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YouTube/OurTube/TheirTube: Official and Unofficial Online Campaign Advertising, Negativity, and Popularity

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YouTube is one of the most-used Web siteWeb sites in the world—in 2012, it ranked only behind Google and Facebook—and is the leading video-sharing Web site (Fitzgerald, 2012). With the slogan *Broadcast Yourself*, YouTube's 2005 launch promised users who registered the ability to create and share their own videos, and to comment on and share videos uploaded by others. Initially seen as primarily a source of entertainment, a space to watch music videos or movie clips and to share personal video blogs (vlogs) or mash-ups, YouTube has increasingly become populated with news and political videos that can prove influential in elections.

In the 2006 mid-term election cycle, for example, the "viral" spread of Virginian Senator George Allen's now-infamous "macaca moment" footage was seen as signaling the YouTube's potential capacity to shape campaign agendas and sway voters. This understanding seemed to be cemented in 2008, when YouTube's *YouChoose'08* was launched as central hub for political and election-related videos. The Obama campaign, alone, posted more than 1,900 ads to YouTube during 2008 (according to Ridout & colleagues' (2010) categorization); this output was augmented by enormously popular third-party videos, such as the celebrity-infused, will.i.am "Yes We Can" music video.

In the 2012 presidential election, the YouTube *Election Hub* (launched in August 2012) again provided a central place for users to find political news and other election videos, and also allowed citizens to browse or search for campaign and candidate-sponsored videos. However, the launch of *Election Hub* came after more than a year after the Republican primaries had begun. While YouTube hosted political debate and discussion during the general election, it also enabled the Republican primary candidates to share and upload political advertisements, speeches and other videos, and offered President Barack Obama, who was running uncontested in the Democratic primaries, a platform through which to communicate his re-election message with voters.

This chapter thus examines political advertising on YouTube during the 2012 primaries, undertaking an analysis of key features such as negativity, popularity, and content producers.

SOCIAL MEDIA, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, AND POLITICAL ADVERTISING

The relationship between media coverage, technology, and election campaigns has been a source of interest for researchers across numerous disciplines, ranging from political science, media and communications, and history to linguistics and behavioral studies. The emergence of a "new" technology or innovation often sparks a wave of research that reconsiders both the form and content of political communication on the new medium and its potential effects on electoral outcomes, voter mobilization and efficacy, and the democratic system. The introduction of television, for example, prompted many studies, across disciplines, that assessed the impact of this new format on politics and campaigns.

As social and digital media technologies became increasingly ubiquitous in the first decade of the 21st century, academic and journalistic attention turned to examining whether these new communication channels might contribute to a recasting of the relationship between government, political parties and candidates, the media and citizens (e.g., Meyer, 2012; Parker, 2012). Participatory or "Web 2.0" technologies seemed to promise new kinds of political messages and interactions. Here (argued the cyber-optimists), increasingly inexpensive and easy-to-use technologies would unsettle monopolies over content production and distribution, blurring the lines between "producer" and "consumer" and making a new participatory media politics possible.

In this context, scholarly considerations of "online" political communication have explored the ability of citizens to connect and interact through social and other digital media (Papacharissi, 2009; 2010); while election-specific research increasingly considers the role and impact of these new media technologies (Williams & Tedesco, 2006). The most recent research shifts from an interest in campaign and candidate Web sites (Xenos & Bennett, 2007; Foot & Schneider, 2008; Schneider & Foot, 2006) to examine the ways that widespread social media might impact on campaign agendas, voter engagement and efficacy, and election outcomes (e.g., Shah et al., 2007). In an early study of YouTube and MySpace in the 2006 elections, Gueorguieva (2008) noted that "no research has been conducted on the use and impact of online social networks on election campaigns," due to the rapid and recent rise of these networks (p. 298).

The years since have seen a dramatic increase in attention to these technologies, especially in light of their prominence in the 2008 and 2010 election cycles (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011). This finding is evident in the recent publication of collections on "new media" in campaigns, and in the inclusion of studies of social and participatory media in edited works assessing campaigns more broadly (Hendricks & Kaid, 2011; Hendricks & Denton, 2010; Sabato, 2010; Panagopolous, 2009).

In this emerging field, attention has been paid to social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and MySpace (Bode, 2012; Woolley et al., 2010; Baumgartner & Morris, 2010b), weblogs ('blogs') (Fung, Vraga, & Thorson, 2011; Snow, 2010), microblogs such as Twitter (Ancu, 2011; Solop, 2010), and video-sharing Web sites such as YouTube (Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma, & Parma, 2010; Powell, 2010).

YOUTUBE AND THE ONLINE CAMPAIGN

Within these studies of social and participatory media, a strand of research focuses specifically on video-sharing Web site YouTube, which has established itself as a significant player in the broader mediated campaign landscape. Researchers have pointed to its popularity as the most-used video-sharing Web site in the world, and the emerging political and journalistic consensus about the potential of online videos to influence politics and campaigns (Basulto, 2012; Wilson, 2012) as compelling more systematic scholarly attention. In particular, YouTube's emphasis on user-generated content has been a focus of early examinations of the rising popularity and influence of this open communication space (van Dijck, 2009; Burgess & Green, 2009), while attention has also been paid to its increasing embrace by political and corporate interests (May, 2010).

A wave of scholarly interest has accompanied YouTube's rising political prominence following the 2006 election cycle (the first after YouTube's 2005 launch), both internationally (Chen & Walsh, 2010; Carlson & Strandberg, 2008; Kalnes, 2009; Lev-On, 2012; Salmond, 2008) and in the United States. In 2010, a "YouTube and the 2008 Election Cycle" edition of the *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* confirmed that studies of YouTube had become a vital component of campaign research, alone and as part of broader considerations of the mediatized campaign environment. The concerns of the papers collected in that volume—how candidates use YouTube; the effects of YouTube on campaign outcomes and on democratic engagement and participation; the interactive trajectories of YouTube videos; and questions of methodology and approach to studying YouTube—provide a useful indicator of the emerging concerns of work in this field more broadly.

Research into the voices engaging in YouTube politics has identified that the video-sharing channel is being used extensively by "official" and institutional political actors, such as campaigns and candidates (Gulati & Williams, 2009; Davisson, 2009; Gueorguieva, 2008), to communicate with voters, fundraise, and mobilize supporters. This is supported by Dylko and colleagues (2011) who found, in a content analysis of political news content on YouTube, that the most popular videos tend to be created by or feature "elites," or consist of traditional news content. However, other studies have highlighted that influential content often comes from beyond political parties and candidates, and have explored genres such as political documentaries (Musser, 2009) and online spoofs and parodies (Tyron, 2008) created by "unofficial" users.

Emerging understandings of who is using YouTube to create, view or comment on videos, are further deepened by research into how and why it is used: for

entertainment, for getting information about politics (Smith & Duggan, 2012), and as a "time-shifting" device for traditional media content (Hanson et al., 2010).

Political videos on YouTube have been analyzed with particular interest in YouTube's potential effect on campaigns (Karpf, 2010) and voters (Bal, Campbell, Payne, & Pitt, 2010; Davisson, 2009; English, Sweetser, & Ancu, 2011; Towner & Dulio, 2011b). The influence on young people's engagement with, knowledge of, and feelings about politics (Hanson et al., 2010; Towner & Dulio, 2010; 2011a) has also been a notable line of study. Researchers have reported mixed findings, reflecting patterns in political communications research more broadly. Some studies challenged common-sense assumptions about YouTube's ability to stimulate political engagement.

For example, Baumgartner and Morris (2010a) found that users of social media sites were no more likely to be politically active than users of other media. Likewise, McKinney and Rill (2009) observed that the CNN/YouTube debates were no more effective at stimulating youth engagement than a traditional general-election presidential debate. However, Ricke's (2010) analysis of voter questions submitted for the debates found that they did "provide an alternative method for political participation" (p. 211), while Schill and Kirk (2011) have positioned the YouTube debates as a "digital agora" that was both deliberative and participatory.

A smaller but equally important strand of research has analyzed the content of campaign videos on YouTube. In particular, scholars have examined the rhetorical and discursive strategies used by candidates in their videos (Church, 2010; Davisson, 2009; Duman & Locher, 2008); while others have analyzed content from both official and unofficial political sources (Hess, 2010). Despite this growing attention to how candidates, voters and other political actors are engaging with YouTube, and the effects of this use, political advertising on YouTube remains under-researched.

YOUTUBE AND CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING

A small, but vibrant, body of research is emerging in U.S. political science and communication that focuses on political advertisements on YouTube. These studies have considered each campaign cycle since 2006, extending both the concerns of new literature on social and digital media in campaigns and traditional political advertising literature. A limited number have focused specifically on campaign advertisements (de Boer et al., 2012; Ridout, Fowler, & Branstetter, 2010, 2012; Salmond, 2008, 2012). Other studies have considered YouTube ads alongside other genres of campaign videos (Cortese & Proffitt, 2012; Klotz, 2010) or as part of analyses of online political advertising more broadly (Cornfield & Kaye, 2009). Ridout and colleagues (2012) position YouTube as an ideal venue through which to understand the content and reach of new advertising forms:

> [YouTube is] a dialogic environment in which voters can and do contest the messages of the campaigns by producing their own videos to communicate directly with other voters. Individuals or other non-campaign groups routinely re-mix and subvert the messages of the campaigns, therefore radically altering the advertising landscape (p. 2).

This perspective speaks to the key concern emerging in scholarly considerations of political advertisements on YouTube; that YouTube is an interactive and open space, in which the participation of voters and other non-campaign groups may influence the campaign agenda and communication environment. In this way, studies of YouTube advertising ask questions about "Web 2.0" communication at the same time as they draw on the concerns of research into political advertising, both traditional (Diamond & Bates, 1992; Kaid & Johnston, 2000; McNair, 2011) and online (Cornfield & Kaye, 2009; Kaid, 2006). Here, exploration of the content and effects of campaign advertising—and in particular, the rise and intensification of negative or "attack" advertising (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Geer, 2006; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991)—has been prominent.

Studies of political advertisements on YouTube extend these concerns, and often seek both to examine distinctive features of political advertising in a social media environment, and also to test the style, content and effects of YouTube ads against their more traditional counterparts (Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005; Salmond, 2012). Questions of content and production are central here, as studies seek to explore notions that participatory media spaces online would democratize conditions of production, distribution and dialogue—allowing for new genres, producers and responses to political advertising.

The possibility for new styles of campaign communication to emerge in online video-sharing is a focus of research into political ads on YouTube. A key concern here is whether campaign ads uploaded to YouTube are designed specifically for that space, as "web-only" or "web-first" content, or whether they are "repurposed" ads originally intended for television. While cyber-optimists emphasized the potential development of new web-based content styles, Cortese and Proffitt (2012) noted that early research has found most election videos on YouTube are "traditional television advertisements or national television program segments" (p. 694).

More recently, in a systematic study of major-party Senate candidates' YouTube presence, Klotz (2010) found that "repurposed 30-second television ads" dominated the most popular political videos, accounting for more than half of the top 12 videos in 2006 and three-quarters in 2008 (p. 116). Despite this finding, Klotz (2010) went on to argue that the video-sharing Web site still acted "as a repository for ads produced by candidates and parties" (p. 122), making them accessible nationwide. In a fragmented media market, where careful targeting means that some television ads are designed and broadcast only in specific areas (such as battleground states), YouTube allows voters to hold candidates accountable for their advertising beyond the borders of particular local and regional media markets.

These findings highlight a related strand of inquiry concerning the producers of political advertisements on YouTube. Towner and Dulio's (2012) warning that YouTube can be "dangerous" for campaigns because it is "driven by "user-generated" or "unmediated content" is representative of this view (pp. 98–99). While the campaigns use YouTube extensively to post advertisements and other videos, "anyone else with a video camera" can also be a content creator, thereby challenging party and mainstream media dominance of campaign agendas. However, there has been little empirical mapping of content creators on YouTube,

which looks not just at the extent to which "official" content is posted by candidates and parties, but also considers the extent to which "unofficial" ads are posted by independent or third-party groups (such as PACs and lobby groups) or individual citizens. Where this has been examined, Ridout and colleagues (2010) found that more than 93% of YouTube ads in their sample from the 2008 campaign were candidate-sponsored, while less than 2% were sponsored by interest groups or citizens.

Similarly, there has been limited systematic analysis of the content of political advertising on YouTube; however, questions of valence are emerging as central in the latest studies (Cortese & Proffitt, 2012; de Boer et al., 2012; Klotz, 2010). For some, the task of quantifying positive and negative content is closely linked to measures of "popularity" and voter engagement. As data is emerging about how voters share and respond to online videos (Smith & Duggan, 2012), some researchers are exploring the relationship between the negativity of online ads and their success in sparking responses (Klotz, 2010).

Cortese and Proffitt (2012) measured levels of user interaction against tone in YouTube videos posted by the McCain and Obama campaigns in 2008, finding that the McCain campaign posted significantly more negative videos than Obama and received more interactions. In addition, across the campaigns: "significantly, more people viewed, rated, made text comments on and created video responses for the negative videos compared to the other three types (positive, both and neither), yet the negative videos were rated significantly lower than the other three" (Cortese & Proffitt, 2012, p. 695).

While negative YouTube videos were more likely to promote participation, the "buzz" created by them did not mean they were "well-liked." Similarly, Ridout and colleagues' (2012) analysis of political advertising on YouTube in Senate races in 2010 found that "negative ads are particularly popular" (p. 14), generating more than half of viewership despite representing one-third of online advertising content, but did not measure voters' reactions to or feelings about these negative ads.

These participatory elements are positioned as central to YouTube's position in a "new media" landscape characterized by the potential for interactivity in the form of sharing, liking and commenting on videos, or even for political "video-exchange" (Duman & Locher, 2008). However, further research on the ability of political advertising (and other genres of political video) on YouTube to spark these interactions is needed (Holbert & Geidner, 2009). While there have been attempts to track the social media trajectories of online viral videos, such as the 2008 will.i.am "Yes We Can" clip (Vernallis, 2011; Wallsten, 2010), more attention is required to understand voters' interactions with political ads on YouTube, situated within a broader emerging field that is developing new research questions and approaches to social and participatory media (Towner & Dulio, 2012).

This chapter aims to explore some of these new questions through an analysis of YouTube political advertising during the primary stage of the 2012 presidential campaign. It links the valence of YouTube ads with the particular nature of attacks

(personal or issue-based) and explores party differences and popularity. Specifically, this chapter poses and examines the following research questions:

RQ1(a): Which candidate had the most negative online campaign advertising, and (b) which party featured more negative campaign ads?

RQ2: Were negative ads online more frequently viewed, liked, disliked, commented, and favorited than positive campaign ads?

RQ3(a): Were there differences in online ads that attacked different parties, and (b) ads that focused on issue or personal characteristics?

RQ4: How did official online advertising compare to unofficial online advertising in terms of negativity and popularity?

METHODS

A sample of political advertisements comprised of both official YouTube channels as well as unofficial videos was found through key search terms. The sample was constructed of videos available online in mid-March 2012, and included videos from May 19, 2011, through March 13, 2012. Though this time frame does not include the entire election cycle, it does provide a lengthy examination of primary election campaigning, and notably includes the run-up to several caucuses and primaries in states that are crucial to determining the eventual presidential candidates.

Official Advertising on YouTube

In this study, "official" advertisements were those collected from the official YouTube channels of the leading Republican candidates at the time of sampling during the 2012 presidential campaign. Specifically, these channels were those of Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney, and Rick Santorum. Also included was the official YouTube channel of incumbent Democratic candidate Barack Obama. Videos were prioritized by number of views to ensure that the advertisements online most likely to be seen were incorporated into analyses. In addition, these ads were selected on the basis that one or more negative statements and/or images were present in some form of attack, comparison, or criticism.

All of the videos considered as official with this sampling procedure were either sponsored or authorized by the presidential candidate that was being promoted in each respective ad. Altogether, this produced the following breakdown of 55 official ads that were considered from each candidate's official YouTube channel: Newt Gingrich ($N = 10$), Ron Paul ($N = 14$), Mitt Romney ($N = 11$), Rick Santorum ($N = 11$), and Barack Obama ($N = 9$).

Searching Advertising on YouTube

To examine online campaign advertising more comprehensively, and outside of only officially-endorsed channels, a separate sampling technique was applied using key search terms and resulted in 18 separate ads (24.7% of the total sample). For purposes of this study, YouTube was searched with the phrases "attack

advertisement president 2012" and "elections attack advertisement 2012." Much like the process of sampling the official YouTube channels, these videos were sorted by view frequency to be certain that the most prominent political advertisements that also had some negative or attack component were selected.

Duplicates of videos already present in the sample of official YouTube channels were not double-counted, and it is worth noting some professional ads sponsored by candidates that had already left the race by mid-March 2012 were drawn into this sample. In other words, in these cases and some others, not all searched videos were necessarily "unofficial" videos, as that distinction was measured by who produced an ad and whether or not it was endorsed by a candidate as being representative of their views.

Variable Categories

The codebook of Geer (2006) on attack ads in televised presidential campaigns was adapted for this study, along with some components of the Kaid and Johnston (2006) codebook for televised political advertising. Non-interpretative features included the date of upload, length in seconds, number of views, comments, likes, dislikes, and number of favorites, as well as which candidate was endorsed in the ad and if it was official or unofficial. Other interpretative aspects were categorized, and these included the overall tone, the number of negative statements and images per ad, the number of positive statements and images per ad, the format, who or what was being targeted, and whether an attack was based on issues or personal characteristics.

Following the work of Geer (2006), the overall tone was determined to be "negative," "neutral," or "positive" by one primary coder. Her level of agreement for this item, when controlling for chance in a randomly selected 15 videos (20.55% of the sample), was 0.89 when calculated with Cohen's Kappa against a second coder working independently.

More specific measures of negativity and positivity were measured by counting the number of negative and positive verbal (spoken) statements per ad along with evaluative (negative or positive) visuals. Recurrent statements and visuals were counted at every instance. Thus, the determination of the level of negativity and positivity was a cumulative figure based on frequency (i.e., recurrence or repetitiveness) instead of intensity (i.e., highly aggressive or offensive statements). In these cases, Kappa = 0.77 for intercoder agreement on negativity levels for both statements and visuals.

A composite positive/negative index was constructed by subtracting the total number of negative images and statements per ad from the total number of positive images and statements per ad. The range of this index was from −26 (most negative) to +24 (most positive), with a mean of −4.14 and standard deviation of 9.52 (skewness and kurtosis were within acceptable levels for normal distributions).

The categories of which candidate was being promoted and which candidate(s) were being targeted showed perfect agreement (Kappa = 1.0) and nearly perfect agreement (Kappa = 0.91), respectively. Coding options for these variables included all candidates' names as well as several combined options, such as "multiple

Republicans," "multiple Democrats," or "Washington in general." The nature of how opponents were being attacked in ads was also measured on the basis of personal characteristics or issue stands—or a combination of both types of attacks (Kappa = 0.84).

The last subjective variable coded in this study measured which actor(s) produced each video, regardless of whether they were found on official YouTube channels or through search terms. Categories here included officially sponsored ads that were endorsed by a candidate (and that were professionally produced by the campaign) as well as an option for having been produced by an (amateur) individual or interest group. It is worth noting that the boundary between "professional" and "non-professional" media creators was often blurred by the often comparable production quality of the ads, so the distinction of "official" versus "unofficial" advertising here is based explicitly on whether or not an ad was produced or sponsored by a candidate or if it was created by a third-party individual or organization. Kappa for this item demonstrated full agreement.

FINDINGS

This study analyzed a total of 73 presidential campaign ads that were featured on YouTube across a nearly year-long period that covered a good portion of a strongly contested Republican primary. Fifty-five of these ads were ads sampled from the official YouTube channel of a candidate that was still running at the time of data collection (mid-March 2012), and another 18 ads were found using key search terms useful to finding ads relevant to the 2012 election. Both officially-endorsed campaign ads and unofficial ads created by a third-party individual or organization were filtered by frequency of views to purposefully gather the most watched negative ads.

Before analyzing ads by candidates, parties, or negativity and positivity, some general trends can be observed. There were 331,575.93 (SD = 981,285.06) views per ad on average, along with a mean of 1,174.22 comments (SD = 3,328.06) and a mean of 311.19 "favorites" per ad (SD = 657.10). The average number of "likes" (M = 2,347.11, SD = 4719.28) was considerably less than "dislikes" (M = 10,945.79, SD = 89,349.22), with one Rick Perry ad in particular being disliked more than 8.2 million times.

When looking at these distributions across candidates, there were a number of interesting similarities and differences. To begin, the overall positive//negative index was not statistically significant ($F(5, 72)$ = 1.57, p = .181) when examined with a joint analysis of variance (ANOVA) across all candidates. In an overall assessment of negativity it is also worth noting that Tukey post–hoc tests did not identify any statistically significant pairwise differences amongst candidates as well. So while it is useful to note that Ron Paul proved to be the most negative in his YouTube advertising with an average of −7.83 (SD = 10.52), this level of combined negative images and statements subtracted from all positive images and statements was not significantly greater than that of the most positive online advertising campaign of Barack Obama (M = −0.70, SD = 9.11) that was considered here.

Though this finding suggests candidates were, overall, not differentiated on the basis of their overall negative/positive measure, the popularity of videos online also needs to be considered in relation to both factors of candidates and their levels of negativity. Starting here with only candidate-sponsored videos, the number of user comments was statistically significant across candidates ($F(5, 72) = 3.54$, $p = .007$), as was the number of ad likes ($F(5, 72) = 5.73$, $p = .000$), and ad favorites ($F(5, 72) = 4.81$, $p = .001$). Other features, namely the average number of views ($F(5, 72) = 1.22$, $p = .312$) and dislikes ($F(5, 72) = 1.13$, $p = .353$) across candidates were not statistically significant when examined with ANOVA.

Post-hoc Tukey tests indicated that Ron Paul generated significantly more comments than Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, and a collection of "other" candidates or organizations. The same finding was generally true of the number of audience-based liking and favoring, where Ron Paul videos were statistically greater than pairwise comparisons to the YouTube advertising of Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, and Barack Obama. Interestingly, these findings signal that the Ron Paul campaign was notable for not only being the most negative (albeit not to a statistically significant degree) but also for being, on average, the most commented on ($M = 3,767.67$, $SD = 5,896.63$), the most liked ($M = 6,622.28$, $SD = 5,341.51$), and the most favorited ($M = 861.22, 693.52$).

When looking more broadly at campaigning across party lines, there was not clear evidence that ads by or for Democrats were significantly more negative or positive than ads posted online that promoted Republican candidates ($t(71) = -0.93$, $p = .304$) when considered as a whole with the combined negative/positive measure. When negative images and statements per ad were isolated, however, it was observed that the Republican advertising had a significantly greater level of negativity ($t(26.91) = 2.07, p = .048$, equal variances not assumed), with an average of 11.44 negative images and statements per ad ($SD = 7.69$) compared to Democratic ads online ($M = 7.79$, $SD = 5.44$). Interestingly, though primary Republican ads on YouTube were not more viewed, on average, they did show mean levels of likes ($M = 2,688.61, SD = 5,174.29$) and favorites ($M = 358.71, SD = 717.50$) that were higher than Democratic ads to a statistically significant degree. For likes, the mean of Democratic ads was 907.93 ($SD = 1,068.07$) and ($t(70.55) = 2.43$, $p = .017$, equal variances not assumed). For favorites, the average for Democratic ads was 110.93 ($SD = 202.76$) with ($t(68.83) = 2.29$, $p = .025$, equal variances not assumed).

Negative ads, when compared only to positive ones (and not the three ads that were calculated to be perfectly neutral with equivalent numbers of negative and positive images and statements) where found to be significantly more viewed on average ($t(67.69) = 2.21$, $p = .031$, equal variances not assumed). The mean number of views for negative ads was 261,235.94 ($SD = 335,963.38$) compared to an average of 135,026.95 views ($SD = 142,430.98$) for positive ads. Interestingly, ads that targeted the candidates from the right were most negative ($M = -6.83$, $SD = 9.49$) and significantly more so ($F(2, 72) = 3.40$, $p = .039$) than ads that feature attacks on the left ($M = -2.52$, $SD = 7.61$) and the political establishment or mainstream politics in general ($M = 0.14; SD = 10.83$) when considered jointly on the composite negative/positive index. Tukey post-hoc tests also indicated that

attacks on the right were significantly more negative than attacks on mainstream politics ($p = 0.049$) in pairwise comparisons, but not ads that attacked the left ($p = 0.194$). No pairwise difference was observed between ads that attacked the left and mainstream politics (0.672).

When looking at whether ads focused on issues, personal characteristics, or a combination of the two, there was a statistically significant difference between these three groups ($F(2, 60) = 3.08$, $p = .054$). On average, issue-based attacks were the least negative ($M = -1.53$, $SD = 7.55$), followed by personal trait-based attack ads online ($M = -4.88$, $SD = 10.05$), and ads that combined both issue attacks and attacks on personal characteristics were the most negative ($M = -8.04$, $SD = 8.65$) when comparing averages of the composite negative/positive measure. Post-hoc Tukey tests indicated that in pairwise comparisons, only combined attack ads were significantly more negative than issue-only attacks ($p = 0.042$). Finally, online ads produced by third parties and not officially endorsed by candidates themselves were more negative, with an average of -8.50 ($SD = 6.17$) compared to official ads posted to YouTube, that had a mean negative/positive composite score of -3.45 ($SD = 9.64$), but this difference was only significant at the .10 level ($t(70) = 1.87$, p $= .066$).

One interesting intersection of these comparisons is where the level of negativity/positivity was measured against which actors produced online ads and who was attacked. This interaction approached statistical significance ($F(2,66) = 2.54$, $p = .087$, partial $\eta^2 = .071$, observed power $= .490$), and showed a main effect by official or unofficial ads ($F(1,66) = 6.21$, $p = .015$, partial $\eta^2 = .086$, observed power $= .690$). The divergence of how officially endorsed ads treated different parties is clear—they were most negative in their attacks on the right ($M = -7.58$, $SD = 9.70$), and increasingly less so on the left ($M = -1.67$, $SD = 7.02$) and actually quite positive in portraying establishment or mainstream politics ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 9.99$). This contrasted with ads created by third parties that actually were most positive in their attacks on the right ($M = -7.33$, $SD = 5.15$), most negative in attacking the left ($M = 11.50$, $SD = 10.61$), but still relatively negative in attacking mainstream "politics as usual" advertising ($M = -10.00$, $SD = 8.19$).

Finally, while the differences do not reach statistical significance, it is worth observing the average number of views per ad as they are situated across parties and whether they are negative or positive. Here, all ads that were below zero on the negative/positive composite measure were considered "negative" and all those ads above zero were considered "positive" ads. For Republican ads posted to YouTube, negative ads were most viewed, with 285,660.38 ($SD = 355,018.79$) views on average, whereas positive ads reached only 117,268.14 ($SD = 131,821.60$) mean views. Democratic ads, conversely, showed an average of just 133,007.63 ($SD = 171,768.55$) views for negative ads, which increased to an average of 176,464.17 ($SD = 170,192.49$) for positive ads. Again, while these differences should not be misconstrued as statistically significant, the pattern is indicative of more negative advertisements being more viewed for Republican candidates and Democrats' positive online ads being more viewed, relatively speaking.

DISCUSSION

This study intended to explore online campaign advertising as it existed in the primary season of the 2012 presidential campaign. A number of noticeable and significant differences were observed, as were several key similarities over the candidates, the parties, and the producers of online advertising, and the level of negativity or positivity found in ads posted to YouTube during this election.

To begin, when looking at RQ1a, it was clear that Ron Paul had the most negative online campaign advertising, but not to a statistically significant degree. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Paul's online ads did generate significantly more comments, likes, and favorites than most other candidates. As to RQ1(b), ads that promoted Republican candidates were significantly more negative than ads supporting Democratic candidates, but only when comparing negative images and statements alone, and not on balance with overall levels of negativity and positivity. This finding aligns with Druckman and colleagues' (2010) observations in their multi-campaign survey of negativity on Congressional campaign Web sites that challengers would be more likely to be negative.

Also, Republican ads were significantly more liked and favorited, on average, when compared with Democratic ads, but not more viewed. This may reflect the contested nature of the Republican primary. Governor Romney did not win the nomination until August 2012 and the preceding campaign battle called on voters to engage with, and make a voting decision about, the candidates in the field. A more positive advertising style would, however, accord with a Democratic primary whose outcome was predetermined, and whose direct competitor was yet unknown.

Altogether, the results of RQ1 suggest in some ways that increased negativity, particularly on the part of Paul and Republicans more generally, was related to more interactions by the audience online. Unlike the Cortese and Proffitt (2012) findings on John McCain's online advertising in 2008, Paul seemingly was rewarded with the most comments, likes, and favorites by YouTube users. Perhaps this finding is reflective of the role that Paul played in the primary. Paul presented himself, in many ways, as an "outsider" candidate who was not representative of the mainstream of the Republican Party, and his libertarian positions were seen as more appealing to younger and anti-war voters. One possible explanation, therefore, is that his appeals matched well with those going online to YouTube in search of political information (or political entertainment).

Shah and colleagues (2007, p. 677) have noted the "mixed empirical evidence" afforded by studies into the effect of negative ads on political participation, pointing in particular to Geer's (2006) "defense of campaign negativity" as focusing voters on the central issues of the campaign. In this case, it may have been that Paul's aggressively negative campaigning was not demobilizing among this online audience but rather something many positioned as valid and worth commenting on, liking, and favoring.

The results of examining RQ2 identified that negative ads online were frequently viewed to a statistically significant degree than positive campaign ads.

It was also evident that online ads targeting candidates from the right were significantly more negative than ads that attacked the left or the political mainstream in general, which answered RQ3(a). The findings for RQ3(b) indicated that online ads that attacked candidates on issues were least negative, and those with combined issue and personal characteristic attacks were most negative. Ads that focused only on personal characteristics were almost exactly midway between these negativity levels, and the differences were statistically significant.

These findings raise interesting questions about the heightened negativity in combined attack ads. Perhaps as a strategy to avoid voter "backlash" against purely personal attacks, these combined ads allowed for an association between a candidate's personal characteristics and their political priorities and policies, thus possibly legitimizing the "negative" strategy. While purely personal attack ads may be off-putting and reflect poorly on the sponsoring candidate, an ad that incorporated policy elements might avoid or lessen this negative voter reaction; further research is needed to explore this proposition with greater detail.

Finally, when considering RQ4, official online advertising approached statistical significance (at $p = .066$) in being more negative than unofficial online advertising. In addition, there was an interaction that also approached statistical significance between media producers, level of negativity, and who was attacked. These findings signal the different tactics that were employed by third parties in attacking different parties in the campaign, and contribute to a deeper understanding of this otherwise under-explored area of unofficial ads both online and on television (see Brooks & Murov, 2012; Cheng & Riffe, 2008).

"Official" advertising posted online seemed to have implicitly reinforced mainstream politics while simultaneously most aggressively attacking Republican candidates, indicating a certain level of in-fighting amongst primary candidates. Conversely, "unofficial" ads were most critical of Barack Obama or other Democratic positions in general, along with negatively portraying the political establishment. This fracture suggests the augmented capacity for third-party advertising to re-order an election campaign, and there was no statistically significant difference in the average number of views of official and unofficial ads online ($t(70) = 0.26$, $p = .794$).

These findings indicate that the nearly one-quarter of ads in the sample from "unofficial" sources (a similar finding to Klotz (2010)'s proportion of "non-traditional" content producers) may have been focusing on the general campaign battle to come. In critiquing the President, his party and the "establishment" in Washington, a "time for change" message can be developed which places these negative ads into a broader political narrative. However, the sample remains dominated by "official" campaign ads, supporting previous research which has found that while YouTube offers *possibilities* for exchange and interaction, this happens mostly at the level of commenting on or sharing existing videos; ultimately the "number of truly independent videos is very small" (Klotz, 2010, p. 118) and "underlying" campaign dynamics have not been dramatically altered (Gulati & Williams, 2010, p. 106). While new producers are engaging and the campaigns and candidates are not the only (or perhaps even the dominant) voices on YouTube,

political ads for the most part are being produced and uploaded by "professional" third parties rather than ordinary citizens.

Also suggested by RQ4, in terms of popularity, though the results did not achieve statistical significance, negative ads that endorsed Republicans were most viewed, on average. Amongst Democratic ads, positive ads were viewed more frequently than negative ads. Here, we can begin to draw out the links between the positive or negative tone of an advertisement and its viewing frequency. Ridout and colleagues (2012) position YouTube as a "dialogic environment" where voters "can and do contest the messages of the campaigns by producing their own videos to communicate directly with other voters" (p. 12). However, as can be observed here, this activity is not the only measure of interaction and communication between campaigns, candidates and voters on YouTube. In watching, commenting on and favoriting political ads, voters are contributing to a dynamic space where dialogue and exchange does occur, despite this being predominantly around official rather than unofficial content.

Of course, the nature of a primary campaign almost certainly had an influence on the results, and some of this advertising was about candidates from within the same party distinguishing themselves from other members of their own party rather than attacking someone from the opposition. In this regard, Obama did not have an "opposition" in the immediate sense, and so Democratic ads online could politically afford to have been more positive. Republican candidates were all "challengers" in a sense in the study of YouTube campaigning considered here and were battling for the chance to go up against the incumbent, and thus positioning themselves for a different end game.

Altogether, online advertising in the primary season of the 2012 election campaign was fairly reflective of similar findings from previous studies of traditional (televised) campaign advertising. To some extent, the patterns observed here may well indicate the normalization and embeddedness that YouTube has taken on in political campaigning. While the user benefits and the interactive options such advertising affords should surely not be discounted, they are by and large no longer "new." Thus, it is only reasonable now to situate YouTube as a permanent fixture in elections, but only as just another mediated space among many that can and does contribute to the defining features and outcomes of elections.