The Influence of Mass Media on Voting Behavior: A Proposal for Sociological Research

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Introduction

We live in an age where society is always on the go. Naturally this makes the demand for information constant. One outlet we often turn to for this is the media. We utilize mediums such as the internet and TV news to gather insights in real time so that we can be aware and able to make informed decisions. One particular crucial time that we turn to such means is during presidential elections.

By analyzing specific news reports and advertisements generated during presidential election periods, it is plain to see that mass media has a large influence on the way in which people vote. [1]

Methods & Materials

- Research was conducted using various academic peer reviewed articles on the topic to familiarize ourselves with the findings of others in specific recent presidential elections.
- We also utilized reports from various news stations, such as FOX News, to examine if there were any biases in reporting towards one candidate over another.
- We looked at social media statistics of the candidates in the 2008 election to determine its potential impact on voting behavior.
- Various campaign advertisements, endorsed by the candidates themselves, and aired nationally during recent presidential elections were also viewed. This was so that we could enhance our understanding of different methods of framing and persuasion, and determine the influence it might have on the potential voter.

Television Media

During the final week of the presidential election of 2012, FOX News reported positively about Barack Obama 42% of the time. They were substantially more negative about Obama, giving him 56% of negative coverage. MSNBC on the other hand, was overwhelmingly negative about Mitt Romney and offered mostly positive coverage about Obama. [2]

The book *The Fox Effect* found that the persuasion rates of the FOX News channel in swaying voters can be found directly in such biases. Authors David Brock and Ari Rabin-Havt found that FOX’s “fair & balanced” slogan has no genuine meaning, as their reports are significantly biased towards republican candidates and their policies. [3]

Social Media

During the 2008 election, something new emerged. Obama began using social networking broadly to catch the attention of the voters. This was a game changer for any election. Obama could now communicate instantly with his voters and talk to them in real time. By November 2008, Obama had approximately 2.5 million Facebook supporters, 114,559 Twitter followers, and 114,000 subscribers on his YouTube channel. John McCain, on the other hand’s numbers were significantly smaller with just 620,359 Facebook subscribers, 4,603 Twitter followers, and 28,419 YouTube subscribers. [4]

Conclusions

From the interactionist perspective, it can be determined that social reaction, including identification with a political party/candidate, tends to be articulated through the mass media. News networks that have biases are in direct relation to their viewership. These biases have the power to either reinforce voters’ initial intent or sway them in the opposite direction.

Additionally, by creating an energy of involvement, participation, and a sense of purpose in supporters, the Obama campaign reached 5 million supporters on 15 different social Networks over the course of the 2008 campaign season. The social media vote largely contributed to his winning the election.

If we were able to study this further we would perform extensive content analysis of media coverage during election times. We would also take surveys from voters in the general public to find out if mass media played any role in the way they voted.

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