

## ABSTRACT

Texas Governor Race: How Media Framing Affects the Perception  
of Greg Abbott and Wendy Davis

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This study examines the effects of framing found in a series of online videos that relate to Republican Greg Abbott and Democrat Wendy Davis in their campaigns for the 2014 Texas gubernatorial election. Both candidates are powerful political figures. Abbott is a well-established candidate running from the position of Texas state attorney general. His opponent, Davis, attained national fame for her filibuster of an abortion bill. She ran from the position of Texas state senator. Framing theory was utilized to compare how YouTube videos affect potential voters' opinions. It was a 3 x 2 factorial design experiment, with pairs of positive, neutral, and negative videos, split by political party. All subjects appeared to evaluate candidates by the same criteria. Tone and framing was found to affect overall candidate impression and voter intention, with more support for positively framed candidates and less support for negatively framed candidates.

Texas Governor Race: How Media Framing Affects the Perception  
of Greg Abbott and Wendy Davis

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The 2014 Texas gubernatorial election promises change, as it is the first since 1990 to be an open race. Governor Rick Perry has held the office since 2000, becoming the longest-serving governor for Texas (Camia & Jervis, 2013). It will pit the candidates Greg Abbott (R) against Wendy Davis (D). Abbott runs from his position as Texas state attorney general, while Davis runs as a Texas state senator. They both have prominence on a state level, and even the national level, as Abbott has held his position for several years and challenged the Obama administration multiple times, and Davis recently filibustered a prominent abortion bill.

Texas has been a traditionally conservative state, but a group of Democrats seeks to influence this election via an independent organization called Battleground Texas. The plan is to make Texas a swing state, colloquially known as “turning Texas blue.” U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, a former mayor of Dallas, summarized future Democratic aspirations as “when Texas turns blue, this country’s going to turn blue and it’s going to stay blue” (Burns, 2013). This grass-roots effort plans to engage underrepresented voters, such as the state’s rapidly growing Hispanic population, so there will be a higher Democratic turnout (Burns, 2013).

Given the unique climate of the election, it is important to study its dynamics and the two candidates who will run against one another. Each candidate has his or her own personal limitations. Through a freak accident, Abbott was partially paralyzed many years ago, which may affect how the public views him as a potential governor. His

campaign embraces this, as a couple minutes of a campaign video titled “Perseverance” was spent explaining how he was injured and how he had moved on from it.

On the other hand, Davis is a female candidate and a Democrat in a Republican-dominated state. She rose to national prominence in June 2013 with her 11-hour filibuster of Texas Senate Bill 5, which dealt with abortion. She talks about how she was a single mother at 19, struggling to support her family and also go to school. Years later, she graduated from Harvard Law School, rising to the position of Texas state senator.

Both candidates have made mistakes early in their campaigns. Davis touts her life story as a way to garner support. Unfortunately for her campaign, early on it was discovered that she was distorting some of the facts. It was found that she remarried at 24, and her husband cashed in his 401k to support her ambitions (Henderson, 2014).

“Davis said she had focused on general themes in her personal history, rather than being precise,” reported the Dallas Morning News, as it clarified some details (Henderson, 2014). The general framework of her story was accurate, but she received help along the way through her marriage with Jeff Davis, which ended in divorce (Henderson, 2014).

In the summer of 2013, Abbott was criticized for thanking a supporter who called Davis a “retard Barbie” on the social media site Twitter. This was before Davis had declared her candidacy (Glueck, 2013). Later, he sent a tweet asking supporters to “stay positive” and that appears to have solved the issue.

Prior to his three terms as Texas attorney general, Abbott served as a Justice on the Texas State Supreme Court, so he is well-established within his party and state. Also,

he started the race with significantly more money than his Democratic opponent, with \$20 million compared to her \$1 million (Glueck, 2013).

This study aims to assess how videos found on YouTube affect viewer opinion of these two candidates. Social, shareable media remains a fairly new concept. The millennial generation has grown up with an idea of instant gratification from “new” media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest, which allow users to interact with each other in real time and share everything about their lives, down to the mundane details. Such technology makes it possible to share videos that go “viral” or are seen by literally millions of people. Popular videos, such as the ones this study uses as a stimulus, can easily have millions of views as friends share what they find interesting with other friends and perpetuate a cycle in new media. This study seeks to examine individuals’ opinions after viewing specifically framed videos in person.

YouTube is considered a part of the wave of “new” media coming along with the advent of the Internet. It was created in February 2005 and is now the world’s most popular online video site, with billions of hours’ worth of videos uploaded monthly (Dickey, 2013). As such, studying YouTube is a new, growing field with limited research into how it affects politics. YouTube is a viable platform for political conversations, especially during the election season; however, online-only political commentary appears to be a niche outside of the season. Mainstream news sources push out less established individuals that present user-generated content, which is not what YouTube was created for (May, 2010).

Regardless, politicians have made user-generated content for YouTube since 2006; a year after YouTube was created. 2006 was referred to as the first “YouTube



election,” when ordinary citizens could hold politicians accountable for what they say and do and the politicians themselves could post videos directly for their constituents (Regnier, 2008). It is possible to study this relationship between “ordinary citizen” and politician through this medium. It is a new discourse in the world of politics and gives power to both sides. Individual citizens and politicians, through the Internet, can have feedback loops that are unlike anything seen before. It is up to the individual politician to create these opportunities.

This study is a 3 x 2 factorial design experiment for investigating the relationship between video tone and subjects’ attitudes toward the candidates. The first factor is video tone (positive, negative or neutral) and the second is political affiliation. It is important to study the intersection between the new media module, YouTube, with videos that represent advertisements or discourse that is common over other mediums, such as the television or radio. As new media grows, more political interaction will occur online.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

Persuasive tactics in advertising, political or otherwise, are important topics of research. The rising use of negative campaigning is scrutinized for its impact on political participation, voters' cynicism, and voter turnout rates (Daignault, Soroka & Giasson, 2013). By measuring skin conductance and heart rate, it was found that negative advertisements keep subjects more activated on a physiological level, with a comparatively lower level corresponding with positive or neutral advertisements (Daignault et al., 2013). This may be part of why negative advertising is still perceived as an effective tactic for political campaigns.

Yoon, Pinkleton, and Ko (2005) found that voting intention for a high-credibility candidate who used negative advertising was higher than for a negative, low-credibility candidate, regardless of subjects' level of involvement. Voters may be less likely to support a low-credibility candidate when he or she uses negative advertising, "because of their belief that the use of such advertising results from the flawed credibility of the candidates" (Yoon et al., 2005, p 107). Several factors seem to affect how negativity is perceived by individuals.

Party affiliation also affects how negatively an individual will see a political campaign. Hong and Riffe (2008) studied the 2004 presidential election and found that approximately 61% of respondents believed that the candidate they planned to vote for was less negative in his campaigning than his counterpart. Since the researchers did not

cover campaign advertising with a more positive tone, to study this effect further, this hypothesis was posited:

H1: A positively framed video will affect how positively a candidate is perceived. Likewise, a negative video will cause subjects to perceive a candidate more negatively.

The manner in which the videos frame the candidates, and the candidates frame themselves, all affect their public perception. Further, framing theory helps to illustrate the association between perception and reality.

### *Framing Theory*

Framing theory was developed in the 1970s by Goffman; however, the most popular definition in the field of mass communication is propagated by Entman (Kenterelidou, 2012; Goffman, 1974; Entman 1993, 2004, 2010). Entman (2010) asserts that framing is selecting a few aspects of a perceived reality and connecting them together in a narrative that promotes a particular interpretation.

The media chooses how it will frame every story it reports. Some news sources are no longer hiding their political biases when it comes to reporting, and as such tend to frame candidates from opposing parties in a negative light. Framing also functions as a way to set the agenda of viewers and shape political reality (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). McCombs and Shaw found that the frequency of important issues mentioned by subjects who favored a particular candidate also matched the frequency of all major and minor issues carried by the media in the Chapel Hill area.

Social media may impact framing theory, as new media is shaping certain types of communications differently than traditional media (Tian, 2010). Tian (2010) studied the framing of YouTube videos concerned with organ donation and found that the

overwhelming majority (95.8%) of them were positively framed. This was compared to the 57% positive rating of newspaper articles with the same topic. Since YouTube allows the lines between audience and medium to blur, it was found that video comments were also quite positive, at more than 90% of relevant comments (Tian, 2010). Building on that research, this study seeks to see if there is still a correlation between video framing and audience response, by asking the following research question:

RQ1a: Will a video's framing affect how much support a candidate will receive from the viewer?

RQ1b: How does framing affect how a viewer thinks his or her friends and family will vote?

These questions are based on the social support dimension of public opinion. Social support measures the extent people think their opinions are shared by others in their social circle (Broom & Sha, 2013). Without perceived social support, opinions change quickly; however, with the impression that an idea is widely shared, opinions are hard to budge (Broom & Sha, 2013).

Social support suggests that Abbott, the conservative candidate in a conservative state, has the advantage in the upcoming election. The following sections will explore the unique challenges both Abbott and Davis have to overcome in their campaigns.

### *Greg Abbott*

To win the 2014 Texas gubernatorial election, one of the things Abbott needs to overcome is his disability. He uses it as a launching point for his personal story in the campaign video, entitled "Perseverance," but it is unknown whether or not his disability will be a factor in a large-scale election such as one for Texas governor. In a campaign to prove strength as a leader, a disability could be seen as a mark of weakness.

Abbott mentions why he is in a wheelchair on his website and does not ask for pity. His direct approach is a different strategy than another notable disabled politician, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who overcame being crippled by polio. “Roosevelt’s fate could have been similar to that of many polio victims, except for his political ambition and his inherent optimism” (Kiewe, 1999). Roosevelt sought to make himself look stronger by downplaying or hiding his disability, instead showing off his self-confidence and air of authority. He practiced walking to show himself as someone lame instead of crippled (Kiewe, 1999).

Advances in media have changed how politicians are scrutinized over time, however. The first televised presidential debate was between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, in 1960. A poll of those listening over the radio thought that Nixon was the winner. However, television viewers thought Kennedy was the winner of the debate by a wide margin, possibly because Nixon was still recovering from a recent illness. Researchers have debated whether or not this effect is a myth. Kraus (1997) compiled a number of studies attempting to explain whether or not the candidates won over different forms of media. While evidence is anecdotal and cannot be replicated due to certain factors, Kraus (1997) concluded that Kennedy winning on the television and Nixon winning on the radio was not a myth. Both men were judged by their physical appearance on a national scale.

Abbott does not have a disability that is as easily masked. It is likely viewers will concentrate on his physical appearance, comparable to the first televised debate between Kennedy and Nixon (Kraus, 1997). Coopman (2000) argues that the Internet has opened up options for discourse, by creating websites and networks that change how disability is

represented. So it is necessary to study Abbott's political career as one of a successful disabled man, to see if Americans are becoming more accepting of disabilities in politics.

*Wendy Davis*

Davis, on the other hand, has two hurdles to cross. She is a female politician and was inconsistent with her life story early in her campaign. In the past, gender has taken prominence with female candidates, such as with Sarah Palin during the 2008 election. Forty percent of Republican blog coverage focused on her during the period of time after she was announced as McCain's running mate until the election (Bradley & Wicks, 2011). This may be compounded in Davis's case, as she made her name on a national level with her filibuster of an abortion bill, which is a controversial issue.

Meeks (2012) studied U.S. news coverage for mixed-gender elections, both in 1999 and the 2008 elections. Politics is generally seen as a masculine arena, due to stereotypes found in gender dynamics and among politicians. In the 113<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress, 18.5% of the House of Representatives and 20% of the Senate seats are held by females (CAWP, 2014). Five women hold governor positions in 2014, and the record number of women serving simultaneously was nine, in 2004 and again in 2007 (CAWP, 2014).

It is increasingly likely to find both genders incorporating masculine and feminine traits into their image, creating "subtypes" that make their image more complex (Schneider, 2004). The idea of a subtype makes a female politician with masculine tendencies stand out against the norm of female stereotypes, thus placing certain female candidates in categories of their own.

It becomes apparent as female candidates run for more executive levels of office, the number of gender labels attached to them increase. Female candidates are more

likely to be subject to gender-related news coverage than their male counterparts (Meeks, 2012). According to Meeks (2012), gender labels for female candidates go from 14.1% when running for senator, to 18.6% for governor, and jumps to 29% for the White House. For male candidates, percentages of gender label coverage go from 13.4% when running for senator, to 3.5% for governor, and 10.6% for the White House. There is a 15.1% difference in coverage for governor races, showing a fixation on a female candidate, though it should be noted that the sample size for this data was smaller for governor (113) than it was for senator (262) or White House (331).

Davis also was framed poorly by the *Dallas Morning News* early in her campaign for fuzzy facts in her biography. By twisting the facts of her life story, Davis ran the risk of damaging her constituents' trust in a bid to secure their votes. A study of inconsistency by Karande, Case & Mady (2008) suggested that intention to vote depends on a few variables. An inconsistent but positive message that is not relevant to important issues has the least impact on voter intention; however, an inconsistent, negative message that is relevant to important issues will cause voters to hesitate at the ballot (Karande et al., 2008). The impact of Davis's biography manipulation, in theory, would depend on how a prospective voter interprets the tone of the message and its relevance. Inconsistency in political dialogue is an area that has not yet been extensively studied; however, the Heuristic-systematic model of information processing can help explain how inconsistency may impact voter intentions.

### *Heuristic Versus Systematic Information Processing*

The Heuristic-systematic model of information processing was created by Chaiken (1980) as a way of seeing how individuals process persuasive messages, such as

those uttered by politicians. The theory behind this model was that individuals with high levels of involvement will process information systematically, while low involvement individuals will process information heuristically. That is, low involvement individuals are more likely to be swayed by likability and high involvement individuals are more focused on important issues and arguments. This study partially operated on this theory, and posited the following hypotheses from it:

H2: Subjects unfamiliar with the politicians will more likely prioritize subjective cues, defined as likability, first impression, trustworthiness, and smooth delivery, when evaluating candidates.

H3: Subjects familiar with the politicians will more likely prioritize objective cues, defined as qualifications, candidate's positions, consistency, and experience, when evaluating candidates.

Aristotle's *ethos*, now referred to as source credibility, refers to perceived believability (Miller & Levine, 1996). Characteristics, like "discrepancy, language intensity, message sidedness, and the quality and quantity of evidence provided also influence persuasiveness" (Miller & Levine, 1996, p. 262), meaning that the perception and influence of a message changes depending on how it is delivered.

Political parties can trigger a heuristic decision making response in subjects, by association of emotional cues. Political climates create the parties and the responses that the parties make to certain issues, thus image management should be done at both the level of candidate and political party (Bratu, 2013).

Similar to the Heuristic-systematic model of information processing is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) created by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). It suggests that individuals want to hold the correct attitude for a situation, based on it being rational, coherent and consistent. However, since time is an issue in compiling these attitudes,



some are evaluated more based on relevance. These issues are said to be evaluated centrally, while other issues are elaborated on peripherally, which means that incidental cues play a much larger role in attitude creation (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Building on this theoretical foundation, this study aims to review the effects that framing of various videos found on YouTube have on an experimental group of prospective voters, as discussed in the methodology section.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

A 3 x 2 factorial design experiment was implemented in order to investigate the relationship between video tone and subjects' attitudes toward the candidates. The first factor is video tone (positive, negative or neutral) and the second is Republican (Abbott) or Democratic (Davis) affiliation. Subjects were 18 years or older and recruited from the pool of available students at a southwestern university in the Journalism, Public Relations, and New Media department and also in the Communication Studies department. The experiment was conducted over a two week period. Students were asked to come to a computer lab and watch one of six YouTube videos, randomly assigned, and complete a survey afterward. They were free to stop answering the survey and leave at any time.

Total participation was 195 students, recruited through incentives, namely extra credit from participating professors and/or entry into a raffle for a \$50 gift card. Ethnicity of the sample was 64% Caucasian, 15% Hispanic, 8% African American, 5% Asian, 4% multiracial, 3% other, and 1% unknown. Sample gender and age were skewed, with a 73% female response rate, and 93% of participants being 18-22 years of age. Those of the 23-27 age range were 6% of the sample, while 28-32 was 1%. Finally, 53% of participants were Republicans, while 21% were Democrats, 18% Independent, and 8% affiliating with other parties.

Every individual was randomly assigned a video from the following list:

Positive (Stories as told by the candidates):

1a. A Texas Story -- Wendy Davis for Governor

This video is a political ad paid for by the Wendy Davis campaign. It covers her rags-to-riches story and also highlights some of her political views. She is shown as supporting education, job creation and security, and being tough on crime. It is positive, with upbeat music in the background.

1b. Perseverance

This video is a political ad paid for by Texans for Greg Abbott. It tells the story of Abbott's disability and focuses on Abbott's perseverance in the face of adversity. Also shown are his family and his political accomplishments as attorney general of Texas.

Neutral (Interviews with candidates):

2a. Wendy Davis attempted filibuster in Texas

This video is a clip from an Anderson Cooper 360° interview with Davis the day after her famous filibuster of Texas Senate Bill 5. She answers questions about what it was like to stand for so long, and how she believes she empowered the voice of Texans through the filibuster.

2b. Greg Abbott Discusses Voter ID on Fox News

This video is a clip from a Fox News Live interview, where Abbott discusses voter ID. He makes several points to defend the implementation of this policy. Abbott's disability is overlooked in this video, as he is shown from the waist-up.

Negative (Candidates portrayed in a negative light by a news source):

3a. Wendy Davis book: Biography or tall tale?

This video is a clip from CNN, and casts a negative look on Davis by discussing what she needed to clarify of the life story she told the public. It also covers some Republican reaction, like the Twitter hashtag #MoreFakeThanWendyDavis, and accusations of her using her second husband as a sugar daddy.

### 3b. Attorney General Abbott Thanks Supporter Who Insulted Sen. Wendy Davis

This video is a clip from KEYE TV, and covers the backlash Abbott received after thanking a user on Twitter who expressed support for Abbott, while also referring to Davis as a "Retard Barbie." The ending shows Abbott later asking supporters to "stay positive" but he does not apologize. An unobservant subject would miss that Abbott is in a wheelchair.

### *Variable Measurement*

The Heuristic-systematic model of information processing weighed heavily into the survey questions' creation. Five questions comprised a scale for interpreting subjects' impression of the candidate's video they watched. These questions were a Likert scale with a 1 to 5 measurement of likability, initial impression, trustworthiness, smoothness of candidate address, and candidate's qualifications. The scale had a Chronbach's  $\alpha=.85$ .

Low-involvement variables were likability, first impression, trustworthiness, and smooth delivery. High-involvement variables were qualifications, candidate's positions, consistency, and experience. Participants were asked to rank these variables 1 to 8 based on most to least important to them. As a control, subjects were asked to match the video they watched with a question relating to its content. Almost all subjects chose the correct categories for the video they watched.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The first hypothesis predicted that video tone would affect how positively or negatively a candidate is perceived. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare the impression left by the pairs of positive, negative, and neutral videos. H1 was supported by the results. The positive pair of videos left the most favorable impression with ( $M = 4.08$  and  $SD = .61$ ). The neutral pair of videos was a step down in impression, with ( $M = 3.79$  and  $SD = .61$ ). As predicted, the negative videos were the lowest, at ( $M = 3.26$  and  $SD = .69$ ).  $F_{(2, 192)} = 28.14, p < .001$ .

Another ANOVA was performed to see the individual impressions left by each video. The results also support H1, and there is little variation between videos paired by tone.  $F_{(5, 189)} = 11.85, p < .001$ . See Table 1, below.

Table 1 Individual Impressions by Video

Video	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Davis Positive	3.98	.63
Abbott Positive	4.19	.59
Davis Neutral	3.88	.67
Abbott Neutral	3.71	.53
Davis Negative	3.27	.63
Abbott Negative	3.25	.75

H2 and H3 predicted the priority of cues based on how familiar subjects were with the candidate of the video they watched. H2 stated that unfamiliar subjects will evaluate candidates on subjective cues—likeability, first impression, trustworthiness, and smooth delivery. Alternatively, H3 stated that familiar subjects will evaluate candidates based on objective cues—the candidate’s qualifications, positions, consistency, and experience. Both hypotheses were erroneous, as expounded upon in Table 2. The *p* values show that no significant difference occurred between the groups. Regardless of familiarity, subjects evaluated the candidates by almost identical cues. After trustworthiness, ranked the most important cue, all four objective categories were considered more important than the subjective cues.

There was a skew in how many subjects considered themselves familiar (40) with the candidates, compared to the number unfamiliar (137).

Table 2 Cues Used to Evaluate Candidates

Characteristic	Rank Order	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> value
Trustworthiness	1	2.81	-.53	56.62	.60
Qualifications	2	3.50	.97	68.34	.33
Candidate’s Positions	3	4.02	1.35	70.16	.18
Experience	4	4.03	-.81	61.38	.42
Consistency	5	4.33	.36	72.14	.72
Likeability	6	5.18	-1.27	73.03	.21
First Impression	7	5.61	-.47	64.69	.64
Smooth Delivery	8	6.52	.30	53.97	.76

Lastly, RQ1, based on social support as a dimension of public opinion, asked whether a video’s framing would affect how much support a candidate will receive from the viewer, as well as his or her friends and family. Since the majority of the study population was uninformed, the unique opportunity occurred to expose some subjects to their first impressions of the candidates. The survey asked which candidate the subject was likely to vote for—Abbott, Davis, or an ambiguous “Other”—and also who they believed their friends and family were likely to vote for. The tone of the video they watched appears to have influenced who the subjects planned to vote for, and also which candidate they predicted their friends and family will vote for, as illustrated in Tables 3 – 5 and predicted by social support.

Table 3 Candidate Participants Would Vote For

Videos	Abbott	%	Davis	%	Other	%
Davis Positive	8	24.24%	19	57.58%	6	18.18%
Abbott Positive	23	69.70%	6	18.18%	4	12.12%
Davis Neutral	10	31.25%	17	53.13%	5	15.63%
Abbott Neutral	21	65.63%	9	28.13%	2	6.25%
Davis Negative	15	46.88%	11	34.38%	6	18.75%
Abbott Negative	14	42.42%	12	36.36%	7	21.21%
Total	91	46.67%	74	37.95%	30	15.38%

Given that 53% of the sample was Republican, and 21% Democratic, it appears the dominant factor here for the total distribution was how the candidate was framed.

Davis has more than 50% of the votes for those who viewed her positive or neutral videos, while Abbott has more than 65% for those who saw his positive or neutral videos.

These percentages dropped significantly for their negative videos. It appears that about 20% were turned off by the negative material they had just seen, and either turned to voting for the other candidate or going for the “Other” category.

Also of note is voter intention. Though the question was posed as if every individual would vote, 49% of participants said they would not be voting in this election.

Table 4 Candidate Participants’ Family Would Vote For

Videos	Abbott	%	Davis	%	Other	%
Davis Positive	10	30.30%	17	51.52%	6	18.18%
Abbott Positive	28	84.85%	2	6.06%	3	9.09%
Davis Neutral	17	53.13%	12	37.50%	3	9.38%
Abbott Neutral	27	84.38%	4	12.50%	1	3.13%
Davis Negative	18	56.25%	9	28.13%	5	15.63%
Abbott Negative	15	45.45%	13	39.39%	5	15.15%
Total	115	58.97%	57	29.23%	23	11.79%

Table 4 has a stronger Republican response, though there is still evidence of video tone affecting voting choice. Abbott has about 84% of voter support for his positive and neutral videos, and even has a higher percentage of votes on the neutral Davis video. However, Abbott drops about 40% when subjects were exposed to his negative video.



Regardless of subjects' personal response, it appears that subjects believe their families will vote more conservatively than the subjects themselves.

Table 5 Candidate Participants' Friends Would Vote For

Videos	Abbott	%	Davis	%	Other	%
Davis Positive	9	27.27%	14	42.42%	10	30.30%
Abbott Positive	25	75.76%	6	18.18%	2	6.06%
Davis Neutral	11	34.38%	16	50.00%	5	15.63%
Abbott Neutral	23	71.88%	7	21.88%	2	6.25%
Davis Negative	17	53.13%	8	25.00%	7	21.88%
Abbott Negative	14	42.42%	14	42.42%	5	15.15%
Total	99	50.77%	65	33.33%	31	15.90%

The total percentages for Table 5 are comparable to Table 3, showing that generally, subjects believe their friends will vote similarly to themselves. Davis has less social support here, however. In her positive video, 30% think their friends would opt for the “Other” candidate, which is the highest percentage of “Other” votes across Table 3 – 5. Overall, Abbott is the more positively received candidate here.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

This study ended with a mix of support for the hypotheses first predicted. It was expected that the tone of the videos would correspond with the tone of subjects' overall impression. What this shows is that the videos are doing their job, regardless of tone. The two positive videos shown to the subjects were designed to be as flattering as possible for their respective candidates. As stories about succeeding in the face of adversity, it is unsurprising that they received the most positive reception.

The neutral videos received an above-average  $M$  as well, which may be related to subjects' party affiliations. These were chosen to show Abbott and Davis in the most neutral setting, which were television interviews. While receiving the lowest  $M$  of the sets of videos watched, the two negative videos still were above  $M = 3.00$ , which also implies the influence of party affiliation.

Unexpected was the unsupported H2 and H3. These two hypotheses were based on the Heuristic-systematic model of information processing, which theorizes that high-involvement individuals will process information more objectively, while low involvement individuals will process information more subjectively. This was not the case here. It appears that, regardless of prior knowledge of candidates, individuals interpret what is most important to them. Trustworthiness was the most important cue in this study, which may relate to how both negative videos portray the candidates as less than trustworthy, especially Davis. Perhaps future political advertisements should emphasize how trustworthy their candidates are.

Considering how uniformed the overall subject pool was, it is likely that a few first impressions were created by this study. RQ1 dealt with Tables 3 – 5, which show a definite skew for a certain candidate, depending on which video was watched. The positive videos attracted more attention for the candidate that was framed positively, while the negative videos seemed to influence subjects' interest in the other candidate or even a nameless "Other." Abbott does appear to have more social support at this stage of the election, which should be unsurprising for an election in the historically conservative Texas. Considering the sample had 53% Republican response, this does closely represent the population of Texas as a whole, when considering 57.2% of Texas voted Republican in the 2012 presidential election (Associated Press, 2012).

When looking at negativity, voting intentions vary depending on how credible the negative candidate is (Yoon et al., 2005). Tables 3 – 5 show that regardless of candidate, negative videos show support going down for the one framed negatively and going up for the other candidate. At this stage it appears both candidates have about equal levels of credibility, considering many subjects were unfamiliar with them.

Abbott and Davis left similar impressions on the subjects that viewed their negative videos. Abbott's related to an altercation on Twitter, where he thanked a supporter who insulted his future opponent. This received a mean of 3.25, so slightly above average on the scale used. The negative video about Davis was about her inconsistencies with her life story, and received a mean of 3.27. Karande et al. (2008) stated that an inconsistent, negative message that is relevant to important issues will cause voters to reconsider who to vote for. Both videos can be seen as an inconsistent, negative message, as Abbott would not be the choice at the Republican primaries if he

called women “retard Barbies” yet by thanking a supporter on Twitter, it seemed like he was doing just that. Respect for women and telling the truth both appear to be important messages for Abbott and Davis to reinforce.

The subject of disability was not highlighted in this study, though it was the topic of one question. About 85% or 165 participants did not know that Abbott was disabled before filling out the survey. It is to be seen whether or not that will have an effect on his campaign beyond his talking points as a Republican. However, he did receive a positive response from potential voters who viewed videos clearly showing him in a wheelchair.

### *Limitations*

There are many ways to improve upon this study. Notably, researching a more diverse crowd, as older individuals may be less impressionable or more set in their political viewpoints. Having a more equal number of those familiar or unfamiliar with the candidates would also likely create more balanced results when seeing what cues are prioritized by either group.

If possible, the study should have been conducted a few months later. At the time, Abbott and Davis were prospective candidates. Later in the political season, both candidates would have a chance to make first impressions through television ads and campaign appearances. Videos sampled could have been entirely campaign rhetoric. More about their pasts could have come to light. But the timing can be seen as an advantage, as it allowed for making a few first impressions on its own.

A future study may look into having subjects return after a period of time and see how their opinions have changed on the candidate whose video they watched. By asking what kind of political propaganda they had been exposed to in the interim, it would be

possible to conclude what may have changed opinions. It would be interesting to see if the subjects' first impression stays with them or changes over time.

### *Conclusion*

Overall impression is a complex subject that cannot be measured after viewing one video. The average American is bombarded with advertisements of all tones, lessening in impact with each view. In part, this study shows how powerful an advertisement can be right after viewing, as it colors a viewer's immediate response.

This study was a 3 x 2 factorial design experiment, which used pairs of positive, neutral, and negative videos, split by candidate. For the open 2014 Texas gubernatorial election, the two candidates are Greg Abbott (R) and Wendy Davis (D). It was predicted that video tone would have an effect on how a candidate was perceived. This appears true; negative or positive, the videos did have a measureable effect on individuals immediately after being viewed.

The two hypotheses created based on the Heuristic-systematic model of information processing proved to be false. Regardless of involvement level, subjects tended to evaluate candidates based on the same criteria. The theory does not appear to apply to politics, as it states that low involvement individuals will look at information heuristically, and high involvement individuals will process information systematically (Chaiken, 1980). For the purposes of this study, heuristic information was studied as subjective cues—likability, first impression, trustworthiness, and smooth delivery. Systematic information was studied as the objective cues of qualifications, candidate's positions, consistency, and experience. Trustworthiness was the highest ranked cue and all the objective cues followed right after it in importance. This suggests that the

hypotheses were false because in a way, all subjects were high involvement, as they tended to prioritize the objective cues.

Campaign strategies of showing a candidate in a positive light did seem to make a favorable impression on subjects, while negatively framed material had the opposite effect. Framing sets the agenda, just like McCombs and Shaw (1972) found in their studies in the Chapel Hill area. Negative tone in advertisements keeps subjects more active physiologically (Daignault et al., 2013) thus making them more influential. Framing and tone prove to be effective ways to influence voter intention.

## APPENDIX

### Survey Instrument

1. Which candidate was featured in the video you watched?  
☐ Greg Abbott   ☐ Wendy Davis
2. Which video did you watch?  
☐ A Texas Story – Wendy Davis for Governor  
☐ Perseverance  
☐ Wendy Davis attempted filibuster in Texas  
☐ Greg Abbott Discusses Voter ID on Fox News  
☐ Wendy Davis book  
☐ Attorney General Abbott Thanks Supporter
3. What are some topics discussed in the video you watched? (Select all that apply.)  
☐ Candidate's life story   ☐ Candidate's Accomplishments  
☐ Tough on Crime   ☐ Response to Adversity   ☐ Filibuster  
☐ Empowering Texans   ☐ Voter Protections   ☐ Candidate's credibility  
☐ Mishandled Twitter Page   ☐ Respect for Women  
☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please rank the following characteristics, from most to least important to you, for evaluating politicians. (1=most important; 8=least important)  
☐ \_\_Likeability   ☐ \_\_First Impression   ☐ \_\_Trustworthiness   ☐ \_\_Smooth Delivery  
☐ \_\_Qualifications   ☐ \_\_Candidate's Positions   ☐ \_\_Consistency   ☐ \_\_Experience
5. How likeable do you think the candidate is?  
☐ Very Likeable   ☐ Likeable   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Dislikeable   ☐ Very Dislikeable
6. What is your impression of the candidate?  
☐ Very Favorable   ☐ Favorable   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Unfavorable   ☐ Very Unfavorable



7. How trustworthy do you believe the candidate is?  
☐ Very Trustworthy ☐ Trustworthy ☐ Neutral ☐ Dishonest ☐ Very Dishonest
8. How smooth was the candidate's address?  
☐ Very Articulate ☐ Articulate ☐ Neutral ☐ Inarticulate ☐ Very Inarticulate
9. How qualified do you think the candidate is for Texas Governor?  
☐ Very Qualified ☐ Qualified ☐ Neutral ☐ Unqualified ☐ Very Unqualified
10. How likely is it that you would vote for the candidate in the next election?  
☐ Very Likely ☐ Likely ☐ Neutral ☐ Unlikely ☐ Never
11. Would you recommend family and friends vote for this candidate? Why or why not?  
☐ Yes ☐ No    Why? \_\_\_\_\_
12. How well did the candidate explain his/her positions?  
☐ Very Well ☐ Well ☐ Neutral ☐ Poorly ☐ Very Poorly
13. How consistent do you think the candidate is in his/her positions?  
☐ Very Consistent ☐ Consistent ☐ Neutral ☐ Inconsistent ☐ Very Inconsistent
14. How strongly do you agree with the candidate's positions?  
☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
15. Do you believe the candidate is a politician worthy of respect? Why or why not?  
☐ Yes ☐ No    Why? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Do you plan to vote in the upcoming Texas governor election?  
☐ Yes ☐ No
17. Which politician would you likely vote for in the upcoming Texas governor election?  
☐ Greg Abbott    ☐ Wendy Davis    ☐ Other  
a. What about your family?  
☐ Greg Abbott    ☐ Wendy Davis    ☐ Other  
b. What about your friends?  
☐ Greg Abbott    ☐ Wendy Davis    ☐ Other
18. Before watching this video, were you aware that Greg Abbott is disabled?  
☐ Yes    ☐ No

19. Gender:

☐ Male    ☐ Female

20. Age:

☐ 18-22    ☐ 23-27    ☐ 28-32    ☐ 33-37    ☐ 38-42    ☐ 43-47    ☐ 48+

21. Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

22. What political affiliation are you?

☐ Republican    ☐ Democrat    ☐ Independent    ☐ Other (please specify):

\_\_\_\_\_

23. What was your first impression of the candidate?

\_\_\_\_\_

24. What do you believe most clearly defines the candidate as a person?

\_\_\_\_\_

25. In your opinion, what are the most important factors in deciding which candidate to vote for in this election?

\_\_\_\_\_

26. How familiar were you with the candidate in the video you watched?

☐ Very Familiar    ☐ Familiar    ☐ Neutral    ☐ Unfamiliar    ☐ Very Unfamiliar

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