

TWEETING DURING PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES: EFFECT ON CANDIDATE EVALUATIONS AND DEBATE ATTITUDES

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This study examined the effects of tweeting while watching a presidential debate (live-tweeting) during the 2012 U.S. election. We examined candidate evaluations and debate attitudes for participants who did and did not tweet while watching a presidential or vice presidential debate. We found that tweeting while watching a debate was related to participants reporting more favorable attitudes about Barack Obama, paying more attention to the debate, and perceiving debates to be more important. Live-tweeting a debate was not related to enjoying the debate more. Overall, our results indicate that live-tweeting a televised political event can result in different effects than simply watching a debate and that live-tweeting debates is an activity driven by engagement with and thoughtful processing of debate content rather than primarily about fun or passing time.

Key Words: presidential debate, social media, Twitter, social watching, politics

The last several U.S. presidential campaigns have each been marked by different, evolving communication technologies. The 2004 election has been referred to as the “internet election,” best characterized by Howard Dean’s innovative use of web technologies to organize campaign events, mobilize volunteers, and raise campaign funds during the Democratic presidential primary campaign (Trippi, 2004; Williams & Tedesco, 2006). The next presidential election in 2008 was characterized as the “Facebook” election, as the presidential candidates, particularly Barack Obama, frequently utilized Facebook to engage and connect with supporters and to coordinate campaign information and activities (Johnson & Perlmutter, 2010). The 2012 presidential election continued the trend of harnessing internet and social media technologies for political purposes, but the most recent election was specifically characterized by use of the social networking platform Twitter (McKinney, Houston, & Hawthorne, in press).

During the 2012 campaign, Twitter was used by political campaigns to disseminate information, organize events, and gauge public sentiment; by the news media to inform reporting and promote news content; and by the public to express political opinions and virtually watch political events with others. As a result of the prominence of Twitter during the 2012 election, as well as the variety of Twitter uses, users, and audiences, there is great need to understand the effect of this emerging technology on political outcomes. This study contributes to this area by examining how tweeting during a political event—specifically a 2012 general election presidential and vice presidential debate—affected attitudes about the political candidates participating in the event as well as perceptions of political debates.

TWITTER AND THE 2012 ELECTION

Twitter is a social media technology that allows registered users (also known as *tweeters*) to create a public or private profile, to post messages (also known as *tweeting*) of 140 or fewer

characters, and to follow other users and see the messages (also known as *tweets*) posted by those users. Twitter was created in 2006 and currently has over 500,000,000 registered users worldwide (Lunden, 2012). Twitter users generate more than 500,000,000 tweets per day at a rate of approximately 5,800 tweets per second (Terdiman, 2012). During the 2012 election, political candidates, the news media, and the public increasingly took to Twitter to discuss the campaign. Campaign discussion on Twitter took a variety of forms, from candidates advocating for their own election or refuting opponent's attacks, to members of the news media reporting on campaign activities or engaging with their audience, to individual citizens praising, lamenting, mocking, or satirizing various political candidates or occurrences. Tweeted political statements and exchanges occurred throughout the campaign; however, political tweets tended to increase in frequency during major campaign events. For example, during Barack Obama's nomination acceptance speech there were 52,756 tweets per minute related to the event (Groom, 2012). Then during the first 2012 Obama-Romney presidential debate there were 158,690 tweets per minute related to the event. Finally, on election night at the time Obama's victory became apparent, there were 327,452 tweets per minute related to the event (Lee, 2012). At the time, each of these events represented a record for U.S. based politically oriented Twitter activity.

Given the increasing intersection of politics and Twitter, not only in the United States but globally, research has begun to examine the nature of political content on Twitter. For example, research has analyzed Twitter content and network structure in order to compare political/media elite tweets to citizen tweets (Ampofo, O'Loughlin, & Anstead, 2011; Hawthorne et al., in press), to understand what users tweet about during a political event (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Hawthorne et al., in press), to explore how politicians and governments use Twitter (Lassen & Brown, 2011; Waters & Williams, 2011), to determine if Twitter content can predict election results (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welpe, 2011), to understand whether tweeters with different political ideologies interact on Twitter (Himelboim, McCreery, & Smith, 2013), and to explain how Twitter is used as part of political protest (Lotan et al., 2011; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Although understanding the nature of Twitter political content, networks, and uses is important, research examining the effects of tweeting about politics is also needed. A focus on tweeting effects guides the current project.

Specifically, we examine how tweeting about general election presidential and vice presidential debates influences attitudes about the political candidates and the debate itself. We focus on general election presidential and vice presidential debates for two reasons. First, general election debates are the single most watched political event during U.S. elections (McKinney & Carlin, 2004) and those who watch debates have been found to be better informed as a result of debate exposure (Benoit, Hansen, & Verser, 2003). Therefore, debates are an important component of the U.S. presidential campaign and viewing debates appears to benefit citizens. Second, and as discussed previously, major political events during the 2012 general election debates were associated with the heaviest political Twitter activity. Individuals who tweet during debates or other unfolding political events as they occur are participating in *live-tweeting* (Hawthorne et al., in press), wherein users watch the live broadcast of the event and tweet about it at the same time. Live-tweeting a political debate expands the debate viewing experience because in addition to watching a live broadcast of the debate, individuals are able to tweet their comments about what is happening; read other tweets from political campaigns and organizations, the media, and other citizens; respond to other tweets; forward tweets (also known as *retweeting*); and otherwise interact with other tweeters. Thus live-tweeting is a (virtual) form of "social watching" a political event (McK-

inney et al., in press). Because live-tweeting a general election debate is an emergent form of debate viewing, the effects of this process are unknown. The current project seeks to better understand these effects.

Overall then, the 2012 debates not only captured the attention of the U.S. public but also of the Twittersphere and thus, provide a good opportunity to examine the effects of tweeting during a political event. Moreover, live-tweeting a political event is an emergent phenomenon that is increasing in popularity and necessitates study. Our variables of interest in this study include candidate evaluations and debate attitudes. Examining the effects of media use on candidate evaluations is a mainstay of political campaign research (Pfau, Houston, & Semmler, 2007), and the opportunity to affect citizen vote choice is the ultimate reason for why candidates participate in debates. Debates have been found to be particularly effective at influencing the vote choice of undecided, less educated, and non-partisan citizens (McKinney & Carlin, 2004). Additionally, both news coverage of debates (Chaffee & Dennis, 1979; Lowry, Bridges, & Barefield, 1990) and interpersonal discussion of debates (Carlin & McKinney, 1994) have been found to contribute to debate viewing effects on audiences. Therefore, based on past research and because Twitter includes information, news, and interpersonal components, we predict that tweeting while watching a debate will ultimately have an influence on perceptions of political candidates participating in the debate:

H1: Tweeting while watching a general election debate will affect candidate evaluation.

Our second variable of interest—attitudes about debates—is related to the normative function of debate viewing. Because watching debates has been found to be related to citizens being more informed and more likely to participate in politics (Benoit et al., 2003; McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007; McLeod, Bybee, & Durall, 1979), watching debates can be understood to be an important citizen campaign activity in a healthy democracy. Thus, understanding what activities contribute to more favorable attitudes about debate viewing is important. As such, we are interested in the effect of tweeting about debates on debate attention, enjoyment, and perceived importance. Little research exists in this area, though Thorson and colleagues (2013) found that retrospective self-report of tweeting during a debate was correlated with individuals reporting that they viewed more debates and enjoyed watching the debates more. Overall, we predict that tweeting a debate improves the debate watching experience for individuals (i.e., it makes debate viewing more informative, interesting, and entertaining) and thus tweeting during a debate will result in more positive debate attitudes:

H2: Tweeting while watching a general election debate will be related to more favorable debate attitudes.

We test our hypotheses using a sample of primarily young citizens from universities across the United States. As with most emerging technologies, Twitter users tend to be younger than the general population (Pew Research Center, 2013). Therefore, we begin the study of political tweeting effects using a sample of younger citizens as they are the ones that are most likely to use Twitter (and be Twitter natives).

METHOD

Procedures

Participants were undergraduate students from 10 universities across the United States who received course or extra credit for participating in this research project, which involved

answering questions and watching a 2012 U.S. presidential or vice presidential general election debate. Participation was voluntary. Each university provided at least one classroom or auditorium for participants to view the debate and answer the study questions. Participants who tweeted during the debate were instructed to bring a laptop, smart phone, tablet computer, or some other form of mobile computing device with internet access to the research session with them. Tweeters also were informed they must have a public Twitter account already established so their tweets about the debate could be captured for separate analysis. Participants who did not tweet were not allowed to use laptops or other devices while watching the debate and were not required to have a Twitter account.

Prior to the start of the debate, respondents completed an online pretest survey that included demographic information and other questions. The respondents then watched the entire 90 minute debate. Participants who were tweeting during the debate were provided a specialized hashtag so that their tweets could be tracked. Immediately following the debate the respondents completed a posttest questionnaire.

Participants

A total of 768 respondents participated in this study, with 416 participants viewing the first presidential debate on October 3, 2012, and 352 participants viewing the vice presidential debate on October 11, 2012. In terms of party affiliation overall, 35% ($n = 269$) of participants were Republican, 34.5% ($n = 265$) were Democrat, 28.1% ($n = 216$) were Independent, and 2.3% ($n = 18$) did not report political party. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 64 but were mostly younger adults ($M = 20.63$, $SD = 4.93$).

Control Variables

Gender, political ideology, and general Twitter use were assessed as control variables for analysis. Overall, 59.5% ($n = 457$) were female, and 37.9% ($n = 291$) were male, with 2.6% ($n = 20$) not reporting gender. To assess political ideology, participants were asked to place themselves on a scale from 1 (*extremely liberal*) to 10 (*extremely conservative*; $M = 5.18$, $SD = 2.27$). To assess general Twitter use, participants were asked whether they had a Twitter account or not. Participants without a Twitter account were assigned a value of zero for the general Twitter use variable. Participants with a Twitter account were then asked how frequently they posted updates (tweeted) using their Twitter account and how often they checked their Twitter account, with possible responses ranging from 1 (*rarely or never*) to 5 (*several times per day*). Response to these two questions were averaged for a single general Twitter use score ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.99$).

Independent Variable

Whether or not participants live-tweeted a debate served as the independent variable for this analysis. For the presidential debate, 14.9% ($n = 62$) of participants tweeted the debate. For the vice presidential debate, 50.9% ($n = 179$) of participants tweeted the debate. Overall 31.4% ($n = 241$) of participants tweeted a debate.

Dependent Variables

Candidate feelings. Before and after the debate, participants were asked to use the "feeling thermometer" to indicate their feelings toward Barack Obama and Mitt Romney (for

presidential debate viewers) or Joe Biden and Paul Ryan (for vice presidential debate viewers). Possible responses to this question ranged from 0 (*unfavorable/cold*) to 100 (*favorable/warm*). Participants were instructed that a response of 50 indicated neutral feelings. For analysis, we used the pre to posttest feeling thermometer change score. The score was calculated by subtracting the posttest score from the pretest score, so that a positive value indicated improvement in candidate feeling over time and a negative score indicated a decline in feeling about the candidate (Biden feeling change, $M = 3.82$, $SD = 23.30$; Ryan feeling change, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 18.27$; Obama feeling change, $M = 0.63$, $SD = 13.90$; Romney feeling change, $M = 5.59$, $SD = 17.12$).

Benefitted from debate questions. Following the debate, participants were asked whether they thought one candidate or the other benefitted from questions asked in the debate with possible responses of *Yes* or *No*. For participants answering *Yes*, a follow-up question asked which candidate benefitted the most from the questions: Obama or Romney for the presidential debate and Biden or Ryan for the vice presidential debate. These questions were collapsed and recoded to form a single variable with the following possible values: 2 = Romney or Ryan benefitted, 1 = No one benefitted, and 0 = Obama or Biden benefitted. For the presidential debate, 16.3% ($n = 68$) thought Obama benefitted from questions, 21.4% ($n = 89$) thought Romney did, and 62.3% ($n = 259$) thought neither candidate benefitted. For the vice presidential debate, 34.1% ($n = 120$) thought Biden benefitted, 11.1% ($n = 39$) thought Ryan benefitted, and 54.8% ($n = 193$) thought no one benefitted.

Debate winner. Following the debate, participants were asked who they thought won the debate. For the presidential debate, response options included Barack Obama (39.7%, $n = 165$) and Mitt Romney (43.0%, $n = 179$), with 17.3% ($n = 72$) of participants not responding. These results were similar to a CBS News instant poll of uncommitted voters ($N = 523$) that found 46% of voters thought Mitt Romney won the debate, 22% thought Barack Obama won, and 32% thought the debate was a tie (Dutton, De Pinto, Salvanto, Backus, & Boerma, 2012a).

For the vice presidential debate, response options included Joe Biden (50.3%, $n = 177$) and Paul Ryan (43.8%, $n = 154$), with 6.0% ($n = 21$) of participants not responding. These results were similar to a CBS News instant poll of uncommitted voters ($N = 431$) that found 50% of voters thought Joe Biden won the debate, 31% thought Paul Ryan won, and 19% thought the debate was a tie (Dutton, De Pinto, Salvanto, Backus, & Boerma, 2012b).

Candidate preference. Vote choice was assessed after debate viewing by asking participants who they would vote for if they were going to vote in the election. Possible responses include Barack Obama (38.7%, $n = 161$); Mitt Romney (31.7%, $n = 132$); and other, undecided, or no response (29.6%, $n = 123$).

Debate attention, enjoyment, and importance. Participants were asked how much attention they paid to the debate, with responses ranging from 1 (*I didn't watch the debate at all*) to 7 (*I watched the debate very closely*, $M = 6.02$, $SD = .98$). Participants were also asked whether they enjoyed watching the debate, with responses ranging from 1 (*I hated watching tonight's debate*) to 7 (*I very much enjoyed watching tonight's debate*, $M = 5.62$, $SD = 1.28$). Finally, participants were asked how important they thought it was to watch a presidential/vice presidential debate, with responses ranging from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 7 (*very important*, $M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.09$).

Analysis

Multiple regression was used to examine the influence of control variables (gender, political ideology, general Twitter use) and the independent variable (tweeted the debate) on

TABLE 1.
TWEETING THE DEBATE AND DEBATE WATCHING FEELING THERMOMETER CHANGE

	Biden Feeling Improvement	Obama Feeling Improvement	Ryan Feeling Improvement	Romney Feeling Improvement
Gender (Female)	-.03	.08	.06	-.09
Political Ideology (Conservative)	-.33***	-.03	.19**	.16**
General Twitter Use	-.02	-.14*	.06	.16**
Tweeted the Debate	-.02	.01	.01	-.14*
R ²	.10	.03	.05	.05
F	10.46***	2.21	4.09**	5.13**

Note. Variable entries are standardized beta coefficients from linear regression.
p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

the dependent variables. Linear regression was calculated for the candidate feelings and the debate attention, enjoyment, and importance variables; binary logistic regression was calculated for the debate winner and candidate preference variables; and multinomial logistic regression was used for the benefitted from debate questions variable.

RESULTS

Before running our regression models, a correlation matrix of control variables and the independent variable was calculated. Bivariate results indicated that being female was associated with more general Twitter use (*r* = .10, *p* < .01) and that tweeting the debate was related to being conservative (*r* = .15, *p* < .001) and to more general Twitter use (*r* = .43, *p* < .001). No other correlations between the control and independent variables were significant.

Our first hypothesis predicted that tweeting while watching a general election debate would affect individual perceptions of political candidates. Perceptions of candidates were measured by change (from pre to postdebate) in feeling thermometer scores for each candidate, by evaluation of whether a candidate benefitted from debate questions, by perceived debate winner, and by postdebate vote choice. See Tables 1–3 for regression results for each of these variables.

TABLE 2.
TWEETING THE DEBATE AND CANDIDATE PERCEPTIONS

	Debate Winner (Ryan)	Debate Winner (Romney)	VP Debate- Presidential Candidate Preference (Romney)	Presidential Debate- Presidential Candidate Preference (Romney)
Gender (Female)	.00	.03	.16	.75
Political Ideology (Conservative)	.64***	.55***	1.12***	1.17***
General Twitter Use	.10	.17*	.11	.32**
Tweeted the Debate	-.57	-1.14**	-.34	-1.28*
Cox and Snell R ²	.30	.25	.52	.51
χ ²	118.54***	95.08***	182.61***	197.66***

Note. Variable entries are unstandardized beta coefficients from binary logistic regression.
p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

TABLE 3.
TWEETING THE DEBATE AND PERCEPTIONS OF WHO BENEFITTED FROM DEBATE QUESTIONS

	Vice Presidential Debate	Presidential Debate
<u>Obama/Biden Benefitted^a</u>		
Gender (Female)	-.15	.17
Political Ideology (Conservative)	.01	-.13
General Twitter Use	.00	.01
Tweeted the Debate	.22	-.22
<u>Romney/Ryan Benefitted^a</u>		
Gender (Female)	-.08	.00
Political Ideology (Conservative)	.12	.09
General Twitter Use	.26*	-.04
Tweeted the Debate	1.01*	1.02*
Cox & Snell R^2	.03	.04
χ^2	10.21	14.80

Note. Variable entries are unstandardized beta coefficients from multinomial logistic regression.

^aReference category is no one benefitted from questions.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

With regard to control variables, gender was not related to any of the candidate evaluation variables, but political ideology was frequently related to the candidate evaluation outcomes in the expected directions (that is, conservative participants were more likely to believe Romney won the presidential debate, and liberal participants were more likely to believe Obama won). With regard to general Twitter use, participants with more frequent general Twitter activity were more likely to report an improvement in feelings about Romney ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$) and a decline in feeling about Obama ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .01$) from pre to postdebate. General Twitter use was also related to perceptions that Romney won the presidential debate ($\beta = .17$, $p = .01$) and for overall preference for Romney as postdebate vote choice ($\beta = .32$, $p < .01$). Finally, general Twitter use was also related to perceptions that Ryan benefitted from the debate questions (compared to no one benefitting from the questions) among vice presidential debate viewers ($\beta = .26$, $p = .02$).

For the independent variable in our analysis, tweeting a debate was related to a decline in feelings about Romney from pre to postdebate ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .02$), to perceptions that Obama won the presidential debate ($\beta = -1.14$, $p < .01$), to a preference for Obama as postdebate vote choice ($\beta = -1.28$, $p = .02$), and to perceptions that Ryan benefitted from debate questions among vice presidential debate viewers ($\beta = 1.01$, $p = .02$) and that Romney benefitted from debate questions among presidential debate viewers ($\beta = 1.02$, $p = .03$).

Hypothesis Two posited that tweeting during a general election debate would result in more favorable attitudes about political debates. With regard to the control variables, female respondents were more likely to pay attention to the debates ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$), but were less likely to report that watching debates was important ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$). Neither political ideology nor general Twitter use was related to any of the debate attitude variables. With regard to the independent variable, tweeting while watching the debate was related to participants paying more attention to the debate ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) and to reporting that watching debates was more important ($\beta = .12$, $p = .01$). However, tweeting during the debate was not related to participants enjoying watching the debate ($\beta = .07$, $p = .19$).

DISCUSSION

This study examined the effects of tweeting during a political debate in the context of the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign, which has been referred to as the Twitter election (McKinney et al., in press). We predicted that tweeting while watching a debate would influence individuals' perceptions of candidates and debate attitudes, and these predictions were largely supported.

In terms of candidate evaluations, general Twitter use (measured in terms of how often individuals check their Twitter account and tweet) and tweeting specifically during a debate were found to exert differing effects on candidate evaluations. We found that more frequent general Twitter use was largely related to individuals reporting pro-Romney attitudes, such as an improvement in feelings about Romney as a result of watching a presidential debate, a decrease in feelings about Obama following debate viewing, a perception that Romney won the presidential debate, and a preference for Romney in postdebate vote choice. Moreover, in our sample more frequent general Twitter use overall was correlated with participants being more conservative. However, the more specific effect of tweeting during a debate (while controlling for gender, political ideology, and general Twitter use) was generally related to favorable views of Obama among participants. For example, we found that tweeting during a debate was related to a decrease in positive feeling about Romney following the debate, to a perception that Obama won the presidential debate, and to support for Obama in terms of postdebate vote choice.

These results illustrate that tweeting while watching a televised political event can exhibit a different effect than occurs as a result of using Twitter in general or of watching a political event without tweeting. Our preliminary evidence indicates that, in terms of impact, live-tweeting a political event is an activity that is distinct from these other related mediated activities. Future research should examine possible mechanisms to explain this effect. For example, the impact of live-tweeting may have something to do with the influence of the content that is available on Twitter during an event. That is, in our study perhaps the Twitter conversation about the general election debates was more favorable to Obama, so that those tweeting the event were exposed to and influenced by more favorable content than was available to those only watching the televised debate. In fact, analysis by the Pew Research Center (2013) has found that Twitter conversation tends to be more liberal than public opinion in general and thus was likely more positive toward Barack Obama during the debate.

Alternatively, perhaps it is the process of tweeting during a political event (as opposed to, or in addition to, reading other tweets) that is the cause of the live-tweeting effect. As a process or activity, live-tweeting an event may be similar to discussing politics with others, which has been found to be an important predictor of political attitudes, knowledge, and behavior (e.g., Beck, 2002; Ikeda & Boase, 2011; Scheufele, 2000). In particular, Eveland (2004) suggested that talking about politics may motivate a more central or elaborative form of information processing, which can in turn result in increased learning or other effects from political discussion. It may be that live-tweeting an event requires a similar level of central information processing, and this in turn contributes to different effects that do not arise from simply watching a political event or tweeting about non-political matters. At the same time, there is nothing in this explanation to address why the live-tweeters in our study were more likely to support Obama compared to Romney. Though research has found less effortful thinking to be associated with more support for political conservatism (Eidelman, Crandall,

Goodman, & Blanchar, 2012), so perhaps the central (and thus more effortful) information processing of live-tweeting contributes to more support for liberal policies and politicians. Much more research is needed in this area.

In addition to influencing candidate perceptions, we found that live-tweeting general election debates during the 2012 campaign was related to participants paying more attention to the debates and to perceiving debates as being more important. The fact that participants who tweeted while watching debates reported paying closer attention to the debates provides evidence that live-tweeting political events may result in more central processing of the events, as discussed previously. From a normative perspective, both paying more attention to political debates and believing that debates are more important are positive actions and attitudes in that political debates have been found to result in a more informed and engaged electorate (Benoit et al., 2003; McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007). Therefore, adding new social media tools such as Twitter to traditional political events such as debates may help spur citizen engagement with those events, which could potentially benefit democracy.

Unlike debate attention and perceptions of debate importance, participants who live-tweeted the debates did not report enjoying the debates more. Previous research had found that retrospective self-reports of debate viewing and debate enjoyment were correlated, though this relationship was not strong (Thorson et al., 2013). Additionally, in the previous study by Thorson and colleagues, live-tweeting a debate did not predict debate enjoyment when controlling for sociodemographics, campaign involvement, media use, and whether participants watched the debates while talking with others in person or via Facebook. Thus, overall it seems the association between live-tweeting a political event and enjoying the event is weak (at best), particularly compared to debate attention. Therefore, the early evidence indicates that live-tweeting political events is not primarily about fun, humor, or passing time, but rather is an activity that is driven by engagement with and thoughtful processing of debate content. Normatively then, the emerging intersection of Twitter and politics may have benefits for citizens and democracy.

Limitations

As with all studies, this project had several limitations. The first limitation is that we utilized a convenience sample of undergraduate students. In addition to being a nonprobability sample, our convenience sample did not include young adults who were not college students. Although this is a limitation of the current project, we utilized college students as participants because they are the demographic group that is most likely to use social media while watching television (Raine et al., 2012). Thus, as an initial attempt to examine Twitter effects, conducting research with this population was appropriate. However, future research should replicate our study with other samples. A second limitation is that we required participants to come to a classroom or lab space to watch the debates, thus creating some artificiality in the research setting. If participants were watching the debates in a more naturalistic location (at their homes, for instance), then perhaps the results would differ. Finally, our analysis simply compared the effects of tweeting while watching a debate to the effects of not tweeting while watching a debate. Therefore, we did not analyze the effects of how often individuals tweeted about the debate. People who tweet more frequently may exhibit different attitudes about candidates and debates than individuals who tweet less frequently. Future research should examine this possibility.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of tweeting while watching a political debate (live-tweeting) in the context of the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign, which has been referred to as the Twitter election. We examined candidate evaluations and debate attitudes for participants who did and did not tweet while watching a presidential or vice presidential debate. We found that tweeting while watching a debate was related to participants reporting more favorable attitudes about Obama, paying more attention to the debate, and perceiving debates to be more important. Live-tweeting a debate was not related to enjoying the debate more. Overall, our results indicate that live-tweeting a televised political event can result in different effects than occur as a result of watching an event without tweeting. Results also indicate that live-tweeting political events is not primarily about fun, humor, or passing time but rather is an activity that is driven by engagement with and thoughtful processing of debate content.

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