perception of positive imagery influence the decision of the undecided voter with regard to the 2004 presidential election,” the “positive perception” of imagery is operationally defined as any form of imagery personally associated with a positive connotation. Survey questions 9 and 10 asked respondents on a 1 to 10 scale what extent positive imagery influenced their voting decision. Response levels 1 through 4 were coded as an insubstantial influence, a response level of 5 as an undetermined influence, and a response level of 6 through 10 as a strong influence and therefore, a voting influence.

Variable 2: Voting Decision

The voting decision of the undecided voter was operationally defined by survey questions 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18 (see RQ1, variable 1).

Research Question 4

The fourth research question: “To what extent is a “heavy” Internet user’s perception of a political candidate different to that of a “heavy” newspaper reader’s perception of a candidate?” was designed to offer comparison data between Internet users and newspaper readers.

Variable 1: Heavy Internet User

The “heavy” Internet user was operationally defined by survey questions 6, 20, and 23. Question 6 screened respondents into which medium they used more frequently. Those who chose the Internet as their primary source for news-related information were placed into the “heavy” category. Question 20 asked respondents how frequently they used the Internet. User who reported using the Internet three to five times a week or more were coded as “heavy users.” Question 23 asked respondents on a 1 to 10 scale how important the Internet had been in helping

them determine how to vote. Responses of 6 through 10 also classified respondents as heavy Internet users. Any respondent found to be a “heavy” user in both categories was not counted within the tally records.

Variable 2: Heavy Newspaper Reader

The “heavy” newspaper reader was operationally defined by survey questions 6, 22, and 24. Again, for comparison purposes, question 6 screened respondents into which medium they used more frequently, and those who chose newspapers as their primary source for news related information were placed into the “heavy” category. Question 22 asked respondents how frequently they read newspapers. Users who reported reading a newspaper three to five times a week or more were coded as “heavy.” Question 24 asked respondents on a 1 to 10 scale how important newspapers were in helping them determine how to vote. Responses of 6 through 10 classified the respondent as a heavy newspaper reader. Any respondent found to be a “heavy” user in both categories was not counted within the tally records.

Variable 3: Perception of a Political Candidate

The “perception of the candidate,” was operationally defined via survey questions 11 and 12. Survey questions 11 and 12 specifically asked participants whether or not imagery viewed on the Internet or newspaper matched their own perception of a particular candidate. Response options of 1 through 10, with 10 being the strongest match and 1 being no match were offered. Responses of 6 or higher were considered a strong match. For comparison sake, the average response for all “heavy” newspaper readers and Internet users was compared to their response for questions 11 and 12.

Research Question 5*Variable 1: Source of the Image*

Specific images in survey questions 1 and 2 of John Kerry and George W. Bush found throughout the 2004 campaign were displayed to determine whether the image played a role in viewers' perceptions of the candidate. Survey questions 1 and 2 were divided into two groups. Within these groups, 300 participants received six images *without* accompanying citations (Group A) and 300 received images *with* accompanying citations (Group B). This attempted to limit biases regarding participant's feelings toward the image in a stand-alone setting compared to that of the image with citation. Each of the 600 randomly selected participants was given a number (1-600) and divided into two groups (A and B) via a random number table.

The six images (three of George W. Bush and three of John Kerry) used to answer RQ5 in survey questions 1 and 2 were divided into three subcategories: Images 5 and 6 represented a non-interest group— taken directly from cnn.com; images 1 and 3, an interest group— were taken from MichaelMoore.com and john.kerry meetup.com (Democrat interest group); and images 2 and 4 were taken from the interest group “Vietnam Veterans Against John Kerry,” (Republican interest group). The groups were compared to determine if the image was influencing the voter or if the source of the image was influencing the voter. All six images in Group A were placed in front of each participant without any knowledge of where the image came from. Group B, however, was given the same images accompanied with original citations.

Variable 2: Perception of the Image

The perception of the image was determined via a cross reference analysis between viewers' perception of positive and negative within survey questions 1 and 2. Voter alignment

was determined via respondent choice of positive and negative images as compared to the same images with and without citations to determine the level of influence.

Miscellaneous Items

Other questions on the instrumentation sheet were designed to answer basic demographics for comparisons between the Census Bureau and the Monroe County Board of Elections, as well as draw comparisons between each research question. Survey questions 6 and 29 through 33 were taken directly from Dilmann's (1978) *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The total design method*. Questions 13 through 15 were taken from a CNN 2004 elections results poll and questions 21 through 26 and 28 from Cornfield's (2004) questionnaire. All other questions were constructed specifically for this research project. As this study involves research with human subjects, all regulations and instructions posed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed. All data were compiled and analyzed via SPSS statistical analysis software accompanied with Microsoft Excel.

Results

Demographic Analysis

Of the 600 surveys sent, 124 were completed and returned. Demographically-based survey questions (questions 14, 16, and 29 through 33) were analyzed and compared with demographics collected through the United States Census Bureau and the Monroe County Census Bureau. The "Vote" column shows the percentage of people who voted; the registered column breaks down the percentage of Republican voters, Democrat voters and other voters. Sex was broken into two categories: male and female, and "Race" into three: Cau. for Caucasian,

Afr. for African American and Other. In the “Education” category, data were gathered for those who did not graduate high school (-H) and those who received a Bachelor’s degree and up (B+).

Table 2

	Vote	Registered			Sex		Race			Education	
		Rep.	Dem.	Other	Male	Female	Cau.	Afr.	Other	-H	B+
Survey	71%	47.6%	45.2%	6.5%	54%	46%	81.5%	10.4%	8.1%	0%	75.8%
Monroe County	79%	45.9%	47.5%	6.6%	48.6%	51.4%	80.2%	14.4%	5.4%	17%	32.2%
United States	60.7%	50.7%	48.3%	1%	48.9%	51.1%	75.6%	12.2%	12.2%	15.4%	27%

**Source: United States and Monroe Count Census Bureaus*

Research Question 1*Variable 1: Self-Reported Undecided Voters*

Of the 124 individuals who returned the survey, 88 (71%) voted. Of them, 31 (25%) described themselves as undecided within one year prior to the 2004 election (survey question 13). Of those undecided voters, 12 (9.6%) voted in the 2004 election. Of those who voted (survey question 15), 18 (20.5%) claim to have been unsure as to whom to vote for sometime prior to the election. Six (6.8%) claim to have decided 4 or more months prior to the election,

Figure 3.1: Q-16 & 17: Democrats, Republicans and Independents who voted for John Kerry or George W. Bush

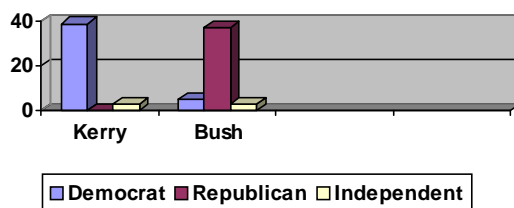
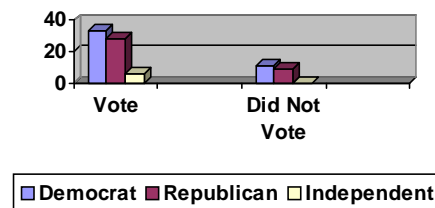


Figure 3.2: Q-18: Have you ever voted for a political candidate in a political party for which you are not registered?



four (4.5%) claim to have decided 2-3 months prior, four (4.5%) claim to have decided one month prior, Two (2.3%) claim to have decided two to three weeks prior and 2 (2.3%) claim to have decided one week before election day. After cross referencing question 13 to 15, all 12 who voted showed consistency in being an undecided; however, seven more respondents who voted expressed indecision prior to the election. This brings the total up to 19 (21.5%) undecided voters who voted in the election.

In figure 3.1, survey questions 16 and 17 show if respondents voted outside their registered parties. 39 Democrats voted for Kerry while 5 voted for Bush. Of those 5 Democrats who voted for Bush, only 2 claim to be undecided. All 37 registered Republicans cast their vote for Bush while the six independent voters cast three for Kerry and three for Bush. When

participants were asked if they had ever voted for a candidate outside of their registered party (question 18, figure 3.2), 96 (76.4%) said yes, while 22 (22.6%) said no. Out of the 96 respondents who answered yes, only 67 of these individuals actually voted in the election. In addition, only 12 of the 22 who answered no actually voted. Question 18B asks those who said yes to question 18 how many times they voted for a candidate outside their registered party. Table 3.2 shows the results.

Table 3.2

Question 18B		86
N	Valid Missing	38
Mean		4.17
Median		4.00
Mode		2
Std. Deviation		3.316
Range		23

Variable 2: Influence of Still Imagery found on the Internet:

Question 8 in the survey found that 76 (61.3%) showed no influence of negative imagery found on the Internet, 28 (22.6%) showed an undetermined influence while 20 (16.1%) showed a strong influence. Similarly, question 10 on the survey discussed the influences of positive imagery viewed on the Internet. 64 (72.7%) show no influence of positive imagery, 19 (21.6%) show an undetermined influence, and 5 (5.7%) show a strong influence of positive imagery. Question 26, which ask respondents if images on the Internet influenced their decision, 58.1% said no, 19.4% said yes, while 22.6% were unsure. When this data was cross referenced with those found to be “undecided,” four (21%) undecided voters were found to be influenced by still imagery. Three undecideds said negative imagery influenced them (question 8), none said

positive imagery influenced them (question 10), while four stated that imagery influenced them (question 26), and five others were unsure.

Research Question 2

Variable 1: Self-Reported Perception of Negative Imagery

Question 7 on the survey asks respondents to rank the influence of negative imagery not found on the Internet. It was determined that 83 (66.9%) were not influenced, 25 (20.2%) had an undetermined influence, while 16 (12.9%) had a strong influence. Similarly, question 8 in the survey found that 76 (61.29%) showed no influence of negative imagery found on the Internet, 28 (22.58%) showed an undetermined influence and 20 (16.13%) showed a strong influence. When these two questions were cross-referenced, it was found that 23 (26.1%) respondents who voted showed a strong influence of negative imagery.

Variable 2: Self-Reported Undecided Voters

Survey questions 13 and 15, along with cross referencing of survey questions 16, 17 and 18 found that 19 (21.5%) respondents who voted in the election were undecided (see results for RQ1 variable 1). Of those undecided voters, 7 (8%) claim to have been influenced by negative imagery.

Research Question 3

Variable 1: Self-Reported Perception of Positive Imagery

For question 9 on the survey, 70 (79.6%) of the respondents show no influence, 14 (15.9%) show an undetermined influence and 4 (4.5%) show a strong influence. Similarly, question 10 on the survey discussed the influences of positive imagery viewed on the Internet. 64 (72.7%) show no influence of positive imagery, 19 (21.6%) show an undetermined influence,

and 5 (5.7%) show a strong influence of positive imagery. When these two questions were cross-referenced, it was found that 8 (9%) of the respondents who voted showed a strong influence of positive imagery.

Variable 2: Self-Reported Undecided Voters

Survey questions 13 and 15, along with cross referencing of survey questions 16, 17 and 18 found that 19 (21.5%) respondents who voted in the election were undecided (see results for RQ1 variable 1). Of those undecided voters, 2 (2.3%) claim to have been influenced by positive imagery.

Research Question 4

Variable 1: Heavy Internet User

Question 6 on the survey found that 38 (30.6%) respondents use the Internet as their primary source for news related information. Question 20 found that of those 38 respondents who use the Internet as their primary source for news related information, an additional 6 (4.8%) of the respondents use the Internet at least three to five times a week. Question 23 found an additional 4 (3.2%) respondents considered to be “heavy” users. When cross-referencing of questions 6, 20 and 23 was completed, a total of 48 (38.7%) were found to be “heavy” Internet users. Of the 48, however, only 31 voted in the election. After eliminating those who claim to be both heavy users of the Internet and newspaper (8 in total), there were a remaining 23 “heavy” Internet users that voted in the 2004 election.

Variable 2: Heavy Newspaper Reader

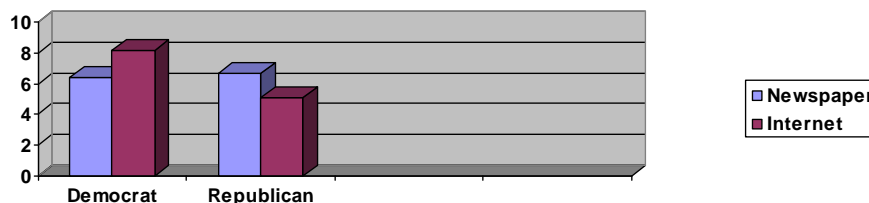
Question 6 on the survey found that 39 (31.5%) respondents read the newspaper as their primary source for news related information. Question 22 found that of those 39 respondents

who use the newspaper as their primary source for news related information, an additional 8 (6.5%) of the respondents read a newspaper at least three to five times a week. Question 24 found that an additional 2 (1.6%) respondents considered to be “heavy users.” When cross-referencing of questions 6, 22 and 24 was completed, a total of 49 (39.5%) were found to be “heavy” users. Of the 49, however, only 40 voted in the election. After eliminating those who claim to be both heavy users of the Internet and newspaper (8 in total), there were a remaining 32 “heavy” newspaper readers that voted.

Variable 3: Perception of a Political Candidate

Of the 23 “heavy” Internet users, 14 were Democrats and 7 were Republicans. All of those who were considered “heavy” users voted for a candidate within their own contingency. Responses for questions 11 and 12 were averaged. Democrats averaged 6.4 for the newspaper and 8.2 for the Internet; Republicans averaged 6.7 for the newspaper and 5.1 for the Internet.

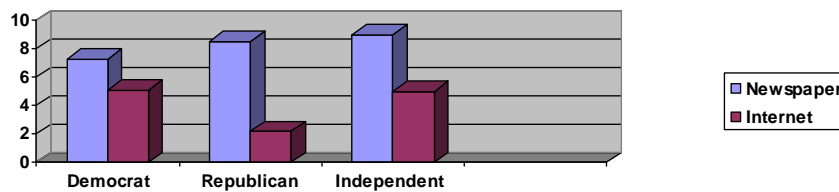
Figure 3.3: Heavy Internet User's Perceptions of a Candidate Compared to their Perception of a Candidate in a Newspaper



Of the 32 “heavy” newspaper readers, 12 were Democrats, 19 were Republicans and 1 was an independent. All of those who were considered “heavy” users voted for a candidate within their own contingency. Responses for questions 11 and 12 were averaged. Democrats averaged 7.3 for the newspaper and 5.1 for the Internet; Republicans averaged 8.5 for the

newspaper and 2.2 for the Internet; the independent heavy newspaper reader gave a 9 to the newspaper perception and a 5 to the Internet.

Figure 3.4: Heavy Newspaper Reader's Perceptions of a Candidate Compared to their Perception of a Candidate on the Internet



Research Question 5

Variable 1: Source of an Image & Variable 2: Perception of the Image

The following graphs show the number of respondents to both surveys (Groups A and B):

Figure 3.5: Group A

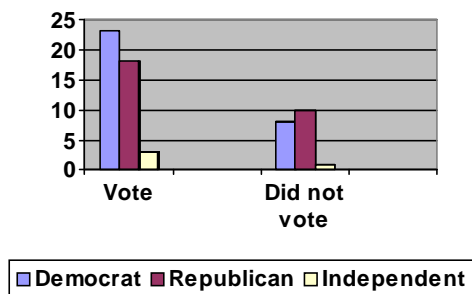
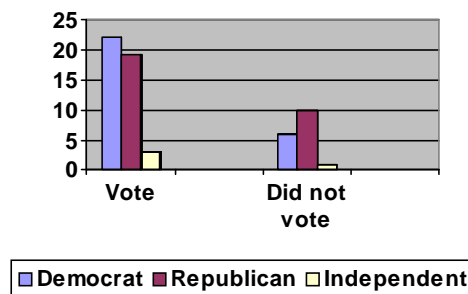


Figure 3.6: Group B



Survey

Questi

on 1:

Images

5 and

6: Non-interest group

Survey question 1 from group A (those who received images without citations) found that image 5 (Table 3.3) was considered negative by 24 (38%) of the respondents. Of those 24 respondents, 18 voted: 7 Democrats, 9 Republicans and 2 independents. 2 Democrats, 3 Republicans and 1 independent comprised the rest. Similarly, those in group B (images with citations) found that image 5 was viewed as negative by 5 (8%) of the respondents. Of those 5

respondents, 4 voted: 3 Republicans and 1 Democrat (1 Democrat who did not vote also marked image five as negative).

Table 3.3

Group A: Image 5				Group B: Image 5			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	7/23	Dem.	2/8	Dem.	2/15	Dem.	1/6
Rep.	9/18	Rep.	3/11	Rep.	3/19	Rep.	0/10
Ind.	2/3	Ind.	1/2	Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2

Image 6 (Table 3.4) within group A was viewed as negative by 51 (78.5%) of the respondents, whereas image 5 in group B was viewed as negative by 30 (49.2%) of the respondents. Within group A, 23 (100%) of Democrats who voted, 10 (55.6%) of Republicans and 3 independents (100%) found the image to be negative. In group B, 15 (68.2%) of the Democrats who voted, 8 (42.1%) of the Republicans and 2 (66.7%) of the independents found the image to be negative.

Table 3.4

Group A: Image 6				Group B: Image 6			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	23/23	Dem.	8/8	Dem.	15/22	Dem.	3/6
Rep.	10/18	Rep.	6/11	Rep.	8/19	Rep.	1/10
Ind.	3/3	Ind.	1/2	Ind.	2/3	Ind.	0/2

Images 1 and 3: Interest Group – Democrat

Image 1 (Table 3.5) within group A was viewed as negative by 16 (24.6%) of the respondents, whereas image 6 in group B was viewed as negative by 45 (73.8%) of the respondents. Within group A, 11 (47.8%) of Democrats who voted, 0 Republicans and 0 independents found the image to be negative. In group B, 15 (68.2%) of the Democrats who voted, 15 (78.9%) Republicans, and 1(50%) independent found the image to be negative.

Table 3.5

Group A: Image 1				Group B: Image 1			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	11/23	Dem.	5/8	Dem.	15/22	Dem.	6/6
Rep.	0/18	Rep.	0/11	Rep.	15/19	Rep.	7/10
Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2	Ind.	1/3	Ind.	1/2

Image 3 (Table 3.6) within group A was viewed as negative by 17 (26.2%) of the respondents, whereas image 1 in group B was viewed as negative by 21 (34.4%) of the respondents. Within group A, 0 of the Democrats who voted, 10 (55.6%) Republicans and 0 independents found the image to be negative. In group B, 2 (9.1%) of the Democrats, 10 (52.6%) Republicans and 2 (66.7%) independents found the image to be negative.

Table 3.6

Group A: Image 3				Group B: Image 3			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	0/23	Dem.	0/8	Dem.	2/22	Dem.	2/6
Rep.	10/18	Rep.	6/11	Rep.	10/19	Rep.	5/10
Ind.	0/3	Ind.	1/2	Ind.	2/3	Ind.	0/2

Images 2 and 4: Interest Group – Republican

Image 2 (Table 3.7) within group A was viewed as negative by 17 (26.2%) of the respondents, whereas image 2 in group B was viewed as negative by 42 (68.9%) of the respondents. Within group A, 12 (52.2%) of the Democrats who voted, 0 Republicans and 0 independents found the image to be negative. In group B, 19 (86.4%) of the Democrats, 5 (50%) Republicans and 0 independents found the image to be negative.

Table 3.7

Group A: Image 2				Group B: Image 2			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	12/23	Dem.	5/8	Dem.	19/22	Dem.	6/6
Rep.	0/18	Rep.	0/11	Rep.	11/19	Rep.	5/10
Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2	Ind.	1/3	Ind.	0/2

Image 4 (Table 3.8) within group A was viewed as negative by 23 (35.4%) of the respondents, whereas image 2 in group B was viewed as negative by 21 (34.4%) of the respondents. Within group A, 4 (17.4%) of the Democrats who voted, 10 (55.6%) Republicans and 3 (100%) independents found the image to be negative. In group B, 15 (68.2%) of the Democrats, 0 Republicans and 3 (100%) independents found the image to be negative.

Table 3.8

Group A: Image 4				Group B: Image 4			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	4/23	Dem.	3/8	Dem.	15/22	Dem.	3/6
Rep.	10/18	Rep.	5/11	Rep.	0/19	Rep.	0/10
Ind.	0/3	Ind.	1/2	Ind.	3/3	Ind.	0/2

Survey Question 2

Images 5 and 6 – Non-interest Group

Survey question 2 (image 5) from group A (images without citation) found that 6 (9.2%) of the respondents found it to be positive, while 1 (1.6%) from group B (images with citations) found it to be positive. Within group A, 2 (8.7%) of the Democrats who voted, 1 (5.6%) Republican and 0 independents found the image to be positive. In group B, 0 Democrats, 1 (5.3%) Republican and 0 independent voters found the image to be positive.

Table 3.9

Group A: Image 5				Group B: Image 5			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	2/23	Dem.	2/8	Dem.	0/22	Dem.	0/6
Rep.	1/18	Rep.	1/11	Rep.	1/19	Rep.	0/10
Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2	Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2

Image 6 (Table 3.10) within group A was viewed as positive by 1 (1.5%) respondent, whereas image 2 in group B was viewed as positive by 2 (3.3%) of the respondents. Within group A, 0 of the Democrats who voted, 1 (5.6%) Republicans and 0 independents found the image to be positive. In group B, 0 of the Democrats, 1 (5.3%) Republican and 0 independents found the image to be positive.

Table 3.10

Group A: Image 6				Group B: Image 6			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	0/23	Dem.	0/8	Dem.	0/22	Dem.	0/6
Rep.	1/18	Rep.	0/11	Rep.	1/19	Rep.	1/10
Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2	Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2

Images 1 and 3: Interest Group – Democrat

Image 1 (Table 3.11) within group A was viewed as positive by 6 (9.2%) of the respondents, whereas image 1 in group B was viewed as positive by 13 (26.2%) of the respondents. Within group A, 2 (8.7%) of the Democrats who voted, 1 (5.6%) Republican and 0 independents found the image to be positive. In group B, 7 (31.8%) of the Democrats, 2 (10.5%) Republicans and 0 independents found the image to be positive.

Table 3.11

Group A: Image 1				Group B: Image 1			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	2/23	Dem.	2/8	Dem.	7/22	Dem.	2/6
Rep.	1/18	Rep.	1/11	Rep.	2/19	Rep.	1/10
Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2	Ind.	1/3	Ind.	0/2

Image 3 (Table 3.12) within group A was viewed as positive by 18 (27.7%) of the respondents, whereas image 3 in group B was viewed as positive by 14 (23%) of the respondents. Within group A, 14 (60.9%) of the Democrats who voted, 0 Republicans and 2

(66.7%) independents found the image to be positive. In group B, 9 (40.9%) of the Democrats, 1 (5.3%) Republicans and 0 independents found the image to be positive.

Table 3.12

Group A: Image 3				Group B: Image 3			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	14/23	Dem.	2/8	Dem.	9/22	Dem.	3/6
Rep.	0/18	Rep.	0/11	Rep.	1/19	Rep.	1/10
Ind.	2/3	Ind.	0/2	Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2

Images 2 and 4: Interest Group – Republican

Image 2 (Table 3.13) within group A was viewed as positive by 15 (23.1%) of the respondents, whereas image 2 in group B was viewed as positive by 20 (32.8%) of the respondents. Within group A, 0 of the Democrats who voted, 9 (50%) Republicans and 2 (66.7%) independents found the image to be positive. In group B, 0 of the Democrats, 10 (52.6%) Republicans and 1 (50%) independent found the image to be positive.

Table 3.13

Group A: Image 2				Group B: Image 2			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	0/23	Dem.	0/8	Dem.	0/22	Dem.	0/6
Rep.	9/18	Rep.	5/11	Rep.	10/19	Rep.	8/10
Ind.	2/3	Ind.	0/2	Ind.	1/3	Ind.	1/2

Image 4 (Table 3.14) within group A was viewed as positive by 6 (9.2%) of the respondents, whereas image 4 in group B was viewed as positive by 5 (8.2%) of the respondents. Within group A, 3 (13%) of the Democrats who voted, 1 (6%) Republican and 0 independents found the image to be positive. In group B, 2 (9%) of the Democrats, 1 (5.3%) Republican and 0 independents found the image to be positive.

Table 3.14

Group A: Image 4				Group B: Image 4			
Voted		Did not vote		Voted		Did not vote	
Dem.	3/23	Dem.	1/8	Dem.	2/22	Dem.	1/6
Rep.	1/18	Rep.	1/11	Rep.	1/19	Rep.	1/10
Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2	Ind.	0/3	Ind.	0/2

Discussion

Research Question 1

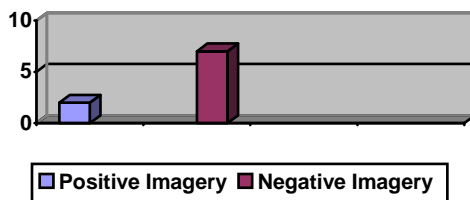
It has been reported by outside sources that as much as 30% of the population was undecided during the 2004 presidential election; this made this contingent of voters extremely valuable within political campaigning (Dionne, May 14, 2004). It has been found, however, that while 30% of the voting population may consider themselves undecided, according to Dionne (2004), the results from this study found that only 21.5% actually voted in the 2004 election (even less, only 9.6%, actually referred to themselves as undecided). Furthermore, only two undecided voters voted outside their registered party. Therefore, while people may consider themselves undecided and willing to vote outside their registered party, only a fraction of those individuals (2.3%) actually do. This lends itself to question the importance/value of the undecided voter.

With that said, however, when these undecided voters were asked if still imagery found on the Internet influenced their vote during the 2004 presidential election campaign, 4 undecided's admitted to being influenced (21% of the undecided population and 4.5% of the voting population). While this percentage might seem low, the number of votes that the 4.5% represents would have been enough to allow John Kerry to win the state of Ohio, which, in turn, would have caused John Kerry to win the election. In this manner, imagery found on the Internet

has proven significant in regards to the effects on the undecided voter. More research would need to be done to further validate these findings as the subgroups within the population data are relatively small with concerns to the undecided voter.

Research Questions 2 & 3

**Figure 4.1: Undecided Voters
Perception of the Influence of Positive
and Negative Imagery**



While the first research question found that imagery viewed on the Internet does play a role in the decision of an election, the second and third research questions are an attempt to determine if positive or negative perceptions of that imagery influenced the undecided voter. Over

three times as many people report being influenced by negative imagery when compared to positive imagery. Therefore, advertisements which paint an opponent in a negative light seem to be the most influential form of political imagery available. The same limitations in research question one, however, may be applied here as well. While 11 undecided voters (12.5% of the voting population) claim to be influenced either by positive or negative imagery, it is still a small number of respondents when compared to the population at large. Further research will need to be done to help validate these findings.

Research Question 4

The purpose of this research question was to draw comparisons between a heavy newspaper reader and a heavy Internet user. Of the voting population, there were 23 heavy Internet users and 32 heavy newspaper readers. Being that the Internet is still a relatively new medium for news related information, it makes sense that there are more heavy newspaper

readers than heavy Internet users. The data gathered for the “matched perception of the candidate for which you voted” was broken into three contingents: Democrat, Republican and Independent. A heavy Internet user’s perception was then compared to their own perception of the newspaper. Similarly, a heavy newspaper reader’s perception was compared to their perception of the Internet and that mediums’ ability to match their perception of the candidate for which they voted.

It was found that a heavy Internet user’s perception of a candidate averaged 7.3 out of 10. In contrast, a heavy newspaper reader’s perception of the Internet averaged 4.1 out of 10. There are several possible explanations to this – one being that heavy newspaper readers are not as trustworthy of the Internet. As noted in the literature review, many people are using the Internet to find images unobtainable within printed forms of media (Cornfield & Rainie, 2003). This may prove to be unsettling to those individuals who are comfortable receiving their news from an older, more trusted medium. Another possible explanation is the age difference between a heavy newspaper reader and a heavy Internet user. It was found that the average age of a heavy Internet user was 6 years younger (34) than that of a heavy newspaper reader (40). A possible explanation could be as the Internet and various forms of technology are implemented into society, the younger the individual the better the chance of that person having direct contact with technology (whether in school or in the workplace) (Rainie, 2007). Perhaps it is a combination of the two, trust and age, which accounts for the difference in perception. Consequently, it would appear that the longer the Internet exists, the more influential it will become. As today’s youth continues to use technology, the aforementioned statistics will undoubtedly begin to change as the youth of today becomes tomorrow’s voter.

While the perception of the Internet is significantly lower within the heavy newspaper reader's category, a breakdown within voter alignment also shows some noteworthy characteristics. Republicans were found to have the lowest matched perception of a candidate on the Internet. Republicans averaged 3.65 using both user categories. Democrats, on the other hand, averaged 6.65 using both user categories (see figures 3.3 and 3.4 within the results section). Possible causes for this difference in perception would need to be tested further before accurate conclusions are made.

Research Question 5

Figure 4.2: Images Viewed as Positive

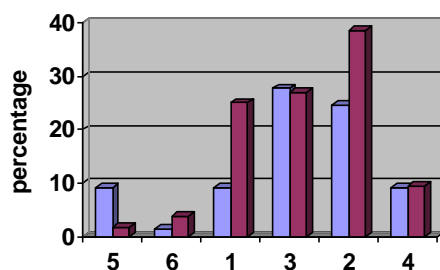
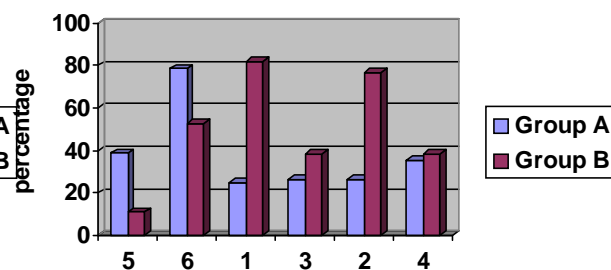


Figure 4.3: Images Viewed as Negative



Research question 5 was designed to see if the source of an image played a role in the perception of the image. Negative perception for images 5 and 6 lowered dramatically when respondents saw the source of the image presented along with it. As both image 5 and 6 are images that have been often associated with attack ads during the election and afterwards as well, seeing them associated with a legitimate source (CNN) could have taken the negative connotation away in favor of a more trusted source. Concerning the other images, voter alignment played a significant role in determining the perception of the image.

Democrats viewed image 2 (without citation) as negative 54.8% of the time. However, when Democrat respondents were shown the same pictures with its source, that number increased to 89.3%. While the picture alone was viewed as negative more than half the time, the source, which was in favor of George W. Bush, increased the amount of negative responses by Democrats over 30%. Likewise, image 1 without citations of George W. Bush was viewed as negative by Republican respondents 0% of the time, while with citations it was viewed as negative by 75.9% of Republican respondents. Similar results can be seen throughout the results section of RQ5. In this manner, it has been determined that the source of the image could very well be seen as important as the image itself. Also, this gives “legitimate” news sources a lot of power insofar as their responsibility to accurately portray a candidate’s intentions. As more people seem willing to view images from these sources as positive, it could prove relatively easy to paint a candidate in an inaccurate fashion and thus, eliminate them from an election.

With that said, of the images presented, more images were found to be negative than positive (323 compared to 108). This lends itself to furthering the results of RQ2 by showing that respondents are more sensitive to discerning negative imagery compared to positive. With that said, however, further testing needs to be done to see how significant/persuasive negative imagery is on the voting public.

Conclusion

The 2004 election between George W. Bush and John Kerry gave rise to a new form of politically active voter. Through the use of the Internet, the public perception of each candidate had the potential to be molded and shaped instantaneously (Dionne, 2004). Political communications experts have seen the steady rise of the Internet as a communications medium

and have also begun to give the Internet credit in influencing the undecided voter (Cornfield, 2003). Through the use of a mail survey conducted in Monroe County, New York, answers to the research questions associated with the undecided voter and political imagery were obtained.

While the undecided voter was found to be considerably less influential than previous research had thought, there still remains a contingent of voters that has the power to sway a close election. Similarly, there seems to be a positive correlation between negative imagery and the persuasive effects of the Internet; although more research would be needed to validate these claims. Furthermore, it has been found that the source of an image is exceptionally important in determining whether that image is deemed positive or negative, which gives “legitimate” news sources a considerable amount of power insofar as their ability to accurately portray a candidate. Finally, it appears that a heavy newspaper reader’s perception of the Internet is skewed significantly when compared to that of a heavy Internet user. As time wears on, and as the youth grows older and moves into the voting population, these perceptions (given mostly by “older” voters) of the Internet should change.

The limitations of this study are consistent with any other form of survey methodology. Self-reported data has a validity issue in that the researcher can only gather information concerning what subjects *say* they feel and what they *say* they do. There is no way of knowing if the information they claim to be true is in fact true. The mail survey has other limitations, however. Of the 600 mailed surveys, only 124 (20.7%) respondents returned the surveys. Also, the Monroe County area has a slightly higher voter turnout (78% compared to 61%) than the rest of the country and the education level of the respondents was significantly higher. Comparisons to the rest of the country will therefore have a validity issue. Also, this study was conducted a

year and half after the election of 2004; other studies should be conducted to limit the time elapsed following an election.

This study was designed to focus in on still imagery associated with Internet. Further research could be adopted to include video, sound clips and multimedia dimensions which help to enhance cognition (Barry, 1997). As server speed continues to improve, these multi-dimensional elements will be incorporated into news related Websites and banner advertisements on a more frequent basis. Hence, further studies could help elaborate on the similarities between television and the Internet.

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Appendix A:

Sources Searches

The search for writings related to political imagery on the Internet with reference to the undecided voter was conducted at Wallace Library at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York January 2005 – May 2007. Abstracting, indexing services as well as databases employed in the search method include: *ComIndex* (searched literature from 1970 to present), *ComAbstracts* (searched literature from 1966 to present), and *EBSCO Host* database which was searched with the following archives: *PsycArticles*, *PsycInfo*, *First Search*, *Academic Search Elite*, *ERIC*, *Newspaper Source*, *Almanac of American Politics 2006*, and *Military & Government Collection*. *The Einstein Library Catalog* (searched literature dating back to 1965), *Yahoo* and *Google* Internet search engines (searched all available literature), the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (searched literature from 1995 to present) and the *Pew Internet & American Life Project* (searched literature from 2000 to present) were also used. The following is a list of keywords and phrases used in the searches: Political imagery; undecided voter; Internet imagery; media persuasion; Internet and politics; television and politics; television + persuasion; third-person effect; third-person effect + politics; third-person effect + imagery.

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Appendix B:

Cover Letter and Survey



Imagery and the Internet

Joseph A. Kunz
959 Five Mile Line Rd. Webster, New
York 14580
585-576-6357

May 18th, 2006
(Current date)

(Name and address of recipient)

Dear (Insert Name):

My name is Joseph Kunz and I am a graduate student at the Rochester Institute of Technology. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. The data from this survey will be used as part of my graduate studies.

I would like your opinion on a category of voters known as the “undecided.” According to the media, during the 2004 presidential election the “undecided” voters had the power to sway the election in favor of John Kerry or George W. Bush. I am looking at how images on the Internet influence an undecided voter’s opinion of a candidate.

To make sure the results of this research accurately reflect your opinions, it is important to complete and return the survey. It shouldn’t take more than 10 minutes to fill out. To assure you of complete confidentiality, I have included an identification number located on the survey which will allow me to check your name off a list when the survey is returned. Your name or any other form of personal information will never appear in the survey results.

If you would like to have a summary of the results, please write “Results Requested” on the back of the return envelope. PLEASE DO NOT PUT ANY PERSONAL INFORMATION ON THE SURVEY ITSELF.

If you have any questions concerning this study or survey, please feel free to contact me by mail, email (jak1206@rit.edu), or by phone (585) 576-6357.

Thank you for all your help.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Kunz



Identification number:

Imagery and the Internet: Survey

Q-1 Which of the following pictures of George W. Bush and John Kerry do you believe represents a **NEGATIVE IMAGE**? (*Please circle the number(s) associated to your choice(s), you may circle as many as you want.*)

1.



2.



3.



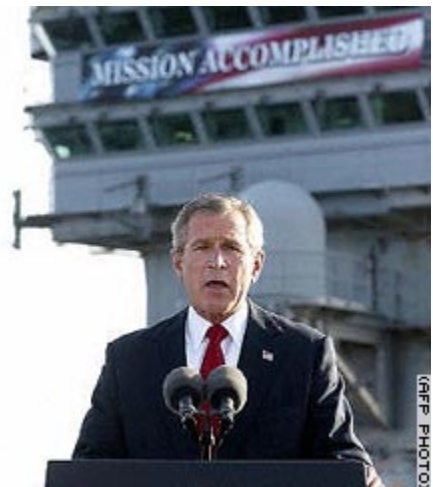
4.



5.



6.



Q-2 Now, instead of a negative image, which of the following pictures of George W. Bush and John Kerry do you believe represents a POSITIVE IMAGE? *(Please circle the number(s) associated to your choice(s), you may circle as many as you want.)*

1.

2.

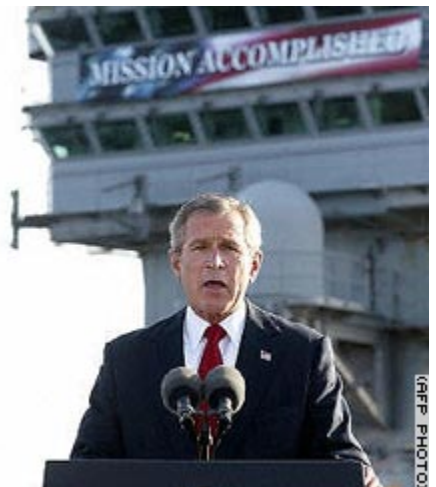
3.



4.

5.

6.





Identification number: 000

Imagery and the Internet: Survey

- Q-1 Which of the six following pictures of George W. Bush and John Kerry do you believe represents a **NEGATIVE IMAGE**? (*Please circle the number(s) associated with the image. You may circle as many as you want.*)

1.



SOURCE:
MichaelMoore.com

2.



SOURCE:
Vietnam Veterans Against John Kerry
Usvetdsp.com/jf_kerry.htm

3.



SOURCE:

johnkerry.meetup.com

4.



SOURCE:
Vietnam Veterans Against John Kerry
usvetdsp.com/jf_kerry.htm

5.



SOURCE:
CNN.com

6.



SOURCE:
CNN.com

Q-2 Now, using the same pictures from question 1, which pictures of George W. Bush and John Kerry do you believe to represent a POSITIVE IMAGE? (*Please circle the number(s) associated with the image. You may circle as many as you want.*)

1.



SOURCE:
MichaelMoore.com

2.



SOURCE:
Vietnam Veterans Against John Kerry
Usvetdsp.com/jf_kerry.htm

3.



SOURCE:
johnkerry.meetup.com

4.



SOURCE:
Vietnam Veterans Against John Kerry
usvetdsp.com/jf_kerry.htm

5.



SOURCE:
CNN.com

6.



SOURCE:
CNN.com

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

- Q-3 Thinking of right this moment, did any of the previous images influence your perception, either positively or negatively, of George W. Bush or John Kerry? (*Circle number*)

- 1. POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF JOHN KERRY**
- 2. NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF JOHN KERRY**
- 3. POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF GEORGE W. BUSH**
- 4. NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF GEORGE W. BUSH**
- 5. NO INFLUENCE**
- 6. NOT SURE**

- Q-4 Do you think these images (or ones similar to them) had an influence on the GENERAL PUBLIC'S vote during the 2004 presidential campaign? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the strongest influence and 1 being no influence, rank your answer. (*Circle one number*)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>least influence</i>									<i>strongest influence</i>

- Q-5 Did any of the previous images (or ones similar to them) influence YOUR DECISION as to whom to vote for during the 2004 presidential election? (*Circle one*)

- 1. YES**
- 2. NO**

- Q-6 Which media sources do you rely on the most for news related information? (*Rank your first choice number 1, your second choice number 2, and so forth until you have ranked all five sources*)

____ **TELEVISION**

____ **NEWSPAPER**

____ **RADIO**

____ **MAGAZINES**

____ **INTERNET**

- Q-7 To what extent did NEGATIVE IMAGERY (in any form of media OTHER THAN THE INTERNET) influence your decision as to whom to vote for in the 2004 election? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the strongest influence, and 1 being no influence, rank your answer. (*Circle one number*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
least influence *strongest influence*

Q-8 To what extent did imagery you saw portrayed in a NEGATIVE WAY ON THE INTERNET influence your decision as to whom to vote for in the 2004 election? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the strongest influence and 1 being no influence, rank your answer. (*Circle one number*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
least influence *strongest influence*

Q-9 To what extent did imagery portrayed in a POSITIVE way (in any form of media other than the Internet) influence your decision as to whom to vote for in the 2004 election? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the strongest influence and 1 being no influence, rank your answer. (*Circle one number*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
least influence *strongest influence*

Q-10 To what extent did imagery portrayed in a POSITIVE WAY ON THE INTERNET influence your decision as to whom to vote for in the 2004 election? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the strongest influence and 1 being no influence, rank your answer. (*Circle one number*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
least influence *strongest influence*

Q-11 If you voted in the 2004 election, did the imagery you saw on the INTERNET match your own perception of the candidate you voted for? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the strongest match and 1 being no match, rank your answer. (*Circle one number*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
no match *strongest match*

Q-12 If you voted in the 2004 election, did the imagery you saw in the NEWSPAPER match your own perception of the candidate you voted for? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the strongest match and 1 being no match, rank your answer. (*Circle one number*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
no match *strongest match*

Q-13 Within ONE YEAR PRIOR TO THE 2004 ELECTION (November 2003 to November 2004) campaign, did you at any point in time describe yourself as an undecided voter? (*Circle number*)

1. YES
2. NO

Q-14 Did you vote in the 2004 presidential election? (*Circle number*)

1. YES
2. NO

Q-15 If answered yes to question 14, at what point in time did you determine which presidential candidate you would vote for in the 2004 election? (*Circle one*)

1. ELECTION DAY
2. 1 WEEK BEFORE ELECTION DAY
3. 2-3 WEEKS BEFORE ELECTION DAY
4. 1 MONTH BEFORE ELECTION DAY
5. 2-3 MONTHS BEFORE ELECTION DAY
6. 4 PLUS MONTHS BEFORE ELECTION DAY
7. I WAS NEVER UNSURE AS TO WHOM TO VOTE FOR

Q-16 With which political party are you registered: (*Circle number*)

1. DEMOCRAT
2. REPUBLICAN
3. INDEPENDENT
4. GREEN
5. OTHER

Q-17 Who did you vote for in the 2004 presidential election? (*Circle number*)

1. GEORGE W. BUSH
2. JOHN KERRY
3. RALPH NADAR
4. OTHER

Q-17B If other, who?

Q-18 Have you at any point in time voted for a CANDIDATE in a political party for which you are not registered (for example: a registered Democrat voting for a Republican or vice versa.)? (*Circle number*)

1. YES
2. NO

Q-18B If answered yes to question 18, how many times have you voted outside your registered party? (*Please provide number in space below*)

Q-19 Just thinking about YESTERDAY, did you get a chance to use the Internet? (*Circle number*)

1. YES
2. NO

Q-20 In general, how often do you use the Internet? (*Circle number*)

1. SEVERAL TIMES A DAY
2. ABOUT ONCE A DAY
3. 3-5 DAYS A WEEK
4. 1-2 DAYS A WEEK
5. ONCE EVERY FEW WEEKS
6. LESS OFTEN

Q-21 Just thinking about YESTERDAY, did you get a chance to read a newspaper? (*Circle number*)

1. YES
2. NO

Q-22 In general, how often do you read the newspaper? (*Circle number*)

1. 2-3 TIMES A DAY
2. ABOUT ONCE A DAY
3. 3-5 DAYS A WEEK
4. 1-2 DAYS A WEEK
5. ONCE EVERY FEW WEEKS
6. LESS OFTEN

Q-23 How important, if at all, was the INTERNET in providing you with information to help you determine how to vote during the 2004 presidential election? On a scale from 1 to 10,

with 10 being the most important and 1 being least important, rank your answer. (*Circle one number*)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>least important</i>								<i>most important</i>	

Q-24 How important, if at all, have NEWSPAPERS been in providing you with information to help you determine how to vote during the 2004 presidential election? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most important and 1 being least important, rank your answer. *(Circle one number)*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>least important</i>								<i>most important</i>	

Q-25 Would you say that you are more likely to read an article, either on the Internet or in the newspaper, which has an image associated along with it? (*Circle number*)

1. YES
2. NO
3. NOT SURE

Q-26 Do you believe that images found on the INTERNET influenced your decision during the 2004 presidential election? (*Circle number*)

1. YES
2. NO
3. NOT SURE

Q-27 Do you believe that imagery found in the NEWSPAPER influenced your decision during the 2004 presidential election? (*Circle number*)

1. YES
2. NO
3. NOT SURE

Q-28 Do you believe that the GENERAL POPULATION is at risk to being misled by increased Internet usage? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest risk and 1 being the lowest risk, rank your answer. (*Circle number*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
lowest risk highest risk

Q-29 Sex: (*Circle number*)

1. MALE
2. FEMALE

Q-30 Age: _____

Q-31 Race: (*Circle number*)

1. AFRICAN AMERICAN
2. ASIAN
3. CAUCASIAN
4. HISPANIC
5. NATIVE AMERICAN
6. OTHER

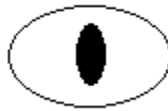
Q-32 What is your level of education? (*Circle number*)

1. NO FORMAL EDUCATION
2. SOME GRADE SCHOOL
3. COMPLETED GRADE SCHOOL
4. SOME HIGH SCHOOL
5. COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL
6. SOME COLLEGE
7. COMPLETED COLLEGE
8. SOME GRADUATE WORK
9. A GRADUATE DEGREE

Q-33 What is your household income? (*Circle number*)

1. 24,999\$ OR LESS
2. 25,000\$-49,999\$
3. 50,000\$-74,999\$
4. 75,000\$-99,999\$
5. 100,000\$+

Q-34 Additional comments:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Thank you for completing the survey!

Biographical Sketch

Son to James and Lucille Kunz, I was born December 6th, 1980 in Rochester, New York. My educational career started at Monroe Community College where I earned my Associate in Science in Liberal Arts. After winning the NJCAA Division III National Golf Tournament in 2001, I transferred to the State University of New York at Binghamton in 2002 with a full golf scholarship. Two years later, I earned my Bachelor of Arts in English. In 2004, I began work on a Masters in Science at the Rochester Institute of Technology. This thesis represents the final requirement for a degree in Communication & Media Technologies. After a brief stint as an apprentice within the Professional Golfers Association in 2005, I accepted an offer to become a New York City Teaching Fellow. While teaching junior high school English in a high-needs school within Queens, New York, I began working towards my permanent certification in June, 2006. Completion of a Masters in Education at Saint John's University is expected early in 2008.