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What Do You Meme?: How Twitter Memes Can Alter Perceptions of Major Democratic Presidential Candidates

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What Do You Meme?

HOW TWITTER MEMES CAN ALTER PERCEPTIONS OF
MAJOR DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL CANDIDATES

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Dr. Merril

20 April 2020

Outline

Establishing Framework

Theory/Hypotheses

Demographics

Name ID Stats

Control & Meme photos included in Survey

Control Model

Condition A Model

Condition B Model

Importance/Conclusion

Establishing Framework

Debate over whether media has any effect on voters at all

- Braum et al suggest media can confirm pre-existing media biases, creating strong partisan filters
- Iyengar et al suggests media plays large role in shaping opinions of American electorate
- Continued exposure to dominant campaigns will have large effect on voters with no pre-existing political schema (Zaller)
- Other side suggests PID comes from family and media would have little power to change perceptions (Berelson et al)

Theory & Hypotheses

- Media has potential to alter the perceptions of major Democratic presidential candidates (Lodge & Taber)
- Increased usage of Twitter by political figures can alter perceptions of presidential candidates (Parmelee & Bichard)
- High Political Knowledge individuals are more likely to be insulated from fluctuations in perceptions of candidates due to strength of PID & family political socialization (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, McPhee)
 - H1: Low political knowledge individuals will experience greater persuasion levels of the top Democratic candidates than their high political knowledge counter-parts.
 - H2: High political knowledge individuals will experience no persuasion, or little fluctuation in their opinions of the top Democratic candidates.

Demographics

Gender:

52% Women

48% Men

Race:

61% White

11% Hispanic

6% Black

3% Native American

15% Asian

2% Other

2% Not answered

N=131 cases



Name Identification

Sanders: 92%

- Incorrect answers include "Old Communist Bastard," and "Bernie Sanders' Dank Meme Stash"

Warren: 81%

- Incorrect answers include "Nancy Pelosi," and "Pochahontas"

Biden: 86%

- Incorrect answers include "Michigan," and "Inslee"



Control Photos of Candidates



Live look of @ewarren on the debate stage



Condition A & B Memes

Table 1: Control Model Persuasion

	Bernie Sanders	Elizabeth Warren	Joe Biden
Political Knowledge Index	-.081 (.102)	-.120 (.092)	-.124 (.090)
Voting History	-.236 (.361)	-.471 (.344)	-.279 (.323)
Partisan ID	.055 (.074)	.026 (.067)	.050 (.056)
Participation	-.143 (.125)	-.157 (.127)	-.171 (.118)
Emotional Reaction	.140 (.124)	.133 (.103)	.131 (.107)
Like/Dislike	-.202 (.100)	-.084 (.081)	-.032 (.078)
News Source	.015 (.145)	-.047 (.139)	-.064 (.127)
Twitter Follow of Candidate	-.268 (.290)	-.326 (.386)	-.554 (.330)
Age	-.205 (.299)	.186 (.317)	.070 (.274)
Income	-.010 (.136)	.043 (.131)	.102 (.122)
Race	.084 (.110)	.065 (.102)	-.012 (.092)
Gender	.148 (.304)	-.303 (.290)	-.335 (.300)
Constant	3.388 (1.400)	3.383 (1.280)	3.250 (1.367)
R-squared	0.3270	0.3676	0.3469

- No significant variables
- Low r-squared
- Respondents were exposed to typical campaign shots of candidates- could help to explain low levels of persuasion

Dependent variable is Persuasion, coefficient one OLS estimates, standard error in parentheses.

** indicates $p < 0.05$ at 95% confidence level

N= 47

Table 2: Persuasion in Condition A

	Bernie Sanders	Elizabeth Warren	Joe Biden
Political Knowledge Index	.035 (.083)	-.143 (.052)**	-.172 (.051)**
Voting History	.248 (.345)	-.235 (.246)	-.114 (.245)
Partisan ID	.098 (.062)	.162 (.047)**	.084 (.042)
Participation	-.154 (.115)	.056 (.073)	-.010 (.070)
Emotional Reaction	.145 (.083)	.230 (.068)**	.082 (.061)
Like/Dislike	-.163 (.067)**	.0499 (.058)	-.128 (.041)**
News Source	.092 (.151)	.166 (.113)	-.087 (.122)
Twitter Follow of Candidate	-.045 (.243)	-.123 (.255)	.107 (.248)
Age	.131 (.192)	-.056 (.135)	-.293 (.136)**
Income	-.024 (.131)	-.119 (.085)	.0931 (.096)
Race	-.103 (.075)	-.096 (.050)	-.198 (.048)**
Gender	-.347 (.235)	-.425 (.189)**	-.253 (.156)
Constant	1.93 (1.23)	1.813 (.964)	3.979 (.823)
R-squared	0.4123	0.6676	0.6450

- Political knowledge significant for Warren & Biden
- PID, Emotional Reaction, Gender all significant for Warren
- Like/Dislike, Age, Race all significant for Biden
- Highest r-squared out of the three models

Dependent variable is Persuasion, coefficient one OLS estimates, standard error in parentheses.

** indicates $p < 0.05$ at 95% confidence level

N= 41

Table 3: Persuasion in Condition B

	Bernie Sanders	Elizabeth Warren	Joe Biden
Political Knowledge Index	-.149 (.122)	-.089 (.087)	-.109 (.071)
Voting History	.331 (.441)	.714 (.284)**	.225 (.294)
Partisan ID	.046 (.111)	.130 (.076)	-.112 (.068)
Participation	-.027 (.138)	-.138 (.099)	-.038 (.103)
Emotional Reaction	.324 (.103)**	.002 (.069)	.118 (.069)
Like/Dislike	-.074 (.129)	-.124 (.083)	-.087 (.061)
News Source	-.249 (.166)	-.113 (.120)	.034 (.115)
Twitter Follow of Candidate	-.487 (.386)	-.333 (.436)	.208 (.306)
Age	.290 (.241)	.105 (.162)	-.117 (.171)
Income	-.128 (.154)	-.093 (.104)	.026 (.114)
Race	-.180 (.106)	-.049 (.076)	.049 (.074)
Gender	-.710 (.363)	-.417 (.231)	-.178 (.247)
Constant	3.401 (3.984)	3.415 (.762)	3.326 (.836)
R-squared	.4508	0.3578	0.3948

- Emotional reaction significant for Sanders
- Voting history significant for Warren
- Low r-squared

Dependent variable is Persuasion, coefficient one OLS estimates, standard error in parentheses.

** indicates $p < 0.05$ at 95% confidence level

N=43

Importance

- Condition A has the most significant variables
 - Further research could attempt to explore further into how user-generated memes have persuasion power

Further research change how memes are selected (more systematically) and focus on how non-Male candidates fare worse in public opinion

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