BEYOND ROCKING THE VOTE: AN ANALYSIS OF RHETORIC

DESIGNED TO MOTIVATE YOUNG VOTERS

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Attempts to solve the continued problem of low youth voter turnout in the U.S. have included get out the vote drives, voter registration campaigns, and public service announcements targeting 18- to 25-year-old voters. Pay Attention and Vote added to this effort to motivate young voters in its 2006 campaign. This thesis analyzes the rhetorical strategies employed by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign advertisements, measures their effectiveness, and adds to the limited body of knowledge describing the attitudes and behaviors of young nonvoters. This thesis applies a mixed method approach, utilizing both rhetorical criticism and quantitative method. The results of both analyses are integrated into a discussion which critiques current strategies of addressing the youth voter turnout problem and offers suggestions for future research on the topic.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Educators, academics, nonprofits and foundations, and politicians endeavor to address the perennial problem of low youth voter turnout in the US through get out the vote drives, voter registration campaigns, and public service announcements targeting 18- to 25-year-old voters. During the 2006 midterm election cycle, the Ad Council, in conjunction with the Federal Voting Assistance Program, created a campaign called Pay Attention and Vote in order to increase youth voter knowledge and participation in the election. In this thesis I analyze the rhetorical strategies employed by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign advertisements, measure their effectiveness, and add to the limited body of knowledge describing the attitudes and behaviors of young nonvoters.

Chapter 2 includes a statement of the problem outlining the issues created by low youth participation in politics and voting and reviews current literature pertaining to the subject. I review several topics concerning campaigns and elections and efforts to turn out young voters, including studies pertaining to candidates and political campaigns, research focused on social marketing and public service announcements, investigations of get out the vote campaign techniques, research analyzing the role of technology in campaigns, and discussions concerning the use of humor in politics. The literature review closes with a discussion of cognitive dissonance theory, the persuasive theoretical framework applied in this project. The literature review uncovers several gaps in knowledge about young nonvoters and the rhetoric used to motive them to vote.

Those gaps in knowledge lead to the rationale for this thesis and to five research questions, which are outlined at the end of chapter 2.

Chapter 3 describes the mixed method approach used in this project, which incorporates both rhetorical criticism and quantitative analysis to answer the research questions. A mixed method approach benefits this project by allowing two different perspectives of analysis. This chapter goes on to describe and discuss the quantitative analysis that allowed me measure the text's effectiveness on the intended audience and allowed me to collect data in an effort to describe the intended audience. The quantitative study demonstrated the overall apathy young people express concerning elections and politics, and their lack of participation in political activity.

Chapter 4 includes the second half of my mixed method: a close textual analysis of the campaign's ad. Utilizing close textual analysis allowed me to understand the intended message of the campaign and persuasive strategies used by the campaign. Through rhetorical analysis I identified the explicit and implicit messages contained in the text, discussed the use of humor and technology by the campaign, and analyzed the effectiveness of the persuasive strategy utilized by the campaign.

Chapter 5 integrates the results from each analysis into a discussion in which I critique current strategies of addressing the youth voter turnout problem, outline potential solutions to the problem, and offer suggestions for future research on the topic.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RATIONALE

My goal in this project is to analyze the rhetorical strategies employed by the Pay

Attention and Vote campaign advertisements, measure their effectiveness, and add to

the limited body of knowledge describing the attitudes and behaviors of young

nonvoters. In the following review of literature I analyze current research in political

communication pertaining to political campaigns, public service campaigns, get out the

vote efforts, the use of technology in campaigns, and the use of humor in politics.

Through this review, I demonstrate a gap in research examining campaigns that attempt

to motivate young voters and build to the rationale for this project and the research

questions at hand.

Statement of the Problem

The passing of the 2006 midterm election provided another example of lackluster

voter turnout and leads to questions concerning the level of interest and awareness

among the American electorate. In the 2006 midterm elections voters had multiple

issues to consider, including US actions in a failing war in Iraq, questionable leadership

on foreign policy with North Korea and Iran, ethics violations by at least a dozen

members of congress, high gas prices, stagnate wages, and an overall sense that our

country was on the wrong track. The sheer number of critical issues facing our country,

combined with unprecedented get out the vote efforts targeting young voters, old voters,

socially conservative voters, and progressive voters might lead some to believe more

Americans would participate in the election. However, voter turnout remained low

across the nation, with only 40.4% of registered voters casting ballots in November, 2006 (Center for the Study of the American Electorate, 2006).

Statistics showing the low voter turnout described above are only one example of the many research results that demonstrate the apathy of the American public. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) conducts an annual survey of citizens age 15 and older to measure the level of civic participation in the nation. The 2006 results offer a few glimmers of hope, but the report mostly reinforces the notion Americans are disinterested in government, politics, and their roles in democracy. On the hopeful side, the survey showed an increase in participation in public protest among Latino respondents and that 36% of respondents participate in volunteer service (CIRCLE, n.d.). Areas of the survey that reflect the conventional wisdom about civic participation include low young voter participation (26% of respondents age 18-25), little knowledge or incorrect understanding of politics and current events, and a decrease in confidence in government (Center for the Study of the American Electorate, 2006).

Little is known about the approximately one-half of the American electorate who choose not to vote on Election Day. In 1996, a group of researchers and graduate students from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University set out to research nonvoters because they are almost always ignored in national polling, by candidates, and by the major political parties (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999). The researchers tested the conventional wisdom concerning disaffected Americans through survey data and interviews, and produced news reports, a documentary, and a book with their results. The researchers reinforced some conventional wisdom, but also found

that many nonvoters made a conscious decision to sit out the 1996 election (Doppelt &

Shearer, 1999). While they did find a number of survey respondents had no interest in

government or policy making and the sense that one vote does not matter, they also

found a large group of nonvoters carefully considered the question of voting or not

voting, and decided to stay home on Election Day. The researchers found nonvoters do

not fit most of the stereotypes the public has about their group. They come from all

ethnicities, income levels, ages, and education levels, and have as many and as varied

a set of opinions as voters do, but tend to feel more disconnected and dissatisfied with

the political process than voters feel (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999).

Although Doppelt and Shearer (1999) focused on nonvoters, they explained why

the issue of nonvoting has captured the interest of scholars and the media. They

reviewed work that argued nonvoting was a symptom of a greater problem in America.

Larry Sabato, political science professor and director of the Center for Government

Studies at the University of Virginia, called the decline in voter participation a national

crisis and echoed Jimmy Carter's concerns from his 1979 "malaise" speech, that low

voter turnout was "symptomatic of a crisis in the American spirit" (Doppelt & Shearer,

1999, p. 9). The nonvoting phenomenon is particular to American democracy. When

compared with other industrialized democracies, the United States does not fare well.

Between 1960 and 2000, the mean turnout in other democracies was slightly above

80%, while the mean turnout in the US for the same time period was barely 55% (Hill,

2006). This American nonvoting phenomenon has a negative impact on our

international reputation (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999). Several American foundations work

to strengthen democratic practices in developing democracies worldwide, and are

frequently questioned concerning their ability to strengthen others' democracies when American democracy seems to be faltering (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999).

The disengagement of young Americans is particularly concerning to those who study trends in civic life. While Doppelt and Shearer (1999) disproved many stereotypes about nonvoters, their research confirms the age gap among nonvoters. Their survey shows 18 to 29 year olds comprise 40% of the nonvoting public. Other research showed young Americans today are much less likely to engage in civic activities than young people were in past decades (Galston, 2004). While volunteerism is up among young people, they fail to make the connections between their individual actions in their communities and the government policies related to their areas of volunteerism (Galston, 2004). For example, young people see value in volunteering for Habitat for Humanity to affect affordable housing shortages in their communities, but they do not see value in advocating government action on national housing policies. Young peoples' neglect of the political and governmental aspects of social issues has created a political environment in which their issues of interest are typically ignored in favor of creating policy to benefit the demographic groups that vote, namely senior citizens (Hill, 2006). Politicians and policy makers will not pay attention to the needs of young Americans until they become engaged in electoral politics.

Galston (2004) argued there might be an even larger concern about the failure of young voter participation than the lack of political attention to issues that impact youth. He highlighted the connection between participation in civic activities and self-development. Using de Tocqueville and Mill as a basis for argument, Galston described the character and personality building benefits young people obtain through civic

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participation. He said young people learned to work with others, learned tools of persuasion, increased interest in the people and world around them, and developed a sense of personal responsibility through participation in civic action. He highlighted the growing need for these skills in an increasingly service-based economy. In sum, Galston showed effective civic education leads to civic participation, which helps create citizens who are better prepared to affect their communities and contribute to the economy. His argument demonstrates the critical need for an increase in the interest and participation of young voters in the electoral process.

Some scholars have argued low voter participation is not a cause for great concern. They claimed people do not vote because they are satisfied with the current state of affairs (Berelson, Lazarfeld, & McPhee, 1954) or that those who do vote are representative of the concerns of nonvoters and increased turnout would not change the outcome of most elections (Gant & Lyons, 1993; Highton & Wolfinger, 1998). While these scholars may be right about the level of satisfaction and representation among nonvoters, low voter turnout is still problematic in a democracy. Hill (2006) argued the turnout issue is about voice in elections. He said the lack of representation of certain groups in the American electorate calls into question the legitimacy of our democracy. Democracy is based on the notion that the members of the governed group choose the individuals who develop, implement, and enforce laws. The success of democracy depends on the participation of the people in choosing their lawmakers. All groups should be represented in a functioning democracy, including young, sometimes apathetic citizens. Hill (2006) hypothesized several reasons for low voter turnout and outlined some remedies for the problem.

Political scientists and sociologists have hypothesized about the causes of low voter turnout for years. Some scholars have blamed lack of civic education for low turnout (Ahmad, 2006; Galston, 2004), while others have focused on the affects of political campaigns and media coverage (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1997; Palast, 2003). Hill (2006) argued that institutional mechanisms, such as the Electoral College and voter registration laws, prevent voter participation. Hill (2006) argued voters are less likely to participate in elections when they believe their votes do not count, as in the Electoral College, or when the process for becoming a registered voter is too complicated. He also argued our government's structure stops voters because the system of checks and balances present in American government is complex and makes the system slow to respond. Recognizing that changing the structure of government in the US would be difficult and an all around bad idea, Hill (2006) instead advocated a change in the Electoral College, single-member congressional voting districts, and voting procedures, such as creating a national election holiday and same day voter registration. Until changes in the system can be implemented to increase voter turnout, the government and nonprofit organizations interested in the preservation of democracy and increasing voter turnout must continue to educate potential voters about the complex system and work to increase voter registration and participation nationwide.

The condition of low young voter turnout has generated several efforts by the government and nonprofit organizations to increase interest and electoral turnout of young voters. Organizations like Rock the Vote and Vote or Die have utilized the power of celebrity to create an entertainment quality in the electoral process in hopes of attracting the attention of young voters (Cloonan & Street, 1998). Few can forget the

1991 Rock the Vote television ad featuring Madonna telling the audience they would get a spanking if they did not vote, or P. Diddy and his friends sporting Vote or Die t-shirts during the 2004 election cycle. Other organizations, such as Kids Voting USA and Project Vote Smart, have tackled the problem of low youth participation through efforts to educate young people about the issues and candidates and by creating a forum for political socialization.

The high level of interest, effort, and funding dedicated to increasing political participation among young voters has sparked the interest of scholars. Several studies have reviewed the tools utilized by these campaigns and dissected outcomes in an effort to determine the effectiveness of the efforts (Cloonan & Street, 1998; McKinney & Banwart, 2005; Strama, 1998; Tedesco, McKinney, & Banwart, 2005; Tindell & Medhurst, 1998). The studies and surveys have demonstrated that despite efforts to increase young voter participation, the percentage of young voters continues to shrink.

Tedesco et al. (2005) studied the young voter problem by analyzing the presidential debate held by Rock the Vote and MTV in 2004. Their research questions focused on the agenda setting nature of a debate held for a specific audience. Their findings led them to call for several action steps to address the lack of efficacy in get out the vote messages targeting young voters. One action step they recommended was a new strategy of message construction by organizations targeting young voters (Tedesco et al., 2005). The rhetorical analysis in chapter 4 and the discussion of that analysis in chapter 5 of this project answer their call for a scholarly focus on message construction and persuasion in youth vote rhetoric.

While the findings of the studies described above better inform scholars about the practice of targeting young voters in get out the vote efforts and add to our knowledge concerning the myriad reasons young people choose to be nonvoters, they do not build a coherent understanding of who young nonvoters are, nor do they focus on the communicative aspects of the problem. This paper increases the limited knowledge we have concerning nonvoters through a quantitative study of 18- to 25-year-old nonvoters and adds a rhetorical perspective to the body of research concerning youth voter turnout by analyzing the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) 2006 effort to increase midterm election participation among young voters. FVAP worked with the Ad Council to develop a multifaceted advertising campaign called Pay Attention and Vote. As an answer to Tedesco et al.'s (2005) call for a new strategy in message construction in the effort to turn out young voters, this thesis examined the Pay Attention and Vote campaign's persuasive strategy in the television advertisements they produced. The campaign created video and radio advertisements and targeted young potential voters in forums they typically visited, such as the YouTube™ Website[*] and other sites. The ads used humor in an effort to create interest in the organization's Website. The Website gave visitors an easy to use, state-by-state guide to voter registration materials and nonpartisan information about the midterm elections. Pay Attention and Vote offers scholars an opportunity to analyze a unique message strategy to motivate young voters. The combination of humor to attract attention with the tools offered by the Web provides rhetorical scholars with unique texts concerning youth vote rhetoric. An analysis of those texts, the Pay Attention and Vote campaign Website and

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[*] YouTube, LLC, http://www.youtube.com

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advertisements, can provide communications scholars, political scientists, and the civics education community an evaluation of a strategy new to the youth vote movement.

Literature Review

Political Campaigns and Candidates

Dozens of components work together to build a modern political campaign. Candidates create persuasive messages, utilize mass media, advertising, and technology to distribute their messages, develop strategies to move their voters to the polls on Election Day, schedule countless public appearances, and raise millions of dollars in each election cycle. All of their election activities are mediated thorough communication processes, and offer communication scholars ample material to study. The following description of the state of the field of political candidate research merely grazes the surface of studies available, but covers the major areas of study receiving attention in political communication research.

One major area of study in the field of political communication is persuasive technique and message choice. Scholars have examined the impact of party affiliation on candidate discourse and language choice (Benoit, 2004; Jarvis, 2004) and have analyzed the framing of specific issues, such as the war on terrorism (Spielvogel, 2005). They have also studied the creation of get out the vote messages (Jackson, 2002; Lariscy, Tinkham, Edwards, & Jones, 2004) and candidate strategy concerning campaign appearances (Althaus, Nardulli, & Shaw, 2002).

Communication scholars also have examined the effect a candidate's gender and ethnicity on voters. In one study researchers targeted the differences in media

coverage for Asian-American candidates and their European-American opponents (Wu & Tien-Tsung, 2005). They found Asian-American candidates received an equal amount of coverage, but news stories about Asian-American candidates were more likely to include stereotypes and to highlight the candidate's ethnicity than stories about European-American candidates. In another study researchers focused on candidate gender in an analysis of print media coverage of Elizabeth Dole in the 2000 Republican presidential primary (Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005). The authors found print media coverage of Dole focused on her gender and her standing as the first serious female contender for a major party nomination for president. They also determined that print media stories described Dole's personality traits and appearance much more frequently than they did her male opponents' (Heldman et al., 2005).

One area of candidate related research that has recently received a great deal of attention is candidates' use of technology in their campaigns. Specifically, scholars have focused on candidates' use of Websites (Hansen & Benoit, 2005; Souley & Wicks, 2005), blogs (Bichard, 2006; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006), and e-mail (Williams & Trammell, 2005) as campaign tools. Benoit and Benoit (2005) developed a research tool for critically evaluating political campaignWebsites, and Delli Carpini (2000) focused on the potential technology has to affect disengaged young voters.

While research about some specific areas of candidate communication and persuasion techniques exists, much of the communication research about political candidates explored political advertising and media coverage of candidates. Research about candidate political advertising focused on a variety of areas, including

examinations of visual aspects of candidate advertisements (Richardson, 2002), the persuasive tools used in candidate advertisements (Perloff, 1991), candidate advertising during party primaries (Haynes, Flowers, & Gurian, 2002), the relationship between candidate advertising and public policy making (Hansen & Benoit, 2002), and general overviews of political advertising (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1997; Levin, 2005). Much of the research concerning media coverage of candidates focused on evaluating the overall job the media did in reporting on candidates in various contests (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005; Farnsworth & Lichter, 2004). Some research focused on more specific issues, such as how media bias affected coverage of candidates (Schiffer, 2006), how media coverage of issues affected voter perceptions of candidates (Drew & Weaver, 2006; Sei-Hill, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2005), how the media influenced the selection of candidates in the primaries (Edwards, 1998; Harmon, 2004), and how the media helped shape voters' idealization of presidential candidates (Trent, Short-Thompson, Mongeau, Metzler, & Trent, 2005).

Research and interest in campaigns is not limited to the campaigns run by political candidates. Many nonprofit organizations and government agencies engage in social marketing and public service announcements. In the next section of this literature review I will describe research pertaining to non-candidate campaigns.

Public Service Announcements and Nonprofit Campaigns

Public service announcements (PSAs) are created to increase public awareness about a specific issue or to encourage the public to change its behavior concerning a specific topic (Bator & Cialdini, 2000). They are used most often by nonprofit

organizations and appeal to organizations because of their ability to repeatedly reach a large audience (Hornik, 1989). Americans are most frequently exposed to PSAs targeting health issues and much of the scholarly research concerning PSAs focuses on health related advertisements. PSAs containing anti-drug messages (Morgan, Stephenson, & Palmgreen, 2003; Stephenson, 2002; Davis, 1997), anti-smoking messages (Durkin & Wakefield, 2006; Eisenberg, Ringwalt, Driscoll, Vallee, & Gullette, 2004; Lavack, 2004), messages concerning healthy lifestyle choices (Boer, Ter Huurne, & Taal, 2006; Henao, Rodriguez, & Wilbum, 2006; Southwell, 2001), anti-alcohol messages (Adnsager, Austin, & Pinkleton, 2001; Agostinelli & Grube, 2002), and HIV/AIDS awareness and safe sex messages (DeJong, Wolf, & Austin, 2001; Lee & Davie, 1997; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1996) received the most attention from researchers examining the effectiveness and message design of PSAs. Most of this research utilized case studies to examine specific pubic campaigns and used various methodologies and theories to determine the positive and negative aspects of the ad campaigns. While these studies contribute to my study by demonstrating the potential PSAs have as a text for analysis, other research on the topic directly builds to my analysis of the Pay Attention and Vote project.

Milburn's (1979) study of the effectiveness of public health campaigns contradicted research that declared mass media campaigns were ineffective. Previous research found public health campaigns were ineffective because audiences used selective exposure concerning their messages. Audiences who used selective exposure would choose to listen to the messages they agreed with more than they would listen to messages that challenged their beliefs or behaviors (Milburn, 1979). Milburn found that

the selective exposure hypothesis did not play a role in public health campaigns, and that the campaigns were, in fact, effective in changing attitudes about health issues. His study confirmed the potential usefulness public campaigns have to change behavior, and supported assumptions that efforts such as the Pay Attention and Vote campaign could have a positive impact on voting behavior.

Other research about PSAs demonstrated the importance of message content in the construction of PSAs. In an article advocating a pretest of anti-drug messages, one group of authors highlighted the importance of message content in PSAs by drawing attention to behavioral science theories that showed appropriate and well-constructed messages could change behavior in individuals (Fishbein, Hall-Jamieson, Zimmer, von Haeften, & Nabi, 2002). In an analysis of literature about the topic of public health mass media campaigns, Randolph and Viswanath (2004) described the characteristics of successful PSAs. They argued public campaign messages must be creative, simple, "excellent and eye-catching" (p. 431) messages that are easily understood by the audience.

Several studies have emphasized the importance of message exposure (Fishbein, et al., 2002; Lancaster & Lancaster, 2002; Randolph & Viswanath, 2004). All three studies have addressed the need for additional funding to increase the exposure and frequency of PSAs. Randolph and Viswanath (2004) focused on the need for public campaigns to seek the most appropriate channels for their messages and to use media coverage of their campaigns to multiply the effect of their messages, while Lancaster and Lancaster (2002) called on broadcasters to schedule PSAs during viewing hours with larger audiences.

A final area of research on PSAs that will inform my study concerns the use of persuasion theory in public campaigns. Bator and Cialdini (2000) created guidelines for the development of PSAs. Using persuasion theory as a framework, the authors described the ideal method for creating PSAs, including an investigation of the target audience, a pilot message vetted by a focus group, and suggestions for message presentation (Bator & Cialdini, 2000). Another study highlighted the effect of emotion on the persuasive quality of PSAs (Dillard & Peck, 2000). The authors argued many PSAs use emotional appeals in an effort to persuade the audience, including appeals to guilt, happiness, anger, and fear. Their results demonstrated the overall effectiveness of emotional appeals in PSAs, highlighting the power appeals to fear have over viewers, and described the need for emotional appeals to connect to the content of the message (Dillard & Peck, 2000).

One benefit the youth vote campaign has concerns the issue of canalization. From a social marketing perspective, canalization is an advertisement that does not try to change a basic attitude, but instead tries to build on an existing attitude to instigate a change in behavior (Kotler & Roberto, 1989). Kotler and Roberto described canalization using an example of a toothpaste ad. Most people already believe that brushing their teeth is a good idea, so the ad does not need to change viewers' attitudes about brushing; it just needs to persuade them to buy a specific brand of toothpaste. Most young people believe voting is an important action of citizenship (Galston, 2004), so ads must only convince them to act on an attitude they already hold.

These studies focused on the application of persuasion theory in public campaigns and lay the groundwork for my study of Pay Attention and Vote. Most PSA

research is dedicated to the analysis of health campaigns. I will address this gap in research by applying persuasion theory to a public campaign dedicated to changing the behavior of young people who avoid participation in the electoral process. Their campaign focused on getting out the vote (GOTV), a research topic popular in several academic fields.

Get Out the Vote

Get Out the Vote (GOTV) is a campaign strategy employed by candidates, political parties, and special interest groups to encourage voters to turn out and vote on Election Day. Pay Attention and Vote is one example of a special interest group utilizing GOTV strategies to increase voter turnout among a specific group. Other organizations have engaged in GOTV efforts, and scholars have focused on the effects of GOTV programs.

According to Green and Gerber (2004), most research concerning GOTV is half-hearted and focused on merely listing techniques. They conducted a study to address this gap in knowledge and attempted to describe the most effective and cost-effective means of moving voters to the polls on Election Day. Green and Gerber (2004) argued GOTV research is important because it is frequently the backbone of lower level campaigns, such as city council, school board, and state representative elections. While most GOTV and other political research is concentrated on federal and statewide elections, the authors argued many of the decisions affecting citizens' everyday lives are made at local levels, and research that concentrates on those elections is critical in the field. They also described the increased effectiveness of door-to-door canvassing,

phone banks conducted by volunteers, and the increased impact of coordinated

campaigns. Green and Gerber's (2004) work highlighted the potential impact well

organized and implemented GOTV strategies can have on voter turnout. They also

demonstrated the positive impact in-person and telephone contacts have on young

voters. Their experiments demonstrated a 5% increase in young voter turnout when

those voters were targeted with nonpartisan door-to-door canvassing and telephone

calls reminding them to vote (Green, Gerber, & Nickerson, 2002).

Most other research concerning GOTV efforts is focused on the actions of

special interest groups. Political scientists have reviewed the efforts of labor unions to

turn out their members on Election Day (Dreyfuss, 2000; Zullo, 2004), the actions of the

two major political parties in turning out their members to vote (Dreyfuss, 2000;

Nickerson, Friedrichs, & King, 2006), and the GOTV strategies used to motivate voters

of color to cast ballots (Dreyfuss, 2000; Green, 2004; Michelson, 2006; Nuno, 2007;

Ramirez, 2007). Overall, the results have shown voter mobilization efforts were useful in

increasing voter turnout, and GOTV strategies that incorporated phone calls, direct mail,

and/or door-to-door canvassing were most effective. Other research has analyzed the

use of GOTV strategies by political candidates (Jackson, 2002; Lariscy et al., 2004) and

the effectiveness of different delivery methods for GOTV messages (Gerber & Green,

2004; Imai, 2005; Nickerson, 2006).

While this research, conducted solely by political scientists and behavioral

analysts, is useful in demonstrating the value of GOTV efforts by special interest

groups, it does not address the critical concern of message development. Scholars now

know that contacting potential voters before an election increases turnout on Election

Day and that various methods of contact are effective, but they do not know what types

of messages and persuasion strategies were most effective in GOTV communications.

This gap in knowledge highlights the important role communication scholarship can play

in our understanding of political campaigns and campaign strategies.

Technology in the Modern Political Campaign

The use of technology in political campaigns is a growing area of interest for

political scientists and other scholars interested in the methods used by candidates,

political parties, and other organizations to influence voter decision-making and

participation. This interdisciplinary area of research has foundations in political science,

business, information technology, public advocacy, and communication studies. The

following review of the literature on technology and campaigning focuses on the role

technology plays in political campaigns, the use of technology by nonprofits and other

organizations in advocacy, and the potential impact the use of technology could have on

young voters.

Much of the research concerning the use of technology in politics comes in the

form of advice on campaign management. The various authors have offered advice to

candidates concerning the appropriate use of email in campaign strategy (Francisco,

1999; Green & Gerber, 2004), methods for conducting opposition research using the

(Bovee, 1998), techniques for voter mobilization utilizing resources (Coombs, 1999;

Dreyfuss & Stolper, 1998; Lavin, 1999), the potential online banner advertising holds for

political candidates (Donatelli, 2003; Hockaday & Edlund, 1999), Website development

(Cornfield, 2003; Johnson, 2002; Marlin, 1999) and overviews of the role technology

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can play in a campaign (Agre, 2002; Delli Carpini, 1996; Grefe, 2003). This research informs my study by confirming the influential role technology plays in modern campaigns and underscores the importance of using technology effectively.

Other research takes the form of analysis, reviewing the methods and content of past campaigns' Websites, blogs, and emails. Research that has investigated candidate Websites focused on the effects those Websites had on viewers' perceptions of the candidates (Hansen & Benoit, 2005), compared opponents' Websites and analyzed their content (Souley & Wicks, 2005), tracked the increase in interactivity and complexity of the technical functions of candidate Websites (Trammell et al., 2006), and established a model for evaluating campaign Websites (Benoit & Benoit, 2005). In other analyses researchers examined the use of framing in blogs on presidential candidates' Websites (Bichard, 2006) and reviewed candidate use of email in distributing their messages to supporters and potential supporters (Williams & Trammell, 2005).

A third major area of research concerning the use of technology and campaigns focused on online advocacy by nonprofit organizations. Research in this area of study examined the benefits and hazards organizations experience by using the Web as a tool for mobilizing volunteers to advocate on behalf of the cause the organization promoted. Much like the research concerning political candidate use of technology, some of this research has focused on giving advice to organizations that plan to use the as a resource in their efforts (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002; Cyriac, 2000; Moore, 1994), while other researchers have conducted case studies to serve as examples of online advocacy in action (Sehmel, 2002; Downing, 1989). This research informs my study by demonstrating the widespread use of technology, namely the Internet, to distribute

information in an effort to influence readers' attitudes and actions concerning specific issues. Pay Attention and Vote, the object of analysis in the current study, used similar techniques to persuade young voters to participate in the 2006 election.

Some research concerning technology in politics focuses specifically on the impact technological use could have on young voters and best informs the current study of Pay Attention and Vote. One nonprofit organization dedicated to the cause of youth participation argued the use of technology is the key to unlocking the problem of youth participation. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) published a study that highlighted the two problems most youth participation research reveals (CIRCLE, n.d.). First, civic education is critical in shaping the attitudes and beliefs young people have about government and politics, but it fails to increase youth participation in voting behaviors. Second, get out the vote efforts are effective in increasing young voter turnout, but they do not change the attitudes young people have about government and politics. CIRCLE and the study's authors argued technology could be used to bring the benefits of civic education and youth voter mobilization together (Iyengar & Jackman, 2004). They demonstrated the adeptness young people have in utilizing new technologies and their willingness to incorporate technology as a part of their everyday lives. The awareness and ability young people have in dealing with technology creates new tools for organizations interested in turning out a youth vote (Iyengar & Jackman, 2004). They tested their hypothesis that political information presented in a technologically advanced format would increase youth interest and participation by developing an interactive compact disk (CD) concerning the 2002 California governor's race. The CD included information about the candidates and

issues prominent in the campaign, and added music, interactive quizzes, and images to the information. The CD was distributed to young people in California, who were later surveyed about their impressions and use of the CD. The study outcomes showed a large increase in the interest and knowledge levels of the people who used the CD, demonstrating the potential technology has for increasing youth interest and participation in political action (Iyengar & Jackman, 2004).

In another area of research linking youth participation and technology, a number of scholars have linked the political interests of young people to their use of the Web. In a 2005 study of British and Irish youth during European parliament elections, Ward (2005) examined the techniques youth organizations and the major political parties used when addressing young voters. Although this study focused on European youth and elections, several factors make it useful in the current study. First, many European democracies are experiencing decline in youth participation similar to US elections. Second, both youth organizations and the major political parties made a dedicated effort to reach out to young voters via the Internet during the 2004 election cycle. Ward (2005) found a variety of Websites targeting youth, from well funded and developed Websites run by the major political parties, to smaller Websites with information but few interesting technologic features. The major party Websites had the most information concerning party candidates and provided viewers with voting information and opportunities to volunteer for the campaign. Overall, Ward (2005) found Websites with interesting presentation style and helpful information about voting procedures targeted at youth were the most useful to young voters, though not most frequently used, campaign Websites.

Ward highlighted Delli Carpini's (2000) research that argued the Internet could be an important tool in increasing young voter participation because it created an alternative sense of community for young people, focused on shared interests instead of geographic location, and used an interesting and accessible format to show young people how they can become active in issues that are important to them. He also discussed the potential the has for creating political interest in young people who are currently uninformed and disinterested in politics by connecting hobbies and social interests to politics. For example, people who search the Internet for information about fishing could be connected to political information concerning the protection of rivers and lakes. Delli Carpini (2000) began by outlining his interest in creating a dialogue about youth participation, and ended by calling on organizations and political parties to use the Internet to create interest in political causes and motivate young voters. His argument concerning the usefulness of the Internet as a tool adds to my study because Pay Attention and Vote exemplified his call for action in their use of the as a resource to distribute information about the 2006 elections and motivate young voters to focus on the election.

Lupia and Philpot (2005) also focused on the use of Websites in generating interest in politics and civic action. Through their research, Lupia and Philpot created a model for evaluating the impact of Websites targeting young voters. They found young voters are most influenced by Websites that provide "interesting information effectively and efficiently" (Lupia & Philpot, 2005, p. 1125). They concluded that Websites have the potential to have a sizable impact on users in general, and on young people specifically,

if the Websites capture young peoples' attention and prompt them to think about politics in new ways.

Other researchers have underscored the results of the studies described above. Bennett and Xenos (2005) examined the growth of political Websites in 2004 and highlighted the impact they had on young voters. They demonstrated the frequency with which young voters seek political information and called on campaigns to increase campaign Website interactivity and online information quality (Bennett & Xenos, 2005). Westen (1998) argued advances in technology could save democracy. Citing the decline in voter participation and civic literacy rampant in the US, Westen concluded our nation's founders' experiment in democracy was on the road to failure. Based on some of the founders' own arguments, such as James Madison's call for knowledge for all citizens and Thomas Jefferson's demand for an informed public, Westen argued the could save democracy because it provided an inexpensive, accessible, and sometimes entertaining resource for citizens to become more informed and knowledgeable about their government, politics, and political candidates.

The literature available regarding the role technology plays in politics today and the potential the Internet holds for the distribution of political and civic information emphasizes the importance of studying technological developments. Studies that examine the impact of sources on young voters are of particular interest in this study of rhetoric targeting young voters. Pay Attention and Vote depended on the to spread their message concerning the importance of voting to young people and offers scholars an opportunity to study how technologies are used to target young voters. This review of research about technology has described one method of distributing messages to

potential voters. Research in other areas tells scholars more about the strategies employed in those messages. The next section of the literature review describes the use of political humor as an example of one type of persuasion strategy.

Humor in Politics

Humor frequently functions as a tool in politics. It can be used by politicians to clarify political concepts, neutralize critics, attract attention, and negotiate conflicts (Nilsen, 1990). Political critics also use humor to uncover incompetence or misdeeds in government and in politicians (Nilsen, 1990). Research concerning the use of humor in politics, by both politicians and critics alike, has focused on critics use of political humor on late night television comedy programs, such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *The Daily Show,* and *Saturday Night Live* (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Baym, 2005; Goldthwaite, 2002; Goldthwaite Young, 2004; Goldthwaite Young & Tisinger, 2006; Niven, Lichter, & Amundson, 2003; Smith & Voth, 2002). Other research concerned the use of humor by specific politicians, such as Texas governor Ann Richards (Martin, 2004).

The numerous studies regarding political humor on late night comedy programs highlighted several of the effects exposure to this type of humor has on viewers' opinions of politicians and politics. One important note regarding political humor in late night television comedy programs is the frequency with which young people use these programs as a source of information about current events and politics (Baym, 2005; Goldthwaite Young & Tisinger, 2006). In 2004, *The Daily Show* had more than 2 million viewers daily, 40% of whom were 18-24 years old (Baym, 2005). Late night comedy has

become a source of political information for young people (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Baym, 2005; Goldthwaite Young & Tisinger, 2006), with both positive and negative effects. Research has shown viewers of late night political comedy were better informed about political candidates and current political events than those who did not watch the programs (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Baym, 2005); however, they were also more likely to be cynical about politics (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). Late night comedy frequently contains little content about political issues, but instead focuses on characterizations and personality traits of politicians (Niven et al., 2003), and these caricatures influence viewers' opinions of the candidates (Goldthwaite, 2002; Goldthwaite Young, 2004). Research concerning *The Daily Show* underscored the programs' use of humor as a tool to create an audience and increase interest in political discourse, even though the effects of that discourse sometimes create cynicism (Baym, 2005). The effectiveness of humor as a method for attracting the attention of young people to politics is an important concept in my analysis of Pay Attention and Vote. Pay Attention's campaign also used humor in an effort to capture the attention of young people to persuade them to become more political aware and active.

Other researchers have examined the role humor plays in persuasion and argument construction (Lyttle, 2001; Smith & Voth, 2002). Although Lyttle's empirical research focused on the use of humor in persuasion in the context of a business training course, his findings call attention to the role humor played in increasing the persuasiveness of the message. Lyttle (2001) found a training presentation that utilized humor as a method for increasing the likeability of the source and elevating the mood of the participants increased the persuasive quality of the presentation. Lyttle's research

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demonstrated the power humor can have in persuasion. Smith and Voth (2002)

examined the role *Saturday Night Live* played in the 2000 presidential election. They

argued the use of humor in the 2000 election cycle was different from previous years.

Earlier political humor was used as a means for dealing with political reality, while

political humor in the 2000 election helped shape political reality because many

Americans chose forums such as *Saturday Night Live* as their primary source of political

information (Smith & Voth, 2002). This shift in the use political humor moved humor

from a method of processing information to a method of gaining information and

endowed political humor with a new role in politics. Smith and Voth (2002) argued one

of the problems Al Gore faced in the 2000 election, the perception that he changed

character from debate to debate, stemmed from Gore's response to the

characterizations created of him on *Saturday Night Live*. They argued Gore's response

to the humorous portrayal created problems in the way voters perceived him. This

example of a politician changing his behavior based on the jokes told about him on

television demonstrates the new role political humor has taken on in the political

process. It persuades not only voters, but the politicians themselves.

A final area of humor research that can inform the current study is advertising

research focused on the use of humor. One study showed that humor was more

effective in advertisements when the audience had a low level of involvement with the

product or brand being advertised, and that humor use with low level involvement

audiences helped viewers create a positive association with the product or brand

(Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006). This research is useful in my analysis of Pay Attention and

Vote advertisements because Pay Attention's audience has a low level of involvement with the topic of the ads.

Theoretical Framework

Persuasion theory is an umbrella category for a collection of theories that address the ways in which individuals, groups, or organizations operate through communication to influence and change the attitudes and behaviors of others (Bostrom, 1983; Larson, 1983; O'Keefe, 1990; Reardon, 1981). Research in persuasion can be found in many academic fields, including communication studies, law, political science, advertising, and psychology (O'Keefe, 1990), with each field developing persuasion theories that best suit their research needs. Although some diversity exists in the theoretical approaches to persuasion the scholars in each field find most useful, most theories share a few common characteristics, namely, their attention to attitudes and the impact attitudes have on behaviors (Bostrom, 1983; O'Keefe, 1990; Reardon, 1981; Shelby, 1986).

Attitudes are defined as "orientations of the mind" that exert influence on overt behavior (O'Keefe, 1990, p. 17), and changes in attitudes are linked to changes in behavior (Bostrom, 1983; O'Keefe, 1990; Reardon, 1981). Multiple theories established measurements for the variables that impact attitude change and behavior change through persuasion. Much of the research on persuasion focuses on the source of the persuasive message, the content and style of the persuasive message, and factors about the persuasive message recipient that could affect the outcome of the message (Reardon, 1981). Other research focused on measuring the impact messages have on opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions to change behaviors as well as on

establishing models to predict the impact of persuasive messages (Reardon, 1981).

Critics of persuasion theory pointed out the lack of a unified, coherent framework in persuasion theory and persuasion researchers emphasis on the process and reasoning behind persuasion with little attention to giving advice to help persuaders be more effective (Shelby, 1986).

While no established framework in persuasion theory immediately speaks to the study at hand, several theories under the umbrella of persuasion theory inform my analysis of the Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign. I will use cognitive dissonance theory as a framework in my quantitative analysis of the Pay Attention and Vote campaign. Cognitive dissonance theory incorporates the components of other persuasion theories and builds a theoretical framework that allows scholars to consider the interaction of attitudes and behaviors.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Cognitive dissonance theory developed from several other persuasion theories, including Fishbein's summative model of persuasion theory, the theory of reasoned action, and the theory of planned behavior. Fishbein's (1957) summative model of persuasion theory posited attitude is based on an individual's most prominent beliefs about any given object or idea. Fishbein explained that individuals have several, often competing, beliefs about a given item or subject. He theorized that the dominant beliefs of the individual would determine the attitude he or she professes and acts upon concerning the item or subject. The theory of reasoned action tells us "the most immediate determinant of a person's behavior is the person's behavioral intention"

(O'Keefe, 1990, p. 80). This theory builds on the summative model by linking beliefs and

attitudes to behavior. People who intend to take a certain action are likely to comply with

their intention. The theory of planned behavior stemmed from the theory of reasoned

action and follows the groundwork of the previous theory, with one additional variable in

the persuasion process: the ease with which the action can be completed (Ajzen, 1985).

This variable, termed perceived behavioral control, is assumed to account for past

experiences with the behavior and anticipated barriers to the behavior. When added to

the theory of reasoned action variables (personal attitudes concerning the subject and

societal norms and expectations about the subject), perceived behavioral control

completes a model connecting attitude to behavior in persuasion theory (Ajzen, 1985).

Cognitive dissonance theory adds to the persuasive models that demonstrate the

connections between attitude, behavior, and perceived behavioral control by explaining

one reason why people are interested in having their behaviors conform to their

attitudes. When Festinger published this theory he set the stage for several attitude

consistency theories to follow (O'Keefe, 1990). Festinger (1957) theorized that the

human psyche is uncomfortable with inconsistent ideas and attitudes, and people will

actively attempt to decrease dissonance when they experience it. The example

Festinger used to describe this process is a person's knowledge that smoking causes

cancer combined with that person's decision to keep smoking. If the knowledge and

action were consonant, the knowledge that smoking causes cancer would lead to a

change in the behavior of smoking. The individual may continue the behavior despite

the knowledge of its dangers because he or she prioritizes some beliefs over others.

Dissonance can be reduced by changing the priority of the beliefs and by gaining new knowledge.

Cognitive dissonance theory is applicable in my quantitative analysis of the Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign because the campaign depended on young peoples' pre-existing desire to reduce their cognitive dissonance concerning the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior pertaining to voting in the persuasive messages of the campaign.

The Pay Attention and Vote Campaign

The organization Pay Attention and Vote created several texts in their campaign to increase participation among 18- to 25-year-old voters in the 2006 election. With financial support from the federal government, a Georgia firm created the campaign in association with the Ad Council. The campaign included both radio and television advertisements, along with a Website and press releases about the campaign and youth participation. The ads featured mock candidates for public office. All of the candidates were inanimate objects. For example, Old Relish Packet and Frozen Peas ran for the Senate, while Someone's Teddy Bear and Spoiled Yappy Dog ran for the House of Representatives. The ads followed an accepted script for political candidates. They included scenes of the candidates traveling in parades with people in the crowd waving American flags or on the steps of the courthouse surrounded by red, white, and blue balloons and a cheering audience, while a voiceover detailed the resume of the candidate. Each ad ended with an announcer saying, "If you're not voting, then who are you electing?" – the ultimate message of the campaign to potential young voters.

The ads ran on television, radio, and on based sources, such as YouTube™.

They encouraged viewers to visit the Pay Attention Website to find out more about the

2006 midterm elections. On the Website viewers could find out more about the

campaigns "candidates," but more importantly, they could register to vote; find

information about Election Day procedures and the candidates in their states; and

forward information about voting to their friends.

Pay Attention and Vote created several rhetorical texts during their campaign that

are ripe for critical analysis. My critique of the campaign focuses on the television ads

because those ads function as a summarized version of the messages provided in the

other formats, such as the radio ads, the Website, and the press releases. They also

utilize rhetorical strategies new to the growing body of youth vote rhetoric. Their use of

technology as a method of information distribution and humor as an attention getting

device set them apart from previous efforts to persuade young people to vote.

I chose the fall 2006 Pay Attention and Vote campaign as the text for my study

for several reasons. First, it is a nonprofit campaign that utilized technology in an effort

to create young voters from a pool of potential young voters. Earlier research on

nonprofit campaigns has focused on health issues, promotion of education and

understanding, and anti-drug messages. The use of technology as a campaign tool has

been limited to political candidates. Both topics are of interest to scholars in the field of

political communication because nonprofit campaigns and technology are being used

more and more as tools for conveying persuasive political messages.

Pay Attention and Vote also used a new rhetorical strategy in its effort to reach

young voters. Instead of depending on the cult of celebrity to draw attention to the

cause, Pay Attention and Vote used humor to attract attention. Research on the use of

humor in politics and the effects it has on voters has focused heavily on late night

television comedy, such as *The Daily Show* and *Saturday Night Live*. An analysis of the

use of humor in the Pay Attention and Vote get out the vote campaign offers an

additional perspective concerning the use of humor in politics.

Rationale

The above literature review provides an explanation of the gaps in current

scholarship concerning our understanding of nonvoters, low youth voter turnout, and the

rhetorical strategies employed by both governmental and nonprofit agencies in an effort

to increase youth participation in elections. The Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign

from the 2006 midterm election cycle provides a text for analysis that closes some of

the current gaps in knowledge.

Lower turnout among 18-25 year olds during midterm elections is a problem

scholars from various fields have examined. A great deal of money has been spent in

an effort to reach out to potential young voters and get them to the polling site on

Election Day. Most research about these efforts focused on one organization in

particular, Rock the Vote (Tedesco et al., 2005; Cloonan & Street, 1998; Tindell &

Medhurst, 1998). In their critique of Rock the Vote, Tedesco et al. (2005) specifically

called for a renovation in the strategies used to motive young voters. The Pay Attention

and Vote campaign used humor as a rhetorical strategy in their messages to young

voters, and their alternative persuasive method deserves scholarly attention. The

rhetorical analysis of their strategies, found in chapter 5, offers a critique of the strategies used.

As noted earlier knowledge concerning nonvoters is limited. According to Doppelt and Shearer (1999) little research focuses on the category of nonvoters. In earlier research, Sigelman (1982) analyzed data from the 1978 National Election Study and described nonvoters. His analysis attempted to describe the characteristics of nonvoters in a major election and reviewed some of the reasons why they decided to abstain from voting. While his research is interesting and demonstrated the potential nonvoters have as research subjects, it is outdated and does not provide a clear vision of the 21st century nonvoter. Doppelt and Shearer (1999) addressed this gap in knowledge concerning nonvoters by surveying and categorizing citizens who fit that description in 1996. However, their research is more than 10 years old, and much has changed in politics and in the dissemination of political information in the past decade. New research is needed to define nonvoters and describe the characteristics of nonvoters. In order to avoid basing my analysis of the Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign on outdated information and assumptions about nonvoters, I conducted a survey of nonvoters to define their characteristics more accurately and to measure their perception of the effectiveness of youth voter rhetoric. The need to better understand young nonvoters and the effectiveness of the Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign provide a basis for my first two research questions.

RQ 1: What are the attitudes of young nonvoters concerning voting and politics?

RQ 2: Are the Pay Attention and Vote campaign messages effective at changing young peoples' attitudes about voting?

Past research about get out the vote campaigns targeting young voters focused on Rock the Vote, a nonprofit organization that uses celebrities as spokespeople to encourage turnout among young voters. Research about Rock the Vote provides a solid foundation for my research because it demonstrates the importance of trying to better understand get out the vote rhetoric targeted at young people. Research that investigates other organization's efforts to turnout young voters, such as this study, builds on the current knowledge about youth vote campaigns. Tedesco et al. (2005) conducted research about Rock the Vote, and their findings led them to call for several action steps to address the lack of efficacy in get out the vote messages targeting young voters. One action step they recommended was new strategy of message construction by organizations targeting young voters (Tedesco et al., 2005). The analysis connected to Research Question 3 answers their call for a scholarly focus on message construction and persuasion in youth vote rhetoric.

RQ 3: What persuasive strategies are present in the Pay Attention and Vote campaign messages?

As technological tools develop in our society and are used more frequently in political campaigns, communication scholars have an opportunity to examine the use and effectiveness of those tools. Researchers have addressed the use of technology by political candidates (Agre, 2002; Delli Carpini, 1996; Grefe, 2003) and in nonprofit issue campaigns (Cyriac, 2000; Downing, 1989; Moore, 1994; Postmes & Brunsting, 2002; Sehmel, 2002), but few have concentrated on the impact technology could have on young voters (Delli Carpini, 2000; Iyengar & Jackman, 2004). Several studies have argued based information could have a positive impact on youth voter turnout (Bennett

& Xenos, 2005; Delli Carpini, 2000; Iyengar & Jackman, 2004; Lupia & Philpot, 2005; Ward, 2005), but few followed up on their arguments with examples or case studies demonstrating the effectiveness of based campaigns (Iyengar & Jackman, 2004). This study examines a nonprofit campaign dependent upon technology to convey their message to young people. I examine the integral role technology played in Pay Attention and Vote's campaign and build on the research that discussed the impact technology can have on young voters in an effort to answer Research Question 4.

RQ 4: How is technology used by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign?

The final gap in research addressed in this study concerns the use of humor in political advertising. Most research concerning this topic has focused on late night television comedy (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Baym, 2005; Goldthwaite, 2002; Goldthwaite Young, 2004; Goldthwaite Young & Tisinger, 2006; Niven et al., 2003; Smith & Voth, 2002) and the frequently negative impact it has on voters (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Goldthwaite, 2002; Goldthwaite Young, 2004; Niven et al., 2003; Smith & Voth, 2002). While researchers have demonstrated the power political humor has to create an audience for political content (Baym, 2005), the power humor has in persuasion (Smith & Voth, 2002; Lyttle, 2001), and the effectiveness of humor in advertising, they have not assembled these components to examine the persuasive quality of humor used in political advertising.

RQ 5: How is humor used as a persuasive strategy by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign?

In chapter 3 I utilize a quantitative measurement of the attitudes of young voters in order to expand scholarly knowledge of this typically ignored population and to determine the effectiveness of the Pay Attention and Vote ads. Chapter 4 includes a description and review the Pay Attention and Vote text using close textual analysis as a method for examining the use of persuasive strategies and as a way to learn more about youth vote rhetoric, the use of technology in nonprofit campaigns, and the use of humor as a persuasive strategy in political communication.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY 1: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

As outlined in chapter 2, scholars from a variety of fields have used an assortment of methods to examine the attitudes of young voters and the messages used to motivate them. The diverse methodological nature of past research indicates that a mixed method approach is the best option for addressing my research questions. Mixed method affords scholars the opportunity to approach research topics from more than one viewpoint. The current study combined a quantitative research component outlined in Study 1 and a rhetorical analysis conducted in Study 2, thereby utilizing the sequential transformative strategy used in mixed methods research projects to "give voice to diverse perspectives" (Creswell, 2003, p. 216).

In this project I examined the applied effectiveness of a Pay Attention and Vote campaign ad by using a quantitative method to measure effectiveness and perceived humor of the ad among the ad's intended audience. My quantitative survey tool also allowed me to collect data concerning young people's attitudes and behaviors regarding politics and voting in order to increase knowledge about young nonvoters.

I also examined the persuasive strategies used by the campaign through a rhetorical analysis of the text to learn more about the message the campaign intended to send and the way persuasion theory functioned in the message. Rhetorical criticism serves a variety purposes in scholarship. Throughout the history of rhetorical studies, critics have served a pedagogical function, analyzing public address and teaching methods for improved rhetorical performance (Klyn, 1968). Measuring effect is a logical and applicable function of rhetorical criticism; however, criticism must do more than

focus on effectiveness alone (Andrews, 1990). In more recent scholarship, rhetorical critics have expanded their scope to include studies concerning the creation of meaning through discourse with a focus on social construction and critical frameworks (Andrews, 1990). This study lends itself to both of these described purposes of rhetorical criticism by evaluating the effectiveness of the Pay Attention and Vote ad and by examining the message construction in order to better understand the persuasive strategy used in the message.

In order to learn more about the intended audience, measure the effect of the message, and analyze the construction of the message within the framework of persuasion theory, a mixed method approach was needed in this project. Using sequential transformative strategy allowed me to gain a better understanding of nonvoters which in turn informed my understanding of the intended audience in my rhetorical analysis.

Method

Ninety-nine college students in an introductory communication course at a large southwestern university completed a survey, which examined their political attitudes and behaviors, opinions about political humor, and their responses to the Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

Participants

Of the 99 participants, 37.4% ($n = 37$) were male and 61.1% ($n = 61$) were female, with one respondent refusing to indicate sex. The average age of participants

was 21.84 years (*SD* = 2.882). The ethnic breakdown of the population was 11.1% (*n* = 11) African American; 11.1% (*n* = 11) Asian; 63.6% (*n* = 63) Caucasian; 9.1% (*n* = 9) Hispanic; 4.0% (*n* = 4) other; and one respondent refusing to indicate ethnicity. The political party affiliation of the participants was 34.3% (*n* = 34) Republican; 26.3% (*n* = 23) Democrat; 19.2% (*n* = 19) Independent; and 20.2% (*n* = 20) some other affiliation. Respondents' self-identified political views were balanced across conservative (32.3%; *n* = 32), liberal (28.3%; *n* = 28), and moderate (39.4%; *n* = 39).

Procedures and Measures

A pre-experimental design including a pre-test, a treatment, and a post-test was used for the study.

Pre-test

The pre-test survey included information concerning participants' voting behavior, such as questions about voter registration status, participation in voting in 2004 and 2006, intention to vote in 2008, and open-ended questions asking why they did or did not vote or intend to vote.

Participants were also asked to describe their participation in other political behaviors, including the frequency with which they discuss politics with family and friends, their participation in volunteer work for nonprofit organizations, their involvement in political meetings and rallies, and their efforts to contact their federal, state, and local elected officials or newspapers about political issues (Doppelt and Shearer, 1999).

The third area of questioning utilized a Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) to measure levels of political cynicism and included 8 questions, such as "People like me don't have any say about what the government does" and "One cannot always trust what politicians say." This survey tool was adapted from the National Election Studies (Rosenstone, Kinder, & Miller, 1997) by Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2000). Previous research (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000; Tedesco & Kaid, 2003) has reaffirmed the reliability of this political cynicism survey tool and reached a moderate level of reliability in this study (α = .629).

The last area of interest included in the pre-test concerned political humor. Because no tool specifically designed to measure political humor exists, I modified a tool (Thorson & Powell, 1993) designed to measure general humor by adjusting some of the wording in the questions. For example, a statement like "I like a good joke" (Thorson & Powell, 1993, p. 21) in the original model became "I like a good political joke" in this study, and "Humor helps me cope" (Thorson & Powell, 1993, p. 21) became "Humor helps me cope with politics or current events." The 12 item political humor scale utilized a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) and was found to be reliable with a Cronbach alpha score of .866.

Treatment

Following the pre-test the participants watched one television advertisement produced by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign. The ad was a satirical portrayal of Old Relish Packet, a candidate for US Senate. It utilized a generic format using all of the buzzwords and topoi of conventional political advertisements, including spokespeople of

diverse ages, genders, and ethnicities who highlighted the candidate's qualifications for office. They described Old Relish Packet as a future focused candidate with integrity and values who cares about families and the young. They also highlighted his military service record and his good looks as qualifications for being elected to the US Senate and closed with the question, "If you're not voting, then who are you electing?" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006).

Post-test

The post-test included questions regarding effectiveness of the persuasive message and the humor in the ad, likelihood of voting in 2008, and demographic information.

Four questions concerning the effectiveness of the persuasive message were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) and included items such "The ad illustrated the importance of following politics" and "The ad was effective at changing my opinion about voting." Six questions utilized the same 5-point Likert-type scale and addressed the effectiveness of the humor in the message. It included items such as "The humor used in the ad was effective" and "I found the humor in the ad to be inappropriate." Both measures reached acceptable levels of reliability (Effectiveness of Persuasive Message: α = .741; Effectiveness of Humor: α = .800).

Participants then indicated if they intended to vote in 2008 and why they will or will not vote. The survey closed with questions concerning demographic data, such as sex, age, and ethnicity.

The quantitative analysis of the Pay Attention and Vote ad for Old Relish Packet provides a snapshot of the attitudes held by the intended audience, as well as a statistical measure of the applied effectiveness of the ad, thus addressing Research Questions 1, 2 and 5 and providing a greater understanding of the audience for the rhetorical analysis reported in Study 2.

Results

Research Question 1 was concerned with understanding the political attitudes of young nonvoters. While 77.8% ($n = 77$) of the participants indicated they are registered to vote, only 23.2% ($n = 23$) voted in the 2006 midterm election. Those who did not vote indicated that they avoided the 2006 election because they did not care about the election (22.2%, $n = 22$), had a technical problem with the electoral system, such as living in their college town while being registered to vote at their permanent residence or not being registered in time (22.2%, $n = 22$), were too busy to vote or forgot about the election (9.1%, $n = 9$), were not US citizens and did not have the right to vote (8.1%, $n = 8$), or did not trust the veracity of the electoral system or believed their vote did not matter (5.0%, $n = 5$).

Further information concerning the attitudes of young nonvoters was arrived at through the use of a series of chi-square analyses to examine the differences in the political behaviors of voters and nonvoters (see Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4). Only one difference in political behavior was significant between the two groups. Slightly more than 52% ($n = 12$) of voters reported that they had contacted their state level elected officials about an issue that concerned them, while only 21% ($n = 16$) of nonvoters had

engaged in that behavior (χ^2 (1) = 8.43, *p* = .004). Additionally, an independent samples

t-test determined that voters (*M* = 3.15; *SD* = .59) and nonvoters (*M* = 3.26; *SD* = .55)

did not differ significantly in their cynicism toward politics (*t* (97) = -.85, *p* = .40).

Research Question 2 specifically explored whether the Pay Attention and Vote

campaign messages were effective at changing young voters' attitudes about voting.

An independent samples *t*-test determined that voters (*M* = 2.82; *SD* = .71.) and

nonvoters (*M* = 2.61; *SD* = .65) did not differ significantly in their perception of the

effectiveness of the ad (*t* (97) = 1.36, *p* = .18). A chi-square analysis compared

participants' intended voting behavior in 2008 in the pre-test and the post-test (χ^2 =

147.68, *p* = .000). While the results indicated a significant difference between

individuals reports in the pre-test and post-test, a closer examination of the frequencies

indicates 9 participants reported that they were definitely not voting in 2008 in the pre-

test, only 2 of these 9 participants indicated that they would probably vote or definitely

vote in 2008 after viewing the ad. Additionally, only 7 participants indicated that they

would probably not vote in 2008 in the pre-test and no one indicated that they would

change their voting behavior after viewing the ad (see Table 5). Thus, the ad did not

significantly change nonvoters' intent to vote in 2008.

Research Question 5 examined whether the humor used as a persuasive

strategy by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign was effective. An independent

samples *t*-test determined that voters (*M* = 3.72; *SD* = .70) and nonvoters (*M* = 3.68; *SD*

= .70) did not differ significantly in their perception of the humor in the ad (*t* (97) = .24, *p*

= .81).

In order to include all possible factors that may influence the outcomes of the above results, I ran a series of independent samples t-tests to account for the influence of gender, ethnicity, party affiliation, and political views on participants' levels of political cynicism, perceptions of political humor, perceptions of humor in the ad, and perceptions of the ad's effectiveness. Of those, the only finding of significance concerned gender and perceptions of the ad's effectiveness, (t (96) = -2.44, p = .02). Females (M = 2.78, SD = .58) found the ad more effective than males (M = 2.45, SD = .76).

Discussion

Young Nonvoters

In order to avoid basing my rhetorical analysis on assumptions about young voters and in order to answer Research Question 1 concerning the nature of young nonvoters, I constructed a quantitative research tool and surveyed a group of young people to find out more about their attitudes and behaviors in regards to voting and politics. The findings of my quantitative analysis reinforced the assumptions most people have about young nonvoters. Statistics concerning past voting behavior indicate that the respondents do not participate in midterm elections. Only 23% of respondents voted in the 2006 election. Thirty-one percent of those surveyed who did not vote in 2006 avoided the election because they did not care about it, or they were too busy or forgot. An additional 22% of respondents failed in their abilities to manage the electoral system, finding themselves unregistered or away from their county of registration on Election Day. Their rate of voting improved in presidential elections, with 41.4% of

respondents reporting they voted in 2004. These statistics reinforce the notion of the disaffected nature of young people.

Another critical finding in the quantitative study concerned the distinction the participants draw between politics and voting. They overwhelmingly believe voting is an important right and 83.9% of the respondents reported they plan to vote in 2008. When asked why they plan to vote they reported that it was their responsibility or duty to vote (17.2%) and that they want to make a difference in the election (31.3%). Only 16.2% of respondents said they would not vote in 2008. Of the few who do not plan to vote, 8% are not American citizens and 4% reported they do not care about the election or do not think their voice matters. The results of the intent to vote in 2008 question indicate that the participants believe voting is important and that they can change the outcome of the election. What they do not believe in is politics and politicians. When asked why they did not vote in 2006, 22% reported that they did not care about the election, with an additional 9% reporting that they forgot to vote. Another 22.2% had difficulty with the electoral system and found themselves in the wrong place to vote or unregistered on Election Day. Five percent of the respondents indicated that they did not trust the system, or that they believed their vote would not matter. In sum, better than half of the respondents did not vote in 2006 because they had no interest in the election or they could not use the system. When questioned about their political behaviors, less than half of respondents reported they engaged regularly in political discussions with their family (voters 47.8%; nonvoters 23.7%) and even less often with their friends (voters 43.5%; nonvoters 29%) (see Table 2). Other political behaviors that received little attention from participants included participation in political meetings and rallies (voters

34.8%; nonvoters 18.4%) and communicating with elected federal representatives (voters 47.8%; nonvoters 26.3%). The only quasi-political behavior the participants reported participating in large numbers was volunteer service in their communities. More than 91% of voters and 82.9% of nonvoters reported volunteering for a nonprofit or charity at some point in their past (see Table 3). These results concerning political behavior and voting behavior support assumptions that young people simply do not care about politics and elections. This realization is integral to understanding the ineffectiveness of Pay Attention and Vote's persuasive strategy and explaining the answer to Research Question 2 concerning the effectiveness of the Pay Attention and Vote ad.

A final finding concerning the attitudes and behaviors of young nonvoters is that there was not a significant difference between young voters and young nonvoters attitudes toward politics; attitudes toward voting; and the political behaviors of young voters (except for contacting state representatives: voters were more likely to contact their state representatives than nonvoters). Young nonvoters participated in similar numbers of political discussions as young voters, consumed similar media sources as young voters, and engaged in similar political behaviors, such as writing letters to newspapers or federal representatives, as young voters participated in. Their levels of political cynicism were similar with both young voters and young nonvoter indicating a generally negative view of politics.

Effectiveness of Pay Attention and Vote Ad

The central message of the Pay Attention and Vote ad focused on young

peoples' ability to change the outcome of the election. The closing line of the ad indicates they wanted to persuade young people that their votes matter and that they could change election outcomes if they turned out to vote. However, this population's failure to vote is not based on their perception that their vote does not matter. Only 5% of respondents in my survey indicated they believed one vote does not matter or that they believed their votes would not be counted, and 92% plan to vote in 2008, with 62.2% of those planning to vote saying they will vote because it is important and that change is needed. They do not doubt their ability to influence election outcomes. Furthermore, the reasons they give when asked why they plan to vote in 2008 indicate that they have attitudes that would lead to voting behaviors in future elections, but their actual behavior in past elections indicates that they do not follow through on their positive voting attitudes. In other words, almost all of the respondents have good intentions when it comes to voting, however, they do not follow through.

Because their lack of interest in elections and politics is based on not caring about elections and politics, messages that are designed to convince them they can make a difference in the outcome of the election will rarely be effective in changing their voting behavior. They would have to care about the outcome to be persuaded by messages that highlight their ability to change the outcome. Additionally, messages that depend on highlighting cognitive dissonance are unlikely to be effective either. The effects of cognitive dissonance rely on an individual's discomfort with conflict between their attitudes and behaviors. According to the data I collected from young nonvoters, they are apparently comfortable with their dissonance or are not experiencing dissonance regarding their reported attitudes toward voting and actual voting behavior.

They expressed positive attitudes about voting to make sure their voice was heard and to fulfill their duty as Americans, but those expressed attitudes did not lead to voting behaviors. Pay Attention and Vote's ad was not effective with its intended audience because it merely reinforced an already held attitude concerning voting. The continued use of this persuasive strategy, calling on young people to vote by highlighting their duty to vote, as Rock the Vote did (Tindell & Medhurst, 1998), or reinforcing the notion that they can change the outcome of the election, as Pay Attention and Vote did, will rarely change young voter turnout because both persuasive strategies neglect the root cause of young voter apathy as highlighted in Research Question 1: they do not care about elections and politics.

The results of the quantitative study discussed above explain the ineffectiveness of depending on cognitive dissonance as a persuasive strategy in this situation. The results show young people believe voting is an important right and duty of American citizenship and that their voices are important in influencing the outcomes of elections. Their expressed positive attitudes about voting would seemingly lead to voting behavior. However, past election results prove that less than one-third of young people typically vote. I would expect young nonvoters to experience feelings of cognitive dissonance in this apparent disconnection between their voting attitudes and voting behaviors, however, they do not seem to experience the expected dissonance. According to my survey results young nonvoters view voting and politics as separate topics and hold different attitudes about each topic that help explain the lack of cognitive dissonance in their attitudes and behaviors concerning voting. While most of the respondents expressed positive attitudes about voting, many of them were cynical about politics.

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Their negative attitude about politics appears to be influencing their voting behavior. Because young nonvoters do not feel a connection to politicians and distrust many elected officials, they do not vote. Their negative attitudes about politics appear to trump their positive attitudes about voting and lead to nonvoting behaviors.

In order to better understand the persuasive strategy at work in the Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign and to offer further insight into youth vote rhetoric, I completed a close textual analysis of a Pay Attention and Vote ad. The rhetorical reading of the ad is informed by the information collected about young nonvoters in this chapter. In the following chapter I report my rhetorical analysis of the ad created by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign in an effort to further explain the problems in their persuasive strategy.

Table 1

*Chi-Square Analysis between Voters and Nonvoters for Political Behavior (*N = *99)*

	χ^2	*df*
Dialogue with family	4.50	3
Dialogue with friends	3.21	3
Volunteer for nonprofit	.97	1
Attended political meetings	2.74	1
Contact member of Congress	3.80	1
Contact state representative	8.43*	1
Contact local elected officials	1.75	1
Contact newspaper	1.63	1

* *p* < .01

Table 2

Frequency of Dialogue

		Daily	Several times a week	Less often than that	Never
Dialogue with family	Voters	1 (4.3%)	10 (43.5%)	11 (47.8%)	1 (4.3%)
	Nonvoters	8 (10.5%)	18 (23.7%)	40 (52.6%)	10 (13.2%)
Dialogue with friends	Voters	2 (8.7%)	8 (34.8%)	12 (52.2%)	1 (4.3%)
	Nonvoters	4 (5.3%)	18 (23.7%)	41 (53.9%)	12 (17.1%)

Table 3

Frequency of Political Behaviors (not including Dialogue)

		Participates in behavior	Does not participate in behavior
Volunteer for nonprofits	Voters	21 (91.3%)	2 (8.7%)
	Nonvoters	63 (82.9%)	12 (17.1%)
Attend political meetings or rallies	Voters	8 (34.8%)	15 (65.2%)
	Nonvoters	14 (18.4%)	62 (81.6%)
Contact member of Congress	Voters	11 (47.8%)	12 (52.2%)
	Nonvoters	20 (26.3%)	56 (73.7%)
Contact state representative	Voters	12 (52.2%)	11 (47.8%)
	Nonvoters	16 (21.1%)	60 (78.9%)
Contact local elected officials	Voters	4 (17.4%)	19 (82.6%)
	Nonvoters	6 (7.9%)	70 (82.1%)
Contact newspaper	Voters	3 (13.0%)	20 (87.0%)
	Nonvoters	4 (5.3%)	72 (94.7%)

Table 4

Frequency of Media Consumption

		Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Business magazines	Voters	0 (0.0%)	4 (17.4%)	12 (52.2%)	7 (30.4%)
	Nonvoters	2 (2.6%)	11 (14.5%)	23 (30.3%)	40 (52.6%)
News magazine shows	Voters	4 (17.4%)	5 (21.7%)	8 (34.8%)	6 (26.1%)
	Nonvoters	8 (10.5%)	23 (30.3%)	24 (31.6%)	21 (27.6%)
Cable news	Voters	10 (43.5%)	4 (17.4%)	5 (21.7%)	4 (17.4%)
	Nonvoters	18 (23.7%)	33 (43.4%)	16 (21.1%)	9 (11.8)
National Public Radio	Voters	5 (21.7%)	3 (13.0%)	3 (13.0%)	12 (52.2%)
	Nonvoters	7 (9.2%)	10 (13.2%)	18 (23.7%)	41 (53.9%)
C-SPAN	Voters	0 (0.0%)	3 (13.0%)	7 (30.4%)	13 (56.5%)
	Nonvoters	4 (5.3%)	9 (11.8%)	22 (28.9%)	41 (53.9%)
Talk radio/ call-in shows	Voters	4 (17.4%)	6 (26.1%)	8 (34.8%)	5 (21.7%)
	Nonvoters	9 (11.8%)	13 (17.1%)	21 (27.6%)	33 (43.4%)
The Daily Show/ Colbert Report	Voters	5 (21.7%)	7 (30.4%)	9 (39.1%)	2 (8.7%)
	Nonvoters	11 (14.7%)	22 (29.3%)	22 (29.3%)	20 (26.7%)
National newspapers	Voters	5 (21.7%)	7 (30.4%)	8 (34.8%)	3 (13.0%)
	Nonvoters	17 (22.4%)	21 (27.6%)	23 (30.3%)	15 (19.7%)
Political Websites	Voters	1 (4.3%)	3 (13.0%)	5 (21.7%)	14 (60.9%)
	Nonvoters	4 (5.3%)	6 (7.9%)	13 (17.1%)	53 (69.7%)

Table 5

Frequency of Change in Intent to Vote in 2008, Pre-test vs Post-test

		Post-test Intent to Vote in 2008			
		Definitely Not Vote	Probably Not Vote	Probably Vote	Definitely Vote
Pre-test Intent to Vote in 2008	Definitely Not Vote	6 (66.7%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)
	Probably Not Vote	1 (14.3%)	6 (85.7%)	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)
	Probably Vote	0 (.0%)	1 (4.0%)	20 (80.0%)	4 (16.0%)
	Definitely Vote	2 (3.4%)	1 (1.7%)	5 (8.6%)	50 (86.2%)

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 2: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of the critic is to analyze a text

. . . from the inside out-- to break down its rhetorical elements so completely as to
determine how they function individually and to explain how they interact to
shape the text as a strategic, artistic response to the exigencies of a particular
situation (Lucas, 1988).

The following close textual analysis of the Pay Attention and Vote ad described in detail

below engages in the type of criticism Lucas described. This analysis of the ad provides

an instrumental view of rhetorical criticism in an effort to better understand the

persuasive strategies used by the campaign in order to address the exigency of low

youth turnout in midterm elections and clarifies the context of the Pay Attention and

Vote campaign. It provides answers to Research Questions 3, 4 and 5.

Rhetorical Lens of Analysis

Wichelns (1925) distinguished rhetorical criticism from other critical fields. His

pioneering article differentiated the study of public address from the common practice of

literary criticism. In his work, Wichelns called for a form of public address studies that

examined speeches with attention to structure, style, audience, ideas, and context of

the speech. Wichelns identified a new field of study that rhetorical scholars have been

building on ever since. While Wichelns' work was critical in the development of

rhetorical studies, it created a scholarly environment in which critics of public address

focused solely on the method he outlined, while neglecting attempts to formulate

alternative modes of analysis. Through the 1950s, rhetorical critics applied Wichelns'

Neo-Aristotelian method without looking for alternatives (Lucas, 1988). Frustrated by

critics' dogged dedication to following the system outlined in Wichelns' essay, Black

(1965) released *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, which exposed the limitations

of Neo-Aristotelian criticism and called on critics to develop greater variety in their

methods for rhetorical analysis. In a 1978 re-release of his book, Black described his

frustration with the formulaic nature of Neo-Aristotelian criticism, saying, "critical method

is too personally expressive to be systematized" (p. x).

Black's call for additional methods of rhetorical criticism led to an almost

wholesale abandonment of the Neo-Aristotelian framework and the study of public

address in general (Lucas, 1988). In the 1960s and 1970s, rhetorical criticism began to

focus on a variety of other texts, such as political campaigns and social movements, a

shift in focus that Lucas (1988) described as "critical pluralism" (p. 242). Critical

pluralism led to examinations of a large variety of texts and contexts, but few scholars

focused on the more traditional view of public address. The texts, meaning the actual

words and contexts of public addresses, were missing from rhetorical criticism. While a

few scholars have highlighted the textual deficiency in contemporary rhetorical

scholarship (Baskerville, 1968; Redding, 1957), a return to the text did not become a

driving purpose in rhetorical studies until Mohrmann's (1980) call for its return.

Mohrmann (1980) argued that the traditional paradigm of rhetorical scholarship

and the alternative approaches to rhetorical analysis that had grown from Black's (1965)

call for methodological variety neglected the content of texts as well as examinations of

how texts function. Mohrmann combined forces with Leff (1974) to demonstrate the

usefulness of rhetorical criticism that closely focused on the text in an analysis of

Lincoln's Cooper Union address. By conducting a close reading and analysis of the

Lincoln speech, Mohrmann and Leff were able to provide new insight as to the purpose

of Lincoln's speech. Earlier analysis of the speech had focused on its historical context

and biographical information about the speaker, and had wrongly described the speech

as being conciliatory to the south (Leff & Mohrmann, 1974). Through their close reading

of the text, they argued that the purpose of the speech was not to offer conciliatory

remarks to southerners. Instead, Lincoln used the speech to criticize others in his party

for their appeasing attitudes toward the south and to offer himself as an alternative

candidate in the upcoming election. Leff and Mohrmann's (1974) close textual analysis

of the Lincoln speech demonstrated the power rhetorical critics can have in analyzing,

interpreting, and judging rhetorical texts when they pay close attention to the content

and context of rhetorical pieces.

Leff continued to develop the rhetorical practice of close textual analysis (Leff,

1986; Leff, 2001; Leff & Sachs, 1990) after Mohrmann's death in 1985. Leff (1986)

called on rhetorical scholars to examine texts closely in order to "focus on the rhetorical

action embodied in particular discourses" (Leff, 1986, p. 378) and provided reasoning

for a practice of rhetorical criticism that has become known as close textual analysis.

Close textual analysis is a means of interpreting a text by examining the "significant

features in the text" (Leff, 1986, p. 378) and explaining "the interactions among these

features" (Leff, 1986, p. 378). Close textual analysis provides for a reading of a text that

examines the rhetorical elements in a way that explains how each element functions

independently and "how they interact to shape the text as a strategic, artistic response

to the exigencies of a particular situation" (Lucas, 1988, p. 249). This practice of

rhetorical criticism provides scholars with a way to fulfill the critical function of analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating texts (Andrews, 1990).

Critics of close textual analysis have said it had a tendency to avoid critique of current events and limited the texts available for analysis (Lucas, 1988). While their criticism of close textual analysis is important, it does not take into account the utility of close textual analysis in an applied rhetorical project. Close textual analysis is useful in my critique of rhetoric designed by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign in their effort to motivate young people to vote in the 2006 midterm election because it allows me to focus on the audience, constraints and strategy the campaign employed in their efforts to increase young voter turnout. Through the use of close textual analysis I am able to describe and analyze the campaign's strategy. The exigence of the 2006 election cycle, combined with the historical context of low young voter turnout in midterm elections, led to the development of a specific text to address the situation. An analysis of that text can provide a better understanding of both message construction for a particular rhetorical occasion and an understanding of the historical moment when the text appeared. While the measurement of audience reactions to the text and a quantitative analysis of effectiveness I described in the quantitative chapter of this thesis offers one method of better understanding the text in question, a rhetorical lens using close textual analysis allows for an examination of effect in a way that is more complex and complete than numbers totaled on a survey can provide. It allows for my analysis, interpretation, and judgment of the potential the text has to persuade an audience, the application of persuasive theory as a rhetorical strategy, and an accounting of the contemporary and historical contexts of the message and audience (Andrews, 1990).

Critics have dozens of options to consider when they endeavor to provide insight and understanding of rhetorical texts. I chose an instrumental approach in my analysis of this text because I am most interested in addressing the uniqueness in this campaign's strategy in reaching out to young people. The campaign was situated in a particular historical context that created a need for youth voter outreach. Below, I emphasize the context of the Pay Attention and Vote campaign that was described in detail in chapter 2. I also want to know more about how the text works in its context. As I described in chapter 2, several organizations have engaged in efforts to increase turnout among young voters in major elections, and their approaches to the problem of low youth turnout have focused on celebrity endorsements of voting and calls to the audience's sense of duty to vote. The Pay Attention and Vote campaign attempted to attract attention to the need for voting through the use of humor. They then illustrated the audience's role in impacting election outcomes, even if they did not cast a ballot. Both the content of their message and the form that message took were critical components of this rhetorical text. A close reading of the text allows for the incorporation of both form and content into the analysis (Leff & Sachs, 1990). I am interested in not only what the Pay Attention and Vote campaign ad had to say, but also in the manner in which they conveyed their message. The following close reading of the text describes and interprets the explicit and implicit purposes of the text, analyzes the constraints the campaign faced and the methods they used to address those constraints, addresses the style Pay Attention and Vote utilized in their message to young voters, and evaluates the strategic decisions the campaign made in the design of their message.

Context

Historical

The Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign is situated in a historical context. As described in detail in chapter 2, the US has a history of low voter turnout by young voters. Since suffrage was extended to 18-year-olds in 1971, turnout among 18- to 25-year-old voters has remained low, with an average turnout of less than 40% in presidential election years and less than 30% in most midterm election years (Galston, 2005; Hill 2006). Several campaigns have attempted to motivate young voters to participate in elections with varying success. Campaigns such as Rock the Vote and Vote or Die have used celebrity endorsements of voting as a method to attract attention to their campaigns and depend on messages concerning young people's responsibilities as Americans to vote (Tindell & Medhurst, 1998). Scholars have examined the effects of Rock the Vote and determined that a new strategy was needed to address the problem of low youth voter turnout (Tedesco et al., 2005). In 2006 the Ad Council, with a grant from the Federal Voting Assistance Program, developed a campaign to increase youth voter turnout during a midterm election. Pay Attention and Vote used humor as a method of attracting attention to their campaign and encouraged young people to believe in their power to change the outcome of elections.

The Ad within the Context of the Campaign

The campaign had several components. As described in chapter 2, the campaign utilized a Website to convey information concerning the midterm election to its audience. In order to attract attention to the Website and to persuade young people to

get involved in the election the campaign developed several radio and television ads to convey their message. The television ads were broadcast in television, but also utilized the Internet as a means of broadcast by posting the ads on the YouTube™ Website.[*]

The Text: Old Relish Packet for US Senate Ad

Pay Attention and Vote created a multifaceted campaign to increase participation among 18- to 25-year-old voters in the 2006 midterm election. As I described in chapter 2, my critique of the campaign focused on ads because they functioned as a type of shorthand for the campaign. The ads summarized the message of the campaign: the need for increased youth voter turnout. The ads also utilized rhetorical strategies new to the growing body of youth vote rhetoric. The campaign's use of technology as a method for information distribution and humor as a persuasive strategy set them apart from previous efforts to persuade young people to vote. I have narrowed my text selection to one of the 10 ads the campaign produced in order to have a manageable text for analysis in this project. All 10 ads utilized similar strategies of humor as an attention getting device and distribution of the ad through Web-based sources, and each ad closed with the same question, "If you're not voting, then who are you electing?" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006). Because of the similarities in the ads, I am confident an analysis of additional ads would generate no additional findings, and an analysis of the Old Relish Packet for US Senate ad will answer the research questions.

The ad I chose to analyze in this paper was an ad for Old Relish Packet for US Senate. The structure of the ad follows a common format for political advertising. The 30-second spot features short clips of the candidate's supporters describing the reasons

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[*] YouTube, LLC, http://www.youtube.com

they plan to vote for Old Relish Packet put together in a montage style. All of the supporters are filmed from the waist up. The first supporter featured in the ad is a middle-aged white woman in a garden who commented on the candidate's integrity. The second supporter is a white man age 25-30 dressed like he is in a blue-collar work environment, with 18-wheeler trucks and a silo behind him. He commented on the candidate's focus on family. The third supporter is a young white woman, about 20 years old, standing in front of a brick building that appears to be a school. She emphasized the candidate's concern for young people. The fourth supporter is a young Latino man, age 25-30 years, dressed as a firefighter standing in front of a fire station. He described the candidate as a hard worker. The next comment came from the middle-aged woman from the first shot. She said the candidate is focused. The next shot featured an older African American man, about 60-years-old, standing on a farm with a red barn and hay in the background. He described the candidate as effective. The seventh shot featured the young man from Shot 2 stressing that he believed in the candidate. The eighth shot returned to the young woman in front of the school who described the community's need for "a condiment with values" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006). The following shot returned to the middle-aged white woman from Shot 1 who commented on the quality job the candidate will do representing the community in Washington, D.C., and pointed out that the candidate is physically attractive. The final comment about the candidate came from the African American supporter who described his stint in the military with the candidate, and how the candidate saved his life when they were trapped behind enemy lines. The ad then flashed to a photo of the candidate with a caption that read "Relish Packet for US Senate" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006)

and a voiceover indicated the message was paid for by "citizens for Old Relish Packet" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006). The final scene in the ad featured a black screen with the Web address for Pay Attention and Vote written in white. A voice asked "If you're not voting, then who are you electing?" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006).

Examining Purpose

Pay Attention and Vote's ad encouraging young people to vote in the 2006 midterm election had both explicit and implicit messages. The explicit message in the text was clear: the audience should vote. The campaign made this point in the closing line of the ad: "If you're not voting, then who are you electing?" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006). The closing question constituted nonvoters as participants in the election by saying that their lack of voting impacts the outcome of the election. People who do not vote cannot escape association with the outcome of the election because their votes could have changed the outcome; therefore, nonvoters are participants in election outcomes. The closing question in the ad summed up the explicit message and main argument of the Pay Attention and Vote campaign.

The implicit messages in the ad require close reading of the text. First, the argument is based on the assumption that every vote matters and is counted in democratic elections, implying that voters should trust the system. The ad made this argument in its closing line by indicating that voting matters and each vote can make a difference. The quote "If you're not voting, then who are you electing?" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006) highlighted the importance of every vote by equating nonvoting with an actual vote. For every single vote to actually matter the system must function

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appropriately and each voter must believe that his or her vote will be counted. By arguing that every vote counts, Pay Attention and Vote is implicitly arguing that every vote is counted, that the electoral system works as it is intended to work.

The second implicit message embedded in the text is that candidates are generic and do not differ from one another when young people do not vote. The ad was structured in a generic format using all of the buzzwords and topoi of conventional political advertisements. The ad featured spokespeople of diverse ages, genders, and ethnicities who highlighted the candidate's qualifications for office. They described the candidate, Old Relish Packet, as a future focused candidate with integrity and values who cares about families and the young. They also highlighted his military service record and his good looks as qualifications for being elected to the US Senate (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006). The strategy of creating an ad that fit the topoi of political advertising and utilized the generic language most candidates rely on when describing themselves during political campaigns pointed to the seeming similarity among political candidates. Any number of candidates running for a position in the US Senate in the 2006 midterm election could have produced an ad that followed the pattern and strategy that the Pay Attention and Vote ad followed. The implicit message argued most candidates are alike, but it did not stop there. The closing line of the message indicated that youth participation in the election could change that outcome. It closed the ad by implying that if young people turned out to vote, someone other than the generic candidate could win the election. The implicit message of the ad charged young people with the task of preventing generic candidates from being elected. Without the attention of young voters, it is possible candidates who depended on empty descriptors and

unclear policy goals would be elected. According to this implicit argument, young people must vote to prevent ridiculous candidates, such as an Old Relish Packet, from being elected.

The third implicit purpose in the Pay Attention and Vote text involves the legitimacy of American democracy and American's standing in the world. As described in chapter 2, Hill (2006) highlighted the reasons our society should be concerned with lack of voter participation in elections, including the questions low voter turnout creates concerning the legitimacy of American democracy. A democratic form of government is incumbent on the governed group selecting its governors. When more than half of the eligible voting body does not vote in an election, questions arise concerning the legitimacy of the resulting governing body. In their ad encouraging young people to vote in the 2006 midterm election, Pay Attention and Vote implied that American democracy was in jeopardy of losing its legitimacy due to lack of voter participation. This implication logically flows from the organization's stated purpose to motivate young people to vote. Voting is necessary to support a democratic form of government. People should vote in order to support the system. Pay Attention and Vote focused on a specific population of nonvoters in their effort to fulfill the requirements of a legitimate democracy, implicitly arguing that young people must participate in elections in order to secure the future of democracy.

Analyzing Constraints

As with all rhetorical situations, the Pay Attention and Vote campaign faced specific constraints in dealing with their intended audience. Their message targeted

potential voters ages 18-25. This audience presented the campaign with several

constraints, and the campaign created a message designed to navigate those barriers.

The intended audience was disinterested, distracted, and disaffected. In the following

paragraphs I will analyze the strategies Pay Attention and Vote used in their message

construction to overcome the constraints of their intended audience.

One constraint Pay Attention and Vote had to account for in their message

construction was the disinterest most members of their intended audience had for voting

and politics. Researchers have demonstrated the lack of interest most young people

have concerning politics, elections, and voting (Hill, 2006; CIRCLE, n.d.). Pay Attention

and Vote had to design a message that would capture the interest of an audience that

typically forgoes participation and concern for political messages. As an answer to

Research Question 3, which asked what persuasive strategies the campaign used in

their efforts to reach this audience, the campaign used humor as a strategy for

overcoming the disinterest of the intended audience. Past youth vote campaigns

depended on celebrity endorsements and a style similar to music videos to attract

attention, with mixed results (Tindell & Medhurst, 1998). Pay Attention and Vote

pursued a unique strategy with their use of humor in a political message to target and

motivate young people to vote. Humor has been successful in creating audience

interest in other settings, such as product advertisements (Spotts, Weinberger, &

Parsons, 1997; Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006) and in adult learning environments, such as

corporate training sessions (Lyttle, 2001). Humor was also proven useful in creating an

audience for politically based late night television comedy programming, such as *The

Daily Show* (Baym, 2005), and satirical presentations critiquing social problems were

proven persuasive to some audiences (Gruner, 1966). Building from evidence that political humor generates audiences of young people (Baym, 2005) and satire can be persuasive (Gruner, 1966), the Pay Attention and Vote ad took a humorous approach as a method to reach a disinterested audience.

Another constraint the campaign faced in getting their message to the audience was the distracted nature of young people. Unlike older voters, the intended audience for this message shies away from traditional information sources concerning politics and public affairs. They typically get their information about public affairs from a variety of nontraditional sources (Bennet, 1997, 1998; Delli Carpini, 2000). While ads on television and traditional news broadcasts concerning public affairs could reach some of the audience, young voters also utilize modern technologies for gathering information (Bennett & Xenos, 2005). Research Question 4 asks how the Pay Attention and Vote campaign used technology in its efforts to reach young people. I argue the campaign used technology as a way of addressing the distracted nature of the audience. Previous research demonstrated the important role Web-based messages play in distributing political messages to young people (Bennett & Xenos, 2005). Pay Attention and Vote used popular technologies to distribute their message and overcome the distracted nature of their intended audience. The campaign produced television and radio advertisements that were broadcast on traditional formats, but also included their ads on Internet sources, such as YouTube™, and made themselves available as friends on social networking Websites such as MySpace® [*] and Facebook. The end of each ad featured the organization's Website address, and people who viewed the ad online could immediately connect to the organization's Website by clicking on the link at the

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[*] MySpace, Inc, http://www.myspace.com

end of the ad. Once viewers reached the Website, they were presented with logistical information concerning the 2006 midterm election, including a state-by-state guide to the election and online voter registration. The state guides included links to information about candidates on the ballot in the midterm election and links to the Websites of each state's elections officials. The campaign's use of Web-based information sources and online networking Websites demonstrates their effort to use technology to overcome the distracted nature of the 18- to 25-year-old population.

The final constraint the campaign faced in dealing with their intended audience concerned the disaffected character of young people when dealing with politics. As explained at length in chapter 2, American youth have neglected electoral politics for decades, with little improvement in the various measurements of political interest over the past 35 years. Surveys of young people, including the data collected in my survey of young voters and nonvoters, consistently show distrust in government and elected officials, a lack of knowledge concerning governmental systems and current events, and a low interest in voting (Bennett, 1997). The disaffected nature of the intended audience is both the reason the Pay Attention and Vote campaign was created and a major constraint for the messages the campaign created to address the problem of disaffected youth.

Various discursive strategies have been used to motivate disaffected individuals to vote, including calling on a sense of duty to vote, creating perceptions of some personal benefit from the election's outcome, and personal investment in the election's outcome (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Cassel & Hill, 1981; Morton, 1991). A fourth discursive strategy has targeted groups by creating the perception that

the group has the ability to change the outcome of the election (Morton, 1991). One study showed that Rock the Vote, the largest get out the vote campaign targeting young people, used both sense of duty and impact on election outcomes in their discursive strategies during their 1996 campaign (Tindell & Medhurst, 1998). Pay Attention and Vote differed slightly from Rock the Vote in that their discursive strategy depended solely on the impact nonvoters could have on election outcomes if they chose to vote in the 2006 midterm election.

The ad described in this paper demonstrates the campaign's dependence on the notion that a youth voter block could change election outcomes. The closing line of the ad, "If you're not voting, then who are you electing?" (Pay Attention and Vote, 2006) uncovers two divergent messages in the campaign: one message of empowerment and a second message of blame. The message can be read as empowering because it indicates young people can influence election outcomes even when they do not cast a ballot. If viewers are effective in influencing election outcomes when they do not vote, then it stands to reason that they can also impact election outcomes if they vote. The closing line of the ad rhetorically transforms disaffected nonvoters into effective participants who change elections. The closing line of the ad can also be read as a message of blame. It implies that young voters are responsible for election outcome whether they vote or not, and that they will be at fault for negative election outcomes if they do not vote in the midterm election. Whether the message is seen as empowering or accusatory, it same underlying message is at play: young voters can change election outcomes.

Investigating Style

Research Question 5 asks how humor was used in the campaign to persuade the audience. A close reading of the text shows that the humor in the ad was not used as a persuasive strategy, but as a form of style in the ad's presentation. The humorous style used in the Pay Attention and Vote ad was there to attract attention, not to be persuasive. They attempted to create an audience for their ads through the use of humor. I found the humorous style of the Pay Attention and Vote ad campaign both a blessing and a curse. Satirical humor was created in the ad through mimicking the format and language of ads designed for real candidates and applying them to inanimate objects. The notion that an Old Relish Packet is filled with integrity and is ready to work hard at representing his constituents in policy making is funny. On one hand, this use of humorous style was positive because of its capacity to build attention for the message. As stated above, the intended audience for this message is distracted and disaffected. They are a difficult audience to reach because they consume a wide variety of media and are not always available through traditional sources (Bennet, 1997; Bennet, 1998; Delli Carpini, 2000). They also have little interest in voting (Bennet, 1997; Doppelt & Shearer, 1999; Hill, 2006). Humor is an effective means of drawing attention to the message and leading the audience to further consideration of the subject of voting.

On the other hand, the satirical take on political ads utilized in the Pay Attention and Vote campaign could have an unintended detrimental effect on the audience's opinions about voting. Almost any real candidate's name could be inserted in place of Old Relish Packet to create a viable political ad. This method of creating humor could

unintentionally reinforce the concept that all politicians are the same and there is no one

for whom to vote. According to the data I collected about young voters and nonvoters as

well as Doppelt and Shearer's (1999) study, the perception that the candidates are all

the same is one of the reasons young people do not vote. In their effort to generate

attention for their message through the use of humor, the Pay Attention and Vote

campaign also reinforced the widely held perception that all candidates are the same

and there is no one for whom to vote. In the earlier section concerning implicit

messages in the ad, I argued the ad implicitly argued that candidates are generic and

that young voters need to vote in order to prevent generic candidates from being

elected. Unfortunately, the argument that calls on young people to vote in order to

prevent generic candidates from being elected is not strong enough to overcome the

humorous message that reaffirms the already held attitude that all candidates are alike.

Thus, the humorous style of the ad draws attention to the campaign, but reinforces

negative attitudes about politics.

Evaluating Strategy

On the surface, the Pay Attention and Vote campaign seemed to use humor as a

new strategy in reaching out to young voters, as called for by Tedesco et al. (2005).

However, a close reading of the text revealed that the campaign actually used humor to

draw attention to the ads. Once humor drew an audience, they were presented with a

message of empowerment or blame that encouraged them to vote in order to change

election outcomes. Their use of the empowerment/blame message did not answer

Tedesco et al.'s (2005) call for a new strategy to motive young voters because past

efforts targeting young voters, such as Rock the Vote and Vote or Die, also depended

on this persuasive technique. Tindell and Medhurst (1998) described Rock the Vote's

use of this strategy in their research. Rock the Vote utilized celebrity endorsements to

attract attention to their message reminding young people they had a duty to vote and

that their vote could change election outcomes. My analysis shows that Pay Attention

and Vote used humor to attract attention in order to deliver the same message. In the

following chapter, I discuss the implications of these findings, in conjunction with the

findings from chapter 3, and provide some suggestions of what strategies could be

effective in reaching young voters.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the following discussion I seek to integrate the knowledge gained from the

quantitative data gathered in Study 1 and the rhetorical analysis of the persuasive

strategy utilized by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign from Study 2 into a concise

set of conclusions, and then to provide some suggestions relevant to the implications of

my findings. This chapter closes with some suggestions for future research concerning

the problem of motivating young voters.

What Does It All Mean?

The findings of both studies lead to a paradoxical situation. The quantitative

analysis showed that young people have positive attitudes about voting, but negative

attitudes about politics. Their negative attitudes about politics more directly affect their

behavior concerning voting than their positive attitudes do, leading a large majority of

them to stay home on Election Day. The results of the rhetorical analysis in Study 2

further complicate the discussion by demonstrating the mistake Pay Attention and Vote

made in their persuasive strategy. Their message focused on an attitude already held

by most young voters, so it did not change attitudes about voting, it just reinforced

already held positive attitudes. While it is important to help young voters maintain their

already held positive attitudes about voting, that strategy does not address the problem

at hand. Young people continue to neglect voting behaviors because they do not see

value in or experience a connection to politics. Ads that do not address their lack of

concern for politics will have a difficult time changing voter turnout among young voters.

Implications

The implications of these findings leave scholarship on this topic in a precarious

position. Apparently, the persuasive strategies that dominate youth vote rhetoric are not

effective in changing the behaviors of their intended audiences. We cannot count on

young people's desire to reduce cognitive dissonance or a call to their sense of duty or

influence to persuade them to vote. These solutions do not address the root problem of

low youth voter turnout: young people do not care about politics. While there are a

variety of possible options for addressing young adults' attitude toward politics, I outline

four options for addressing this root problem in the following discussion.

Option 1 is simple. Do not worry about it. Rely on the beliefs of those who claim

low voter turnout is a sign that the majority of the electorate is satisfied with the

progress of our government and actively choose not to vote because they are content

(Berelson, Lazarfeld, & McPhee, 1954), or that those who vote represent the interests of

those who do not vote (Gant & Lyons, 1993; Highton & Wolfinger, 1998). While many

consider the do-nothing approach an appropriate reaction to low youth voter turnout, I

am concerned that this approach does not live up to the promise of democracy. The

purpose of a democratic government is based on the notion that the governed choose

those who govern them. When better than 70% of young people do not vote in an

election, as is typical in midterm elections, they are not active participants in democracy.

Government is something that happens to them, not something that they are a part of.

As Galston (2004), Hill (2006), and Doppelt and Shearer (1999) have pointed out,

democracy depends on participation to succeed. Participation in elections is about

having voice in the system (Hill, 2006). Right now, policy makers do not take the needs

of young Americans into account because young people do not have a voice in the process. Young people must be a part of the democratic process for our government to be truly representative; therefore, ignoring the problem of low youth voter turnout is not a viable option.

The second option for improving youth voter turnout concerns the functional aspects of the electoral system. As Hill (2006) noted, our system of conducting elections in the US is cumbersome and difficult to use. Twenty-two percent of the participants in my survey cited problems with the electoral system as the reason they did not vote in 2006. Many of these respondents were not registered to vote 30 days prior to the election, as required by Texas election law. Others were attending school and living in one county and registered to vote at their permanent address in a different county, and could not make it home to vote on a Tuesday Election Day. The rules governing the administration of elections, including voter registration requirements and election timing have a negative impact on young voter turnout. If we want to increase young voter turnout, we should make changes in the electoral system. Hill (2006) suggested nationwide same-day voter registration laws, moving elections to the weekend or creating a national holiday for voting, creating an or vote by mail system for all voters, and increasing competition in congressional elections by eliminating single member congressional districts as ways to improve access to the electoral system. While Hill's suggestions for improving the functionality of the electoral system could have a positive impact on many voters who avoid elections because of the difficulties inherent in the system, they do not address the root cause of youth voter apathy about politics and elections. Changing attitudes depends on changing education.

The third option for addressing the need to increase youth participation in politics and elections involves changing civics education in the US. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) published a study that highlighted the impact civics education has on American youth. They found civics education is critical in shaping the attitudes and beliefs young people have about government and politics, but it currently fails to increase youth participation in voting behaviors (Iyengar & Jackman, 2004). A fundamental shift in the pedagogy for civics education is needed if we hope to increase young people's concern for government, politics, and elections.

Education and democracy were connected in the earliest days of our republic. Thomas Jefferson advocated a free public education for all citizens because he claimed education was the key to preserving liberty and democracy. Jefferson lead the newly formed US government in establishing a free public education system, and many of his writings expressed his vision of the role education plays in democracy. In a letter to Virginia Senator Littleton Waller Tazewell in 1805, Jefferson wrote "Such a degree of learning [should be] given to every member of the society as will enable him to read, to judge and to vote understandingly on what is passing" (Thomas Jefferson on Government and Politics). In later writings, Jefferson argued the republic would fail without general education for all citizens because citizens must have the ability exercise critical thinking skills and an understanding of current events if they hoped to maintain their freedom (Thomas Jefferson on Government and Politics). From the beginning, the guiding purpose of public education in the US was civic education. Almost 100 years after Thomas Jefferson convinced the Congress of the necessity of public education,

John Dewey published a seminal work on educational philosophy again linking the success of democracy to public education and communication.

Dewey outlined his belief that education is rooted in communication and the educational system must prepare individuals for action as members of their communities. He emphasized the need for experiential learning over the rote memorization of facts because only experiential learning prepared students for their role as active citizens. He argued experiential learning allowed students to develop critical thinking skills that enabled them to be lifelong learners. Experiential learning created a student body that was able to learn from experiences throughout their lives, not just in classroom learning environments. Critical thinking skills and the ability to learn through experience are crucial to active citizenship. Active citizens must gather large quantities of data, compare that information to their understanding of the world, and make decisions based on their interpretations. Dewey's proposed education system created students able to accomplish the tasks of active citizens. Civics education concepts seem to be the perfectly suited to experiential learning because students can learn government concepts by enacting the rituals of the institutions they are studying. For example, students can learn about the judicial branch of government by attending a court hearing in their community or by reenacting a court case in class. They can learn more about the election cycle by participating in a mock presidential election or running for student government. Experiential learning offers students a first hand, more interesting view of government systems at work. Other research has confirmed Dewey's focus on experience in learning. Research has shown civic education systems that accomplish the tasks of the field share a few similar characteristics, such as allowing

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students to put classroom concepts into a "real world" context, utilizing service learning, teaching others about the concepts they have learned, and incorporating current events discussions into their classes (Abilock, 2005; Galston, 2001).

However, Dewey (1982) was adamant in his belief that understanding the mechanisms of government was not enough to teach students the skills they needed to practice active citizenship. Dewey argued we should not limit our understanding and teaching of civics and citizenship to its political functions. He said the practice of citizenship went beyond the citizens' role of voter. Dewey's philosophy about civics education was situated in the idea that citizens must work together in their communities to solve community problems. While government action is one forum for affecting societal change, Dewey argued that citizens must have the skills to work together outside of the political forum to address problems. The ultimate value of civics education was not to prepare voters, but to prepare social actors (Dewey, 1982). Spiezio (2002) agreed with Dewey's assessment of the purpose of civics education. His research highlighted the desire students have for a connection between the lessons they learn in the classroom and the "real world" application of those concepts. He said students who experience deliberation and decision-making models in school are more likely to use those models in their lives outside of school (Spiezio, 2002).

An important note about Dewey's philosophy concerned his connection between effective education and communication. Dewey argued social interaction was based in communication, and education was an inherently social system. Students not only learned from their personal experiences, but also from the experiences of those around them through communication (Dewey, 1916). This link between communication and

experiential learning comes to life in a particular model of civics education called the deliberative democracy model.

As Dewey described in his writing on the experiential learning cycle, students will best understand their roles as active citizens in a democracy if they are able to enact democratic values in the classroom. There are countless teachers in the US who utilize the democratic classroom model as a method for helping students experience democracy in action. The democratic classroom model is "organized to respond to the entire range of student perceptions of government and power, with particular emphasis on countering apathy and cynicism" (Knight & Pearl, 2000). Teachers who utilize this model create a government model in the classroom. Students are required to establish rules for their interaction, including rules to protect individual rights, create methods for dealing with rule violators, and make decisions (Knight & Pearl, 2000). Through their enactment of a democratic model in the classroom, students learn not only history and governmental processes, but they develop skills in deliberation, agenda setting, and consensus building. All of these skills carry over into active citizenship outside of the classroom.

One key component of democratic education is the role discourse plays in decision-making. Deliberative democratic education incorporates a focus on the discursive aspects of the democratic process (Murphy, 2004). Research has shown this form of democratic education has a greater influence on learning outcomes (Spiezio, Baker, & Boland, 2005), creates a dedication to lifelong learning (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006), and better prepares students for discourse outside of the classroom than other forms of teaching (Gastil & Dillard, 1999). Deliberative democratic education has a

multiplier effect in that research has demonstrated that students who experience this type of education in class take it home with them. McDevitt and Chaffee (2000) conducted a study that showed students who debate current events at school talk to their parents about those same issues at home. Deliberation skills are critical for active citizenship, and experiential learning models that emphasize the development of discursive skills, like the deliberative democratic model, are needed in civics education.

Option 4 would answer Tedesco et al.'s (2005) call for a new strategy to reach out to young voters through public service announcements (PSAs). PSAs could be redesigned to incorporate research findings that better explain the attitudes and behavior of young nonvoters. Instead of developing ads that address viewers' attitudes concerning their sense of duty to vote and their abilities to change election outcomes, attitudes that my survey showed they already have, future ads should address negative attitudes about politics that seem to keep young voters from the polls. My study showed that young nonvoters have positive attitudes about the importance of the act of voting, however, they have negative attitudes about politics and politicians. Future PSAs should address young peoples' attitudes about politics if they hope to persuade more young people to vote.

Future Research

Several findings from this study create the opportunity for further scholarship in this field.

Future research should explore the connection between service learning programs in US schools and political action. The one quasi-political behavior the

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majority of the respondents to my survey participated in was doing volunteer work for charities and nonprofit organizations. Eighty-four percent of respondents indicated they had volunteered in the past. Many public high schools now require students to participate in service learning programs in order to graduate (Knight & Pearl, 2000). However, this required participation in community service does not seem to translate into concern for political activity. Service learning programs seem to fail to link the community action they advocate to a larger concept of civic action, and further research is needed on this topic.

Additionally, further study should explore what happens to cause young people to neglect to enact their intentions to vote. More than 92% of those surveyed in this study said they will definitely vote or will probably vote in the 2008 presidential election. However, election outcomes in past years tell us that fewer than half of citizens aged 18-25 will actually show up on Election Day. Research is needed to examine the separation between young voters' attitudes about voting from their behaviors. According to my results, they believe all of the right things to become active voters. They believe their voice matters and that they have a duty to vote, but they rarely follow through on those positive voting attitudes. Future research on young nonvoters should address this disconnection between attitude and behavior.

The role of the electoral system should also be considered for future study. Research is needed that focuses on what changes in the electoral system would help young people overcome their difficulty with voting. Twenty-two percent of those surveyed who did not vote in 2006 claimed they did not vote because they experienced a technical problem with the electoral system, mostly concerning voter registration.

Future research should examine the suggestions Hill (2006) advocated to evaluate the impact those changes could have on young voter turnout.

This study briefly examined the application of technology by the Pay Attention and Vote campaign, but the ineffectiveness of the campaign's persuasive strategy made it difficult to assess fully the impact technology could have on future young voters. Research is needed to develop wholly the implications technology has for young people in politics and elections.

While the quantitative survey attempted to shed some light on the gap in knowledge that exists concerning the attitudes and behaviors of young nonvoters more research is warranted. A broader survey of this population is needed to flesh out fully our knowledge of this population if we hope to address the causes of their disinterest in politics, elections, and government.

Finally, civics education holds promise to change the role of young voters in the political process. Can civics education change participation levels and create engaged communities as Dewey theorized? I argue the root cause of the problem of low youth voter turnout, young people's lack of interest in government and politics, can only be truly addressed through a fundamental change in civics education in America. Political communications scholars should play a role in the development of a new civics education curriculum because a deliberative democracy model depends on discourse and argument analysis to build the critical thinking skills needed by active, engaged citizens. Communications scholars add an integral perspective to civics education models and are vital to the process of developing a new curriculum because government, politics, and elections happen through communication.

APPENDIX

Please answer the following questions regarding your interest and participation in the political process. Please circle the appropriate answer or write your answer in the space provided. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Are you currently registered to vote?   Yes   No

2. If you are not registered to vote, what would you say is the main reason why you are not registered to vote?

_____

3. Did you vote for president in 2004?   Yes   No

4. If you did not vote in 2004, what would you say is the main reason why you did not vote?_____

5. Did you vote in the 2006 election?   Yes   No

6. If you did not vote in 2006, what would you say is the main reason why you did not vote?_____

7. How likely would you say it is that you will vote in the 2008 presidential and congressional elections?

Definitely Vote	Probably Vote	Probably Not Vote	Definitely Not Vote

8. What would you say is the main reason for your choice to vote or not vote in 2008?
_____

9. How often would you say you discuss politics and public affairs with members of your family?

Every Day	Several Times a Week	Less often than that	Never

10. How often would you say you discuss politics and public affairs with your friends?

Every Day	Several Times a Week	Less often than that	Never

11. Have you ever done volunteer work for a charity or other nonprofit organization?

Yes	No

12. In the past 3 or 4 years have you attend any political meetings or rallies?

Yes	No

13. Have you ever called or sent a letter or e-mail to your congressional representative or senator to express your opinion on an issue?

Yes	No

14. Have you ever called or sent a letter or e-mail to a state representative or state senator to express your opinion on an issue?

Yes	No

15. Have you ever called or sent a letter or e-mail to a member of your local school board or a city government official to express your opinion on an issue?

Yes	No

16. Have you ever sent a letter or e-mail to a local newspaper to express your opinion on an issue?

Yes	No

17. How often do you read certain publications or watch certain types of programs?

a. News magazines such as *Time*, *US News & World Report*, or *Newsweek*	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
b. Business magazines such as *Fortune* or *Forbes*	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
c. News magazines shows such as *60 Minutes*, *Dateline*, or *20/20*	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
d. Cable News programming such as CNN, Fox News, or MSNBC	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
e. Programs on National Public Radio, such as *Morning Edition* or *All Things Considered*	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
f. C-SPAN	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
g. Radio shows that invite listeners to call in to discuss current events, public issues, and politics	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never

h. The Daily Show or *The Colbert Report*	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never	
i. National newspapers, print or online versions, such as *New York Times*, *USA Today*, or *Wall Street Journal*	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never	
j. Political Websites such as a Politco.com or Slate.com	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never	

18. Please answer the following questions about your general attitudes toward politics.

a. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
b. One never really knows what politicians think.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
c. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
d. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
e. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
f. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
g. Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
h. One cannot always trust what politicians say.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

19. How would you describe your views on most political matters?

Liberal   Moderate   Conservative

20. In politics you consider yourself a:

Republican   Democrat   Independent   Other

21. Please evaluate the following statements about the role of humor as it relates to POLITICS.

a. Humor helps me cope with politics or current events.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
b. I appreciate those who generate humor in the political arena.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
c. I'm uncomfortable when everyone is cracking jokes about politics.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
d. Uses of wit or humor help me master difficult situations related to politics.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
e. Coping by using humor is an elegant way of adapting in the political arena.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
f. I like a good political joke.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
g. People who tell political jokes are a pain in the neck.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
h. Trying to master political situations through use of humor is really dumb.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

i. I dislike comics who focus on politics.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
j. Humor is a lousy coping mechanism for politics or current events.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
k. I can use wit to help adapt to many political situations.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
l. Use of humor about politics helps to put me at ease.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Post Test

22. Please answer the following questions after you have watched the ad for the Pay Attention and Vote Campaign. Please evaluate the following statements about your perception of the ad itself. There are no right or wrong answers.

a. I found the ad to be humorous.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
b. The humor used in the ad was appropriate.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
c. The ad was effective at changing my opinion about voting.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
d. The humor used in the ad was effective.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
e. The ad illustrated the importance of following politics.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
f. The ad convinced me to vote in 2008.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
g. The ad did not change my opinion about the importance of voting.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

h. I am more likely to follow politics now that I watched the ad.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
i. I found the humor in the ad to be inappropriate.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
j. The ad did not impact my decision to vote in future elections.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

23. How likely would you say it is that you will vote in the 2008 presidential and congressional elections?

Definitely Vote	Probably Vote	Probably Not Vote	Definitely Not Vote

24. What would you say is the main reason for your choice to vote or not vote in 2008?
_____

Please provide us with the following information about yourself. This will not be used to identify you. We use this to report the characteristics of people who helped with our research.

Your sex: *Male*   *Female*

Your age (in years): _____

Your ethnicity/ race (please check):

___African-American

___Asian

___Caucasian

___Hispanic

___ Other (please list):_____

THANK YOU FOR YOU PARTICIPATION!!

PLEASE RETURN YOUR SURVEY TO THE RESEARCHER

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose and benefits of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Attitudes toward political ad campaign and voting

Principal Investigator: Angela Brewer, a graduate student in the University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Communication Studies.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves understanding young adults voting behaviors and attitudes toward voting.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to complete a survey about your interest and participation in politics, watch a 30 second public service ad about voting, and complete a second questionnaire about the ad that will take about 20-30 minutes total of your time.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: We expect the project to benefit you by gaining knowledge about the importance of voting and the political process.

Compensation for Participants: You will receive a small amount of course credit (20 points for Experiential Learning Assignment) as compensation for your participation.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Your confidentiality/anonymity will be ensured by separating signed consent forms from the completed survey results.   The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact _Angela Brewer_ at telephone number 940-369-7612 or the faculty advisor, Dr. _Karen Anderson,_ UNT Department of Communication Studies, at telephone number 940-369-7612.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights: Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- *Angela Brewer* has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

For the Principal Investigator or Designee: I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the participant signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee   Date

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