Evaluation:
The Web White and Blue Network 2000

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For the Markle Foundation. March 2001.

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Acknowledgements

In the final week of July 2000, I received a telephone call from the Markle Foundation. The foundation wanted to conduct an innovative and rigorous evaluation of a project called Web White and Blue. Its goal was to learn about how the project affected two audiences – the 17 Web White and Blue charter sites and the growing universe of Internet users. It also wanted evidence and insights about the impact of political web sites that it could share with a broader audience. In particular, Markle challenged me to create evaluative instruments that could help those who attempt to provide or obtain political information from the Internet work with greater efficiency and effectiveness. By the final week of August, I developed an evaluative strategy that could accomplish Markle's goals.

From the end of August through Election Day, many people worked hard to help the evaluation succeed. At Markle, I was able to draw from the talent and good grace of Barbara Fedida and Tracy Calvan on an almost daily basis. Markle's financial team, Karen Byers and Suzie Siegel, were able to draw and deliver a complex set of contracts with multiple vendors in very short order. Julia Moffett and Amy Wolfcale gave sound advice regarding the evaluation's public face and Florence Gibbs' tremendous skills in multimedia were critical in helping me present the evaluation to the Markle Board of Directors. Zoë Baird leads this remarkable group with strong vision and sound leadership. Her contributions to my conceptualization of the project were particularly important to its success and I appreciate her support.

Markle assembled a talented team of journalists, political insiders, and Internet pioneers to build and maintain Web White and Blue. Each member of this team was helpful to me at critical moments in the evaluation and I am thankful for their efforts. I

learned many important lessons about the goals and structure of the project by listening in on the team's planning meetings, which usually took the form of very professional and constructive teleconferences. The main participants in these meetings were Doug Bailey, Mike McCurry, Jonah Seiger, Steven Clift, and the Markle personnel named above. Each was extraordinarily generous in their support of the evaluation.

The University of California, San Diego is another organization whose support was essential for this evaluation to proceed. Sean Cain, a Ph.D. student in Political Science and the lead research assistant on this project, was instrumental in the execution and data analysis portions of the activities described in this report. In December, Catherine Algeri and Tiffany Chew joined the analysis team through the UCSD Faculty Mentors program. Penny Cumbey, the Political Science department's fiscal supervisor, worked diligently and quickly on important contractual matters. Jeff Fritsch, the department's computing specialist, and Timothy Groeling gave sound advice on several occasions and helped with key technical aspects of the operation. Tony Wood and Rick Accurso from the university's Academic Computing division helped me to construct a new kind of Internet laboratory on very short notice. They also worked hard to ensure that the unique software configuration that my experiments required were up, running, and protected for the duration of my data collection. The entire staff at UCSD's Center for Library & Instructional Computing Services maintained and secured the lab for the duration of the study. Several other university departments, notably Contracts and Grants and Human Subjects, acted with great effectiveness to help a project whose potential value they recognized quickly. Christopher Den Hartog, David Leitch, Rafael Vergara and Laura Wimberly assisted with subject recruitment. I also deeply appreciate the

support of the Political Science department, who partially funded Sean Cain for the period in which he worked on the evaluation and also provided the space in which Sean and I did much of the work for the evaluation.

Knowledge Networks ran important part of the evaluation. Even though I presented them with a tight schedule and new technological challenges, they proved themselves up to the challenges I posed. I particularly appreciate the assistance of Ellen Veccia, who helped draw up the contract, and Richard “Chip” Feldon, with whom I worked on a wide-range of technical issues.

In the last six months, I have also drawn from the expertise of a wide range of leading academic minds including R. Michael Alvarez, Nancy Burns, James Druckman, James Hamilton, Shanto Iyengar, Jon Krosnick Diana Mutz, Russell Neuman, and Samuel L. Popkin. Michael Cornfield was particularly gracious throughout the months of this evaluation, giving me advice on a range of important topics. He and Barbara Fedida did the heavy lifting on the charter site interviews and I am fortunate to have worked with them. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to my family for their support of my desire to undertake this project.

Executive Summary

Background on Web White and Blue

"Web White & Blue 2000, a project of the Markle Foundation, was a non-partisan consortium of 17 of the largest Internet news and news organizations who came together to highlight the potential of the Internet to expand citizen participation in our democracy.

A centerpiece of Web White & Blue 2000 was the first-ever online presidential debate which ran from October 1 through November 8, 2000 and was carried simultaneously on the 17 sites on the Web White & Blue network. The presidential campaigns of George W. Bush, Al Gore, Pat Buchanan, Harry Browne, Howard Phillips and John Hagelin participated in this historic Internet event. The debate exchanges contained two parts: a Message of the Day from the campaign and a response to a Question of the Day submitted by an Internet user. Responses could take any form (video, audio, text, or links to a candidate's web site), and were not limited in length. Each campaign was permitted a rebuttal to their opponent's message of the day and question of the day responses.

In addition to the Rolling Cyber Debate, Web White & Blue 2000 featured a daily selection of links to online political information from the 17 charter sites known as the Best of the Best, a Featured Non-Profit Site of the Week, and a directory of state-by-state election information."

From the "WWB Traffic Report" by Jonah Seiger

The Charter Sites of the Web White and Blue Network

- ABCNews.com
- America Online
- Excite
- CNN.com
- FOXNews.com
- I-Village.com
- MSN.com
- MSNBC.com
- Netnoir.com
- MTV.com
- NPR.com
- The New York Times on the web
- Oxygen.com
- PBS.com
- WashnigtonPost.com

- USAToday.com
- Yahoo.com

Web White and Blue is a Markle Foundation attempt to use the power of new and emerging communication for the public good. Like its other projects, Markle pursues this goal through a range of activities including analysis, research, public information and the development of innovative media products and services. Web White and Blue is but one example of a project that Markle has created and operated - using not only grants but also investments and strategic alliances with non-profits and businesses to accomplish its desired ends.

To manage Web White and Blue, Markle assembled a bi-partisan team with diverse talents. Leading the team are Zoë Baird, Markle Foundation President, who helped to conceptualize and implement the project; Markle Foundation Chief Strategic Officer and Managing Director Julia Moffett, who assembled the management team; and Markle Foundation Director of Project Development Barbara Fedida Brill, who serves as the Web White and Blue Project Director. The outside members of the team include seasoned political veterans such as Grassroots.com CEO and former White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry, a Democrat, and Doug Bailey, a Republican and founder of FreedomChannel.com and The Hotline. Jonah Seiger, co-founder of Mindshare Internet Campaigns LLC, manages Web White & Blue's Internet strategy. During the 2000 election cycle, Peter Orvetti, formerly of National Journal's Cloakroom and National Journal's Technology Daily, oversaw the editing of Web White & Blue content. Steven Clift leads Web White & Blue outreach and site recruitment efforts.

Evaluation Goals and Components

The Markle Foundation, Web White and Blue's management team, and Web White and Blue's 17 charter sites put substantial effort into building and maintaining the Web White and Blue network. To better understand the effect of this collaboration and to build a strong foundation for future efforts, the Markle Foundation engaged in a multi-faceted evaluation of Web White and Blue 2000. The evaluation was conducted with the following questions in mind:

- How did participation in the WWB network affect the charter sites?
- Did the WWB network affect the expectations or behaviors of those who used it?
- Where do users and the charter sites want WWB to go from here?

Answers to these questions serve several purposes. First and foremost, it provides data critical to determining how to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Web White and Blue endeavors. Second, the evaluation fills a critical gap in scientific knowledge about what and how citizens learn about politics from the Internet. As a result, the evaluation is designed to provide broad audiences with new insights on how the Internet changes politics.

The evaluation has five main components:

- Web White and Blue network usage statistics,
- a voluntary user survey,
- in-depth interviews with representatives of the charter sites,
- Internet-based interviews with a random sample of Americans that gauge the effect of particular web sites across broad populations, and

- laboratory experiments that reveal how differences between web sites affect the extent to which they change users' political beliefs and behaviors.

Each component of the evaluation provides a key piece of information regarding how the Web White and Blue network affected the charter sites that contributed to it or citizens at large. Some of these components, such as usage statistics and the voluntary user survey on webwhiteblue.org, are standard fare for evaluations of Internet entities. Other components, such as the Internet-based interviews and laboratory experiments, add innovative social scientific methods to this evaluation. Collectively, the five components clarify the impact of the Web White and Blue network. They reveal which aspects of Web White and Blue boost user confidence in the quality of political information online, raise user interest in the campaigns, and spur political learning. They also show which aspects of the site were most successful in the eyes of the charter sites. This executive summary lays out the main themes of the evaluation and highlights a few of its findings.

Charter Site Interviews

A critical component of the evaluation is to learn about Web White and Blue from the perspective of its 17 charter sites. Barbara Fedida and Michael Cornfield interviewed representatives from Web White and Blue network Charter Sites. The interviews, designed to be 45-60 minutes in length, cover four main areas – *Working with WWB*, *Effect of the Partnership*, *Rolling Cyber Debate and Best of the Best*, and *The Future*.

The following headlines emerge from the interviews:

- The charter sites expressed universal praise for the syndication model, Mindshare's performance, and the WWB mission. The WWB brand is "established"

as far as the charter sites are concerned and chances are excellent they will continue to participate.

- The charter sites see little-to-no downside to participating in Web White and Blue so long as the content is free and non-partisan, requires no labor from the participants, and viewers remain on the charter sites. They are amenable to other public service applications of the "plug and play" format within WWB's syndication model.

- Traffic was very, very low, both within the charter organizations (i.e., charter site employees made limited use of WWB) and with their audiences. However, most charter site representatives attributed this to the candidates' performance in the Rolling Cyber Debate, not to Markle's efforts or WWB generally.

- There were three types of charter members: news organizations (e.g. CNN), specialty portals (e.g., I-Village), and content aggregators (e.g., Yahoo). While all voiced support for the public service mission behind WWB, each brought distinctive desires to the project. News organizations were most concerned about competition, and wanted, above all, breaking news such as the Rolling Cyber Debate was designed to generate. The specialty portals sought credibility with their target audiences, news organizations, and political elites; consequently, they wanted debate topics that spoke to theses identities. The content aggregators wanted visitors to stay a long time and return regularly, so the more content WWB generated, including "Best of the Best" and other features, the better.

- The willingness of charter participants to promote WWB and the Rolling Cyber Debate seemed more closely tied to the content (and their distinctive content needs) than to the interactive features. That is, they were more interested in promoting the candidates' debate answers (tying them to their own content) than a question from someone using their site.

- In considering possible applications of the WWB network to other aspects of public affairs, there was more enthusiasm for special events (i.e. a town meeting or debate on an urgent issue featuring officials from the White House and minority party Congressional leadership) than for ongoing events (i.e. an interactive adjunct to the weekly radio addresses, featuring the same types of speakers).

MAIN IMPLICATION: WWB found a way to attend to, and reconcile, participation incentives for citizens, media enterprises, and politicians. These interviews suggest that the WWB network can continue to serve as a unique and valuable public affairs forum that benefits both the charter sites and the growing universe of WWB network us.

Usage Statistics

Mindshare Internet Campaigns LLC developed and maintained the Web White & Blue web site, its content syndication system, and its Rolling Cyber Debate technology platform. They also tracked patterns of usage to the Web White and Blue site (http:webwhiteblue.org; henceforth referred to as WWB.org). These patterns reveal interesting trends – changes in how viewers used the site as the election approached. Chapter 2 contains a full account of what we learned. Headlines from this data are as follows:

- From its launch on June 28, 2000 through November 8, 2000, WWB.org received a grand total of 7,518,608 page views.
- Between October 1, 2000 and November 8, 2000, the Web White & Blue Rolling Cyber Debate received 737,944 page views.
    - Of these, 43% (314,833) were through the 17 Charter sites.
    - The remaining 57% (423,161) were through WWB.org, in part because America Online linked to it for the first 10 days of the debate.

- The Best of the Best feature received 3,919,214 page views.
    - Of these, 56% (2,197,226) were before the launch of the WWB Rolling Cyber Debate, when Best of the Best was on the WWB.org homepage.
    - The remaining 44% (1,721,988) took place from October 1 through November 8, when Best of the Best was housed on an internal page.

- The state-by-state election directory received 732,621 page views from its launch on September 15, 2000 through November 8, 2000.

Voluntary User Survey

Usage statistics provide valuable information about the frequency and timing of traffic to webwhiteblue.org. Frequency and impact, however, may be two different things. As a result, it is important to supplement usage statistics with users' views of the network. For that reason, I asked that a voluntary user survey be added to WWB.org. The survey joins questions about viewers' Internet habits and prior interest in politics with questions about how they judged WWB.org, its Rolling Cyber Debate, and its links as informative, useful, and trustworthy. The survey was added to the site on October 11, 2000 and over 3000 viewers completed it. With so many responses, we can identify how and why users differed in the parts of the site they liked. Chapter 5 contains a full account of what we learned.

Headlines from this data include the following:

- We asked participants to "tell us what you think of the Web White & Blue site. Did you find the site: easy to use, comprehensive and frustrating."
  - 81% of participants found the "easy to use."
  - 79% of participants found the site to be "comprehensive."
  - 11% of participants found the site to be "frustrating."

- To gauge the effect of the network, we asked: If you were looking for specific election information on this site, did you find it or do you expect to find it by following our links to other election sites?
  - 31% chose the response “yes, I found what I was looking for.”
  - 24% chose the response “yes, I expect to find it.”
  - 20% chose the response “No, I did not find it.”
  - The remaining 24% responded that they were “not looking for specific information.”
  - In short, over 70% of participants who were on the site looking for something specific were able to, or expected to, find it on the network.

- In three separate questions, we asked participants if they found “links from Web White and Blue to other election related sites” to be *useful*, *informative*, and *trustworthy*. In each case, at least 75 % of participants gave positive answers.
  - Users who were in their first year of using the web to access election information, roughly 70% of our participants, were more positive about link quality. For each of the three categories, no less than 78% of these Internet rookies gave positive answers.
  - More experienced users had more varied opinions with 73% responding positively to questions about link usefulness and informativeness and 68% responding positively to a question about the links’ trustworthiness.

- In two separate questions, we asked participants if they found "Web White and Blue's Rolling Cyber Debate to be" *useful* and *informative*. In each case, at least 74% of participants gave positive answers.
  - Again, new users were more enthusiastic. 77% gave positive responses to the *useful* question and 79% gave positive responses to the *informative* question.
  - The equivalent statistics for more experienced users were 65% and 66% respectively.

The user survey, by allowing users to express their views about various aspects of Web White and Blue, provides a clearer view of how the WWB network affected users than would usage statistics alone. However, such responses – as is true of the responses to most published Internet evaluations – must be understood for what they are. The people who take such surveys are not representative of broader populations. They are the select few who are so interested in news and politics that they found WWB.org and stayed on it long enough to answer questions about it. While there is no reason to doubt that the survey tells us about *their* experiences with Web White and Blue, a firm understanding of its effect requires additional kinds of data.

Internet-based Interview Headlines

To clarify the Web White and Blue network's affect on users, we needed a way to compare data such as that collected in the voluntary user survey with data on how the network affected the people who were not be inclined to fill out such a survey. Internet-based interviews, therefore, became a critical part of the evaluation. Such interviews

resemble telephone-based public opinion polls. Participants are recruited via telephone. They are asked if they want a free personal computer and/or Internet access in exchange for agreeing to participate in web-based interviews. The advantages of such interviews over telephone polls are numerous and include the fact that images, audio, and streaming video can be sent to respondents during questioning – which widens the kinds of Internet-related hypotheses analysts can test.

We contracted with Knowledge Networks of Menlo Park, CA – the Industry leader in Internet-based interviewing -- to administer this part of the evaluation. I presented the firm with a new research design. In it, subjects are presented with a seemingly standard interview about their Internet usage. Then, the interview is interrupted and subjects are sent to one or two web sites of our choosing for five minutes each. Some of the sites are members of the WWB network, while others are not. After time is up, the interview resumes, with respondents answering questions about what they saw. A week later, all respondents are contacted for a brief follow-up interview. Between October 13 and November 6, 2000, we interviewed a random, and quite diverse, sample of 1199 Americans.

This way of examining a web site's impact produces interesting findings. One such finding focuses on WWB.org and is displayed as Figure 1. Chapter 6 contains findings on other sites as well as a more detailed explanation of the storyline that follows.

Figure 1 depicts the effect of WWB.org from the respondents' perspective. The first bar shows responses to the question "Have you ever heard of webwhiteblue.org?" Only 1% of the randomly selected respondents were initially aware of the site. Since

WWB.org was not designed as a destination site and did not engage in extensive self-promotion, such numbers are not unexpected.

This numbers seems to suggest that WWB.org had little or no effect on citizens. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the general public's lack of awareness of this and most other political sites we tested implies that the sites had no effect. To better gauge the effect, it is important to determine whether those who viewed the site were changed by it. So, after interrupting the interview and bringing respondents to the site, we then continued the interview by asking them to judge what they saw. We asked respondents to "agree" or "disagree" with statements such as:

- I can use the site to find information that is accurate and non-partisan.
- I can use the site to get the information I want quickly and easily.

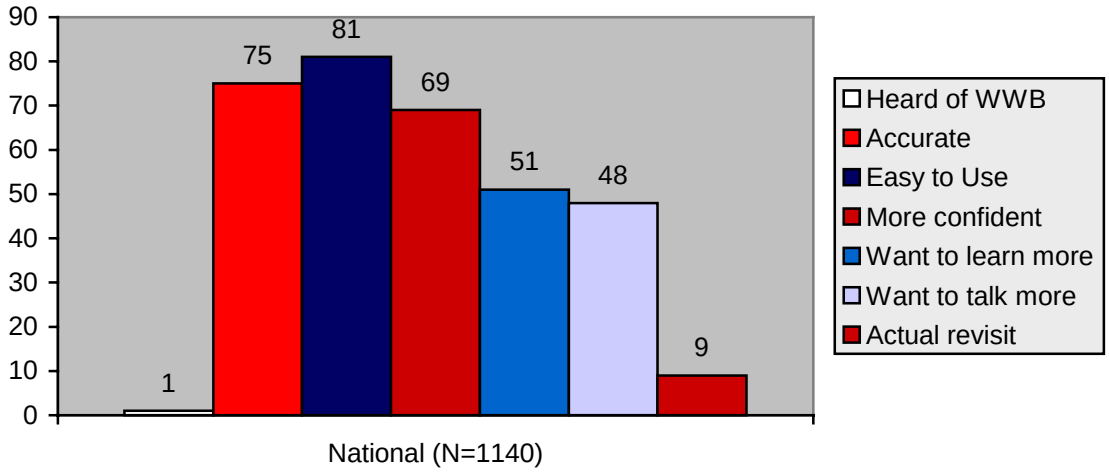


Figure 1. Percent responding yes to WWB questions.

As Figure 1 shows, webwhiteblue.org was judged "accurate" and "easy to use" by an overwhelming number of respondents -- about 99% of whom were viewing the site for the very first time. 75% judged it to be "accurate" and 81% responded that it was "easy to

use." To gauge how viewing webwhiteblue.org would affect citizens' subsequent political beliefs and behaviors, we then asked the respondents a series of questions about themselves. Among the things we asked was for respondents to reply "agree" or "disagree" to the following statements:

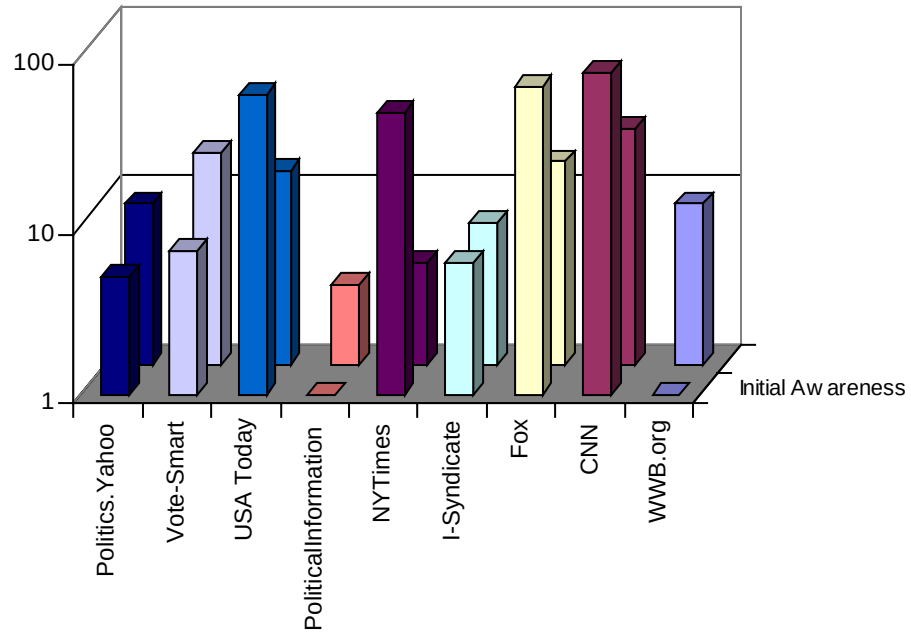
- The site makes me feel more confident about the quality of political information available on the Internet.
- The site makes me want to learn more about politics.
- The site makes me more likely to talk about politics with others.

As Figure 1 shows, here too, a single five minute viewing period changed how these new viewers would next engage the political process, with 69% expressing greater confidence in the quality of political information on the Internet, 51% wanting to learn more, and 48% more likely to discuss politics with others.

To further gauge the effect of a single exposure to a particular web site to a broad population of Internet users, we contacted all respondents a week after their initial interview. 9% revisited webwhiteblue.org. In other words, a single exposure to webwhiteblue.org by members our respondent pool, most of whom were not very interested in the political side of the Internet, induced a near ten-fold increase in the number of people visiting that site. Such results are very suggestive of the impact that a well-conceived web site can have.

Indeed, revisitation rates provide a firm measure of how a site affected individuals because there is an important difference between feeling good about a site after viewing it and actually taking the time to revisit it later. Revisitation suggests a level of interest so

large that a respondent would choose to view that site over all of the other things that he or she could do. Figure 2 documents revisitation rates for other news and information sites. As a benchmark for evaluating the extent to which the single site view during the interview could have prompted the revisit, we also include the sites' initial awareness numbers in the figure (they are the bars in front.)



	Initial Awareness	Revisit
WWB.org	1	9
CNN	80	25
Fox	66	16
I-Syndicate	6	7
NYTimes	46	4
PoliticalInformation	1	3
USA Today	59	14
Vote-Smart	7	18
Politics.Yahoo	5	9

Figure 2. The Impact of Exposure

Before drawing conclusions from this figure, it is worth noting that the numbers in the two columns are not strictly comparable. Brand awareness does not constitute

evidence of prior use. And just because 80% are aware of CNN does not mean that we should expect 80% to use the site within a given week. With those caveats in mind, here is how to read the figure.

Three of the four sites for which respondents were most aware before the viewing periods are also the ones that respondents were most likely to visit afterwards (CNN, Fox, and USA Today). The site for which this pattern does not hold is the New York Times site. Taking the Times' place among the top four revisited sites is Vote-Smart, the site that respondents regarded as best on several qualitative dimensions (see Chapter 6).

Respondents made other distinctions as well. Of the two least known sites initially, political information.com and WWB.org, the percentage revisiting WWB.org was more than triple the percentage revisiting politicalinformation.com. It is also true that a higher percentage of respondents ranked WWB.org higher than this commercial version of a syndicated content site on every qualitative dimension that we measured. Yahoo's political site, also consistently evaluated more favorably than politicalinformation.com, was also far more likely to be revisited.

With the revisitation statistics presented, we can see that respondents' site evaluations impact not only their feelings about the political process but also at least one of their subsequent politically oriented behaviors. When users identified sites that they regarded as inferior in terms of performance, such as the New York Times and PoliticalInformation.com sites, they refused to revisit – a justifiable choice given the presence of numerous other sites providing similar information. Similarly, when users found sites they regard as accurate and easy to use, such as Vote-Smart, WWB.org, and the other news-based dot-coms, they returned voluntarily.

Laboratory Experiment Headlines

Laboratory experiments provided our final venue for evaluating the effects of the WWB network on users, both current and potential. The experiments address the main problem associated with drawing causal inference from more commonly available types of Internet usage information (hits, page views, time spent on a page). The problem is *self-selection.* Specifically, people who view one political web site are likely to view many others of the same kind (e.g., a randomly selected user who views CNN is more likely to also view other news sites – i.e., the New York Times site -- than is a randomly selected viewer who does not view CNN.) As a result, it can be difficult to determine whether a user's exposure to *a particular site* caused them to change their beliefs or behavior.

The experiments address self-selection problems by varying the extent to which users can experience other web sites. Specifically, we asked some subjects to restrict their attention to only one site, others we asked to view only two sites, others were asked to view only three, others were given very long lists of sites to view, and some were given no instructions at all. By varying subjects' exposure and access to WWB.org and other web sites, we can obtain a much clearer view of what happens to users of the Web White and Blue network.

Our experiments were run in a lab designed to record every aspect of a person's Internet viewing behavior. The lab generates data that shows us why people choose one web site over another. Such comparisons provide information critical to understanding what aspects of the Web White and Blue network were most effective. They can also prove insightful to a broader range of current and future Internet entrepreneurs.

We conducted the experiments at the University of California, San Diego from October 16 through November 4, 2000. Among the headlines emerging from the experiments is the Internet's power to affect citizens' evaluations of presidential candidates. After viewing various web sites in our laboratories, we asked all 428 of our experimental subjects the following true/false question.

- [Site X] makes me think about at least one of the candidates in the presidential election in a new way.

316 of our subjects viewed webwhiteblue.org and were asked this question about it. Figure 3 summarizes their responses. Approximately 50% of the subjects reported a change in how they viewed at least one of the candidates, with an even split in whether these revised evaluations were more positive or negative.

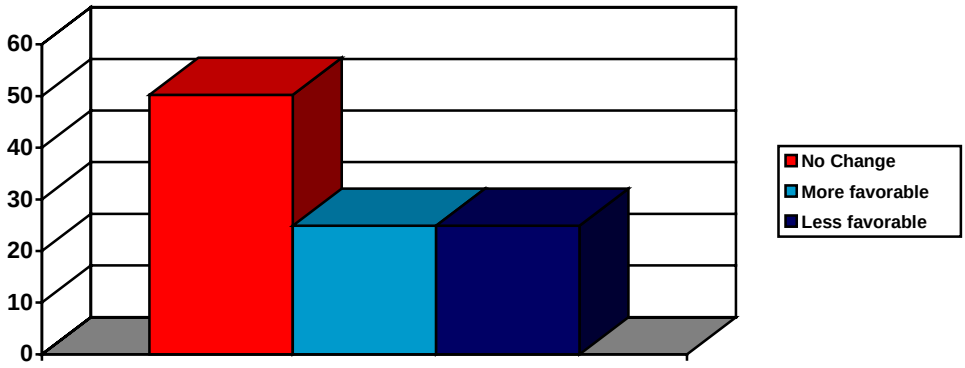


Figure 3. How one exposure to WWB.org affected candidate evaluations.

To see that this high rate of change is unlikely to be an artifact of how the site was presented to subjects, and to preview the fact that many political web sites had such an effect, Figure 4 shows how responses to WWB.org and CNN.com varied over a range of experimental treatments.

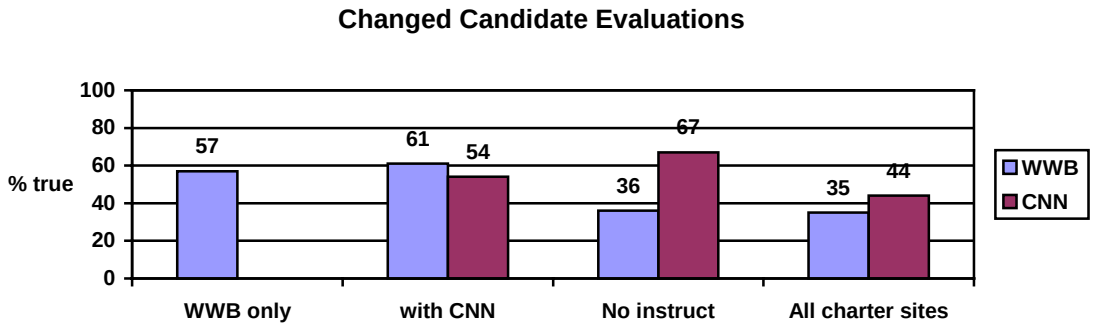


Figure 4. How the Effect Survives Varied Experimental Conditions

The bar to the left shows that 57% of the subjects who viewed WWB.org -- in an experiment where we asked them to view *only* that site -- changed their evaluation of at least one presidential candidate. The second set of bars shows an equivalent statistic for an experiment where subjects were asked to view WWB.org and CNN.com. The third set of bars shows an equivalent statistic for an experiment where subjects were given absolutely no instructions about which sites to view. The right-most set of bars gives the same statistic for an experiment where subjects were given a list of all the Web White and Blue charter sites.

While many interesting conclusions can be drawn from the data, two lessons of Figure 4 should not be overlooked. First, as subjects are given an increasing number of options from which to choose, the effect of any particular web site on someone who actually views it decreases. This is not surprising, the more sites that people are encouraged to view the less likely it is that any particular one could cause a change as important as a candidate evaluation. Second, many site-specific effects do not disappear; even when users have many sites from which to choose, certain sites leave distinct impressions. Indeed, subjects report that viewing one of these sites changed their view of a candidate even when given long lists or no lists at all. In sum, introducing numerous

other viewing possibilities did not eliminate how many of these sites affected people who viewed them.

The exact meaning of these findings is the subject of ongoing analyses. For example, we find that as the number of options people have increases, or if no instructions are given, respondents are increasingly likely to view only sites with established brand names. This suggests that the lure of brand names is quite high in the political part of the Internet and, as a result, that the barriers to success for new political Internet efforts can be quite high. Another caveat to keep in mind is that many of our subjects had not before used the Internet to learn about the election – so the effects we witness are partially attributable to the fact that some of our subjects were really thinking deeply about the candidates for the first time.

In general, however, these findings also suggest just how powerful Internet presentations can be and how their power might grow as more people turn to the Internet for news and information. Indeed, comparing responses over the wide range of circumstances in which subjects are placed in the experiments and Internet polls provides a rich picture of what attracts users to any particular political web site, what aspects of the site are most likely to encourage return visits, and what types of changes are most likely to increase the site's reach and influence.

Implications

It has become increasingly fashionable to claim that the Internet did not have an important effect on the 2000 elections and has only limited potential for affecting politics in the immediate future. But what does it mean to say that the Internet has had little or no effect? In a year where the presidential election was determined by a few hundred votes

in the state of Florida and where the balance of power in the U.S. Senate was determined by a similarly close margin, it was possible for even a small Internet effect to change electoral history.

A problem with debates about the Internet's political impact is that systematic data about its effects is difficult to come by. Hit counts can reveal who saw a web site, but they provide little credible evidence about the extent to which a web page or web site changes users' behaviors or beliefs. This evaluation of Web White and Blue reduces doubts about the Internet's political impact by documenting and analyzing how an innovative Internet entity affected its contributors and its real and potential client base.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This is the second evaluation of the Markle Foundation's Internet venture called Web White and Blue. Marvin Kalb and Marion Just conducted the first evaluation in the fall of 1998. In their report, Kalb and Just used site traffic statistics and approximately a thousand responses to a voluntary user survey to document its impact on web users. They found high levels of satisfaction with the site and evidence of about half a million visits to webwhiteblue.org.

Much has changed in the last two years. Not only has the content and organization of Web White and Blue undergone a dramatic transformation, but so has the nation whose political communication it aims to enhance. The 2000 evaluation reflects these changes.

The evaluation occurred during the general election of the year 2000. This election, and its aftermath, will influence our nation's collective political consciousness for years to come. It featured a presidential election that was ultimately decided by a Supreme Court verdict and a margin of less than one thousand votes in the state of Florida. The margin of victory in the US Senate was also historic with a small number of votes in the State of Washington proving the final step in producing a 50-50 partisan split in the federal government's upper house. Such minute margins led to a national civics lesson on little-known aspects of electoral law and the constitution. Among the most important things taught during this period is the power of individual votes. In homes and offices across the country, people came to realize just how much a few votes could matter.

Close elections were not the only factors that differentiate the falls of 1998 and 2000. The Internet was also an agent of substantial change. In the months following the 1998 election, the national economy continued its longest sustained period of post-war growth. This trend fueled a belief in a "New Economy" – an economy in which business solutions based in computational technologies would drive an era of higher productivity and efficiency. The stock markets soared in response to this belief, as did the incomes of those who invested early in a wide variety of web-based businesses.

By the fall of 2000, however, the New Economy's luster had faded. Venture capital dried up after many dot-coms never realized the revenue streams that they would need to stay in business. Public emotions about Internet-based investments turned from irrational exuberance to great uncertainty.

These changes in politics and the economy provide the backdrop for this evaluation. In particular, the fall of the New Economy has produced broad-based skepticism about the Internet as an agent for social change. This is particularly apparent in the political domain

Pundits from across the country have rallied around the idea that the impact of the Internet on the 2000 elections did not live up to expectations. To be certain, evidence to support this idea has emerged. By the end of 2000, the information superhighway was littered with the carcasses of well-intentioned people who simply did not understand important aspects of politics and the web. They did not get what people wanted. They did not get something fundamental about how people interact with web sites. Political "for profit" web sites, such as politics.com and voter.com,

were almost universal in their failure. Not surprisingly, there is now great uncertainty about the feasibility of using the Internet as a portal for election-oriented news and information.

Is there a way to help future entrepreneurs reduce future losses? I contend that there is. Systematic analysis of the political Internet can alert present and future web strategists to common errors. Such analyses can provide a better understanding of how web site organization affects the relationship between those who want to provide political information and those who seek it. Scientific response to this need is just beginning to be recognized as this passage from the 2001 edition of the Annual Review of Sociology suggests.

> "As with other topics, the literature about politics on the Web has progressed through three stages: unjustifiable euphoria, abrupt and equally unjustifiable skepticism, and gradual realization that Web-based human interaction really does have unique and politically significant properties." (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, and Robinson 2001).

Which brings us to the current evaluation. The Markle Foundation commissioned an evaluation of the 2000 version of Web White and Blue (henceforth WWB). WWB's 2000 organizational model is much different and, in many ways, more ambitious than its 1998 predecessor. One important change was the construction of a relationship with 17 of the largest and most influential news and information providers on the Internet. Together, these sites form the Web White and Blue network – an association that collectively reaches 85% of the Internet audience. The other important change, and indeed the centerpiece of the 2000 effort, was an historic online debate among the presidential campaigns in the fall. Beginning on October 1 and continuing through Election Day, Web White and Blue hosted the first-ever daily

online exchange among the presidential campaigns. Designed to complement the traditional televised debates, the Rolling Cyber Debate consisted of a daily exchange between the campaigns on topics provided by the campaigns themselves and citizens via WWB. The site also contained a full archive of previous days' Rolling Cyber Debate content, a "Best of the Best" page -- which gave users the opportunity to do one-stop shopping for the charter sites' election related headlines, a page about select non-profit organizations, a column by Peter Orvetti about the online campaign trail, and a directory of information about state-level concerns.

This evaluation gauges the impact of WWB. It documents the extent to which WWB achieved several key goals. The origin of these goals is the Markle mission itself. The Appendix to this chapter contains a full statement of the Web White and Blue mission. The Foundation's vision statement summarizes the mission as follows:

> "Emerging communications media and information technology create unprecedented opportunity to improve people's lives. The Markle Foundation works to realize this potential and promotes the development of communications industries that address public needs."

Web White and Blue was designed to address public needs by altering the opportunities of two important groups. The first group is the 17 charter sites – each of which has committed substantial resources towards providing political information to citizens. The second group is the citizens themselves – many of whom might find politics more engaging if the Internet provided new kinds of political information. If Web White and Blue is to satisfy the Markle mission, the new opportunities that WWB creates must have tangible impacts on targeted groups. The evaluation is directed squarely at documenting the extent of the desired effects.

About the charter sites, the Markle Foundation wants the evaluation to report on their perceptions of the Web White and Blue project. Were they pleased with the Rolling Cyber Debate? Did they find the Web White and Blue team easy to work with? Were there technical problems that Markle should know about? Do they have suggestions that would enhance the future performance of the network? From answers to these questions we may learn new ways to enhance the effectiveness of many media organizations' communicative efforts. Ultimately, WWB should change media opportunities in ways that enhance the content and presentation of campaign coverage.

Markle also wants the evaluation to report on citizens' perceptions. Answering questions about the present and potential future impact of the network depends on answering some basic questions about how citizens interact with the network. For example, who knew about the network and what differentiated these people from those who did not? Of those who knew about the network, who used it? Of those who used it, how did it affect them? Did they trust the information on it? Did they find it easy to use? Would they return to the network for information in the future? Do they have suggestions that would enhance the future performance of the network?

Answering such questions requires more than hit counts. It requires methods of analysis that give us a clearer perspective on how WWB *caused* changes in the behavior or beliefs of its two targeted groups. The methods of analysis brought to this task are as follows.

1. Interviews with people who contributed to the network. These interviews, conducted by Dr. Michael Cornfield and Barbara Fedida, reveal the perspectives of representatives from most of WWB's charter sites as well as key WWB personnel. The interview template includes questions that probe the experience of working with WWB, views of the Rolling Cyber Debate, and questions about potential future directions of the project.
2. Standard data on usage of webwhiteblue.org (e.g., page views).
3. A voluntary user survey. This survey, located on webwhiteblue.org, is a standard means of gauging a web site's effect. Our survey provides up-to-date information on the identity of over 3000 WWB users. The survey first asks respondents about their previous political interest and media usage, and then asks users to rate WWB on a range of important criteria. I compare the results of this survey to one administered in the 1998 WWB evaluation. The comparison reveals how users have changed over the last two years.
4. *Laboratory experiments* provide a venue for testing hypotheses about the extent to which WWB causes changes in users' feelings and behavior relative to politics and the Internet. In an experimental setting, we can vary the situations in which users find themselves to evaluate the effect of WWB in a range of realistic environments. Experiments provide our best opportunity to systematically evaluate WWB's impact on citizens.
5. Internet polls allow us to capture the internal validity of traditional experiments while realizing the benefits of contact with large, diverse subject populations. Our Internet poll begins as a traditional survey about the presidential election. In the

middle of the interview, an interruption occurs and the respondent is prompted to visit up to two web sites for five minutes each. Sites from the WWB network are always at least one of the sites. The respondent is then asked questions about the web sites and about what impact the sites have on their feelings about the Internet, politics-in-general, and the presidential campaign. This poll gives a unique view of the Web White and Blue network's actual and potential impact. It gives us direct access to the viewpoints of a broad audience and lets us hear first hand how the public evaluates various web sites, particularly political ones.

Together, the laboratory experiments and Internet polls allow me to construct an estimate of a political web site's impact under conditions of normal usage – where normal usage entails a person sitting in front of a computer choosing to view a very small fraction of all available web sites. The range of circumstances in which subjects are placed in the experiments and Internet polls are many. Results that survive in all of these analytic environs reveal a rich picture of what attracts users to any particular political web site, what aspects of the site are most likely to encourage return visits, and what types of changes are most likely to increase a site's reach and influence.

The evaluation answers many questions about WWB's impact including:

- Did WWB increase or enhance interaction between users and candidates?
- Did the Rolling Cyber Debate help create a richer, more informative dialogue among candidates?
- How did charter sites use WWB content?
- How can the format and content be more engaging in the future?

- Did WWB affect citizens' perspectives of the Internet as a source of political information?
- Did WWB affect citizens' interest in politics or candidate evaluations?

Our findings, many of which are highlighted in the Executive Summary, speak directly on the increasing skepticism about the real and potential impact of Internet-based political communication. In a year where the presidential election was determined by a few hundred votes in the state of Florida and where the balance of power in the U.S. Senate was determined by a similarly close margin, how much of an effect would the Internet – or a particular web site -- have to have had to change electoral history? Indeed, and as most journalists can testify, casual empiricism has almost always been insufficient to trace how a particular form of mass media affects individual and social decisions. So is the suspected lack of effect of the Internet a reaction to previous irrational exuberance about its potential or does it follow from the flawed assumption that if effects are not easily visible, then they must not be there.

I find that the Web White and Blue network has an important impact on its desired audiences. For the charter sites, there is widespread enthusiasm about participating and deep approval of the WWB operation. WWB creates new opportunities for charter sites to provide engaging content. While the quality of candidate participation in the 2000 Rolling Cyber Debate was less than all had hoped, the format is held in high regard, and all want to continue participating. For citizens, Web White and Blue provides an instrument that generates greater confidence in the Internet's political space as well as higher levels of political participation, with both factors measured several different ways to improve accuracy. These effects are as present for relatively new Internet users as they

are for more experienced users. Such findings should instill hope that the impact of future versions of WWB can be substantial. Indeed, the Web White and Blue network accomplished some important things and its current impact alone is sufficient to counter broad negative claims about the ineffectiveness of the Internet for enhancing political communication.

Clarifying Web White and Blue's impact not only helps us understand the recent past, it also provides information vital to our future. For example, the emergence of the Internet was supposed to improve politics by allowing more people to be more engaged in more aspects of the political process. At present, the information superhighway is littered with the carcasses of well-intentioned people who did not get the web. People who guessed incorrectly about what people wanted from the web. People who misunderstood about what people learn from their interaction with particular web sites or the Internet in general. The future is filled with the same mistakes waiting to be made again. It is my hope that the work described herein will help a broad audience better understand how to use the quickly evolving capacity of the Internet more effectively and efficiently.

Appendix to Chapter 1. Mission Statement

Web White & Blue 2000 (WWB2000) is an online public service project sponsored by The Markle Foundation in collaboration with major news and information traffic centers on the Internet (the project's "charter sites"). Markle and the charter sites in Web White & Blue 2000 seek to increase awareness and use of election-oriented resources on the Internet by journalists, academic and not-for-profit organizations, and the American people. Web White & Blue 2000 does not endorse or support candidates for public office and does not take a position on partisan or election-related issues.

The purposes of WWB2000 are to increase voter understanding of public policy and election related issues and to increase civic participation and voter interaction with candidates on a nonpartisan basis. WWB2000 will provide its users with a sample each day of interesting, newsworthy or helpful information on the Internet that allows the American citizen to engage in the 2000 national campaign online. This information will be drawn from the charter sites, other participating sites, campaigns and other actors in the national campaign. During a period from October 2000 to Election Day, WWB2000 will also host a "rolling cyber debate" between the presidential campaigns, which will be available to both the general public and syndicated for republication by the project's charter sites.

WWB2000 promotes online access to selections of content in two ways. The first is through summaries of existing resources provided by the project's charter sites and by other sites participating through links to WWB2000. This summary of content resources will be available directly at the WWB2000 web site (http://www.webwhiteblue.org) and will also be syndicated for republication in whole or in part by the project's charter sites.

WWB2000 will also provide original content in the form of the rolling cyber debate between the campaigns and may offer additional original content such as interviews and coverage of Internet-related developments during the campaign. Content originated by WWB2000 will be syndicated to the charter sites in the project and will also be available to the public at webwhiteblue.org. Once content has been submitted to WWB2000 it will be displayed with no special favoritism to any particular charter site or other participating group.

The editorial policy of WWB2000 requires the project to be nonpartisan, fair, balanced and ethical. WWB2000 will refrain from editorial comment on the candidates, parties and campaigns. The opinions expressed in the content featured by WWB2000, including opinions expressed by users online, are solely those of the participants and do not represent the views of WWB2000 or The Markle Foundation.

In featuring content, WWB2000 will provide balance, impartiality, a range of views, and the right of those challenged to respond. Disclaimers will be displayed, where appropriate, to prevent any appearance that WWB2000 or The Markle Foundation is endorsing any candidate or particular point of view.

The WWB2000 content will be monitored by an outside independent and nonpartisan Board of Advisors drawn from the academic community who will advise the project and The Markle Foundation as to WWB2000's fairness and impartiality.

The general guidelines for selecting content to feature include these:

1. The content provides the user with up-to-date, accurate, balanced information about the 2000 campaign.

2. The content increases voter understanding of public policy and election related issues and encourages civic participation in the electoral process.
3. The content directs the user to information or interaction sites that feature useful, accurate or helpful information, especially voter education information that allows the user to meet his or her citizenship responsibilities.
4. The content is especially newsworthy and/or has been the subject of coverage by media organizations reporting on the 2000 campaign.
5. The content provides original insights or views on subjects relevant to the 2000 campaign.
6. The content (or resource) has become a particular subject of debate between the candidates or parties.
7. The content illuminates or clarifies (in a strictly impartial way) some point of contention or debate raised during the campaign.
8. The content is unique on the Internet in the format or style of its presentation.

Chapter 2. Year 2000 Usage Statistics

Mindshare Internet Campaigns LLC developed and maintained the Web White & Blue web site, its content syndication system, and its Rolling Cyber Debate technology platform. They also tracked patterns of usage to WWB.org. The content of the “Headlines” section and the data for this chapter’s other sections derive primarily from the “Web White and Blue Traffic Report” by Mindshare co-founder Jonah Seiger.

Headlines

From its launch on June 28, 2000 through November 8, 2000, Web White & Blue 2000 received a grand total of 7,518,608 page views. A more accurate measure of web traffic than a "hit", a page view refers to the number of times a web page is viewed by a visitor. While one page view is equal to one pair of eyeballs viewing one page on the web site, it is not a measure of unique individual visitors.

Between October 1, 2000 and November 8, 2000, the Web White & Blue Rolling Cyber Debate received 737,944 page views. Of these, 43% (314,833) were through the 17 Charter sites. The remaining 57% (423,161) were through the Web White & Blue site. It is worth noting that this last number may inflate the true number of people who viewed WWB.org directly, because America Online linked to the WWB site for the first 10 days of the debate rather than incorporating the debate template into its own pages.

The Best of the Best feature received 3,919,214 page views. Of these, 56% (2,197,226) were before the launch of the WWB Rolling Cyber Debate, when Best of the Best was on the

homepage at www.webwhiteblue.org. The remaining 44% (1,721,988) took place from October 1 through November 8, when Best of the Best was housed on an internal page.

The state-by-state election directory received 732,621 page views from its launch on September 15, 2000 through November 8, 2000.

Nearly one million page views (943,617) were registered for the Participate in Web White & Blue section of the site, while the Web White & Blue interview with President Clinton received 26,618 page views.

Finally, interest in George W. Bush's Message of the Day slightly led interest in Al Gore's messages, but Gore logged more page views for Question of the Day as Table 2.1 shows.

Table 2.1 MOD/QOD page views.

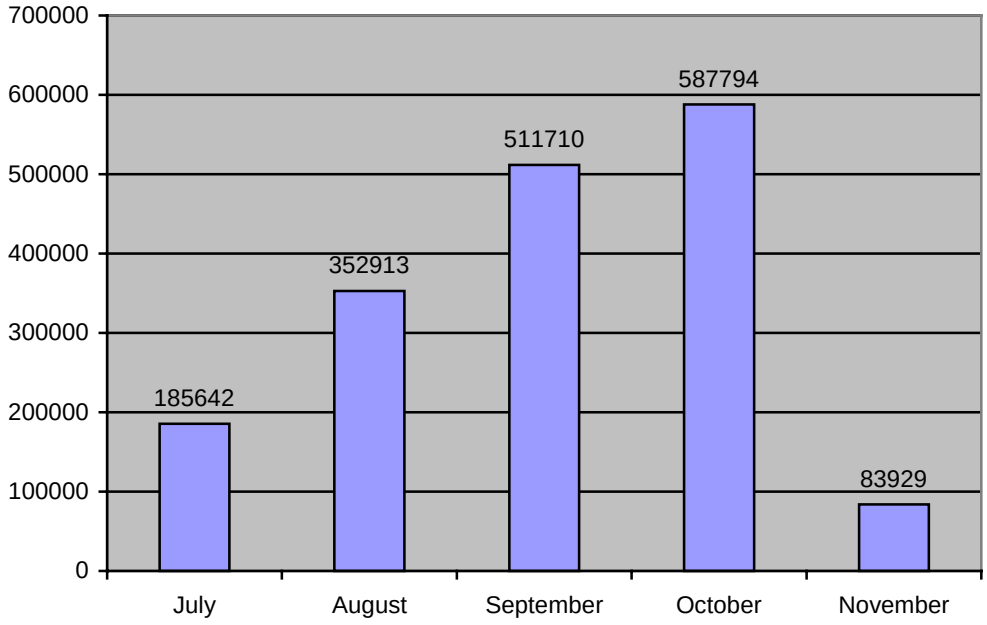
	Message of the Day	Question of the Day
George W. Bush (R)	58,501	65,081
Al Gore (D)	52,525	67,973
Ralph Nader (Grn) *	5,889	9,282
Patrick Buchanan (Ref)	5,461	12,051
Harry Browne (Ltn)	4,922	8,036
Howard Phillips (Cst)	4,134	7,095
John Hagelin (NLP)	2,497	6,201

- *Nader's pages continued to receive traffic despite his nonparticipation*

Details

This section contains detailed traffic information for the Rolling Cyber Debate component of Web White & Blue 2000. Figure 2.1, for example, shows a steady increase in traffic to the Best of the Best pages as the election season progressed. The growth in traffic declined after the Rolling Cyber Debate" replaced "Best of the Best" as the focal content on the WWB.org home page.

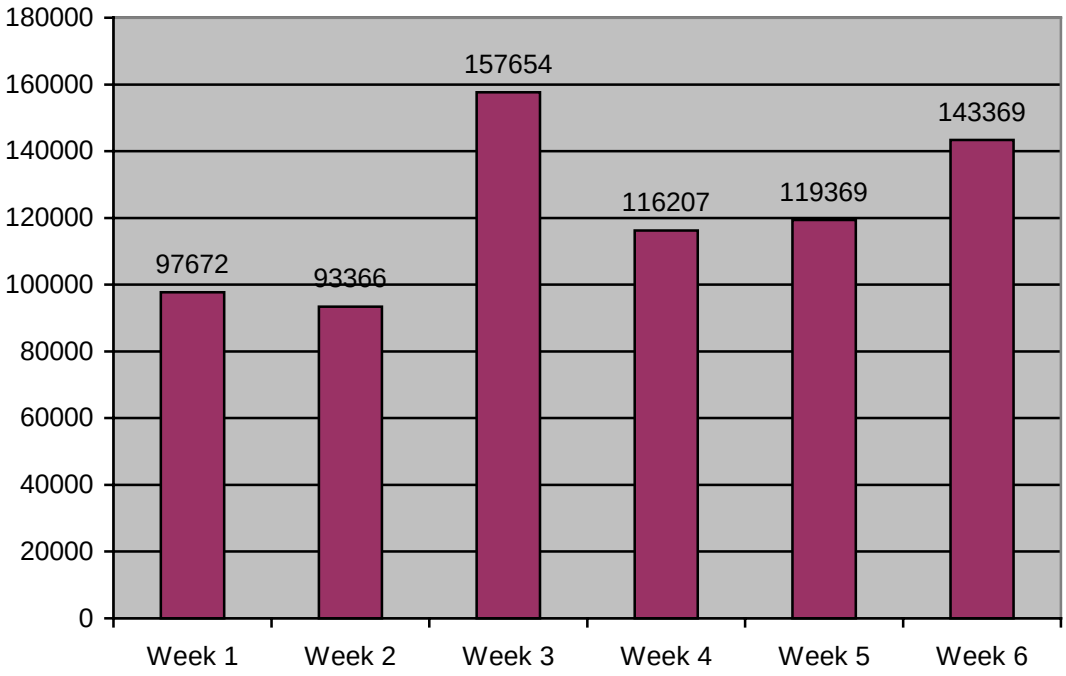
Figure 2.1 Best of the Best Total Page views by Month *



** November indicates Nov. 1-8,2000*

Figure 2.2 shows traffic patterns for the Rolling Cyber Debate. The figure reveals two peaks. The first peak occurs during the cyber debate's third week (October 15-21). The second peak in Rolling Cyber Debate traffic was the final week of the election – a time at which media outlets have traditionally experienced maximum interest in election-oriented news.

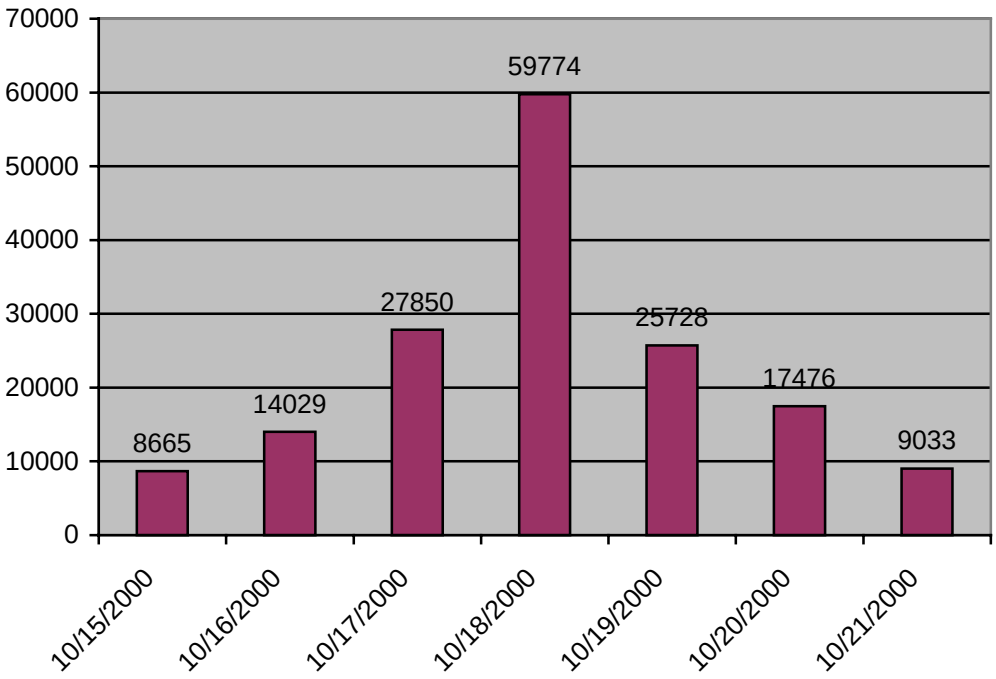
Figure 2.2. Rolling Cyber Debate Total Page views by Week



There are two likely explanations for the first peak that are difficult to disentangle. The first is that this is the same week that the last of the three presidential debates occurred (October 17). The topic of debating was particularly newsworthy and may have led some information seekers to have greater interest in the televised debates' Internet parallel. The second likely explanation is that week's content. Topics discussed on the Rolling Cyber Debate that week included religious freedom, tissue research and cloning, Internet and copyright, china trade and human rights, world hunger, and space exploration. Of those topics a likely promoter of traffic was the October 17th debate on Internet and copyright. This debate centered on the legal status of the music-oriented file sharing Internet entity called Napster. In the closing weeks of October, federal courts contemplated requests to shut the free music service down. Mike McCurry and Doug Bailey (2001) called this exchange "the only truly coherent comment on technology policy during the entire cycle of the general election" and it is the aspect of the Rolling Cyber Debate

that generated the most media attention. Figure 2.3 provides greater detail about the first peak week.

Figure 2.3. Rolling Cyber Debate Total Page views by Week

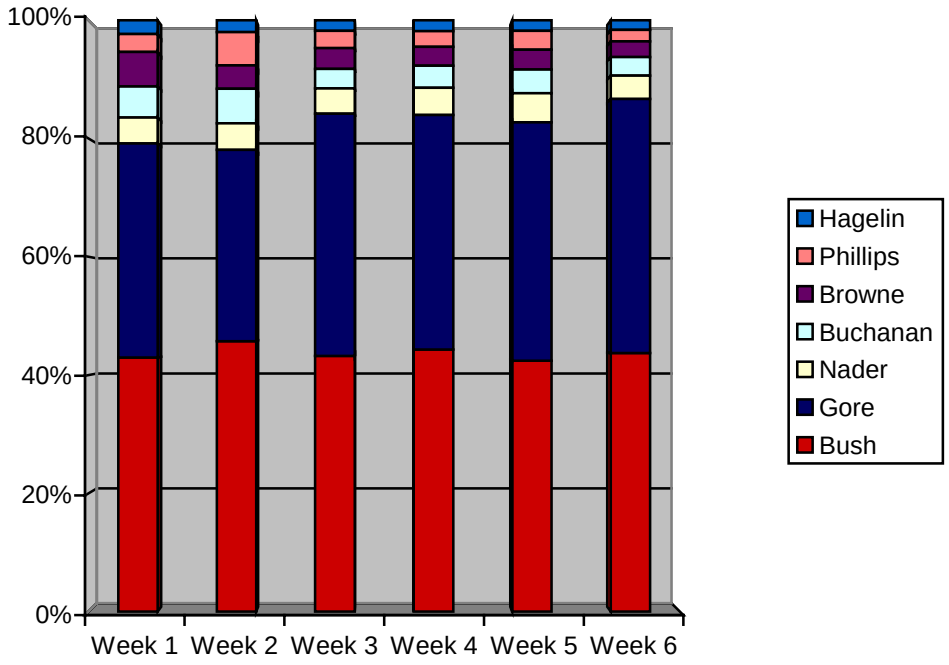


The peak day is the one that follows the presidential debate and the Napster story. While it is difficult to disentangle, the existence of these peak days reveals the Rolling Cyber Debate's potential impact. Closer association with venues such as the televised debates or attempting to induce more Napster-like exchanges should be pursued as options if future WWB planners desire increased RCD impact.

In Figure 2.4, we focus on the Rolling Cyber Debate Component called "Message of the Day" (henceforth MOD). During the six weeks of the cyber debate, WWB offered each presidential candidate an opportunity to present a message of its own choosing. The table at the bottom of Figure 2.4 sorts the raw totals for MOD page views by candidate and by week. The figure itself shows the relative percentage of MOD page views by candidate for each week.

I comment here only on the candidate-specific aspects of this table as the weekly trends in page view mirror those reported in Figure 2.2. For Messages of the Day, there was little variation in which candidate's messages viewers visited. The percentage of MOD viewers going to Bush messages is remarkably constant through the entirety of the debate – with a low of 43% and a high of 46%. The percentage of MOD viewers going to Gore messages shows more variation, ranging from 32% in week 2 to 43% in week 6 – the same weeks that total traffic to the Rolling Cyber Debate were greatest. The other trend of note in this data is that the share of MOD viewers visiting the message of a major party candidate increased through the debate's six weeks – starting at 79% in the first two weeks, moving to 84% in the next three weeks and peaking at 87% in the final week.

Figure 2.4. Total Page views for Rolling Cyber Debate Message of the Day, by Candidate and Week

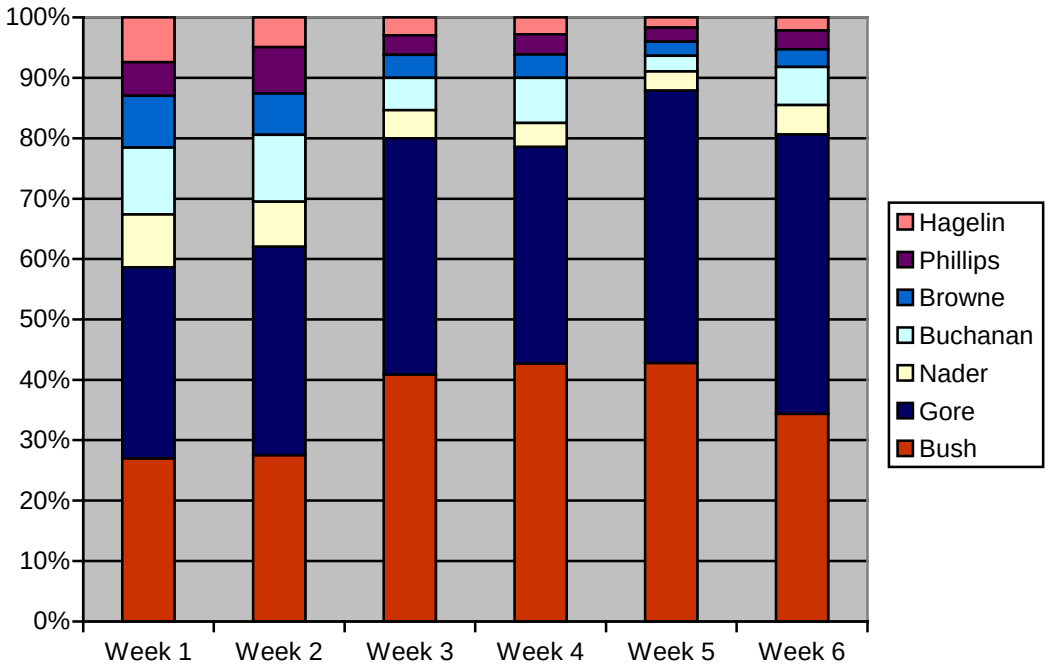


	Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four	Week Five	Week Six
Bush	8,557	8,109	11,812	9,911	8,530	11,582

Gore	7,210	5,737	11,198	8,883	8,099	11,398
Nader	864	791	1,168	1,028	995	1,043
Buchanan	1,053	1,034	893	837	804	840
Browne	1,159	705	971	709	677	701
Phillips	604	997	792	591	639	511
Hagelin	462	354	485	411	355	430
TOTAL	19,909	17,727	27,319	22,370	20,099	26,505

Figure 2.5 provides weekly page view data for the Rolling Cyber Debate's "Question of the Day" (henceforth QOD). Questions for QOD were submitted by Internet users through each of the charter sites in chat rooms and other online forums. Questions were reviewed and selected by Web White & Blue Editor Peter Orvetti with the supervision of the charter site editors. The format of Figure 2.5 parallels that of Figure 2.4, with the table at the bottom sorting the raw totals for QOD page views by candidate and by week and the figure itself showing the relative percentage of MOD page views by candidate for each week.

Figure 2.5. Total Page views for Rolling Cyber Debate Question of the Day, by Candidate and Week



	Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four	Week Five	Week Six
Bush	6,917	6,735	20,598	11,133	14,094	5,604
Gore	8,100	8,428	19,708	9,348	14,838	7,551
Nader	2,231	1,825	2,353	1,032	1,044	797
Buchanan	2,833	2,700	2,682	1,946	865	1,025
Browne	2,200	1,671	1,917	1,007	762	479
Phillips	1,433	1,875	1,631	877	772	507
Hagelin	1,889	1,203	1,490	723	544	352
Hagelin	25,203	24,437	50,379	26,066	32,919	16,315

The visual presentation of Figure 2.5 masks an important difference between weekly trends in MOD and QOD page views. Where the MOD page views largely mirror WWB.org's overall traffic patterns, the QOD page view data does not. Instead, the dominant peak occurs in week 3 – the week in which the Napster issue hit the Question of the Day page.

Otherwise, what Figure 2.5 shows is great variation in which candidates' answers QOD viewers sought. The minor party candidates initially drew much more attention here than in the Message of the Day. As answers to open-ended questions in our laboratory experiments suggests, these trends may be due to the fact that the minor party candidates' responses were perceived as less "canned" and more sincere. Pat Buchanan was particularly timely with rebuttals, which kept his share of the QOD's audience high relative to his poll numbers, particularly in early October.

As Election Day approached, however, QOD viewers turned increasingly to the frontrunners' pages. This trend parallels that seen with Message of the Day page views. The percentage of QOD page views devoted to major party candidates rose from 59% at the beginning of the debate to 81% by the debate's end. It is interesting to note that an increased interest in Bush QOD pages drove 76% of the increase in weeks 3 and 4. This occurred at the same time that Bush public opinion poll numbers were rising (CNN's tracking poll had Bush

ahead by 4 points on October 14th – the end of the cyber debate's second week, by 11 points on October 21 – the end of week 3, and 14 points on October 27th – the end of week 4.) In weeks 4 and 5, an increased interest in Gore QOD's was wholly responsible for the second surge in the percentage of major party QOD page views. Again, this surge corresponded to Gore's rise in the polls – by week six, the Bush lead in the CNN poll was back down to 4 points.

In my view, the lessons of WWB's usage data for the future of the project are limited, as such data gives only a vague reading of how the site affected either of the project's target audiences – the charter partners or citizens. With that caveat in hand, I draw the following lessons.

First, the increase in traffic surrounding the Napster debate reveals the potential of the Rolling Cyber Debate. Users were very interested in the idea and had high hopes for it. Realizing the venue's untapped potential will require changing the rules of debate in ways that make scripted answers less likely. It is also possible that issues associated with government regulation of the Internet have special drawing appeal on Internet venues. In future versions of WWB, it may be worthwhile to consider placing preferred emphasis on such issues.

One idea with substantial promise is requiring candidates to submit their material by video in future versions of the debate. WWB would provide real time translation of video submissions to audio and print formats to facilitate users with limited computational capacity. As digital video and broadband, the technological and logistical requirements of such a change should only become easier to satisfy. To facilitate busy schedules, WWB should continue to allow each candidate or campaign organization to appoint surrogates to make video statements on their behalf. At a minimum, this will lead to the same people providing content to the Rolling Cyber Debate as occurred in 2000. However, there is a chance that requiring video submissions

will induce a competition among candidates that will lead them to respond to questions more directly and, perhaps, personally – which, as later chapters reveal, is users' main criticism of the Rolling Cyber Debate. It is easy to imagine cases where Candidates A and B begin a debate by using surrogates to answer questions. If, however, one candidate begins to take on the questions in person, then the other will gain an incentive to do the same. The result would be more like the day-to-day hand-to-hand verbal contest that many viewers of the Rolling Cyber Debate had hoped to find.

Second, the increase in traffic devoted to the major party candidates towards the end of the election suggests that there is an important upper bound on the extent to which citizens use the Internet differently than other election information mediums. As is the case with other forms of media, as the election tightened and as its outcome became more uncertain, users focused their attention on the front-runners and away from the rest of the pack. This was a sound informational investment for citizens who were concerned about the outcome and suggests a general, but not universal, understanding in the electorate on the concept of a "wasted vote."[1] The lesson for future efforts is that citizens' informational needs evolve throughout an election cycle. It may, therefore, be fruitful for future WWB organizers to coordinate the timing of their efforts to citizens' evolving needs. Such coordination plans can include when to introduce and how to publicize efforts such as the Rolling Cyber Debate.

Third and finally, by comparing this data to 1998, we can see that the WWB site experienced a very large increase in usage. Where the 1998 evaluation reports that "half a

[1] Such findings need not imply that the debate venue becomes less valuable for minor party candidates – the amount of attention they receive in other media formats likely also decreases as does citizen demand for it. They do, however, make it all the more regrettable that Nader did not participate as the variation in attention paid to his responses would have been very informative with respect to which web traffic is driven by citizen expectations of the election outcome.

million visitors used WWB.org, the 2000 traffic report reveals over 7.5 million page views. For a site with no promotions budget, this kind of traffic is substantial. It should be noted that this number pales in comparison to the traffic numbers of many of the network's charter partners. Since the goal of WWB was not traffic maximization, this comparison seems to mean very little. It does, however, affect what WWB needs the rest of the evaluation to demonstrate. In particular, I understand my charge to be to determine the *quality* of the effect on charter sites and citizens. Therefore, I focus on this task exclusively in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3. Contributor Interviews

By Michael Cornfield
Associate Research Professor of Political Management
The George Washington University

This paper summarizes interview responses of twenty participants in the Markle Foundation's 2000 version of the online public affairs initiative Web White and Blue. Representatives from 15 of the 17 charter partners in the WWB2000 network were interviewed, as well as 5 members of the WWB executive team. (A list appears at the end of this document.) Professor Cornfield and Barbara Fedida of the Markle Foundation conducted the interviews between December 21, 2000 and February 1, 2001. In addition, Cornfield interviewed Fedida, the project manager, on February 6, 2001. The interviews ranged from 30-90 minutes, and followed a question template developed by Cornfield, Fedida, and Dr. Arthur Lupia, the principal evaluator of the project. A number of interviewees requested confidentiality for their answers, and we have honored their requests. Interview answers were transcribed and analyzed by Cornfield, with the assistance of Julie King.

Principal Findings

1. PROJECT MISSION. Universal praise for the syndicated network and an online debate as a means of developing unique public affairs content. The WWB brand and model is established as far as these participants are concerned, and chances are excellent that they would all join in again. Partners see little-to-no downside to

participating in the network so long as the content is free and non-partisan, requires minimal labor from the syndicating organizations, and viewers remain on their sites.

2. TECHNICAL ADMINISTRATION. Again, universal praise for the performance of Mindshare Internet Campaigns. On the whole, problems were solved swiftly and successfully. Some expressed dissatisfaction at the amount of time needed to "plug and play" the WWB format and contents. Some also desired a longer lead-time in future activations of the network.

3. CONTENT AND TRAFFIC. Traffic was lower than expected (which was not high for some). A small percentage of charter site viewers looked at WWB pages, both within the charter organizations and with their audiences. However, most attributed this to the candidates' performance and the souring of the press on the Internet, not to the design or execution of the model. The Rolling Cyber Debate was regarded as the most popular and important feature, followed by Best of the Best and Featured Non-Profits and the State Directories.

4. PROMOTION AND FORMAT. Charter participants are amenable to increasing and improving WWB promotion of the candidates' exchanges. They prefer to promote their own content independently, including that featured in "Best of the Best" and Debate questions originating from their sites.

5. DISTINCTIVE INTERESTS. Beneath the general public service mission and syndicated model, news organizations, content aggregators, and specialty portals had different priorities. News organizations were most concerned about competition, and wanted, above all, breaking news such as the RCD was intended to generate. Content aggregators wanted visitors to stay a long time and return regularly, so

the more content WWB generated, the better from their point of view. Specialty portals sought credibility with their target audiences, the news organizations and content aggregators, and the general public; consequently, they wanted debate topics and other featured content, which spoke to their identities.

6. **OTHER APPLICATIONS. There was general enthusiasm for developing additional uses of the WWB network between presidential elections.** Charter participants will be receptive to such proposals, especially at the national level of politics.

Details

1. PROJECT MISSION. Universal praise for the syndicated network and an online debate as a means of developing unique public affairs content. The WWB brand and model is established as far as these participants are concerned, and chances are excellent that they would all join in again. Partners see little-to-no downside to participation in the network so long as the content is free and non-partisan, requires minimal labor from the syndicating organizations, and viewers remain on their sites.

Web White and Blue shifted in two important respects between its debut in 1998 and its appearance in 2000. “We expected that the model would evolve as the Web did,' said Zoë Baird, and, indeed, WWB progressed from a destination site featuring a directory to web content to a network of super-sites carrying original content and, most notably, a sustained exchange among the candidates for president which would complement, not duplicate, the fall debates on television. Jonah Seiger: “Doing it as a Web site was not enough, you had to reach an audience through [web sites that] had existing relationships with audiences. Trying to siphon people away was not the right

approach." Doug Bailey: "We quite intentionally chose language right from the outset that made a distinction that the Rolling Cyber Debate was not the same thing as the televised debate."

The principal challenge thus became successfully negotiating and executing an arrangement, which the charter sites, the presidential candidates, and the Foundation could all agree to commit to. Without the charter sites and their huge potential audience, the presidential candidates would not participate. Without the presidential candidates, the charter sites would not participate. Without both the charter sites and the candidates, citizens would not discover that the Internet can add something new to campaigns and elections.

This intricate challenge was met, as far as the participants interviewed are concerned. Although the success was neither as spectacular nor as influential as some had hoped for, the core concept proved its viability.

Furthermore, most participants agree that the concept could not be replicated without Markle playing the role of catalyst and coordinator. An outsider had to pay the monetary and human costs of building the network, assure that no charter site and no candidate would be favored, and assure, as well, that all charter sites and candidates would be able to play their roles with a minimum of labor and fuss. The interviewers heard no complaints about special treatments, broken promises, structural bias, or technical breakdowns.

So WWB accomplished its transition. Some members of the team expressed the desire of looping back to the 1998 version in order to retrieve and rejuvenate the public affairs directory, on a continuous basis if possible (Steven Clift suggested monthly

updates). Some charter members feel differently, that they can construct and maintain such directories on their own. It's an unanswered question, made more poignant at present by the collapse and retrenchment of several ambitious dot-com political portals.

2. TECHNICAL ADMINISTRATION. Again, universal praise for the performance of Mindshare Internet Campaigns. On the whole, problems were solved swiftly and successfully. Some expressed dissatisfaction at the amount of time needed to "plug and play" the WWB format and contents, and a desire for a longer lead-time in future activations of the network.

Fast and reliable technical assistance was essential to the execution of the model. Many charter sites required customizations to integrate the WWB template and updating system with their own operations. And the charter sites had little time or staff input to spare. Said Kirk Spitzer of USA Today, "Programming time, IT [Information Technology] time is at a premium and you can't use up too much of that." Brian Hartman, ABC: "The Web White and Blue project was being launched at a time when we were under the gun here editorially, and so I ended up kicking things back to the Mindshare folks, saying look, we need a different workable solution, and they were great about that."

Mindshare came through. Ethan Zindler, MTV: "I thought Jonah and his team did a terrific job; I thought they made it as easy as possible."

One problem that did arise was that the start up required more implementation than expected, in part because the personnel responsible for the implementing were not always the same as those who made the organizational commitment to participate. Some charter sites could not keep up with the four daily updates of the RCD, especially at night

and on weekends. Others fell off the pace set for the Best of the Best submissions, with Mindshare editor Peter Orvetti picking up the slack. However, the content aggregators liked the abundance of information. Randy Legersky, AOL: "I'd rather have too much than not enough."

There was, however, one technical feature that certain charter participants found annoying. Mark Stencel, Washington Post: "Alphabetical listings of Web sites was never going to be satisfactory to a Web site that began with the letter W."

3. CONTENT AND TRAFFIC. Traffic was lower than expected (which was not high for some). A small percentage of charter site viewers looked at WWB pages, both within the charter organizations and with their audiences. However, most attributed this to the candidates' performance and the souring of the press on the Internet, not to the design or execution of the model. The Rolling Cyber Debate was regarded as the most popular and important feature, followed by Best of the Best and Featured Non-Profits and the State Directories.

Partners did not enter the network expecting the online equivalent of a Kennedy-Nixon debate. They entered, instead, to make sure they didn't miss out should such an unlikely event come to pass, and to do what they could, given resource constraints and competitive necessities, to advance the Internet as a place where public affairs could be discussed with candidate and citizen participation.

That said, the Cyber Debate was the main event. "Everything else was window dressing," said Cyrus Krohn of MSN. "We had decent response early on when we made a very, very concerted effort to promote [WWB]," said Kirk Spitzer. "Once the

promotion efforts stopped or slowed down, traffic slowed down." The content could not sustain the spark of the debate's debut.

The candidate contributions were criticized for being little more than press releases or policy papers. "It was like we had a set of canned questions," said Felicia Wilson of NetNoir. Gretchen Cook of NPR was concerned that the candidates were not forced to answer questions more specifically, and wonders whether a better format is out there which can push candidates to give better responses, or at least be more accountable for what they say as the debate progresses.

Doug Bailey and Mike McCurry of the Markle team put the candidates' efforts in a different perspective. Just having them stay the course was an achievement. Besides, what strikes the press and political junkies as stale can be fresh and valuable to others. And the press didn't help matters with its collective judgment after the summer conventions that the Internet had been over-sold as a venue for politics.

Best of the Best evoked a variety of reactions. One news organization didn't want to promote the work of others, while another wasn't concerned with the competition's presence, and a third relished the opportunity to have its campaign coverage matched against the competition. Specialty portals loved it, as a vehicle to get their content and their sites noticed. Yet Maura Polley of Oxygen, who called it "a great value," suggested modifying the look to display headlines instead of logos and icons: "Make it more about the content rather than about where it came from." The content aggregators relied on it to fill gaps and check the competition. Tynan Schmidt of Yahoo thought that it had almost too much information: "At some point, too many choices does make it too hard to make a decision."

The Featured Non-Profits was least popular, mainly because of concerns that the charters would be seen as endorsing political interest groups and ideologies. Given the likelihood of that perception, charters preferred to select their own non-profits to feature.

4. PROMOTION AND FORMAT. Charter participants are amenable to increasing and improving WWB promotion of the candidates' exchanges. They prefer to promote their own content independently, including that featured in "Best of the Best" and Debate questions originating from their sites.

Partners promoted WWB, and countenanced doing more, but not at the expense of revenue-generating content. Two types of promotion were most common: packaging candidate responses to particular questions with news articles (for example, USAToday.com for October 3, and I-Village on October 13), and invitations for viewers to submit questions. Absent hard numbers, the first seemed more effective than the second, in the interviewees' recollections.

There were numerous suggestions on how to improve promotion, including:

- A bigger kick-off event for the Debate, with a guide as to what to expect.
- Clarifying the concept of a Rolling Cyber Debate for the press and public.
- Better news sense in the selection and timing of the day's questions, with corresponding advisories to alert partners.
- A summary of the Debate to date, with highlights and a searchable index to the archive.

As Cyrus Krohn observed, "I think we learned as the debate progressed that the partners needed more information for their own promotion."

The partners were not enthusiastic about incorporating an interactive, evaluate-the-Debate element into the format. One size would not fit all; instead, each might be encouraged to add such features (message boards, polls, ratings) as best suited their own identity.

In at least two instances, Excite and Oxygen, organizational exigencies prevented them from promoting WWB as much as they wanted.

5. DISTINCTIVE INTERESTS. Beneath the general public service mission and syndicated model, news organizations, content aggregators, and specialty portals had different priorities. News organizations were most concerned about competition, and wanted, above all, breaking news such as the RCD was intended to generate. Content aggregators wanted visitors to stay a long time and return regularly, so the more content WWB generated, the better from their point of view. Specialty portals sought credibility with their target audiences, the news organizations and content aggregators, and the general public; consequently, they wanted debate topics and other featured content that spoke to their identities.

What the news organizations valued comes as no surprise. Spitzer, USAToday: "Our readers are here to come in, get the news, and get out." Stencel, Washington Post: "My success isn't measured by how much information I make available to my users." Speed and exclusivity are the hallmarks for the news organizations.

The content aggregators did not require information to be late-breaking and/or exclusive to be worthwhile. If it was an interesting aspect of the political scene, if it could help a voter choose, it was of use. Tynan Schmidt, Yahoo: "The question is whether it was relevant or useful to the users....the question of whether we would use

[WWB content] did not come up." Randy Legersky, AOL: "It was flexible enough to meet our rapidly changing needs – kind of like a buffet, where you can pick what you want to eat and leave the rest."

The specialty portals liked being able to pick and choose content which would appeal to their demographic target groups: women, young people, African-Americans. They were particularly interested in information which could recruit more members of their target groups to the topic of public affairs and, thereby, to their sites as portals to public affairs. They looked for a chain of engagement: Just as the presidential campaign promotes politics as something interesting and important; so WWB could promote the specialty portal as the place to find what's interesting and important about public affairs to these relative outsiders.

The low traffic and media visibility of WWB 2000 may have minimized the potential for conflicts stemming from these different priorities, both within participant types and between participant types. Had the debate become a sensation, attracting new people to the Web, the charters might have found themselves more interested in becoming an exclusive gateway for the influx, and less amenable to displaying content (and links) which alerted the influx to the existence of the other charter sites.

Meanwhile, there is yet a fourth category of Web site that could be included in future activities of the WWB network: the retailers. "Why not include Amazon and E-Bay," said Mike McCurry. Why not? The more participating sites there are, the less harmful – and the less likely -- the exit of any one participant would be. The user base would still be large enough to attract candidates less the presence of one defector; thus,

the show would go on; and if the show went on, the greater the pressure on the wavering participant to remain a part of it and not defect.

6. OTHER APPLICATIONS. There was general enthusiasm for developing additional uses of the WWB network between presidential elections. Charter participants will be receptive to such proposals, especially at the national level of politics.

Four years is a long time to sit on a success. During the interviews we broached several preliminary ideas for reconvening the WWB network before the next presidential election. The general goals would be the same: the creation and distribution of original public affairs content, the promotion of the Internet as an instrument of civic engagement and democratic politics. The settings, however, would be different. They might involve other Markle concerns, particularly health and children.

As examples, we mentioned the possibility of making the syndication and debate model available to other nations, and to state and local consortia of media and civic groups, for adoption in their elections. We raised the idea of putting the WWB network on stand-by, ready for activation at the request of the White House and minority party Congressional leadership, should a big issue worthy of a national debate arise. A variation of this concept envisions the creation of an American version of "Question Time," a regular forum for exchanges between party leaders, adapted from its parliamentary origins to incorporate citizen participation.

We were not looking for support for any one or combination of these ideas, because they are just ideas, not proposals. Instead, we wanted to explore the receptivity of the charter representatives and the Markle team to additional uses of WWB. And this, we found.

INTERVIEWS

Maura Polley, Oxygen, December 21, 2000

Hannah Pingree, I-Village, December 21, 2000

Ethan Zindler, MTV, December 21, 2000

Cyrus Krohn, MSN, December 21, 2000

Pat Anastasi, MSNBC, January 4, 2001

Kirk Spitzer, USAToday, January 4, 2001

Marc Stencel, Washington Post, January 4, 2001

Felicia Wilson, NetNoir, January 8, 2001

Tynan Schmidt, Yahoo, January 8, 2001

Brian Hartman, ABC, January 10, 2001

Laura Dines, PBS, January 10, 2001

Randy Legersky, AOL, January 10, 2001

Gretchen Cook, NPR, January 11, 2001

Steve Clift, WWB team, January 11, 2001

Kirsten Hoefer, Excite, January 11, 2001

Caren Dessauer, CNN, January 16, 2001

Doug Bailey, WWB team, January 22, 2001

Jonah Seiger, WWB team, January 22, 2001

Mike McCurry, WWB team, February 1, 2001

Barbara Fedida, WWB team, February 6, 2001

Chapter 4. User Evaluation Overview

In the remainder of this evaluation, I focus on how WWB affected citizens. To gauge the effect of WWB in the past and to enhance its future prospects, we should understand as much as possible about how a web site's presentation, design, and content changes how citizens understand and participate in the political process. In particular, explaining the impact of the project requires a firm understanding of the conditions under which a person will drop everything else they could be doing to look for political information on the WWB network.

Figure 4.1 depicts the different situations in which citizens can find themselves with respect to a particular web site. The next three chapters of the evaluation focus on explaining why and how various citizens ended up on different branches of this decision tree with respect to the WWB network.

In what follows, I seek estimates of how WWB network sites affect users under "normal usage conditions." I define normal usage conditions as the context in which users usually view the Internet. Two aspects of normal usage conditions that make scientific research on the topic difficult are freedom of choice and freedom from view. For example, a wondrous fact about the Internet is that there are billions of channels from which to choose. The downside of users' "freedom of choice," for the purpose of analysis, is that users may choose not to visit the sites whose effects you want to analyze or, in studies of multiple users, they may be so diverse in their site selection that you can collect only limited data on any particular site. Freedom from view poses a different kind of problem. Ideally, we would obtain data about user behavior under normal usage

conditions without users knowing that they were being watched. In many situations, such observations are either impossible or unethical.

The problems associated with freedom of choice and freedom from view imply that any kind of data collected for the purpose of determining how a particular web site affects users is likely to be an imperfect representation of the effect under normal usage conditions. As these imperfections are largely unavoidable, the importance of responsible interpretations of such data is paramount. There is, however, a way to minimize the effects of these problems. The method will be familiar to anyone who is building a financial portfolio – diversification.

Any single gauge of the impact of a web site will provide an imperfect measure of its effect under normal usage conditions. Different measures, however, entail different imperfections. Relying on any single measure leaves the researcher vulnerable to the imperfection of that gauge. With multiple measures, the risk can be distributed. The second and third gauges, for example, used can provide evidence on the reliability of the first and vice versa. If the shortcomings of each gauge are known, then additional gauges can be used to shore up analytic weak spots in the others. Such diversification is a core principal of my research strategy and the end result is analyses whose findings are much more likely to provide an accurate understanding of target phenomena than studies that depend on any single gauge.

The user-centered aspect of this evaluation has three components: a voluntary user survey, an Internet-based poll, and laboratory experiments. Of the three components, only voluntary user surveys are standard fare in published evaluations of web sites and related entities. In the interest of full disclosure, Table 4.1 summarizes the main

advantage and imperfection of each component as well as the manner by which the latter's impact is mitigated by another component.

	Voluntary User Survey	Internet Poll	Laboratory Experiments
Advantage	We gain detailed information from a site's users.	We speak to a broad population of Internet users and can better determine how a site's impact varies within the population.	Through random assignment and experimental control, we can better assess causal claims.
Imperfection	Participants tend to be dedicated users. They badly represent the views of people who do not like the site.	We interact with users at a distance and are limited in how much we can direct their activities.	Experimental subjects are drawn from a limited geographical area and tend to be students.
The fix	The Internet poll and experiments gather equivalent data on broader populations.	The experiments gather equivalent data under more controlled conditions.	Our Internet poll design includes some random assignment and experimental control while interviewing a very diverse population.

In a voluntary user survey, people already viewing a site are asked to answer questions about it. While such surveys can provide useful information about users, they are extremely limited in their ability to answer the questions we pose above (e.g., when we are interested in why some people did not like the site or network.) As a result, answering questions about WWB's impact requires other gauges.

Why a National Internet-Based Poll?

One shortcoming of a voluntary user survey is that only a certain type of person tends to participate – specifically, a person who is so engaged in the site that they stay around long enough to fill out a survey. People who are turned off by some aspect of a site's content, presentation, or design are far more likely to leave the site before finding and then taking such a survey. As a result, the results derived from a voluntary user survey will be biased in the direction of people who liked the site – the fan club. When the objective is to document the impact of the web site on a larger and less peculiar population, more data is needed.

I commissioned a national Internet-based poll. An Internet-based poll has the same basic structure as a telephone-based public opinion or marketing survey. The main differences are that the respondent takes the survey at the time of their own choosing an that the format allows us to send things such as audio, images, and streaming video to respondents during an interview. In our poll, the format allows people to surf the web at certain points of the interview. Specifically, we interrupt a standard interview on political participation and Internet usage—sending respondents to web sites of our choosing and allowing them to use the sites before completing the interview. Since such interactivity cannot be accomplished on telephone-based surveys, this kind of research offers many advantages to the evaluation.

Knowledge Networks of Menlo Park, CA – the industry leader in Internet-based polls, administered the poll. It includes 1199 Americans – each of whom was selected randomly and without prejudice to whether or not they had used, or even heard of, the sites in which we are interested. We randomization devices also determine which and how many web sites respondents view during the interview. This analytic design allows

us to evaluate important aspects of the WWB network, given the realization that the network exists in the presence of other web sites that could affect how citizens view it.

The respondent population in our Internet-based poll is very diverse and from all over the country. Such sampling brings with it greater confidence that its results are representative of how the Web White and Blue network is affecting, or could affect, larger populations. More importantly, the respondents vary widely on dimensions such as political engagement and use of news and information web sites. Moreover, very few were acquainted with sites such as WWB.org. Such variance gives us the ability to identify what causes people to like and dislike particular sites.

Why Laboratory Experiments?

Laboratory experiments provide a venue for testing hypotheses about the extent to which WWB changes or reinforces users' feelings and behavior about politics and the Internet. In an experimental setting, we can vary the situations in which users find themselves. Such variations allow us to document WWB's impact in many environments, which generates opportunities to evaluate detailed causal claims.

The experiments described in Chapter 7 identify important aspects of how the Internet, in general, and WWB, in particular, affect the user community. Collectively, the experiments provide a unique portrait of WWB's current impact and help clarify ways to increase the network's future reach and influence. The experiments have this effect because they address the two main problems with drawing causal inference from more commonly available types of Internet usage information (hits, page views, time spent on a page, and voluntary user surveys).

The first problem is s*elf-selection.* A main goal of the evaluation is to determine how people benefit from their interaction with WWB and what we might do in the future to increase WWB's reach and influence. As a result, we would like to understand the conditions under which viewing a WWB network site or page causes a user to change his or her beliefs on topics such as the value of participating in politics. The phenomenon of self-selection, however, renders commonly available data on web site usage unsuitable for evaluating such causal claims. Specifically, people who view one political web site are likely to view many others of the same kind (e.g., a randomly selected user who views CNN is more likely to also view other news sites – i.e., the New York Times -- than is a randomly selected viewer who does not view CNN.) As a result, it can be difficult to determine whether a user's exposure to *any particular site* caused them to change their beliefs or behavior.

The experiments address such problems by varying the extent to which users can experience other web sites. By varying subjects' exposure and access to WWB and other political web sites, we can determine which aspects of the site catch their attention, which aspects of the site cause them to learn new things, which aspects of the site make them more interested in politics, and which aspects of the site makes them more likely to return to the Internet (and WWB) the next time they want to learn about politics.

The second problem is obtaining more accurate measures of *attention and retention.* One goal of news and political web sites is persuasion – they want to give users information that will cause them to change their minds. Partisan web sites desire changes of mind that favor a certain policy stand or ideological perspective. Leading journalistic web sites desire changes of mind that are consistent with an accurate and unbiased

presentation of facts. If web sites do not persuade (e.g., if, at a minimum, they fail to persuade users that their own site is a good place to get valuable information), then they have no effect on users.

Persuasion requires attention (people must choose to use WWB instead of doing anything else) and retention (if people are to be influenced by WWB, it must affect what they recall). So to evaluate the extent to which WWB persuades users to become more interested or active in politics, it is necessary to evaluate hypotheses about attention and retention. Data on page views or time spent looking at a particular page are not sufficient for such purposes. We need more precise information about what aspects of a page users attended to and which aspects they retain in their minds after their Internet session has finished.

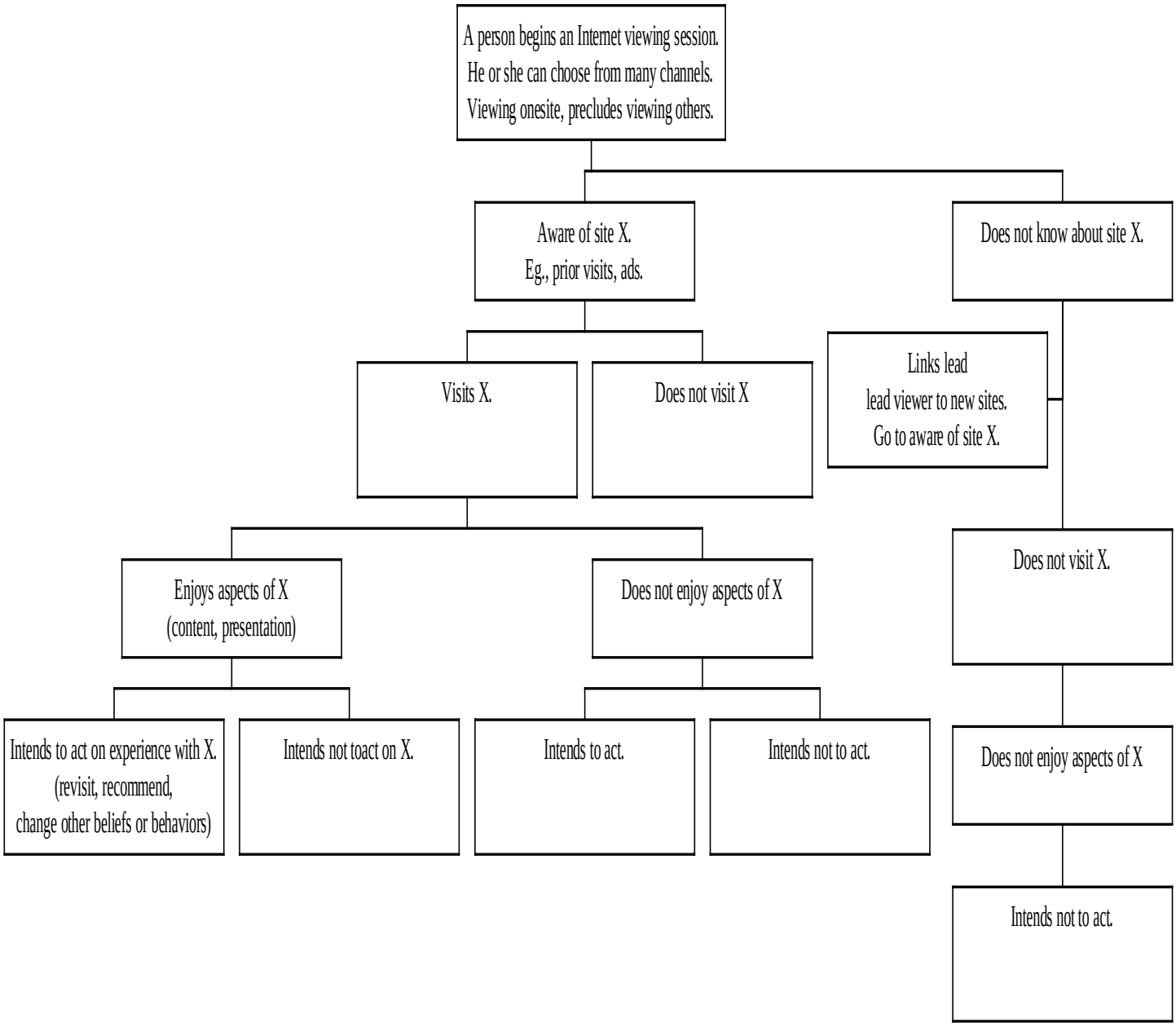
The experiments address problems relevant to attention and retention by merging conventional Internet usage information (hits, page views, time spent on a page) with content-specific responses to WWB. In particular, we not only record subjects' Internet usage during experiments, we also ask certain questions about what they noticed, liked, disliked and remembered about the sites they viewed. In many cases, we allow subjects to view multiple sites. We can use such subjects' comparative evaluations to better understand why people do (or do not) choose WWB over other web sites. Such comparisons provide information critical to understanding how to increase WWB's reach and influence.

Summary

Together, the usage data, the voluntary user survey, the Internet-based poll and the laboratory experiments allow us to construct an estimate of WWB's impact under normal usage conditions– where normal usage entails a person choosing to view a very

small fraction of all available web sites. The range of data we have on subjects provides a rich picture of what attracts users to WWB, what aspects of WWB are most likely to encourage return visits, and what types of changes are most likely to increase WWB's reach and influence.

Figure 4.1. Decision Sequence



Chapter 5. Voluntary User Survey

Usage statistics provide valuable information about the frequency and timing of traffic to various destinations within the Web White and Blue Network. Frequency and impact, however, are two different things. Usage statistics provide limited information about how people felt about the site generally – in the sense that if the site were truly inferior, traffic would cease. Usage statistics provide no information about how a site affects the people who use it and no evidence of why people liked a site or what they learned from it. As these are things Markle wanted to know about Web White and Blue, I felt it important to supplement the usage statistics with users' views of the network. For that reason, I asked that a voluntary user survey be added to webwhiteblue.org.

The WWB.org voluntary user survey joins questions about viewer's Internet habits and prior interest in politics with questions about whether they judged WWB.org, its Rolling Cyber Debate, and its links as informative, useful, and trustworthy. The survey was added to the site on October 11, 2000. From that date through early November, 3052 viewers took the survey.

As noted in the previous chapter, surveys such as this can be valuable ways for the producers of products such as web sites to learn important things about their client base. The data from all such studies, however, must be carefully handled because the persons who participate in voluntary user surveys tend to be unrepresentative of larger populations. As a result, it can be dangerous to generalize findings from the WWB user survey to audiences beyond those who were so interested in webwhiteblue.org that they took the time to answer questions about it. With the knowledge that important things can

be learned about users and the limits of such data firmly in mind, I now offer the findings of the survey.

I begin by using responses to questions that participants answered about themselves to build a profile of the typical WWB user. I then present results on how participants felt about various aspects of the site, including questions that focus exclusively on their reactions to the Rolling Cyber Debate. Throughout the analysis, I not only provide summaries of the answer to each question, I also detail how differences in respondent attributes correspond to differences in the answers observed. Such comparisons can provide a clearer understanding of what it is about a citizen or the site that affects its views of Web White and Blue.

For all questions, except those focusing on the cyber debate, I derive results from two sources – the voluntary user survey that we ran in 2000 and an equivalent survey placed on webwhiteblue.org in the fall of 1998. In that year, 925 viewers answered the survey. Comparing responses from the two years allows me to document how the profile and perception of the typical WWB user has changed. It also provides me with a way to combat some of the data's inherent self-selection problems. For example, since there is no reason to believe that one study is more afflicted with the self-selection ailment than the other, results derived from comparisons of the 1998 and 2000 can provide reliable information about the direction of changes over time in participant perceptions or attributes. To make the fruits of such comparisons as effective as possible, I retained as much of the 1998 wording as possible in the 2000 survey.

Who Used the Site

The 1998 and 2000 editions of the WWB.org voluntary user survey asked participants a series of questions about themselves. I begin my analysis focusing on responses to these questions.

Both surveys ask, “Is this the first year that you have used the Internet/web to access election information?” In 1998, 83% of respondents answered yes. In 2000, 72% did. The surveys then ask about prior experience with WWB.org. In both years, most survey participants are first time WWB.org users (74% in 1998, 72% in 2000).

The surveys then ask, “During this election what is your primary media source for election information?” Figure 5.1 displays the responses. In both years, television is the primary source. In 2000, however, the percentage of respondents reporting that the Internet is their primary source of information increases dramatically by almost 14 percentage points. This increase corresponds with a drop of almost equal size in the percentage of respondents citing newspapers as their primary source of information.

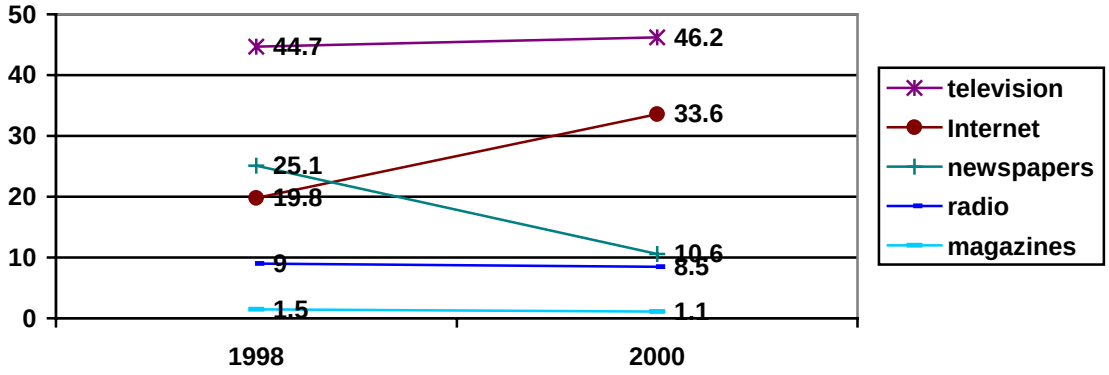


Figure 5.1. Primary source of election information by year.

A subsequent question queries respondents’ second media source. Figure 5.2 reveals little movement in responses to this question over the two-year period.

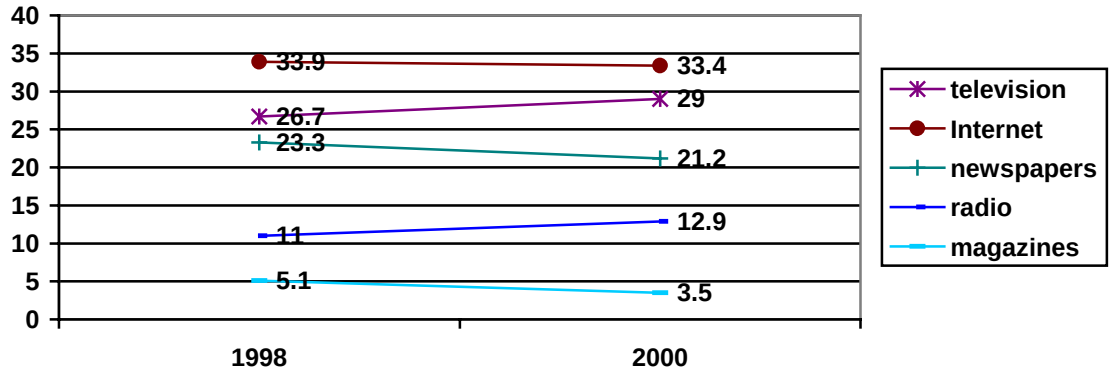


Figure 5.2. Secondary source of election information by year.

Together, these statistics are evidence of a sizeable exodus from newspapers to the Internet as the primary source of election information for WWB.org users. It wasn't just that newspapers and the Internet switched places in users' top two sources of electoral information. Increased interest in the Internet did not have an analogous effect on other media. Rather, the data suggests that a sizeable portion of the WWB.org user population have *simply substituted* the Internet for newspapers as one of its two main election news sources.

Respondents were then asked to disclose the locale from which they were visiting the site. In 1998, the top two responses were home (82%) and work (12.7%). In 2000, these two categories continued to account for over 90% of the responses though the balance shifted, 60.5% responded "home" while 31.1% responded "office."

The surveys conclude with demographic questions. Comparing the two years reveals that the 2000 respondent base was younger and more female than in 1998. In 2000, 46% percent of the 2000 participants were female, up over 6 percentage points from 1998. Simultaneously,

- the percentage of participants under 18 doubled (from 2.7% to 5.4%),

- the percentage of participants from 18 to 30 tripled (from 8.2% to 26.7%),
- and percentage of participants from 31 to 45% increased by over 10 percentage points (from 22.6% to 34.2%), while
- the percentage of participants from 46 to 65 was nearly halved (from 51.4% to 28.6%),
- and the percentage of participants over 65 was cut by almost two-thirds (from 15.1% to 6.3%).

The other personal question asked was on vote intention. This characteristic of WWB.org users remained relatively constant over the years, with 94% intending to vote in 1998 and 92% stating that intention in 2000.

Why Users Visited

In 1998 and 2000, the WWB voluntary user survey began with the same question: "Which of the following phrases describe why you visited the site?" Table 5.3 depicts the responses. There is a clear change in how people answered. In 1998, the most frequent response was "interest in politics in general." In 2000, respondents had a more concrete reason for visiting the site – nearly half "wanted to know more about the election."

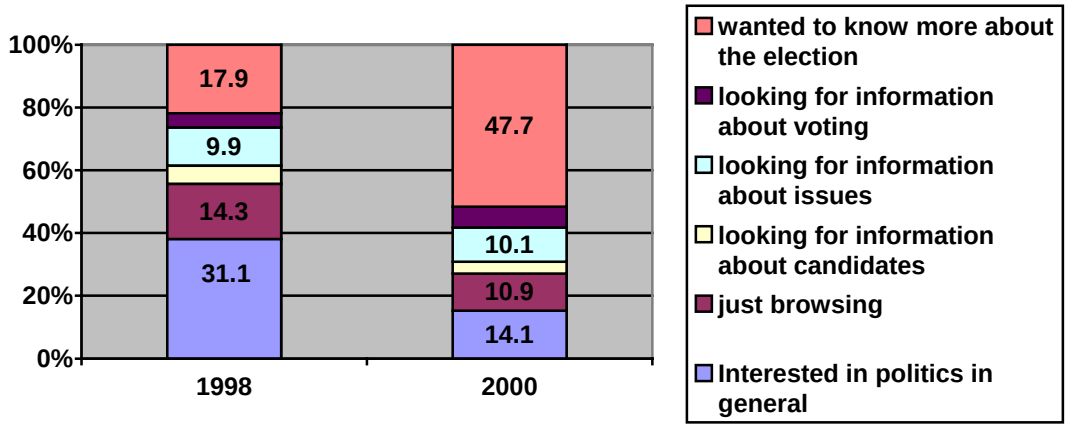


Figure 5.3. Purpose of visiting webwhiteblue.org by year.

From such a short time series, it is difficult to identify the exact cause of this shift. One plausible hypothesis is that more people respond to be looking for election information because 2000 featured a presidential election – an event that always has a higher profile that most elections held in non-presidential years. To evaluate this hypothesis directly, the question must be asked again in a subsequent off-year election.

A second plausible hypothesis is that the observed change in response is due to a change in the type of person who visited WWB. It may be that people who are new to the Internet want different things from a news and information web site than those who were using the site in 1998. Figure 5.4 shows a test of this hypothesis.

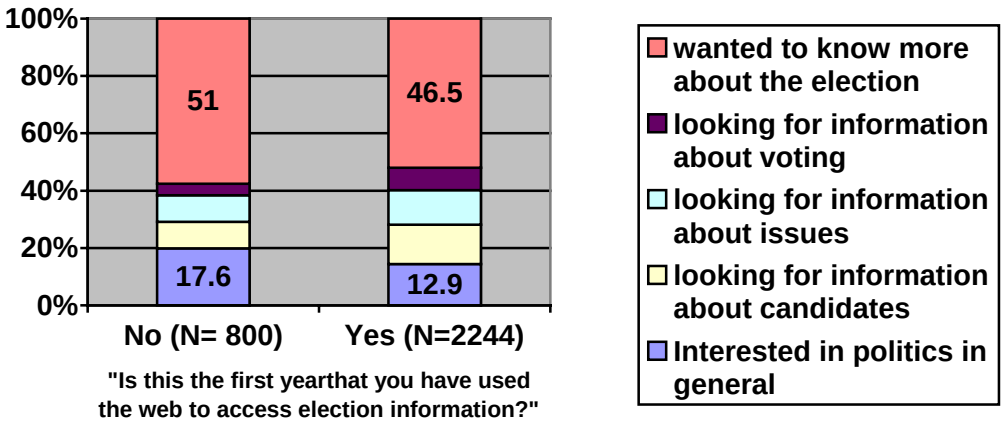


Figure 5.4. Purpose of visiting webwhiteblue.org by Internet experience, 2000.

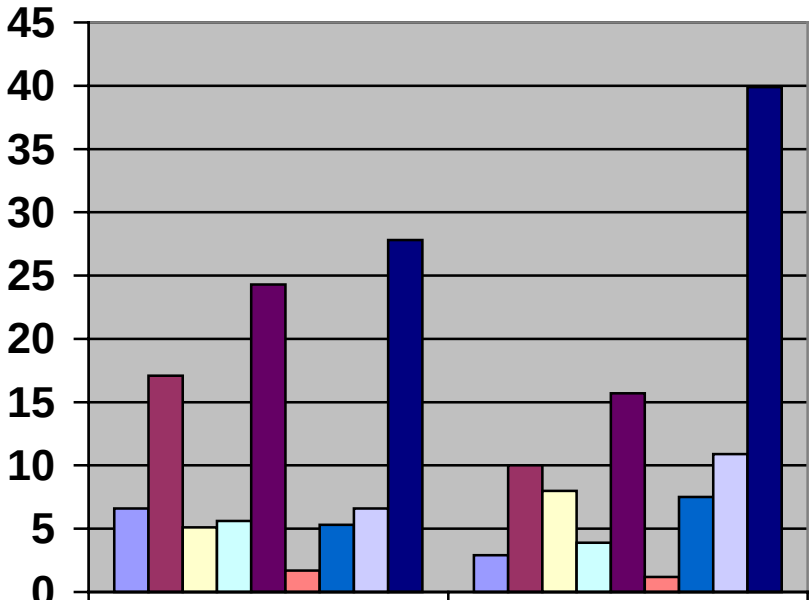
In Figure 5.4, we sort responses from the 2000 survey by users' subsequent self-reports of previous Internet experience. In 2000, experienced and inexperienced Internet information seekers alike came to WWB.org for similar reasons – election information. Both groups also came for starkly different reasons than did 1998 visitors. A difference of note in Figure 5.4 is that newer users were more likely to choose more specific

categories. Roughly 41% of new users reported seeking information on “voting,” “issues,” or “candidates,” while only 31% of more experienced users said the same.

Together, the data presented in Figures 5.3 and 5.4 suggest that WWB.org users as a whole viewed it in a very functional way. In a time where a close and high profile election was occurring, users came seeking more specific information. In a time where there was no such race, traffic was driven more by an interest in politics in general. New users were even more driven by function, seeking certain kinds of election information.

How Users Learned About WWB

The second question on the 1998 and 2000 surveys asked respondents “How did you find out about Web White and Blue?” Figure 5.5 depicts the responses.



	1998	2000
advertisement from WWB	6.6	2.9
banner ad from WWB	17.1	10
e-mail discussion list or news group	5.1	8
newspaper or magazine	5.6	3.9
online news article	24.3	15.7
radio coverage	1.7	1.2
referred by a friend	5.3	7.5
television coverage	6.6	10.9
WWB icon on another	27.8	39.9

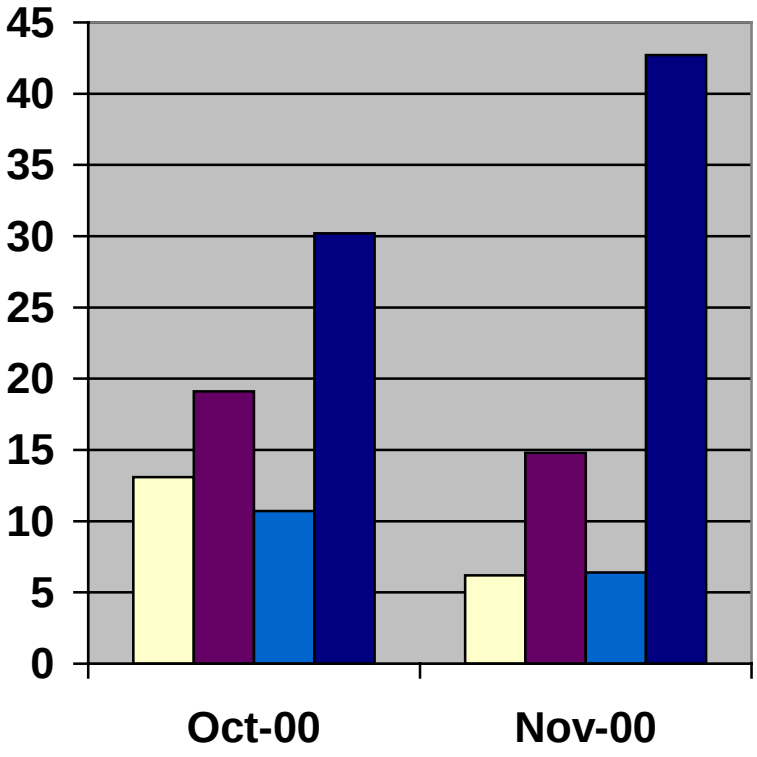
Figure 5.5. Learning about webwhiteblue.org by year.

There are some stark changes in how 1998 and 2000 participants respond to this question. These changes, however, correspond well to changes in how WWB.org was organized and publicized in the two years. In 1998, there was substantial effort directed at establishing media attention for WWB, particularly on its opening day (i.e., Web White and Blue Day.) In 2000, by contrast, the effort was directed away from self-promotion and towards building and promoting the Web White and Blue network. Therefore, the

decrease in the percentage of WWB.org users who learned about it through advertisements and online news articles should not be surprising. The emphasis on network also explains the substantial increase in those who learned about the site from a WWB icon on another site.

It is worth remembering that the 1998 figures are based on 900 responses while the 2000 figures are based on 3052 responses. So, in terms of raw numbers, the amount of people responding affirmatively to every category increased from 1998 to 2000. For example, the percentage of users who learned about WWB from print sources decreased from 5.6% to 3.9%. However, the actual number of users who gave this response doubled from 50 in 1998 to 118 in 2000.

While this comparison highlights an important difference in how users learned about WWB.org, its presentation obscures some potentially important attributes of how users learned about WWB on 2000. In particular, it may confound forces that were effective at drawing attention to WWB.org early in the survey period from those that drew attention later in the period. Separating such factors can provide new insights about what ways of drawing attention to WWB.org in 2000 did and did not work. Figure 5.6 speaks to this issue, though – for simplicity-- it shows only the categories in which there was substantial change within the year 2000.



	Oct-00	Nov-00
e-mail discussion list or news group	13.1	6.2
online news article	19.1	14.8
referred by a friend	10.7	6.4
WWB icon on another site	30.2	42.7

Figure 5.6. Learning about webwhiteblue.org by month.

Figure 5.6 shows that as the campaign season neared a close, the presence of the WWB icons on other sites accounted for a much higher percentage of traffic to WWB.org than in earlier weeks. Note that since these results are stated in percentages, this is not a restatement of the Chapter 2 claim that more people visited the site in the final weeks. Instead, the claim is that of the people who visited the site in the last week of the election, a substantially higher percentage learned about the site through icons on other sites. This finding can be read to support the 2000 WWB strategy and the value of its content to

users -- in the critical last week of the election, users of other sites found WWB content more relevant than they did in October.

Missing from Figure 5.6 are categories in which the move from October to November had little or no impact on responses. These categories include learning about WWB.org from advertisements, print sources, radio coverage, and television coverage. More detailed analysis of the survey data reveals only one caveat to the claim of no movement in the impact of these potential referral sources -- a spike in those who learned about the site from "television coverage." From October 11-21, only 3.3% of respondents chose this option. From October 22-31, the percentage giving the same response jumps to 16.4%. In November, however, the percentage drops to 11.1%. My data does not reveal which television coverage corresponds to the spike.

Did users find what they were looking for?

The third question on the 1998 and 2000 user surveys asked "If you were looking for specific election information on this site, did you find it or do you expect to find it by following our links to other election sites?" Figure 5.7 displays the responses.

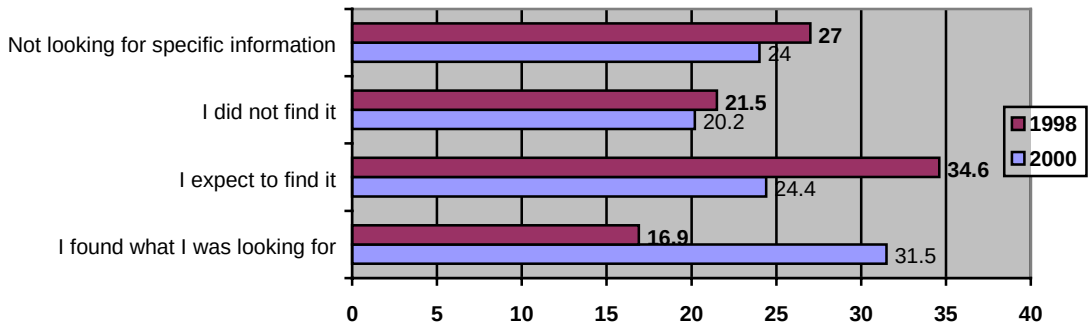


Figure 5.7. Webwhiteblue.org performance by year in percentages.

Figure 5.7 indicates that users perceived the 2000 version of WWB to be more effective than its predecessor. The percentage of users responding that they found what they were looking for nearly doubled while the percentage of users who did not find what they were looking for decreased.

What Users Thought of WWB.org

Next, users were asked to "Please tell us what you think of the Web White and Blue site." They were then offered three possible characteristics: easy to use, comprehensive, and frustrating. Figures 5.8-5.10 reveal their answers.

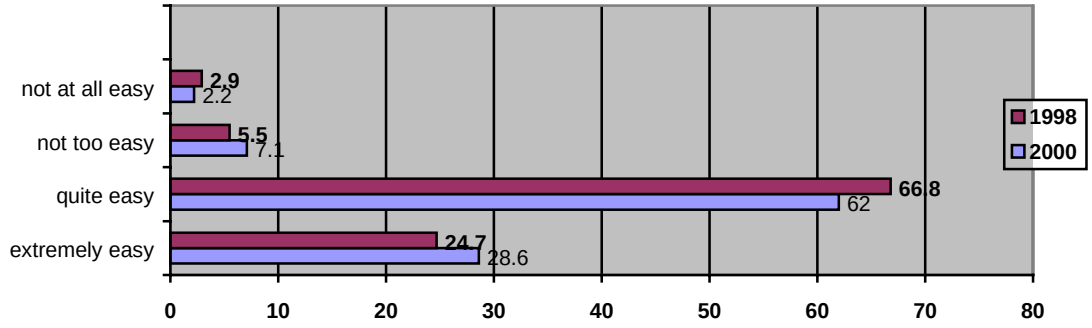


Figure 5.8. Webwhiteblue.org easy to use, in percentages.

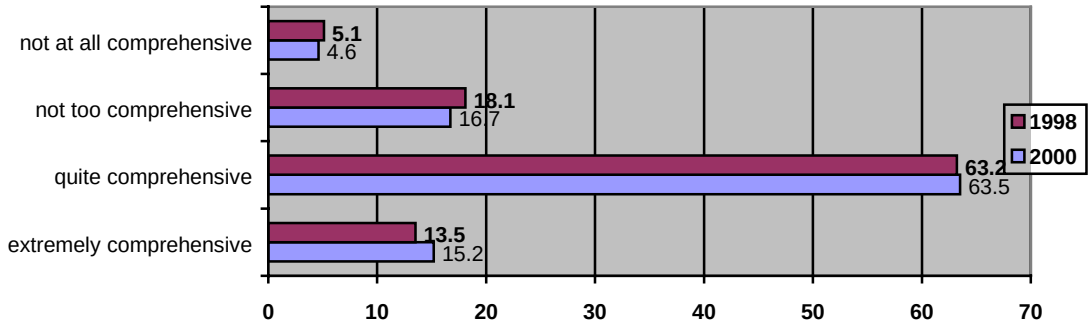


Figure 5.9. Webwhiteblue.org comprehensive, in percentages.

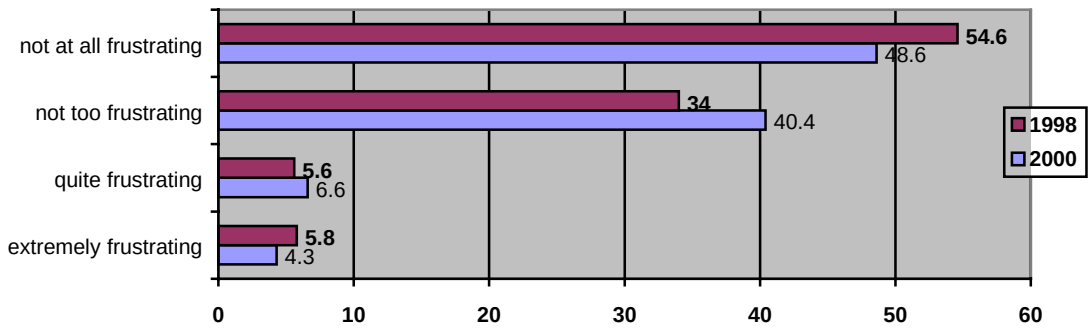


Figure 5.10. Webwhiteblue.org frustrating, in percentages.

Two aspects of these responses stand out. First, on all counts, they are overwhelmingly positive. Over 90% of respondents judged the site easy to use, over 76% rated the site comprehensive and fewer than 12% rated the site frustrating. Second, these judgments are virtually identical in 1998 and 2000.

While such statistics can serve as a source of pride for the WWB team, they must be accompanied with a healthy dose of skepticism. As discussed in Chapter 4, the participants in a voluntary user survey are self-selected. The respondents are people who are so engaged in the site, that they opt to take the survey. They are, in all likelihood, overrepresenting the views of the site's fan club. We must presume that the less that people thought of the site, the less likely they were to find, let alone take, the survey. To draw conclusions about a larger set of users from such a survey is to come away with a rose-colored impression of the site's impact. The findings in Figures 5.8-5.10 are most profitably conceived as a best-case scenario regarding user impressions of the site. The analyses described in Chapter 6 and 7 provide an important corrective to the impression laid out here and, because those analyses combat the self-selection problem in different ways, provide a more accurate of WWB.org's impact.

What Users Thought of the Rolling Cyber Debate

In 2000, the survey included questions about the Rolling Cyber Debate. Specifically, they were asked to "If you viewed Web White and Blue's Rolling Cyber Debate please tell us what you think about it. They were then offered two possible characteristics: useful and informative. Figure 5.11 reveals their answers.

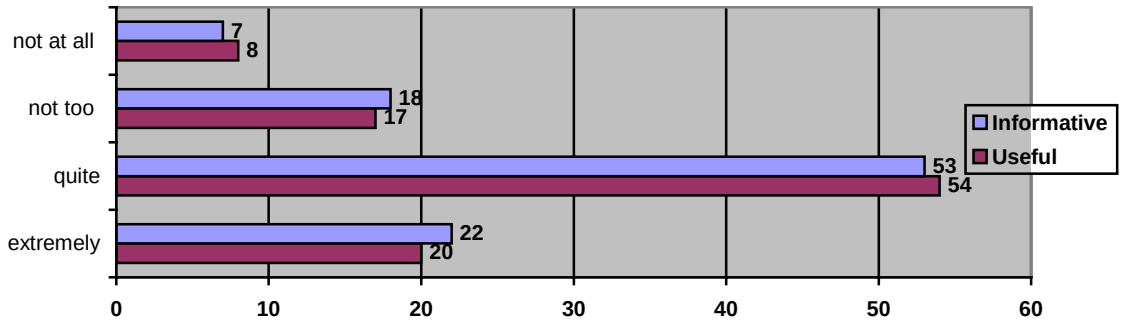


Figure 5.11. Rolling Cyber Debate useful and informative, in percentages.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents had positive reactions to the Cyber Debate. While these numbers are positive, it is worth noting that they are lower than the percentage of positive evaluations given for the site in general or the links. In Chapter 7, where I present more detailed analysis of reactions to the Cyber Debates, I observe frustration with the quality of the candidates' participation. I suspect that some of the same frustration is at hand here.

We conducted a more in-depth analysis of these responses to see if we could locate any trends in who liked and disliked the cyber debate. We found a sizeable difference in the evaluations given by people who were using the Internet to find election information for the first year and those who were more experienced. Figures 5.12 and 5.13 reveal the difference.

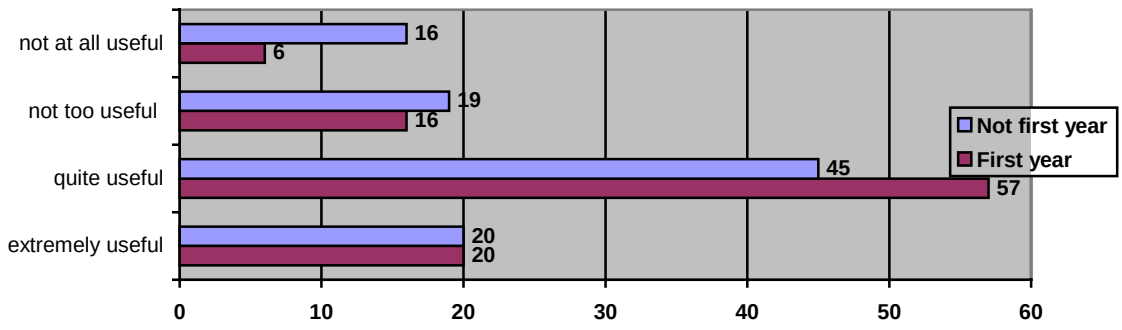


Figure 5.12 Rolling Cyber Debate useful by prior experience, in percentages.

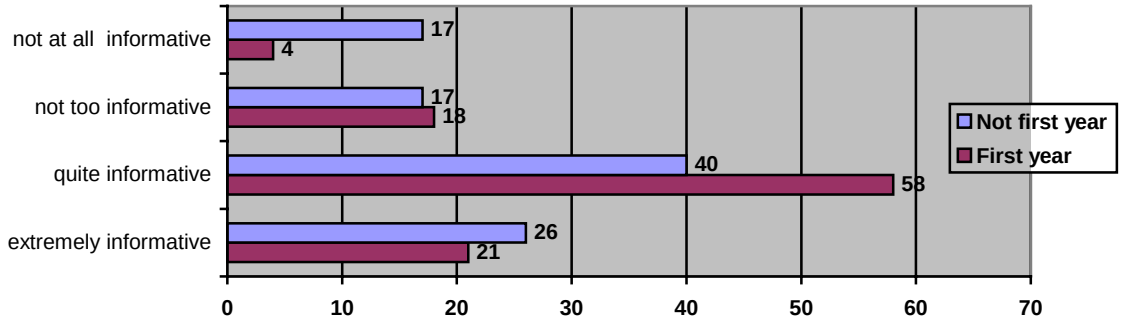


Figure 5.13 RCD informative by prior experience, in percentages.

In both cases, participants who were relatively new to using the Internet to find election information were 11-12 percentage points more positive about the Rolling Cyber Debate than were more experienced participants. It is likely that more experienced users expected more from the medium.

What Users Thought of the Links

Users in both the 1998 and 2000 surveys were also asked to evaluate the WWB.org's links. Specifically, they were asked: If you followed links from Web White and Blue to other election-related sites please tell us what you think about them. They were then offered three possible characteristics of the Rolling Cyber Debate: useful, informative, and trustworthy. Figures 5.14-5.16 reveal their answers.

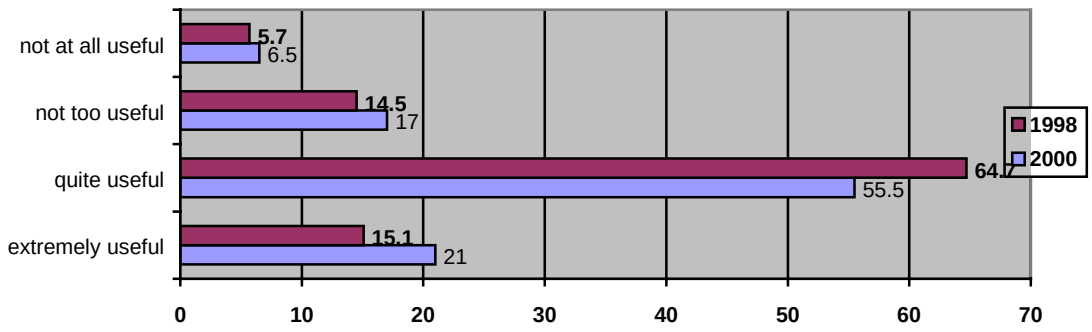


Figure 5.14. Links useful, in percentages.

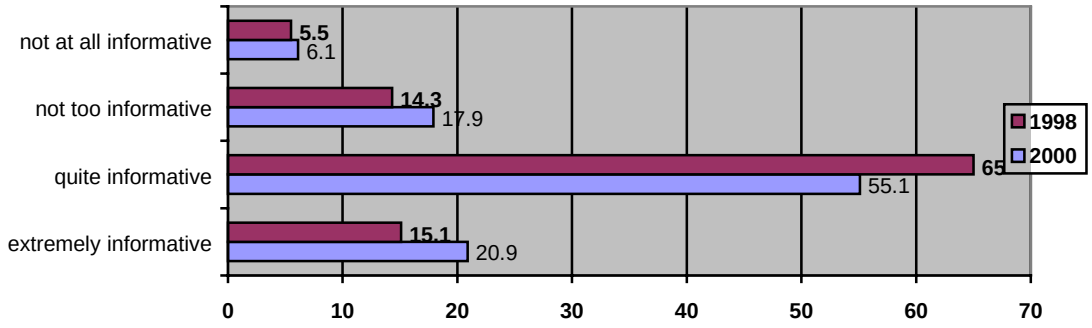


Figure 5.15. Links informative, in percentages.

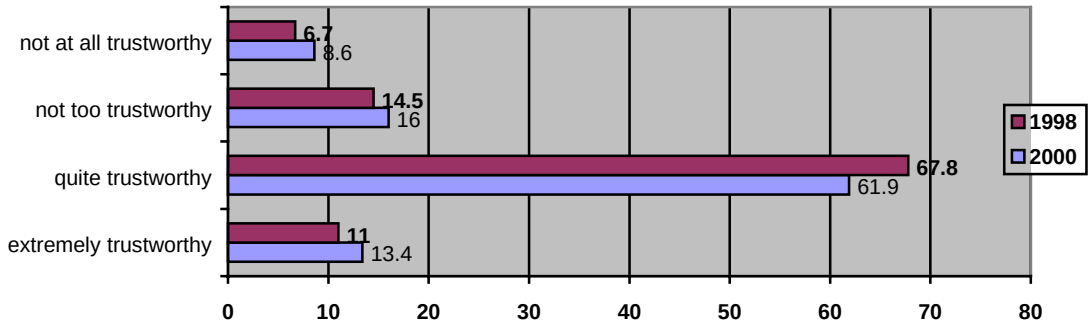


Figure 5.16. Links trustworthy, in percentages.

Like respondents' opinions of the site itself, their views of the links are very positive. In 1998, for example, over 78% of respondents gave positive answers to the useful, informative, and trustworthy questions. While these numbers are high, the same

caveat noted above applies – the people responding to the questions are those who are sufficiently engaged in the site to take the survey. Surveying a broader sample of WWB or Internet users would likely give less positive results.

Unlike respondents' opinions of the sites, we can observe a difference in their views of the links over the two-year period. Indeed, in 2000, there was a three to four percentage point drop in all of these statistics. Subsequent analyses of the 1998 and 2000 surveys show this drop to be across the board. For example, participants for whom it was their first year using the Internet to find election information were more likely to evaluate the links more positively regardless of the year of the study or the attribute in question. Before saying more about this drop in positive evaluations, I present one more statistic.

Would Users Recommend WWB.org to Others?

The final question devoted to WWB.org on both the 1998 and 2000 surveys asked if participants would recommend the site to others. Figure 5.18 reveals the responses.

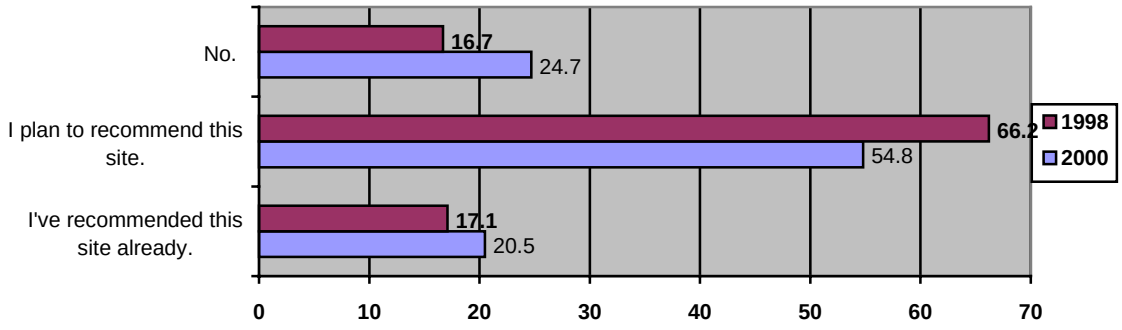


Figure 5.18 Webwhiteblue.org recommend, in percentages.

In both cases, large numbers reported that they had, or intended to, recommend the site to others. However, 2000 participants were about 8 percentage points less likely to recommend the site to others than was the case in 1998. What this statistic says about the relative impact of the site must be carefully considered. After all, the range and

quality of sites offering election information improved dramatically over the two-year period. Is increased competition in the Internet's political space the cause of the approval drop? To answer this question fully, we would need analogous data from other sites. If we found users less satisfied with almost all sites, then we would have evidence that competition drove the drop in Figure 5.18. Lacking such data, we can at least refer back to participants' evaluations of particular site aspects. Supporting the conclusion that greater competition is the cause of the decline is that fact that participants were more likely to find what they were looking for on WWB.org in 2000 and that they rate the site's ease of use and comprehensiveness as highly as they did in 1998. Supporting the idea that the site itself is to blame is the decrease in satisfaction with the links and some users dissatisfaction with them. Beyond these facts, the voluntary user surveys are inconclusive. The analyses of Chapters 6 and 7, however, provide additional information that resolves this quandary in part.

Appendix to Chapter 5. 2000 Survey Interview Template

Tell us what you think of Web White & Blue

We need your feedback to help improve online efforts in future elections. Please take a moment to complete this brief survey. All answers are optional and anonymous. Our Privacy Policy explains our commitment to your privacy.

To leave a quick comment, please use the box at the end of the survey form. If you have a question, please send us a message.

1. Which of the following phrases describe why you visited this site?

Wanted to know more about the 2000 elections

Wanted to view the Rolling Cyber Debate

Looking for specific information about candidates

Looking for specific information about issues

Looking for specific information about voting

Interested in politics in general

Just browsing

2. How did you find out about Web White & Blue?

Web, White & Blue icon on another site

Banner ad from Web White & Blue

Online news article

E-mail discussion list or news group

In print - newspaper or magazine

Television coverage

Radio coverage

Referred by a friend

Advertisement from WWB

3. If you were looking for specific election information on this site, did you find it or do you expect to find it by following our links to other election sites? Yes, found what I was looking for Yes, I expect to find it No, I did not find it Not looking for specific information

4. Please tell us what you think of the Web White & Blue site. Did you find the site:

Easy to use Extremely easy Quite easy Not too easy Not easy at all

Comprehensive Extremely comprehensive Quite comprehensive Not too comprehensive Not comprehensive at all

Frustrating Extremely frustrating Quite frustrating Not too frustrating Not frustrating at all

5. If you followed links from Web White & Blue to other election-related sites please tell us what you think about them. In general did you find those sites:

Useful Extremely useful Quite useful Not too useful Not useful

Informative Extremely informative Quite informative Not too informative Not informative

Trustworthy Extremely trustworthy Quite trustworthy Not too trustworthy Not trustworthy

6. If you viewed Web White & Blue's Rolling Cyber Debate please tell us what you think about it. In general did you find it:

Useful Extremely useful Quite useful Not too useful Not useful

Informative Extremely informative Quite informative Not too informative Not informative

7. Is this the first year that you have used the Internet/web to access election information?

Yes No

8. How many times have you visited the Web White & Blue (webwhiteblue.org) site? If this is your first visit please check 1. 1 2 3 4 or more

9. Have you or will you recommend this site to others? Yes, I have recommended this site already Yes, I plan to recommend this site No

10. During this election what is your primary media source for election information?

Television Internet/Web Radio Magazines Newspapers

What is your second media source for election information? Television Internet/Web Radio Magazines Newspapers

11. Have you ever used the Internet to discuss public issues, elections or to express a political opinion?

Check all that apply:

Yes, private e-mail with friends or family.
Yes, e-mail group discussion lists
Yes, newsgroups (Usenet)
Yes, live chat (IRC or web-based)
Yes, filled in web-based opinion poll
Yes, web-based discussion forums
No

12. From where are you accessing the Web White & Blue site? Home Work School Library Other access

13. To better serve the public in future elections it would be helpful to know something about our users (These questions are optional and the information you provide is anonymous.)

State/Place:

Gender: **M** **F**

Age: Under 18 18-30 31-45 46-65 Over 65

If you are eligible, do you plan to vote in November 2000 elections? Yes No Not eligible

14. Please share your other comments about Web White & Blue, election/political web sites in general, or ideas about what should be online in future elections.

Chapter 6. Internet Poll

In this chapter, I present the results of an Internet poll. The objective of the poll is to determine how the network affects Internet users. The poll has several novel features. It is, for example, carried out entirely over the Internet and respondents are encouraged to view certain web sites during the interview. This degree of interactivity is impossible in telephone-based polls. Moreover, Internet polls allow researchers to capture the internal validity of traditional experiments while realizing the benefits of contact with large, diverse subject populations. Put another way, we avoid the problems of self-selection that affect voluntary user surveys. Indeed, between October 13 and November 6, 2000, we interviewed a random, and quite diverse, sample of 1199 Americans. These attributes provide us with data that can play a critical role in determining the actual performance of the WWB network.

Study Design

The poll strategy is as follows. A random sample of computer users is exposed to WWB.org and an alternative source for information. Four of the alternate sources are, like WWB.org, web sites that operate on a syndicated content model (isyndicate.com, vote-smart.org, politics.Yahoo.com, and politicalinformation.com). Another four sources are designed as destination sites (cnn.com, foxnews.com, nyt.com, and usatoday.com.) The difference between the two site types is that a destination site is fully functional when users are induced to stay on its pages to retrieve the content they desire, while a syndicated content site functions by directing its users to other sites. A random number generator is used to make each of the eight alternate sites equally likely to appear during the interview.

After respondents complete the five-minute viewing period, we ask them to evaluate what they saw. One week later, and without advance warning, we contact them again and ask follow-up questions about their Internet usage with particular emphasis on whether or not they voluntarily revisited the pages we showed them.

1199 citizens from across the country completed our poll. This sample size and the kind of questions about WWB network impact that we wished to answer dictated a firm limit on the number of sites to which respondents would be sent. To maximize the number of sites used in the study while reducing the risk of a serious degradation in statistical reliability, I capped the number of sites included in the study at nine.

The eight sites chosen, in addition to WWB.org, were selected with evaluation goals firmly in mind. All of the destination sites, for example, are WWB charter sites. The same is true of one of the syndicated content sites (Yahoo). The inclusion of this many charter sites allows us to use the data to draw conclusions about the network as a

whole. The inclusion of three non-charter sites has advantages as well – it provides a benchmark for evaluating the network and also provides some variation on the syndicated content model now used by WWB.org. By including other syndicated content sites, we can observe how differences in implementing the syndicated content model affect variations in effectiveness. Such observations inform discussions about the future design of WWB.org as differences between the syndicated content sites may reveal which features have the greatest effects on particular users.

I designed the interview format and wrote the questions. Knowledge Networks of Menlo Park, CA did the required programming and conducted the interviews. Knowledge Networks is the brainchild of Stanford professors and was built on Silicon Valley venture capital. It is one of the first Internet poll companies in the world using probability sampling techniques – which provides its clients with the unique combination of a diverse sample and interactive interviews. Specifically, it first uses random digit dialing techniques to choose a sample of households from across the country. Using reverse directories it sends letters of introduction via special delivery mail and then contacts households by telephone to recruit them. It offers these households free personal computers and/or Internet access in exchange for their agreement to participate in on-line polls on a periodic basis. As a result, all respondents to the poll described herein have already agreed to participate in a series of Internet polls.

The subject pool for the Internet poll is anyone who agrees to participate in Knowledge Networks polls. It is important to note that unlike most current web polls, the pool of potential respondents is not limited to those parts of the population that have purchased computers and web access. Knowledge Networks provides the computers, the

Internet hookup, and on-site training and set up if necessary. The only other requirements for participating in the poll is that the respondent live in the United States and is age 18 or older.

This method of recruiting subjects produces a respondent base that is uncommon in studies of the Internet and politics. Specifically, some of these people are neither interested in politics nor very interested in the Internet. Because most respondents have never before used the sites we show them, we can use the poll to identify their *initial* reactions to these sites. We can also compare such responses to those of more experienced users – a comparison that we can use to clarify where opportunities for more effective performance are more likely to lie.

Results

In what follows, I describe responses from a situation in which we interrupt a seemingly conventional Internet poll by giving respondents an opportunity to test-drive WWB.org and, for most, one other site. I begin by giving a brief description of the poll's participants. Then, I provide a profile of how respondents reacted to each of the nine sites.

The Respondents

The poll began by asking respondents about their prior Internet usage. The first question was "Do you ever get any kind of news online?" 77% answered yes. This percentage is higher than in the general population, but not surprising given the fact that Knowledge Networks supplied them with free Internet access. For those who answered yes, a follow-up question asked, "How often do you go online for news?" 27% of those who responded yes to the initial question reported going online for news "everyday",

24% responded “3 to 5 days a week,” 21% responded “1 to 2 days a week,” 18% responded “once every few weeks” and 9% reported going online “less than once every few weeks.”

The poll then asked about the respondent’s political interest. For example, subjects were asked, “Do you ever look online for political or presidential campaign information?” 36% responded “yes.” This answer provides evidence that our subject pool is representative of online users as a whole. At the same time as this poll was conducted, for example, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press conducted a telephone poll on the “2000 Campaign and the Internet.” In that study, they asked 4,186 online users “Do you ever go online to get news or information about the 2000 elections?” To that question 33% answered “yes.”

A follow-up question then asked, “How often do you go online for political or presidential campaign information?” Of those who responded yes to the initial question, 16% responded “everyday”, 22% responded “3 to 5 days a week,” 26% responded “1 to 2 days a week,” 27% responded “once every few weeks” and 9% reported going “less than once every few weeks.”

Site Impact Profiles

We now turn our attention to documenting how respondents reacted to the sites they saw. We begin with a focus on WWB.org. We then compare the nine sites in the study, on a range of important criteria. It is worth noting that in all but a few cases, respondents tend to rate site attributes highly. This fact is due in large part to the fact that I selected sites that were likely to have an impact (e.g., I could have included personal

political web sites, of which there are thousands.) Having said this, I will not focus on the high approval levels further in what follows. Instead, I focus on differences in how respondents judged the sites. It is through such differences, I contend, that important lessons about what makes a site effective can be drawn.

WWB.org

Figure 6.1 depicts the effect of WWB.org from the respondents' perspective. The first bar shows responses to the question "Have you ever heard of webwhiteblue.org?" Only 11 of the 1173 people who answered the questions said yes. This awareness level is the lowest of the nine sites we tested. Since WWB.org was not designed as a destination site and did not engage in extensive self-promotion, such numbers may not be unexpected.

These numbers also suggest an upper limit on the effect that WWB.org had on the past election. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the general public's lack of awareness of this and most other political sites we tested implies that the sites had no effect. To better gauge the effect, it is important to determine how those who viewed the site were changed by it. I designed the poll to make such determinations possible.

After interrupting the interview and bringing respondents to WWB.org, we returned to the interview and asked them to judge what they saw. Among the questions we asked were these:

- I can use the site to find information that is accurate and non-partisan.
- I can use the site to get the information I want quickly and easily.

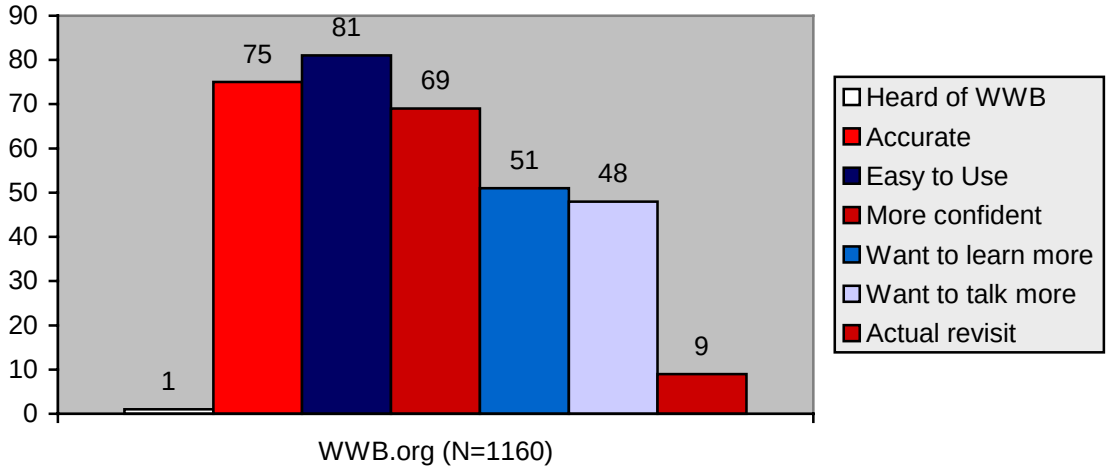


Figure 6.1. Percent responding yes to WWB questions.

As Figure 1 shows, webwhiteblue.org was judged "accurate" and "easy to use" by an overwhelming number of respondents -- about 99% of whom were viewing the site for the very first time. 75% judged it to be "accurate" and 81% responded that it was "easy to use."

We then asked questions that would measure how viewing WWB.org would affect citizens' subsequent political beliefs and behaviors. Among the things we asked was for respondents to reply "true" or "false" to the following statements:

- The site makes me feel more confident about the quality of political information available on the Internet.
- The site makes me want to learn more about politics.
- The site makes me more likely to talk about politics with others.

As Figure 6.1 shows, here too, a single five minute viewing period changed the way that these new viewers would next engage the political process, with 69% expressing

greater confidence in the quality of political information on the Internet, 51% wanting to learn more, and 48% more likely to discuss politics with others.

To further gauge the effect of a single exposure to a particular web site to a broad population of Internet users, we contacted all respondents a week after their initial interview. Nine percent had revisited WWB.org. In other words, a single exposure to WWB.org by people who tended not to be very interested in the political side of the Internet induced a near ten-fold increase in the number of people visiting that site. Such results are very suggestive of the impact that a well-conceived web site can have. They also provide concrete evidence against the common post-election spin that the effect of the Internet in Election 2000 was disappointing. With other more visited sites having analogous effects, the impact of the Internet – actual and potential -- is apparent. It changes what people can learn about the political process and how they feel about participating in it.

It is difficult to gauge the exact meaning of this revisitation rate. I think that it is helpful, however, to keep the following facts in mind. All respondents have many activities to which they can direct their attention. None are obligated to use the web or to visit any particular site. If they do visit a site, they must decide that they prefer doing so to all of the other things to which they can devote attention. Since nearly all respondents had never before heard of WWB.org, their basis for revisiting the site is likely to be the single five-minute exposure during the initial interview. To me, this suggests that the site had quite an impact. It also is a credible basis for basing future versions of the project on the belief that there is the potential for the site to have an impact on the public at large.

Initial Awareness

The first question respondents faced about the sites that they would soon be shown was "Have you ever heard of the web site called …?" Figure 6.2 shows their responses and a clear division. The sites associated with major news organizations are names that respondents recognize. CNN.com is best known followed by Fox, USA Today and the New York Times. All of the syndicated content model sites do not have names that the general public recognizes. Even the Yahoo political site is not one people claim to have heard of, despite the popularity of Yahoo. In all the cases that follow, 1160 respondents viewed WWB.org, while the other eight sites were viewed by 70-100 subjects each.

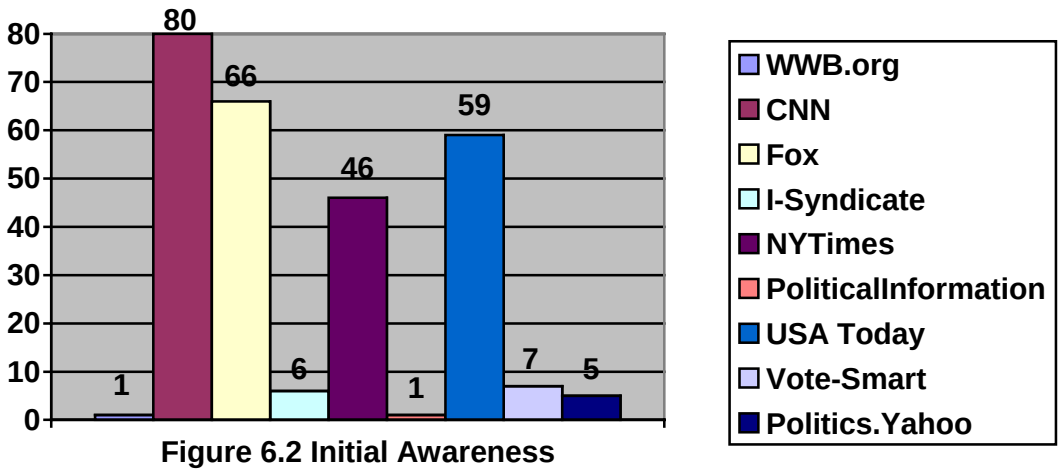


Figure 6.2 Initial Awareness

New Information

The next set of questions was designed to document respondents' site-specific impressions. The questions appeared in the form of statements with which respondents could agree or disagree. The first such question was "I can use [name of site] to find information that I have not seen elsewhere." I asked this question as a respondent's

willingness to visit a site can depend on what they expect to learn once they reach the site. Indeed, what matters with respect to respondent viewing habits is not the actual amount of new information that a site contains. Rather, it is the respondents' perception of new information that drives their viewing behavior; particularly if, as suggested in Chapter 5, they are increasingly driven by a desire to get specific kinds of information instead of just pursuing an interest in politics in general. Figure 6.3 depicts the responses to this question.

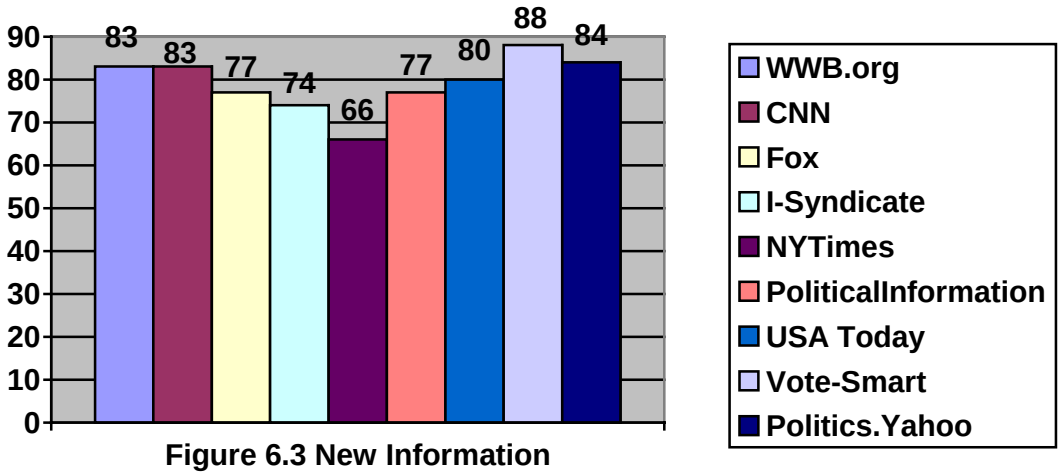


Figure 6.3 New Information

Respondents differentiate between the sites. The New York Times site stands out as one on which respondents felt significantly less likely to gain new information, while WWB.org, Vote-Smart, Yahoo and CNN are the sites where subjects were most likely to perceive new information residing.

Accuracy

Next, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "I can use [name of site] to find information that is accurate and non-partisan." I asked this question to gauge respondent perceptions of the value of a web site's content. And while it is

possible for information to be both partisan and accurate, many people discount information when partisanship is overt. Moreover, since all of the sites strive to be seen as non-partisan, we should expect perceptions of their accuracy to be based in perceptions that the sites are not biased. Figure 6.4 shows respondents' evaluations of the sites' accuracy.

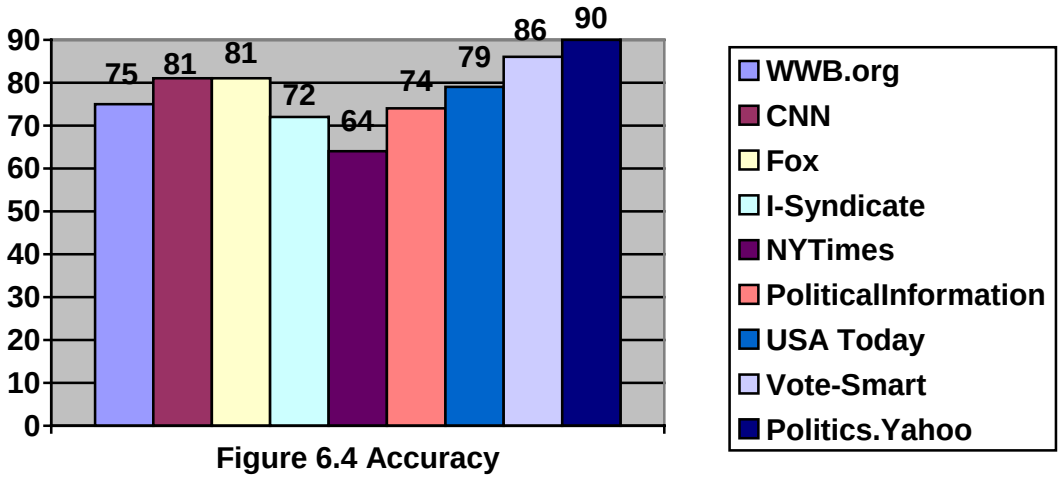


Figure 6.4 Accuracy

Again, some distinctions are made. As was the case with "new information," the New York Times site finds itself at the bottom of the ledger by a considerable margin. Vote-Smart and Yahoo, by contrast, are rated highest in terms of accuracy. The rankings of other sites fall within a narrow range and are non-distinguishable statistically.

Ease of Use

In the last of the questions directed at respondent impressions of the site, they are asked to agree or disagree with the statement "I can use the site to get the information I want quickly and easily." I asked this question and some that follow to gauge respondent's perceptions of the value of a web site's content. With so many political web sites, ease of use is an important factor in many Internet users' site assessments – a topic

about which we have more to say in Chapter 7. Figure 6.5 shows respondents' ease of use assessments.

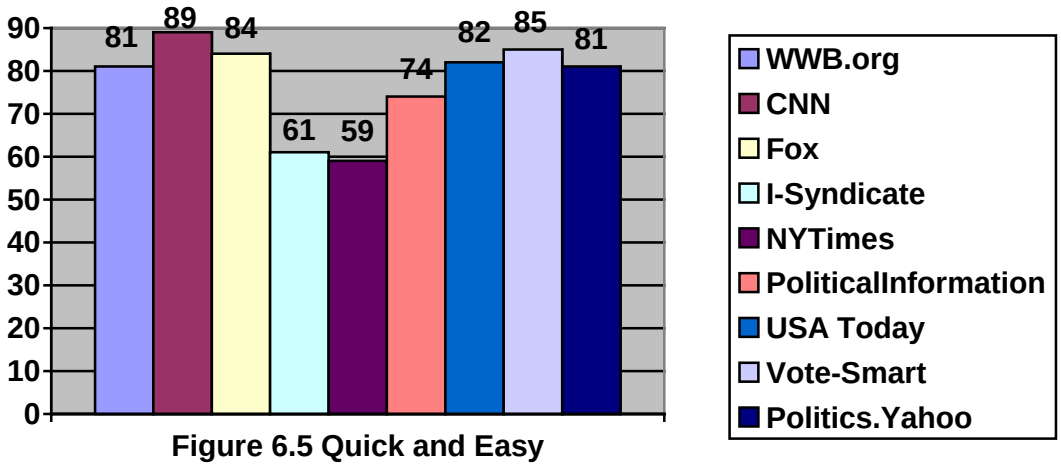


Figure 6.5 Quick and Easy

With respect to these assessments a clear dichotomy emerges. Respondents were far less likely to find the I-syndicate and New York Times sites easy to use than the other sites. At the top, the sites cluster, with CNN leading the pack and Fox and Vote-Smart close behind.

Confidence

The next set of questions is an attempt to gauge how viewing a site changes the user's perceptions of politics and the Internet. We are particularly interested in the extent to which an Internet presentation affects citizens' views about the political process and of the efficacy of increasing their political participation. In the first of these questions, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "[Name of site] makes me more confident about the quality of political information available on the Internet."

The motivation for asking this particular question is the knowledge that many citizens find politics to be very complex. When taking actions such as voting, they seek information from reliable sources that are easy to access. With so many choices,

however, it is easy for a person who does not regularly engage in politics to become overwhelmed. It is at this juncture that a well-designed web site can be critical. By proving to themselves that they can learn what they need to know about politics, citizens may gain confidence in their ability to participate effectively, which can then translate into more frequent and meaningful participation. Figure 6.6 documents the extent to which respondents report that viewing the sites in our study increases their confidence about the Internet as a source of quality information.

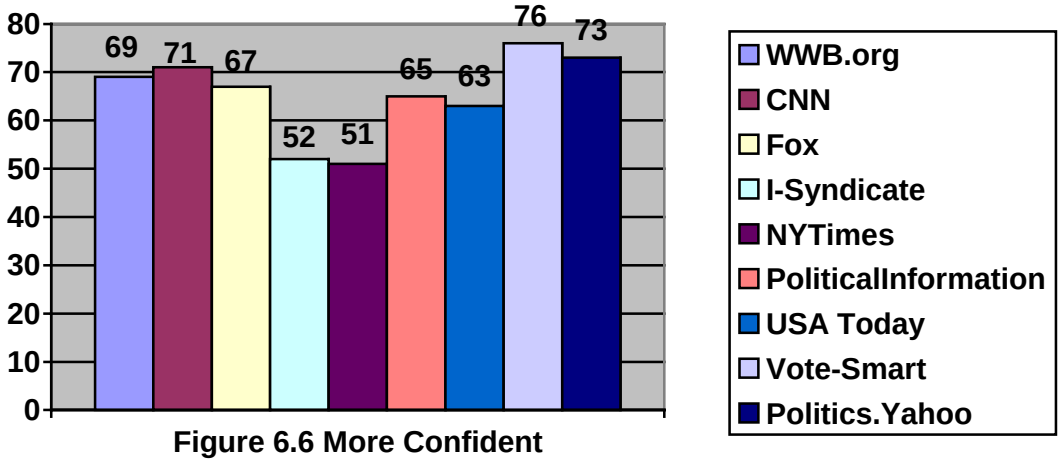


Figure 6.6 More Confident

Here, the same dichotomy observed in respondents' ease of use judgments emerges. Respondents were more likely to give I-Syndicate and the New York Times sites low grades. Otherwise, the sites cluster, with Vote-Smart leading the pack and Yahoo close behind.

Want to Learn More

The second question in the series that attempts to document how a web site affects subsequent user political behaviors asks whether respondents are willing to take an important step beyond gaining confidence. Specifically, respondents are asked to agree or disagree with the statement "[Name of site] makes me want to learn more about politics."

Figure 6.7 documents the extent to which respondents report that viewing the sites in our study increases their desire to learn more about politics.

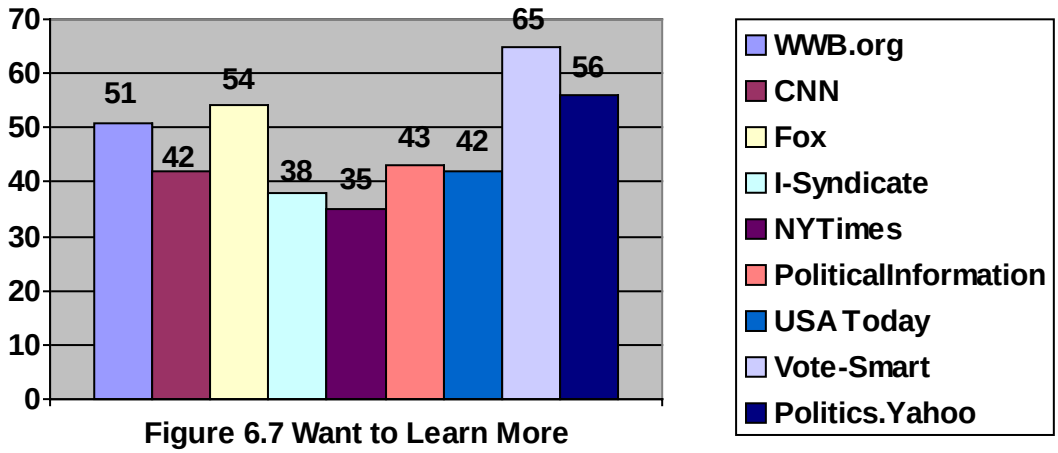


Figure 6.7 Want to Learn More

In this case, a different pattern emerges. At the top of the pack is Vote-Smart, followed by a cluster of Yahoo, Fox, and WWB. Then, there is a sizeable gap between the remaining sites. The data does not permit a more detailed analysis of why respondents made this particular distinction; however, our experimental data – described in Chapter 7 does – a point that we will pursue in our ongoing research.

Want to Talk More

The next question asks whether respondents are willing to take a different kind of step beyond being more confident. Specifically, respondents are asked to agree or disagree with the statement "[Name of site] makes me want to talk more about politics." Political discussions are an important form of political activity. If a web site can make people more confident and desirous of greater knowledge, it may also make them feel better able to contribute to, or survive, political conversations. Figure 6.8 documents the extent to which respondents report that viewing the sites in our study increases their willingness to talk more about politics.

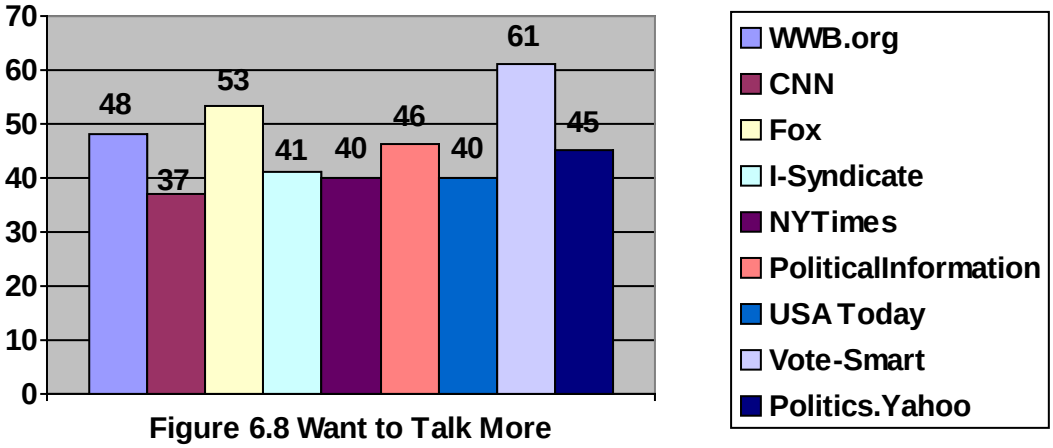
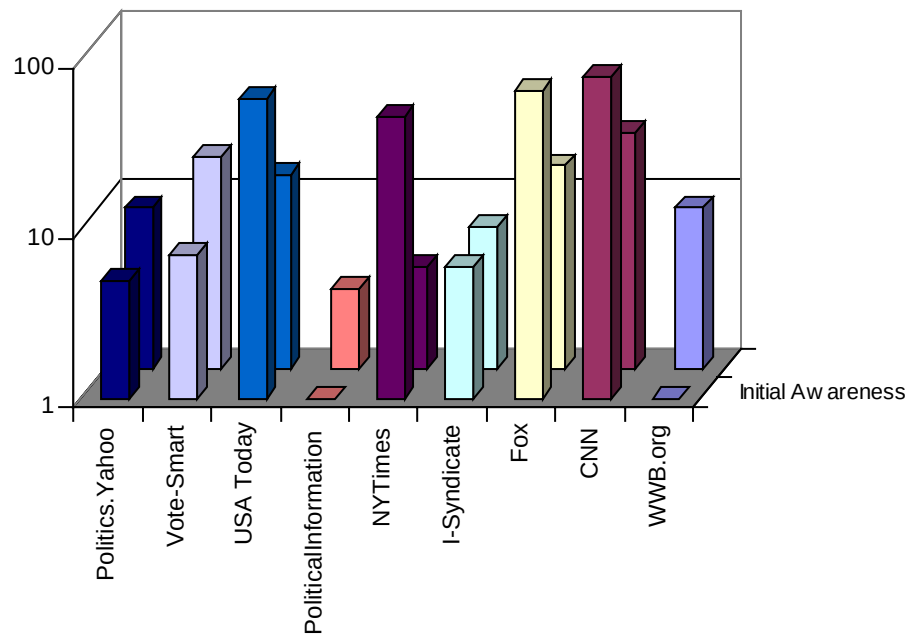


Figure 6.8 Want to Talk More

Here, the pattern resembles that of the previous figure. Vote-Smart leads the pack and, when error margins are properly accounted for, Yahoo and WWB join the pack, where Fox rated as slightly more effective than the rest.

Revisit

The last of the questions whose responses we report was asked one week after the initial interview. The purpose of the question is to document revisits to the sites that respondents were shown. Together, with the responses listed above, revisitation statistics give us a firm measure of how a site affected individuals. In particular, there is an important difference between feeling good about a site after viewing it and actually taking the time to revisit it later. Indeed, revisitation suggests a level of interest so large that a respondent would choose to view that site over all of the other things that he or she could do. Figure 6.9 documents revisits. As a benchmark for evaluating the extent to which the single site view during the interview could have prompted the revisit, we also include the initial awareness numbers in the figure (they are the bars in front.)



	Initial Awareness	Revisit
WWB.org	1	9
CNN	80	25
Fox	66	16
I-Syndicate	6	7
NYTimes	46	4
PoliticalInformation	1	3
USA Today	59	14
Vote-Smart	7	18
Politics.Yahoo	5	9

Figure 6.9 The Impact of Exposure

Before drawing conclusions from this particular figure, it is worth noting that the numbers in the two columns are not strictly comparable. Brand awareness does not constitute evidence of prior use. And just because 80% are aware of CNN does not mean that we should expect 80% to use the site within a given week. With those caveats in mind, here is how to read the figure.

Three of the four sites for which respondents were most aware before the viewing periods are also the ones that respondents were most likely to visit afterwards (CNN, Fox, and USA Today). The site for which this pattern does not hold is the New York Times

site. Taking the Times' place among the top four revisited sites is Vote-Smart, the site that respondents regarded as best on several dimensions.

Respondents made other distinctions as well. Of the two least known sites, political information.com and WWB.org, the percentage revisiting WWB.org was more than triple the percentage revisiting politicalinformation.com. It is also true that a higher percentage of respondents ranked WWB.org higher than this commercial version of a syndicated content site on every dimension we measured. Politics.Yahoo.com, a site consistently evaluated more favorably than political information.com, also received triple the percentage revisiting that site.

With the revisitation statistics presented, we can see that respondents' site evaluations impact not only their feelings about the political process but also at least one of their subsequent politically oriented behaviors. When users identified sites that they regarded as inferior in terms of performance, such as the New York Times and PoliticalInformation.com sites, they refused to revisit – a justifiable choice given the presence of numerous other sites providing similar information. Similarly, when users found sites they regard as accurate and easy to use, such as Vote-Smart, WWB.org, and the other news-based dot-coms, they return voluntarily.

A more rigorous analysis reveals which site attributes correspond to respondent revisitation decisions. We conducted a number of multivariate analyses – statistical procedures in which the unique contribution of each of a number of potential causal factors can be estimated. The analysis that answers the question most clearly is an analysis run on the 411 subjects who viewed only WWB.org. In that analysis, we used answers to all questions in the series' described above as potential causes of revisitation.

Of the questions listed above, the largest, and only statistically significant factor was whether or not the site led the respondent to want to learn more. Using standard means of translating such analyses into percentages, the analysis shows that a person for whom WWB.org made them *want to learn more* was 23 percentage points more likely to revisit than were those who gave the opposite response. Of the factors listed above, the attribute with the next largest impact was *ease of use*, which corresponded to a 14-percentage point gain in the likelihood of revisitation.

Appendix 1 to Chapter 6: Internet Interview Template

START of the Interview's First Segment

- Do you ever get any kind of news online?

  (If yes, ask:)

  - Did you happen to do this within the past week, or not?

  - How often do you go online for this type of information...everyday, 3 to 5 days per week, 1 or 2 days per week, once every few weeks, less often, or never?

- Do you intend to vote in the upcoming presidential election?

- Do you ever look for news or information about politics or the presidential campaign?

  (If yes, ask:)

  - Did you happen to do this within the past week, or not?

  - How often do you go online for this type of information...everyday, 3 to 5 days per week, 1 or 2 days per week, once every few weeks, less often, or never?

- When you are looking for news and information about politics, which web site do you visit most often?

- Are there any other web sites that you would recommend to others as good sources for news and information about politics?

END of First Segment
Administrative Notes for the Second Segment

In this segment, R's are directed to one or two political web sites. They will have five minutes to explore each. After each session, we will ask questions about the sites. One of the two web sites is WWB. The other is alternative source for news and information.

Randomization instructions.

One of the sites is always WWB.org.

The alternative web site is chosen from the list of eight below.

A random number generator, or equivalent, should be used to make each of the eight alternative sites equally likely to appear as the alternative site in the interview.

The generator should also be designed so that roughly equal numbers of R's are exposed to each of the alternative sites.

A second and independent random number generator, or equivalent, should be used to determine whether WWB or an alternative site is shown first.

The device should be designed so that for every alternative site we observe roughly equal numbers viewing WWB first and last.

Alternative Site list

There are four syndicated content sites:

www.isyndicate.com/directory/categories/all/top_news.us_politics.html

vote-smart.org

politics.yahoo.com

www.politicalinformation.com,

There are four original content sites:

www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/

www.foxnews.com/elections/

www.nytimes.com/pages/politics

www.usatoday.com/news/politics/campfront.htm

START of Second Segment

- Have you ever heard of [Site1 ∈ {WWB, {alternative set}}]? (If yes:) Do/did you ever go onto [site1] to get news and information on the presidential campaign?

- Now we are going to send you to [site1]. For the next five minutes, we would like you to use this site to learn about the candidates in the presidential campaign. At the end of the five minute session, this interview will resume and we will ask you questions about [site1].

[SEND TO WEB SITE]

- Now, I am going to read you a list of statements about [site1]. For each statement, please tell me wither you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.

1. I can use [site1] to find information that I have not seen elsewhere.
2. I can use [site1] to find information that is accurate and non-partisan.
3. I can use [site1] to get the information I want quickly and easily.
4. [Site1] makes me feel more confident about the quality of political information available on the Internet.
5. [Site1] makes me want to learn more about politics.
6. [Site1] makes me more likely to talk about politics with others.
7. [Site1] makes me more likely to vote in the November election.
8. [Site1] makes me more certain about who I will vote for in the presidential election.

- What is the most important thing you learned from looking at [site1]?
- If you had to name one thing about [site1] that makes it different than other news and information web site1s, what would it be?
- Again, thinking about [site1], is there anything you would change about it?

[REPEAT SEGMENT FOR SECOND WEB SITE, site2]

END of Second Segment

The Interview's final question.

The next time you use the Internet to find news and information about the presidential election, which site will you visit first?

Asked One Week Later

- Did you, at any time during the last week, use [WWB/other] to get news and information on the presidential campaign? (Ask once for each of the two sites R observed).

Chapter 7. Laboratory Experiments

In this chapter, I present results from the evaluation component that provides very detailed observations of how the Web White and Blue affected users. This method of evaluation can be summarized as follows.

- **Strategy:** Experimental subjects are brought to a laboratory and paid $35 for participating in a 1-hour study of the Internet. In the middle of the experimental session, subjects are instructed to use certain web sites to learn as much as they can about the upcoming presidential election. The key experimental variation is that subjects are randomly assigned to one of eight web site lists. The lists vary from "use WWB.org only" to "use the following 15 sites" to no direction at all. We administer questionnaires before and after the viewing period to gauge the impact of things viewed during the experiment. We employ several kinds of specialized software to compile a record of all sites visited during the experiment with time stamps. Such data will give us important information about the sequence of sites that users visit – data that we can use to evaluate how specific web pages affect subject reactions and subsequent behaviors. For a limited number of subjects, we also employ software that collects screen captures several times a minute. This data reveals which parts of a page people focus on. Such data is among the best available for answering questions about what aspects of page design affect users' subsequent beliefs and actions.

- **Anticipated Result:** In the long run, new discoveries of how specific aspects of a web site or web page's content, presentation, and design affect specific kinds of election information seeker. In the short run, clean answers to simple questions about the impact of WWB.

About the Experiments

The Laboratory

The experiments were conducted in a brand new facility at the Center for Library and Instructional Computing Services at the University of California, San Diego from October 19 to November 4, 2000. The laboratory contained 25 brand new PC's with 17-inch monitors. The PC's were aligned in five rows of five with monitors positioned so that all subjects could see the front of the room. The front of the room contained a

whiteboard and the room was well soundproofed. The room was secured for exclusive use of the experimenters for the entire duration of the study.

In addition to Netscape Navigator and Windows 98, we installed two special kinds of software on the terminals. On every terminal, we installed software that allowed us to record minute details of an Internet viewing session. This software records usage data that is far more useful to us than that provided by the standard utilities for Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. The standard utilities record and keep only the time of the first visit, the time of the most recent visit and the number of visits to any particular page. As a result, the data cannot be used to evaluate the sequence of pages viewed. This matters because page sequences are an important part of determining an individual page's functionality. If, for example, a page is designed to refer users to certain kinds of destinations, the standard utilities provide little data about functionality. Our software keeps a complete record of the sequence in which users viewed pages along with the length of time associated with each view. On four terminals, we also installed software that records and stores screen captures. With such data, we not only know how long a user spent on a particular page, we also know the parts of the page that held his or her attention. Collectively, this data creates many possibilities for creating new knowledge about what aspects of a web site or web page most affect users.

Recruitment

We recruited subjects through newspaper advertisements, flyers posted on the UCSD campus, and a team of recruiters who were sent to events where numerous non-UCSD people were likely to be. Appendix 3 to this chapter depicts a sample flyer. The

advertisements and flyers directed interested people to either call a dedicated phone line or send a message to a dedicated e-mail address (psexper@ucsd.edu).

Sean Cain, the project's lead research assistant, processed all requests, building and maintaining an appointment database. Once a potential subject contacted us, he would send a return message spelling out our eligibility requirements and then, if the requirements were met, scheduling subjects in one of our 25 experimental sessions.

The requirements for participation were as follows:

- Over 18.
- Have a social security number or a driver's license.
- Must be able to operate Netscape Navigator.
- Must be able to arrive on time with the understanding that latecomers would not be admitted.

Over 90% of the subjects whom we recruited arrived on time and were admitted as subjects. Most of the other subjects failed to show up. All subjects participated in only one experiment.

During the contact, we also told subjects the following things about the study: it lasts approximately an hour, they would be paid $35 for completing the session, they would be asked to looking for information on the Internet and to answer questions about what they found.

The Day of the Experiment

On the day of an experiment, Sean and I arrived at the laboratory at about 30 minutes in advance of the starting time. The PC's were in locked mode to protect the special software we had installed. We unlocked the terminals, which activated the data

collection programs. We programmed the Internet browsers to assure that all subjects experienced the same start up page. We chose a page that had nothing to do with elections (the home page for UCSD's Academic Computing division).

Upon subjects' arrival to the lab area, Sean asked for a form of legal identification and checked names against those in our database. A sample of the list he used is contained in Appendix 4. We asked subjects to stay in a waiting area until we made an announcement about the beginning of the session.

At about five minutes before the scheduled starting time, we admitted subjects into the lab. When all subjects were seated at terminals, we closed the laboratory's doors and began the session. In all cases, we began within five minutes of the advertised starting time and finished within 60 minutes.

To minimize variance in what subjects believed about the study, I followed several procedures. First, I was the only person who spoke to subjects during the experiment. Second, all of my statements to subjects were scripted. Appendix 1 contains my script. Third, we did not allow subjects to communicate with one another during the session. The reason for doing this is to reduce the likelihood that observed differences in subject behaviors across experiments are due to differences in their interaction with the laboratory and the experimenters.

After a brief introduction, subjects received the first of two questionnaires. Appendix 2 contains the questionnaires used in one of the treatments. Questionnaires for the other treatments vary only in the sites named, changes we made to account for the fact that subjects in different experimental treatments viewed different sites. The first

questionnaire focused on obtaining socioeconomic data and information about subjects' interest in politics and experience with the Internet.

After collecting the questionnaires, we instructed subjects to use the Internet to learn as much as possible about the upcoming presidential election. It is at this point in the session that we implemented the key experimental variation. Across our 25 sessions we ran eight different experimental treatments, each of which is described below. Our ability to make causal claims about the differential effects of certain sites comes from our ability to compare data from each of the treatments. The difference between the treatments is in the instructions that we gave to subjects, differences I describe below. Appendix 6 shows a sample instruction sheet.

At the end of the viewing period, we handed subjects a second questionnaire. This questionnaire contained a battery of questions about subjects' reactions to what they say. When subjects completed the questionnaires, I asked a few questions of the group. Then, we paid subjects, had them sign receipts, at which point the session ended. When all subjects left, we locked the computers and the lab.

Note that no subject knew that Markle sponsored the experiments or that the WWB network was the primary focus of the investigation. At the UCSD campus, this information was tightly held, known only by the requisite financial people, my research assistant Sean Cain and myself. Of course, I was asked about who was funding the experiments. In all cases, I answered, "The research is sponsored by a non-partisan, non-profit organization that wants to learn more about the Internet."

Experimental Protocol
Treatments

I ran eight experimental treatments. Each one serves a distinct analytic purpose, as I describe below. Moreover, the treatments also serve a collective purpose; for if we identify characteristics of a web site's impact that stand up across all experimental treatments, then we are more likely to have identified an effect that persists in normal usage conditions. By contrast, if a site-specific effect disappears across treatments then its empirical robustness must be questioned. In what follows, I provide a brief description of each treatment. Table 7.1 supplements this description with a statistical overview of the treatments.

Test Treatment

I call the first four experimental sessions we ran the test treatment. They are sessions in which we tested the effectiveness of the experimental plan. The goal was to determine if subjects could understand the instructions and items on the questionnaires. We also used the sessions as dress rehearsals – events that allowed us to determine how much time we would need to activate the lab software, process subjects' consent forms, read instructions, collect questionnaires and process subject exits. In what follows, data from the Test treatment is not included.

WWB.org Treatment

This treatment is important for all experimental results bearing on the performance of WWB.org. In this treatment, subjects are instructed to use only WWB.org. This treatment provides an important baseline for testing claim about the site's effectiveness.

All Partners Treatment

In this treatment, subjects' lists contain all of the WWB network charter sites. This treatment provides a baseline for evaluating the operation of the network as a whole. With so many options, it is also possible to say that this treatment allows relatively high freedom of choice which marks it as a domain that is more likely than most to resemble normal usage conditions.

No Instructions Treatment

In this treatment, subjects are simply asked to find election information and we do not ask them to visit any particular site. Because of this lack of direction, we feel that this treatment provides effective inferential leverage on normal usage conditions.

Vote-Smart Treatment

With this treatment, we can compare the effect of WWB.org to a site offered with similar public-serving intent but a very different design. In this treatment, subjects have only WWB.org and Vote-Smart on their lists.

Fox Treatment

This treatment replicates the Vote-Smart treatment but now adds a popular commercial site, foxnews.org. At interest here is to see how evaluations of the .org sites react to the introduction of a .com site with high production values.

CNN Treatment

This treatment has only two sites on the subjects' list: CNN.com and WWB.org. Its purpose is to evaluate the impact of the .org site when a highly professional and well-known commercial site is available simultaneously.

I-Village Treatment:

This treatment replicates the CNN treatment but now adds another syndicated content site, I-Village.com. At interest here is to see how a non-profit syndicated content site does in the presence of a commercial site with the same design while document user reactions to both in the presence of the highly popular destination site, CNN.com.

Table 7.1. Overview of the treatments.

	CNN	Fox	I-Village	No Instr	Partners	V-Smart	WWB.org
Number	60	58	52	66	71	65	56
Dates administered	10/28, 10/31, 11/3	10/28, 10/31, 11/2, 11/4	10/28, 11/1, 11/3, 11/4	10/26, 10/28, 11/3, 11/4	10/24, 10/28, 11/3, 11/4	10/26, 11/1, 11/4	10/24, 10/28, 11/2
Length of viewing session	20	30	30	30	30	20	20
% female	33	52	44	38	59	45	61
%undergrad	85	84	92	83	90	75	71
%gets news online	80	79	81	79	83	85	89
% gets pol. info. online	60	55	35	53	42	57	50
% intends to vote	67	64	76	72	54	72	82
Ideology							
conservative	33	36	24	20	24	24	21
liberal	45	47	61	62	46	60	48
neither	22	17	16	18	28	16	30
Presidential preference							
Bush	29	28	16	23	17	14	25
Gore	51	59	72	57	57	52	48
Other/undecided	20	12	12	18	26	34	27

The value of experiments is that control and random assignment breed a clearer view of causal processes. The most commonly cited drawback of experiments is that subjects are likely to be the kinds of people who live near the places where experiments are held. Our study has both characteristics. Many of our subjects are UCSD undergraduates. When compared to the general population of the US, or just the

population of Internet users, our subjects tend to be younger, better educated, more liberal and less white. Having stated this, you will notice that on most other demographic criteria, there is not great variance. As a result, while the raw numbers produced by this group may not well represent the population at large, changes in the effect of a web site found across groups should not be so affected – the same kinds of people are in each experimental treatment. Note that in cases where the demographics of our subjects can lead to atypical responses, we can compare them to responses gathered in the Internet poll, which, while lacking experimental controls, features a more representative population.

Initial Awareness

Before moving to an analysis of how subjects responded to various web sites, it is useful to establish a benchmark for what their reactions mean. Table 7.2 reveals two important statistics. The first is the percentage of subjects who heard about each of the sites in the study; the second is the percentage of subjects who had used each of these sites before participating in the experiment. Note that these statistics are drawn from responses to a categorical question about familiarity in which subjects could choose one of three categories for each site used in their treatment. The categories are: I've used it to get information *about elections*; I've heard of it, but I've never used it to get information *about elections*; and I've never heard of it.

Site	Percent "heard of"	Percent "prior use"
Yahoo.com	100	28
AOL.com	100	12
CNN.com	95	31
MSNBC.com	97	25
ABCNews.com	93	12
MTV.com	92	9

USAToday.com	81	6
PBS.org	78	1
Foxnews.com	73	5
WashingtonPost.com	71	11
NYTimes.com	44	14
NPR.org	42	2
Oxygen.com	42	0
I-Village.com	34	1
Vote-Smart.org	15	3
WWB.org	5	0

Table 7.2. Initial Awareness of WWB Network Sites, percentages.

The table shows almost universal awareness of the most established .com sites. It also shows that the sites affiliated with a major newspaper or television news network were the most visited. In terms of awareness and prior use, the .org sites consistently trail the .com sites. Subjects were significantly less aware of Vote-Smart.org and WWB.org than all other sites, which is reflective of the fact that these sites engage in little or no self-promotion.

First Experimental Comparison

In the first of the two major experimental comparisons, I document how subject reactions to the studied web sites are affected by the introduction of additional sites. This first comparison includes the WWB.org, CNN, and I-Village treatments. In the comparison, I first isolate what happens to effects of WWB.org when I introduce a strong commercial site, CNN.com. I then identify the effect on both WWB.org and CNN.com of a syndicated content site's introduction, I-Village.

The idea behind this strategy is to distinguish site-specific reactions that do not change across treatments from reactions that do change. To the extent that reactions remain constant across treatments, we have stronger evidence that the observed effect

would also be realized under normal usage conditions. If, by contrast, a set of reactions changes across treatments, then the lesson is that at least one of the observations is unlikely to be seen under normal usage conditions. When this occurs, I will sometimes incorporate data from the user survey or Internet poll to clarify which of the divergent experimental observations is more likely to be what we would see under normal usage conditions.

Site visits

The first piece of evidence shows how the introduction of additional sites affects subject's willingness to visit the site at all. Figure 7.1 displays site visit by treatment. It shows that for the three treatments in the comparison, subjects visit all sites on the list. Note that we will revisit this topic to show how things change when the list of sites on subjects' instructions is much longer or when subjects get no instructions.

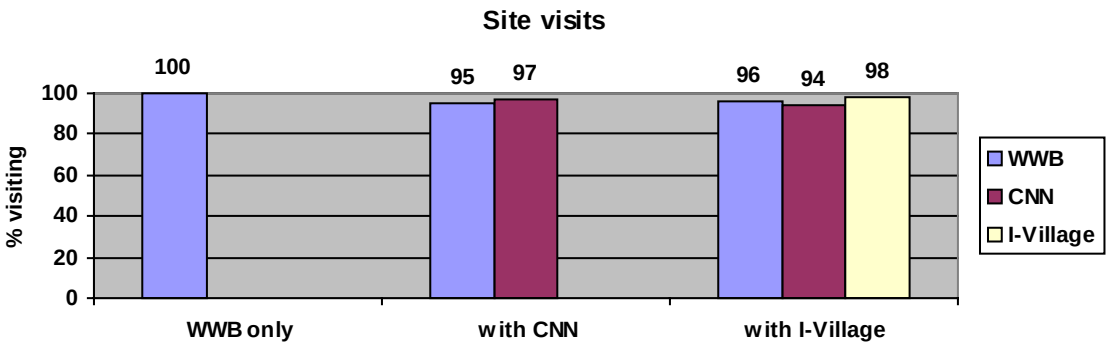


Figure 7.1. Site visits, in percentages.

New Information

The next demonstrations are culled from answers to a set of true-false questions on the post-viewing period questionnaires. The questions are largely the same ones that I used in the Internet polls – which allow for detailed comparisons between the two modes in future analyses. The first such statement we ask subjects to evaluate is. "I can use

[name of site] to find information that I have not seen elsewhere." Figure 7.2 displays the percentage of subjects responding "true."

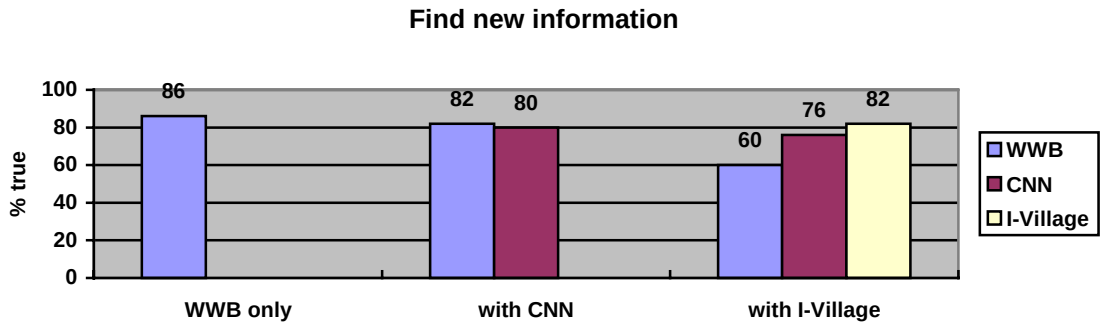


Figure 7.2. New information in percentages.

Subjects rate all three sites highly when it comes to new information. Subjects' evaluation of CNN's ability to deliver new information is not significantly affected by the introduction of I-Village. The same is not true for WWB.org. While including CNN on the instruction list does not change subjects' perception of WWB and new information, the introduction of I-Village corresponds to a sizeable increase. There are two lessons to draw from these variations.

First, they are to be expected, in part, because I-Village and WWB.org are primarily syndicated content sites – in the view of many viewers they are likely to be what economists call substitutes, and what lay people may call redundant. Moreover, since a syndicated content site draws much of its content from other sites, there was no reason to expect that they would do as well in this regard as a site that creates large amounts of content, like CNN.

Second, the fact that I-Village scores so much higher than WWB.org implies that subjects are more easily able to attribute having learned unique things from I-Village. From response to open-ended questions asked later in the interview, I contend that much

of this difference is due to the format of candidate issue comparisons and a candidate match utility of I-Village. Subjects liked the convenience of these instruments and, as I argue in more detail later, came away feeling that WWB.org lacked a page that helped frame the basic issue differences of the candidates. Whether WWB.org wants to incorporate such content depends on many factors and this data suggests that doing so may induce more users to feel as if they have come away with tangible new knowledge.

It is also interesting to note that subjects' views of WWB.org's ability to supply new information are roughly the same as was found in the Internet polls (83%) until I-Village is introduced in the experiment. A ready explanation for the drop is that neither the Internet poll nor treatments WWB or CNN gave subjects the ability to compare syndicated content sites face to face. Therefore, if users are readily familiar with a well-organized syndicated content site, we should expect their impressions of WWB.org to match those observed in the I-Village treatment; otherwise, it is reasonable to expect their impressions to more closely resemble those seen in the Internet poll.

Ease of Use

"I can use [name of site] to get the information I want quickly and easily" is the second true/false question subjects view. Table 7.3 shows the percentage of subjects responding "true."

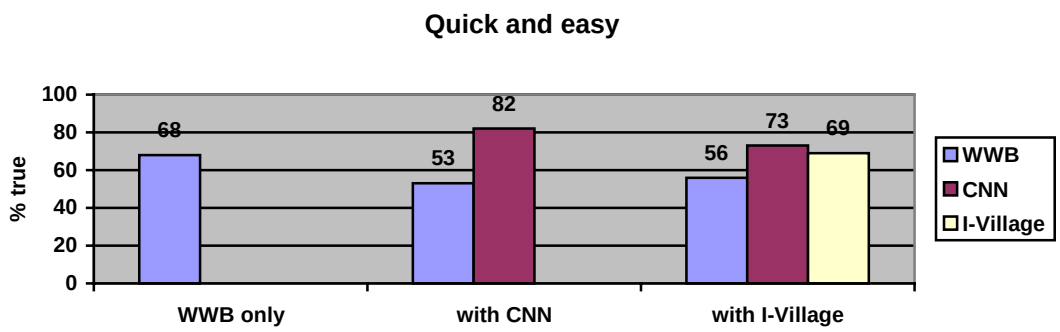


Figure 7.3 Ease of use, in percentages.

Subjects found CNN.com easier to use than the other two sites in this comparison. Subject evaluations of WWB.org on this dimension drop when they are able to view either of the other sites. As a result, I contend that the figures from the treatments with additional sites provide better representations of subjects' ease-of-use impressions under normal usage conditions. Again, WWB.org rates somewhat lower than the other syndicated content site and, again, when the subjects use the open ended questions to speak to us in their own words a common theme is differences in the presentation of candidate issue positions. In short, many users want a focal page where they can compare candidate issue positions quickly and then link to explanations of these positions if they are interested. I-Village provided one, WWB.org did not.

It is also interesting to note that the figures for CNN and WWB.org are lower than was observed for the same question in the Internet poll (I-Village was not highlighted in that study). While somewhat speculative, it is likely that the lower numbers here arise from subjects using the sites for longer periods – periods over which they are more likely to encounter a memorable difficulty with almost any site. Since people are not induced to spend 30 minutes on a short list of sites under normal usage conditions, it is likely that the Internet poll numbers provide a more accurate impression of these sites' ease of use. The experimental figures can, however, be treated as a lower bound on the ease of use impressions held by more frequent viewers.

Accuracy

The third true-false statement is: "[Name of site] provides accurate information." Figure 7.4 shows subject responses.

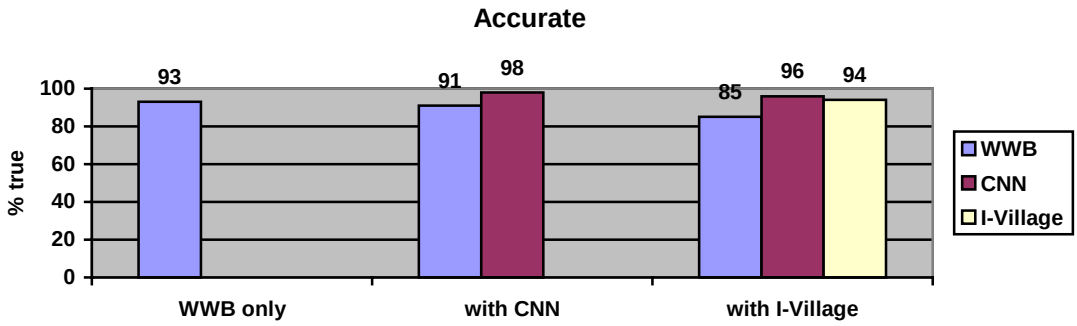


Figure 7.4. Accuracy, in percentages.

All sites in this comparison are rated highly for accuracy. The only movement across treatments is a subtle drop in subject evaluations of WWB.org. Our open-ended data suggests that the Rolling Cyber Debate is partially to blame here. It is not the formatting, Markle, or the network that subjects' found inaccurate. Instead, a number of subjects complained about the "canned" quality of candidates' RCD contributions – particularly Bush and Gore. While these contributions are no less canned than what appears on the other sites, it is clear that users walked into RCD with different expectations and were disappointed in the site for delivering "more of the same." In subsequent analyses of the open-ended questions, we attempt to determine the extent to which such complaints are driving the observed differences.

It is interesting to note that the accuracy figures shown here are actually higher than those observed in the Internet poll (WWB was viewed as accurate by 75%, CNN by 81% -- both were in the middle of the pack). It is likely that the longer time periods spent on the site gave users more data on which to base an evaluation. As a result, I would interpret these figures as better representations of the views of frequent users and the Internet poll data as more consistent with the impressions that these sites leave on more transient observers.

Want to Learn More

As was the case in the Internet poll, the next set of questions attempts to determine how the sites viewed affect subjects' subsequent political behaviors. The first such statement to which subjects responded was: "[Name of site] makes me want to learn more about the election." Figure 7.5 displays subjects' responses.

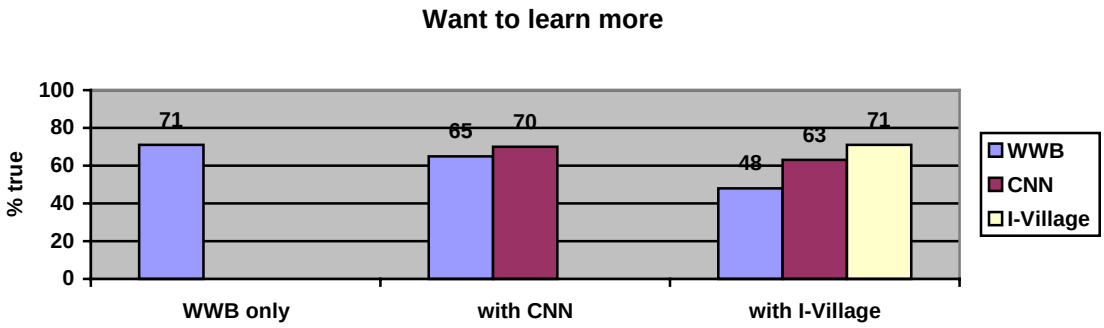


Figure 7.5. Want to learn more, in percentages.

It is clear that as sites are added, the extent to which WWB.org makes users want to learn more decreases. It is interesting to note, however, that by the time I-Village is introduced, both the WWB.org and CNN evaluation percentages converge to those viewed for them in the Internet poll. That being true suggests that the numbers viewed in the I-Village treatment better represent normal usage conditions. Moreover, our initial analysis of subjects' open-ended responses suggests that the formatting of information about the candidates, particularly on I-Village and that site's candidate match utility, accounts for much of the difference in how subjects view the sites.

Want to Talk More

We next asked subjects to respond to a question about a more interactive form of political participation: "[Name of site] makes me more likely to talk about elections with others." Figure 7.6 reveals subjects' responses.

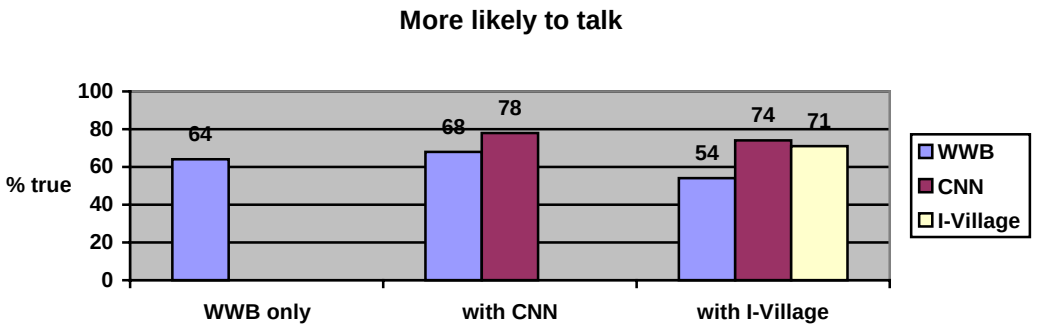


Figure 7.6 More likely to talk, in percentages.

In this case, the introduction of additional sites had only a limited impact on how subjects answered this question about any particular site. As was true above, WWB.org scores somewhat lower than the other sites in this regard.

Changes Candidate Evaluations

The battery of post-viewing period true/false questions ended with a question that I thought particularly important – the extent to which anything they saw on the site leads subject to change their impression of any of the presidential candidates. The specific statement they responded to was "It makes me think about at least one of the candidates in the presidential election in a new way." While sites need not explicitly attempt to change what voters think of candidates, the fact that a site can have this effect may say something powerful about the value of the site's content. Figure 7.7 shows subjects' responses to this question.

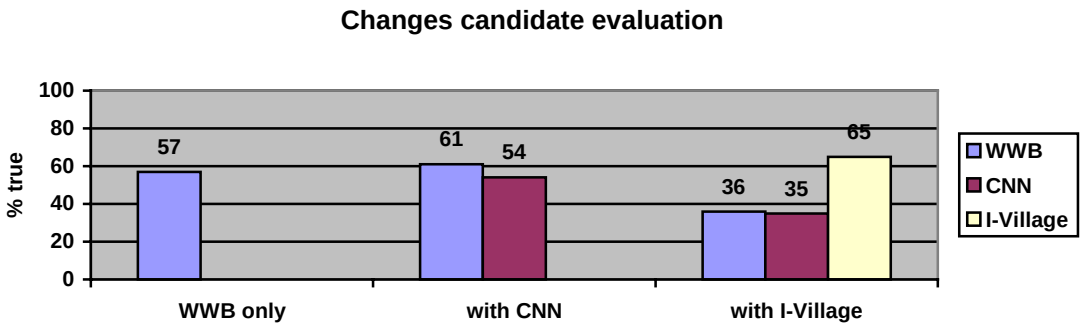


Figure 7.7. Changed evaluation, in percentages.

It is interesting to note here that across all of our treatments, 316 subjects viewed WWB.org and were asked this question about it. Figure 7.8 summarizes their responses. Approximately 50% of the subjects reported a change in how they viewed at least one of the candidates, with an even split in whether these revised evaluations were more positive or negative.

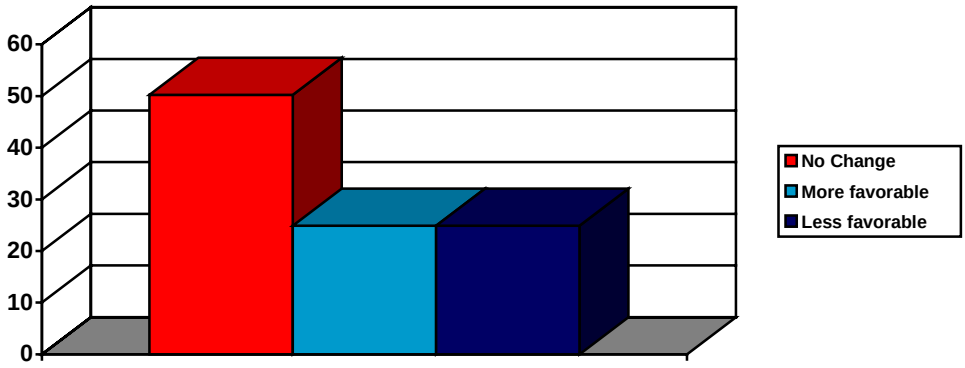


Figure 7.8. How one exposure to WWB.org affected candidate evaluations.

If we take seriously the view that the Internet was not a serious factor in the 2000 elections, findings such as those in last two figures are quite remarkable. They show that a single twenty or thirty minute viewing session induced a change in how roughly half of our subjects viewed at least one of the presidential candidates. That the I-Village number

is so much higher when all three are paired is due largely to the presence of I-Village's candidate comparison and candidate match utilities.

Summary Judgment

Later in the questionnaire, we asked subjects a few questions designed to discover their summary judgments of the sites viewed. The first such question was "Will you visit this site again (for either this election or a future one)?" Figure 7.9 reveals subjects' responses.

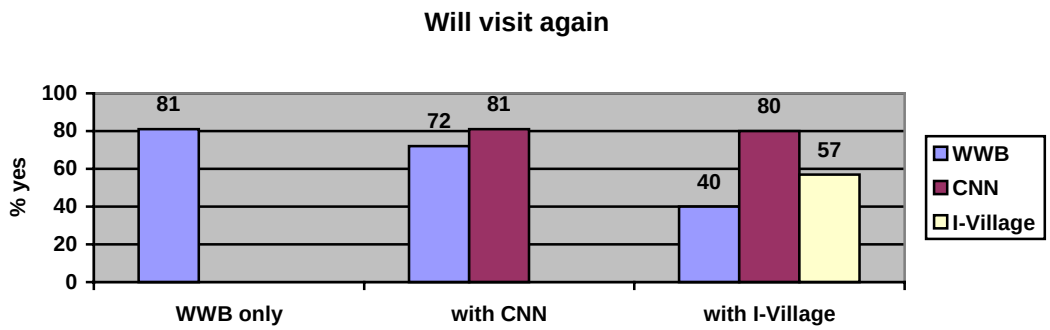


Figure 7.9. Revisitation intent, in percentages.

Two things in this table are of note. First, subjects' willingness to revisit WWB.org is impacted by the introduction of additional sites in a way than CNN.com is not. From a preliminary analysis of our open-ended data, and as supported by our findings in the "All Partners" and "No instruction" treatments" established, media-linked brand names are crucial determinants of which sites election information seekers visit. Nascent founders of the next generation of voter.com and politics.com should understand going in that they will encounter massive difficulty attempting to steer people away from sites such as CNN.com. Second, while WWB.org's score on this question is the lowest of the three sites, it is also useful to recall that subjects' initial awareness of WWB.org was

the lowest of the charter sites. That one viewing period induces even 40 percent of subjects to want to revisit is a testament to users' appreciation of the site.

Second Experimental Comparison

This second comparison includes the WWB.org, Vote-Smart and Fox. The sequencing is chosen to first isolate the effect on WWB.org of another publicly oriented dot-org site and then to identify the effect on both of a strong commercial site. The questions and statistics used to describe the effects of the experimental variation are the same as those used in the first.

Site Visits

Table 7.10 shows the percentage of subjects visiting each site in each of this comparison's treatments. In general, all subjects visited all sites. The exception was in the Vote-Smart treatment where a few subjects visited only one of the two sites.

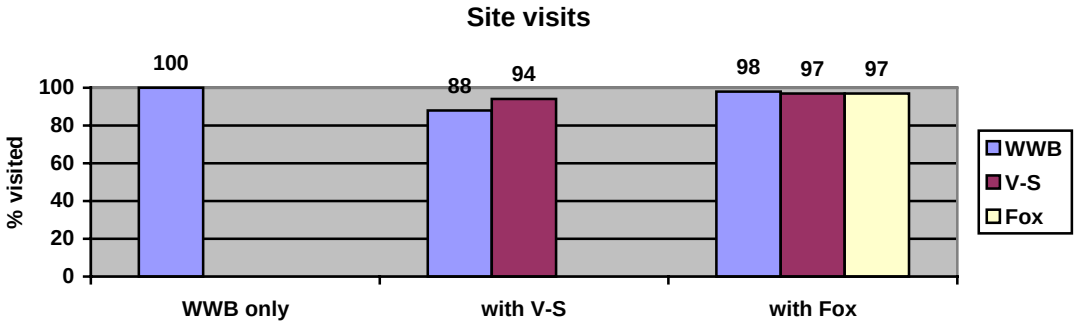


Figure 7.10. Site visits, in percentages.

New Information

Table 7.11 shows responses to the true-false question "I can use [name of site] to find information that I have not seen elsewhere." For WWB.org, subject responses when both sites are introduced do not vary markedly from subjects' responses when they view

WWB.org only. In particular, we do not see the substantial drop witnessed when another syndicated content site, I-Village, was introduced.

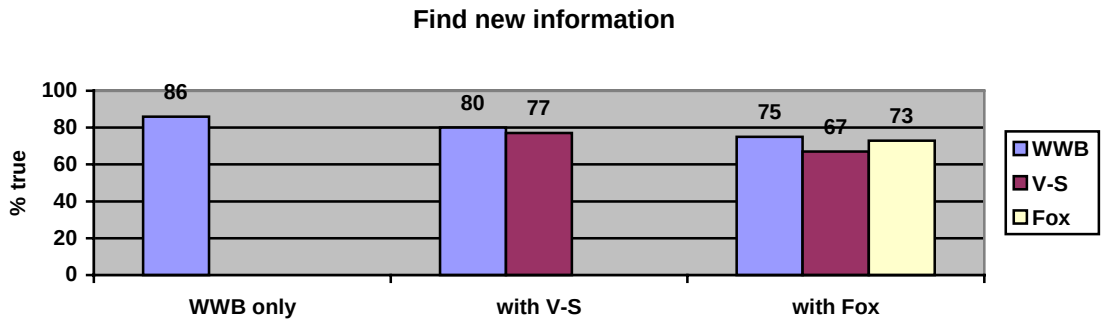


Figure 7.11. New information in percentages.

It is worth noticing that the Vote-Smart numbers in this figure tell an interesting story. To begin with, the Vote-Smart evaluations suffer a larger drop than WWB.org when Fox is introduced. Moreover, when we compare subject evaluations of this question to those offered in the Internet poll, the WWB.org and Fox percentages are relatively close (the WWB percentage here is 7 points lower, the Fox percentage here is 4 points lower). The Vote-Smart percentage, however, is 21 points lower. A likely explanation for this difference is that the Vote-Smart and Fox sites are substitutes for each other in a way that neither is with the WWB.org site. Only WWB.org is a syndicated content site, designed to send users to other sites for full functionality, Vote-Smart's design, while a hybrid, features numerous destinations for people seeking election information. So does Fox. As subsequent figures bear out, it appears that when Fox is introduced, Vote-Smart loses its appeal for many users. It seems as if, given the parallels in presentation strategy, many users opt for the polished, commercial site.

Ease of Use

Next, users respond to the statement "I can use [name of site] to get the information I want quickly and easily." In Figure 7.12, a familiar theme begins to emerge. Subject evaluations of WWB.org are resilient to the introduction of Vote-Smart and Fox, while the introduction of Fox has a large impact on how subjects evaluate Vote-Smart.

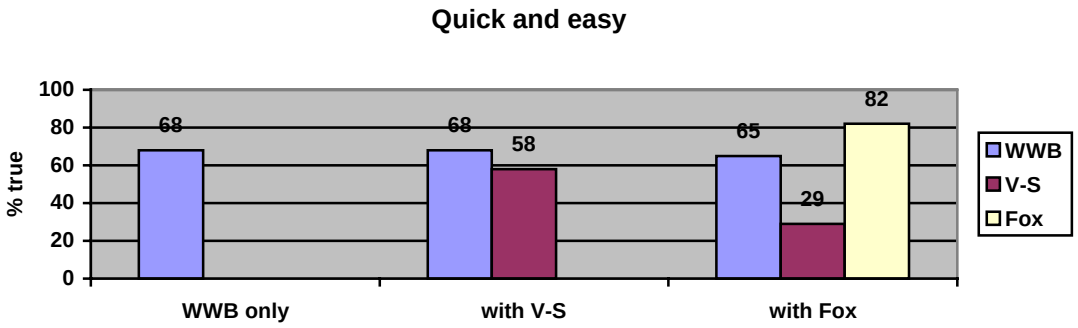
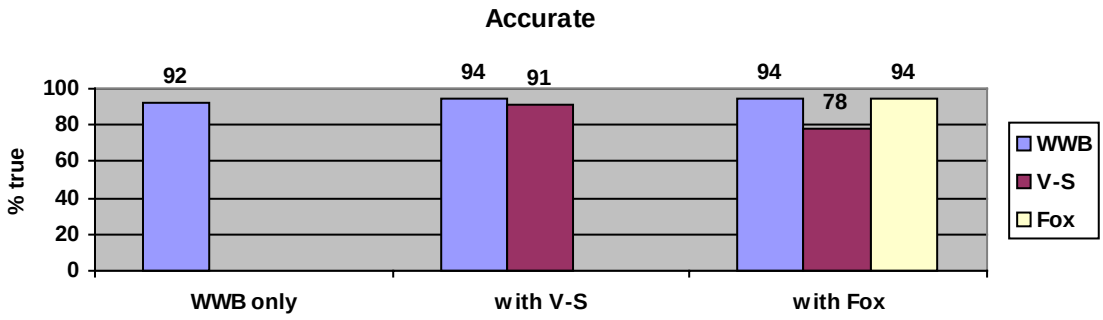


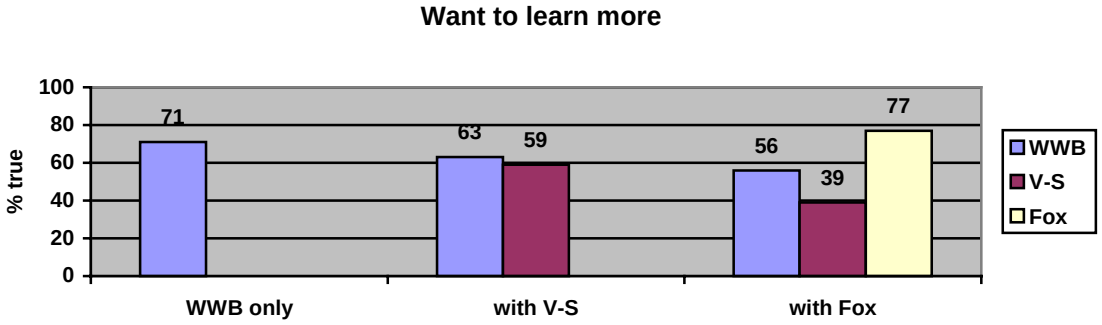
Figure 7.12. Ease of use, in percentages.

A lesson to be drawn from such findings, in my view, is this: in users minds destination sites and syndicated content sites are to a considerable degree categorized as distinct entities. Within each category, voters have a relatively easy time determining what they prefer – this contention explains why I-Village had a relatively large effect on WWB.org but not CNN.com on many dimensions and why Fox has such a large effect on user views of Vote-Smart while at the same time having relatively little effect on viewers of WWB.org. To the extent that the public consciousness focuses on sites with familiar and media-linked brand names, this categorization would seem to limit the potential of .org *destination sites* – from the viewpoint of many of our subjects they are not able to compete. While this explanation bodes well for the WWB organizing strategy at present, the outlook would change if brand-name syndicated content sites became more of a political information fixture in the future.

Accuracy, Want to Learn More, More Likely to Talk

Next, subjects were asked to respond to the claim "[Name of site] provides accurate information." Figure 7.13 displays the percentage of subjects who responded "true" to each question. In each case, WWB.org and Fox are rated highly and, in a now familiar pattern, so is Vote-Smart until Fox is introduced. It is also interesting to note that the Fox numbers are generally similar to those experienced by CNN in the first comparison.





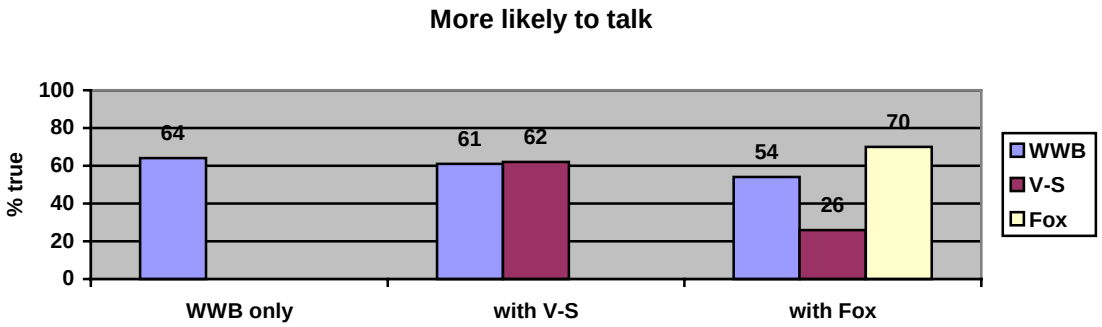


Figure 7.13. User evaluations in percentages.

Changes Candidate Evaluations

The battery of post-viewing period true/false questions ended with the question "[Name of site] makes me think about at least one of the candidates in the presidential election in a new way." Figure 7.14 shows subjects' responses to this question. Again, a single viewing period produces changed evaluations for almost half of the subjects whose responses are depicted in the figure. Unlike previous analyses, however, the introduction of Fox has a large negative impact on both WWB.org and Vote-Smart. It is worth noting here that in a more detailed analysis, the average amount of time subjects spent on Fox during the Fox treatment (13.51 minutes) was approximately equal to the amount of time spent on the other two sites combined (15.06 minutes.)

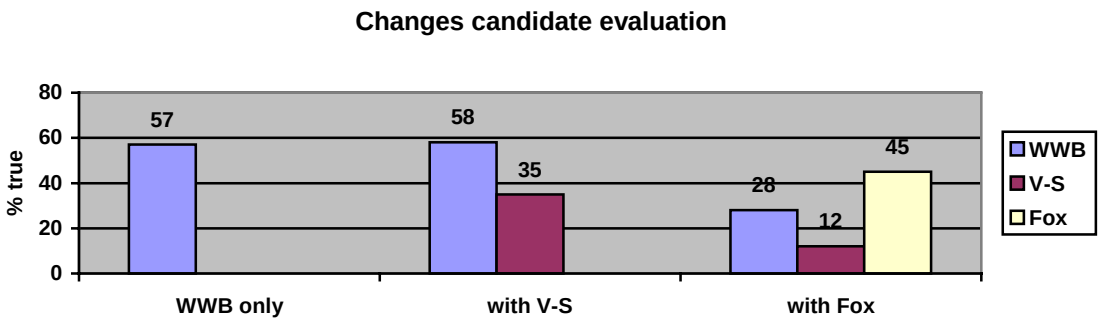


Figure 7.14. Candidate evaluation changes, in percentages.

Summary Judgment

Finally, we asked subjects to respond to the question "Will you visit this site again (for either this election or a future one)?" Figure 7.15 shows the percentage responding true. Here, as in the first comparison, introduction of any other site drives down respondent willingness to revisit WWB.org. Of interest is the fact that without another syndicated content site in the mix, the responses here for WWB.org never drop to

the low level experienced with the introduction of I-Village. Fox, like CNN, does very well on this dimension while Vote-Smart is comparable to WWB.org before Fox is introduced and does far less well after.

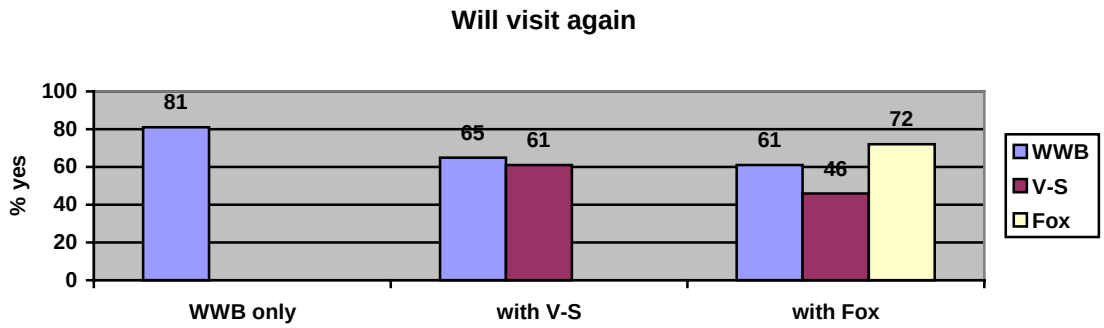


Figure 7.15. Revisitation intent, in percentages.

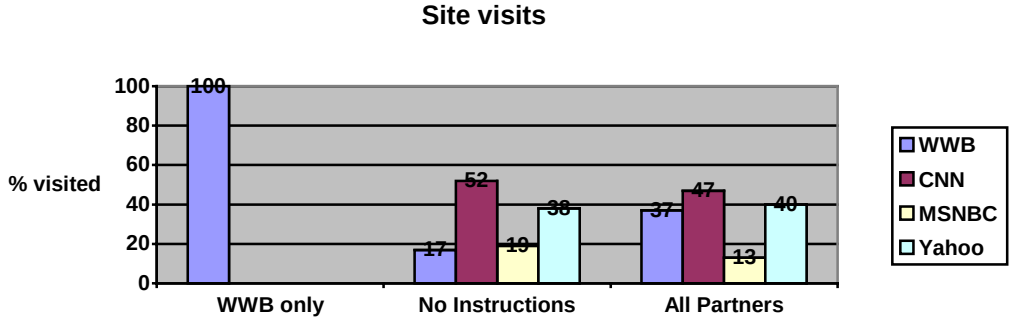
Extreme Experimental Treatments

I end this part of the analysis by comparing the findings described above with those found in our "extreme" experimental treatments – All Partners and No Instructions. In one sense, the No Instructions treatment most resembles normal usage conditions, so we ought to learn a lot from it. Unfortunately, the treatment's virtue is also its vice – with no instructions, you cannot expect subjects to visit the sites that you analyzed elsewhere. In the All Partners treatment, the stated problem is slightly ameliorated but at the cost of giving subjects an actual list, albeit a long one.

To simplify the presentation, I present the results from these treatments alongside results from the first comparison for WWB.org and CNN.com. I choose the former because it is a focal point in the evaluation; I choose the latter because it was the best known of the sites we tested.

It does not give a great deal away to reveal that the largest difference in observed behavior comes in the form of site visits. Figure 7.16 shows that while CNN is visited by

about half the subjects in the extreme treatments, WWB is visited by only 1 in 4. It should be noted that WWB.org did much better here than I expected, but for reasons that I admit to not anticipating. For example, in both extreme treatments I added a question asking subjects to describe how they chose which sites to visit. In the "All Partners" treatment, I learned that many visited WWB.org (most for the first time) because it was a dot-org and because they were intrigued by the name. In the "No instruction" treatment, the surprisingly high number of visits was, I learned, due to the fact that I asked about all WWB network sites in the pre-viewing session questionnaire and a number of people remembered the WWB.org name when it came time to choose a site in the viewing period. This unanticipated consequence was, in my view, a necessary one as it is important to establish subject's initial awareness of a site when attempting to interpret their subsequent reactions.

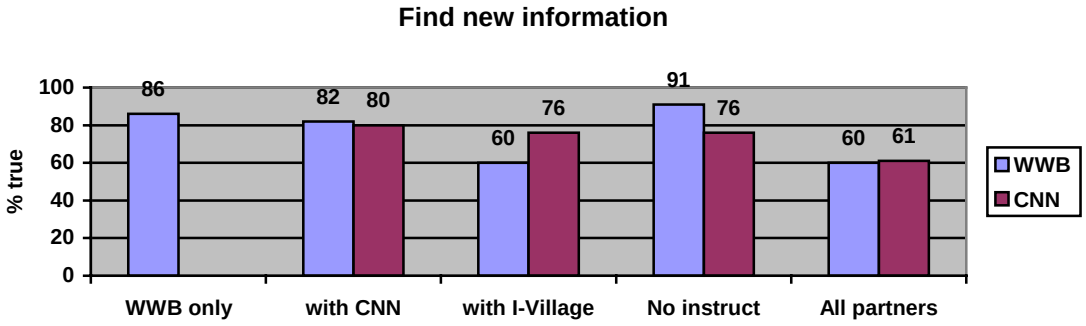


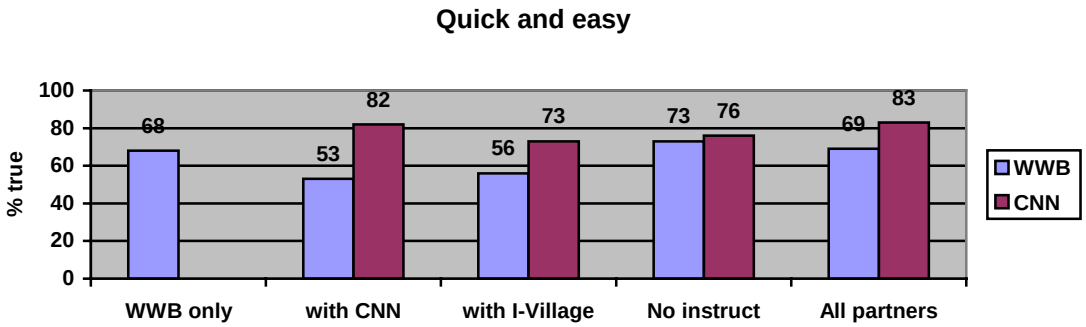
	WWB Only	No Instructions	All Partners
Total # subjects	56	66	71
Visited WWB	56	11	26
Visited/asked CNN		21/40	16/34
Visited/asked Yahoo		10/26	15/37
Visited/asked MSNBC		5/26	5/37

Figure 7.16 Site visits in percentages.

Because far smaller numbers of subjects visited the named sites in the extreme treatments, the figures that emanate from them should be treated as if they have greater measurement error.

Figures 7.17 and 7.18 shows the data for the extreme treatments side by side with data from the first experimental comparison for WWB.org and CNN.com. For "finding new information," "ease of use," "accuracy," "will visit again," and changing candidate evaluations, the sites' approval ratings remain about the same or increase in the extreme treatments. Indeed, they approach levels observed in the Internet poll. I would, however, not invest a great deal in these new numbers as they are based on a relatively small set of observations.





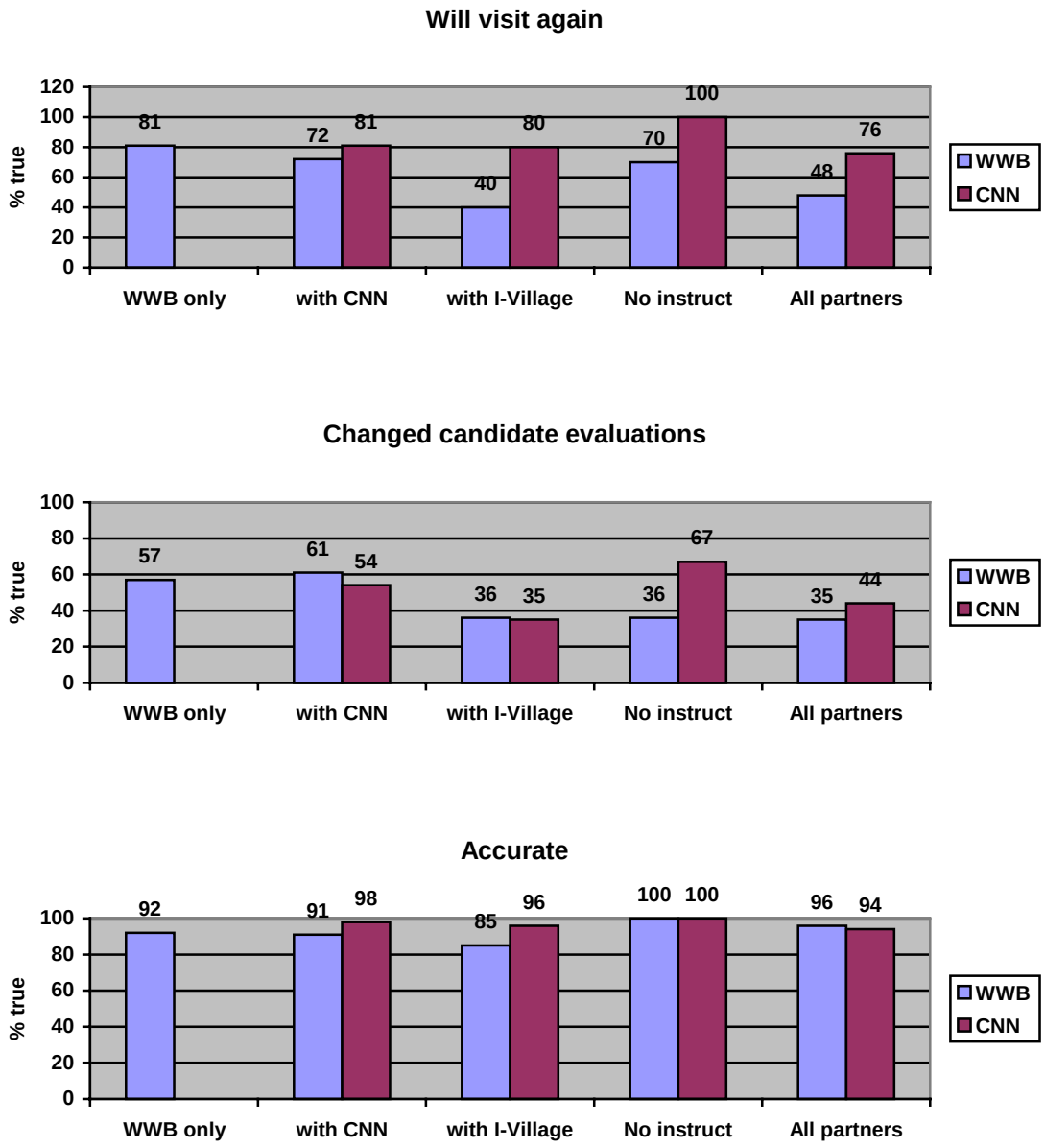


Figure 7.17. Extreme condition user reactions in percentages.

By contrast, the extent to which subjects rate the sites as making them want to learn or talk more decreases as more sites are added. While these figures too are based on low numbers, such personal evaluations may in fact be reflective of the effect of any particular site under normal (i.e., uncontrolled) usage conditions.

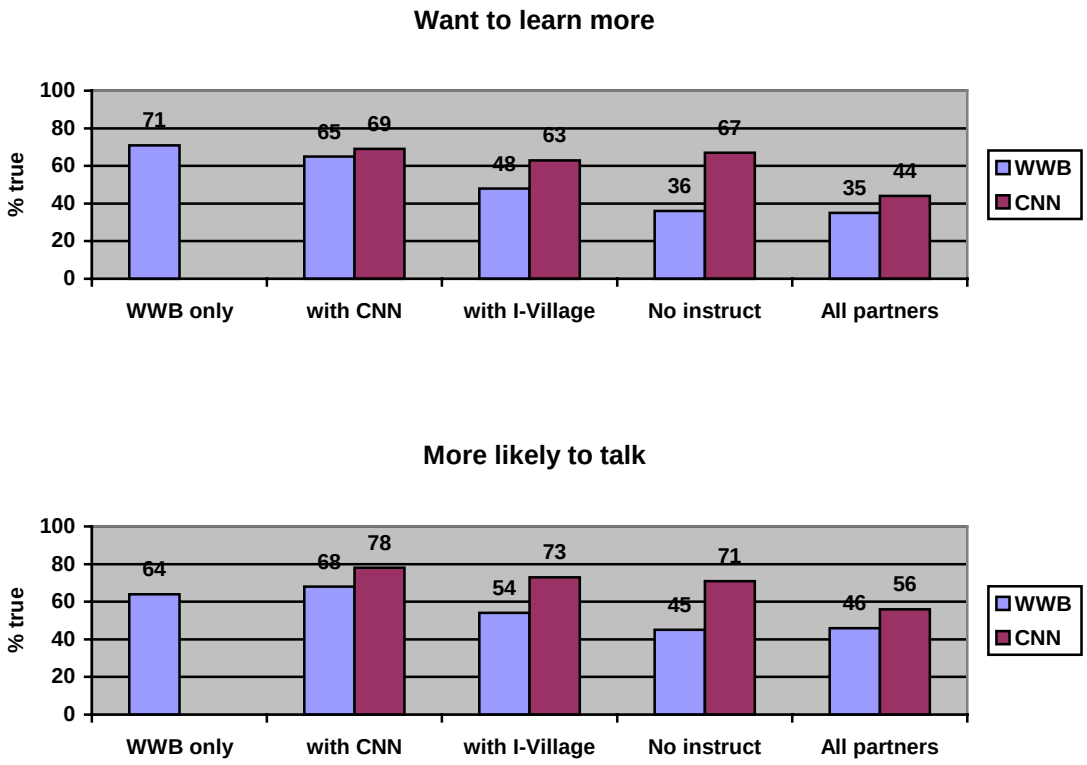


Figure 7.18. Extreme condition user reactions in percentages.

Insights from Analyses of Screen Captures

As mentioned above, the laboratory in which these experiments were conducted was designed with the explicit purpose of collecting as much data as possible about subject's Internet behavior. One of the two kinds of software installed on 4 of the laboratory's 25 terminal recorded subject screen captures. To keep the size of the resulting data file at a reasonable size, we programmed the utility to record a capture every 20 seconds. So for each experiment with a 20 minute viewing period we have 60 screen captures per subject and for every experiment with a 30 minute viewing period we have 90 screen captures per subject. We collected such captures from 99 subjects – those who unknowingly sat at the terminals with the screen capture recording software. In what follows, I answer some questions about the functionality of specific WWB.org pages

using this data. The analyses that follow are based on a grand total of 7,740 screen captures. Figure 7.19 shows one of them.

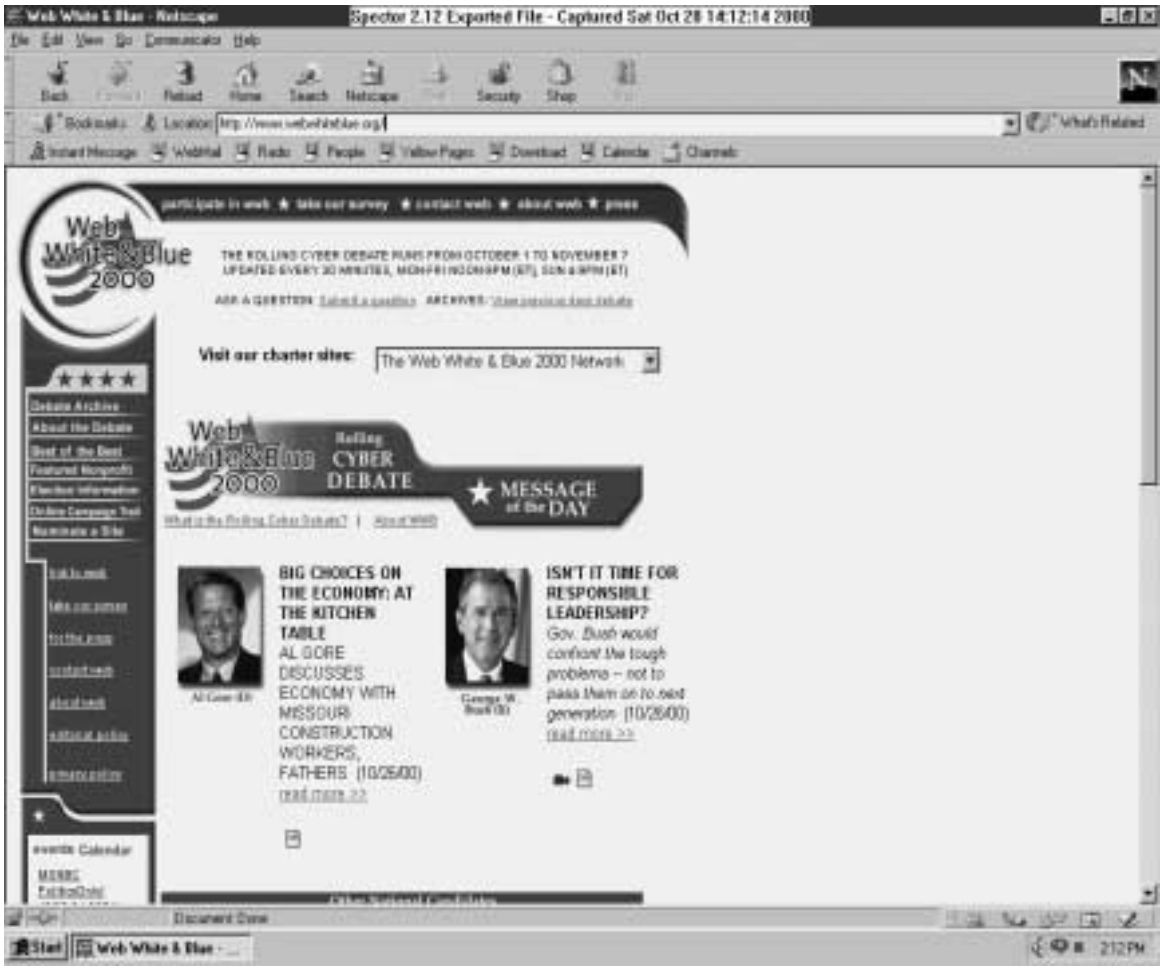


Figure 7.19. A screen capture.

In these analyses, I am very conservative in drawing conclusions. I do so because scholarly analysis of such data is infrequent and there are not, to the best of my knowledge, established protocols for coding the data. In the coming months, as my efforts turn towards more scholarly questions, I intend to develop a reliable protocol so that we may learn more from this rich set of observations.

Which WWB.org Pages Held Viewer Attention?

Table 7.3 provides an estimate of which WWB pages held viewer attention for at least sixty consecutive seconds. The estimate is a rough one based on data from screen captures taken every 20 seconds from 99 randomly selected experimental subjects. The table includes all WWB.org pages in the sample viewed for at least 60 seconds on at least two separate occasions.

Page Name	# Views	# Views longer than 60s	% of views > 60s
Bush MOD	38	22	58
Trail	17	7	41
Gore MOD	38	15	39
Archived Bush QOD	23	6	26
Bush QOD	20	4	25
Buchanan MOD	11	2	18
Archived Gore QOD	29	5	17
Gore QOD	27	3	11
RCD	27	2	7
Archived QOD (all)	199	11	6
Home Page	180	4	2

Table 7.3. Long page views from screen capture sampling.

The table reveals a difference in the functionality of WWB.org pages. It shows for example, that viewers of Bush pages were more likely to linger on those pages than were viewers of Gore pages. This finding supports the conclusion that users found the Bush contributions to the Rolling Cyber Debate more interesting, on average, than the Gore contributions. Peter Orvetti's "Online Campaign Trail" generated relatively low traffic, but a sizeable chunk of those who viewed it were enthralled. The length of these page views was among the longest in the entire sample. On the other end of the ledger is the WWB.org home page. Its functionality was clearly different with almost no one staying on it for long.

Which WWB.org Pages Led Viewers to Leave the Site?

There is no hard and fast empirical rule about the moment at which a user will leave a site. That is, there is no set amount of seconds or minutes after which people leave regardless of their experience with the site. There is, however, a strong theoretical basis for understanding a central principle that determines when and why a subject stops viewing. In short, we expect a user to leave a site the moment they find something more interesting to do – whether the new target of their attention is another web site or a non web-related activity. While there are many reasons that a "something else" can appear to be relatively interesting, I think it useful to place these things into two categories: (1) the "something else" seems like it will provide the user with something he or she wants and does not have, (2) the web site he or she is currently viewing is no longer meeting his or her expectations.

The page level data that we have can provide information about which parts of a site are the doors through which users exist. We can further distinguish between different types of exits. In particular we can distinguish between terminal exits and non-terminal exits. I define a terminal exit as the last page on a site that the user views. A page is counted as having a terminal exit only if the user goes to another site and does not return. An exit from the site is non-terminal if the user exits the site only to return before the end of the viewing session (e.g., a user goes from Bush's MOD on WWB.org to the Bush site, later in the session he or she returns to WWB.org). I define an exit as neither terminal nor non-terminal if the viewing session ends while the subject is on a site. This distinction is important because finding that a particular page is more likely than others to result in terminal exits can be an important indicator of what parts of the site drive

viewers away. Of course, it is possible that a user could intend to return to the site and run out of time. This possibility should not bias the presentation, however, as the design is not biased towards a terminal exit appearing on any particular page.

Table 7.4 uses the page view sample described above to give estimates of the kinds of exits the WWB pages produce. Recall that this table is taken from the viewing sessions of 99 subjects spread across all treatments with data gathered from screen captures taken every 20 seconds. It should, therefore, be treated as a rough estimate of actual entry and exit patterns.

	Initial Entry	Any Entry	Any Exit	Terminal Exit
Home Page	11	67	40	16
Gore MOD	2	3	5	2
Bush MOD	1	3	2	2
BOTB		7	9	7
CNN-RCD page		6	6	1
Archive pages		4	9	
Gore QOD		2	5	4
RCD		2	2	2
State		2	5	1
End of time terminated session				17

Table 7.4 Sample Entry and Exit Data

From this sample, we can see a dichotomy in the pages that led to a high number of terminal exits relative to total exits. The Best of the Best page produced a high ratio of terminal exits to total exits. This suggests that the page was functioning as intended; it sent subjects to sites where they presumably found something of interest. The same was true of the Bush and Gore specific pages, with supplementary analysis showing many of these exits going directly to the candidates' own web sites. On the other side of the ledger were the WWB.org home page, the version of that page as it appeared on CNN.com and the state page. All three induced users to leave but only temporarily in a large majority of cases.

Which Pages Kept Viewers on the Site?

With the screen captures, I can estimate the sequence of moves that WWB.org users made within the site. Analyzing such data shows that some pages were exceptionally good at steering users towards the site's original content. I refer, in particular, to the page called "debate." This page lists the previous days of the Rolling Cyber Debate and the topics covered in that day's MOD and QOD. In our sample of screen captures, that page was viewed 68 times. In only one case was a screen capture of this page followed by a screen capture of any other site (i.e., there were no exits of the type described above.) In 43 cases, the next screen captured was one of the archive pages. In the other 24 cases, the next screen captured was another part of the site. This page was very effective at drawing people to RCD content and keeping them on the site. The page labeled directory, a page that gave links to information about the states, had a similar effect with 19 of its 21 visits followed by another page on WWB.org.

Insights from Experimental Usage Statistics

In addition to gathering screen captures, we also programmed the laboratory's 25 terminals to record many details of the viewing session, including the exact sequence and timing of page views. The data allows us to answer detailed questions about why users spend particular amounts of times on certain pages and on certain sites. For the purpose of this evaluation, we use the data to demonstrate an important difference in viewing behavior as it might be experienced in common marketing surveys and viewing behavior as it might be experienced under normal usage conditions.

How Experimental Variations Affect Time Spent on Individual Sites

	WWB	CNN	I-Vill	V-S	Fox	No Inst	All Part
Total Time	20	20	30	20	30	30	30
WWB	12	6	5	6	6		2
CNN		13	12			7	4
I-Village			13				
Fox					14		2
V-Smart				12	9	2	
ABC						1	3
AOL							6
Excite							3
MSNBC						2	
NPR							2
Oxygen							2
PBS							
Wash Post						2	
Yahoo						2	2

Table 7.5. Time Spent on Studied Sites By Treatment.
(Data coded in minutes, fractional minutes coded as whole minutes, average rounded to the nearest minute). All empty cells represent average viewing time of less than 1 minute

Table 7.5 shows how the introduction of additional menu items affects the average amount of time that subjects spent at each site. As we should expect, the amount

spent at any particular site on the subjects' instruction list decreases as additional sites are added to that list. Of interest is any difference in the rate of decline.

For WWB.org, the news is that if the site is on the subjects' menus, they visit it and spend a few minutes, though the rate of decline in time spent is steeper than is the case of the experiment's other two focal sites, CNN and Vote-Smart. When WWB.org is the only site on the subjects' list (treatment W), they spend 12 minutes on the site. The remaining time is split between sites to which WWB.org is linked and sites sought by those who become dissatisfied. When our list contains two sites (treatments C and V), the time spent on WWB is halved. In both cases, the alternate site (CNN and Vote-Smart, respectively) draws twice as much attention. When a second alternative site is introduced (treatments I and F), subjects reduce time spent on WWB.org from 30% of the viewing period (6 of 20 minutes) to 17-20% of the viewing period. In each case, WWB.org is the least viewed of the three sites, and its decline from the two-site treatments to the three-site treatments is the most severe. If this seems alarming, it is useful to recall that WWB.org is, of all the sites in such treatments, the one whose design most resembles a pure form of content syndication. As a consequence, it is not meant to hold users in the way that CNN and Fox are. Also of note is the fact that WWB.org attracts as much attention as many of the partner sites in treatment P, when experimental menus consisted of all WWB partners.

For the WWB network the news is that the network grabs and keeps attention. In most treatments, subjects choose to view network sites at least 90% of their time. The one exception is in the treatment where subjects are given no menu of sites with which to work. In this case, network sites occupy 58% of subjects' viewing time. In other words,

subjects spend 58% of their time at the 18 WWB network sites, splitting the remaining 42% of their time between the billions of other sites on the web. This final statistic suggests the centrality of the network in users' thoughts when they are driven to seek political information from the Internet. The network offers a range of complementary products that interest a large part of the user universe.

Findings from the Experiment's Open Ended Responses

All of the questionnaires that we handed to subjects provided opportunities for subjects to react to what they saw in their own words. Some themes emerge that are either directly relevant to the future of WWB or should force us to think carefully about some of the categorical findings displayed in this and previous chapters. The following are, in my view, the headlines of that data.

- **Consider reformatting the RCD archive page.** The page-level analysis of WWB.org revealed the effective functionality of the RCD archive page. It was a place where people came to search the archives, and returned after viewing a particular day's debate to find other days. It was also not a site that resulted in many terminal exits, which suggests that it helped users find what they were looking for. The open-ended responses, however, revealed a common critique of WWB. Nowhere does the site present in summary form the content of the Rolling Cyber Debate. If one chooses, there are many ways in which to respond to such demands. At one extreme is to feature contribution synopses on a single page. Other sites (e.g., Fox and Vote-Smart) offer simple utilities for comparing candidate issue positions. Another, and in my view more practical idea is to amend the current format. Instead of listing debate topics next to the dates, include a little more content on the page – such as who contributed and the title of their contribution (for MOD's) or the key clause of its opening sentence (for untitled rebuttals and QOD responses). Such a move would give users a more useful birds eye view of the debate and would allow those who are interested in utilizing the utilities a more effective roadmap for so doing.

- **Subjects liked "candidate match" utilities.** Two studied sites, Vote-Smart and I-Village, featured Candidate Match programs – utilities in which users can see how their own issue positions compare to those of the candidates. Whether such utilities are better characterized as gimmicks or useful candidate evaluation

devices is for others to decide – bottom line in the experiments is that the utility was very popular—particularly for people who were not following the election closely. Looking beyond presidential elections, such utilities may have analogous appeal on other races or on legislative debates.

- **Why Vote-Smart fared well in the Internet Poll but was savaged in Experimental Assessments.** A common denominator in subjects' negative assessments of vote-smart was difficulty of use. Apparently, this difficulty became more obvious when subjects were encouraged to comparison shop (i.e., when they found out that Fox and WWB.org was easier to use, they bailed on Vote-Smart). This kind of reaction did not occur in the Internet poll, where Vote-Smart was highly regarded. The difference is likely due to two factors: the difference in the demographics of the Internet poll respondents and the experimental subjects *and* the ability to do instant comparison-shopping in the experiments. How much each factor contributes to the difference requires further examination of both data sets. To me, however, it reveals the dangers of drawing conclusions from common forms of market research –studies that do not explicitly incorporate the fact that actual users can and do "change the channel" at any moment and for the slightest reason.

-

Appendix 1 to Chapter 7: Instructions to Subjects

Internet Study

[Supplies: consent forms, money, questionnaires, subjects' instructions, box of pens, receipt book, flyers]

[Make sure that Data recording software is operative.]

Upon entry into the lab.

Please have a seat at one of the terminals. The study will begin in a few minutes. While you are waiting, please read and fill out this consent form. If you agree to its terms, please sign the consent form. We will collect all of the consent forms in a few minutes. Please do not use the computers until we ask you to do so.

[Ensure that friends do not sit next to one another. Start seating people at Terminal 1, 2 and upwards, etc. Distribute consent forms.]

The study will begin at [time + 5].

[Collect the consent forms.]

Welcome to the UCSD Political Science Computer Lab. Today's study is on the impact of the Internet. This study is for research purposes only and is intended to help scientists understand how people learn. Though some of the subject matter of today's study will be about politics, the study is strictly non-partisan and the data we collect will not be shared with any political or marketing groups. At the end of the study, I will pay you $35 for your participation. Today's study will last about an hour.

Today's study has two parts. First, each of you will fill out a short questionnaire. Then, I will ask each of you to use Netscape Navigator to find a particular kind of information from the Internet. After 20 / 30 minutes, I will announce that time is up. Then, I will pass out a second questionnaire. When everyone has finished, I will ask the group a few questions about your experience. Then, I will pay you for your participation.

It is important that you do not communicate with any other person in the study at any time. If you have any questions during the study, please raise your hand and I will assist you.

I will now pass out the first questionnaire. Please answer every question. Notice that this questionnaire is completely anonymous. We will keep this questionnaire separate from

your personal information. No one will ever be able to identify your questionnaire. Please respond to each question carefully, as the integrity of the study depends on it. When you are finished, please raise your hand and I will collect your study from you.

[Pass out questionnaire 1 and wait until everyone is done.]

[Collect questionnaire 1.]

Now I will distribute a list of web sites to each of you. Over the next twenty /thirty minutes, I would like you to use the sites on the list to learn as many new things as you can about the upcoming presidential election. Please begin now.

[Subjects surf. Sort the money.]

The viewing period is now up. Please turn your browsers off. I will now hand out the second questionnaire. Please respond to each question carefully, as the integrity of the study depends on it. When you are finished, please raise your hand and I will collect your study from you. When everyone is finished, I will ask a few questions of the group.

[Pass out questionnaire 2 and wait until everyone is done.]

[Collect questionnaire 2.]

Thank you for your participation. When telling others about the experiment, we would appreciate it if you would not discuss the details of this study with anyone until after Election Day. While we will not ask others to do the same things we asked of you, scientists will learn more from the study if less is said.

If you want to know about what we learned from this study, please contact us after November 20th and we will be happy to send you a brief report.

I will now pay you for your participation. Before you leave the lab, you must sign our receipt book and take a copy of your receipt. Thanks again for participating in our study.

[Pay each subject $35. Give each subject a receipt and a flyer.]

[Collect and save the data.]

Appendix 2 to Chapter 7: Sample Questionnaire – From "All Partners/No instructions" questionnaire version 2. (Version 1 asked about X and Y instead of Z and W.)

Internet Study Questionnaire – October 2000. Part 1. Version PN.

Please answer every question as carefully as possible.

1. What is your terminal number? PC_____
2. What is today's date? _____
3. At what time did this study begin? _____
4. Circle the correct response. I am a male. I am a female.
5. What is your age? _____.
6. In what race or ethnic group do you consider yourself? Choose the category that best applies to you.

   Black/African American Native American

   Latino/Mexican-American/Hispanic Filipino

   Asian/Pacific Islander White

   Other:_____

7. Which category best applies to you?

   UCSD undergraduate student UCSD graduate student

   UCSD staff Other (please describe):_____.

8. If you are a student what is your major (for undergraduates) or field of study (for

graduate students)? _____.

9. Which statement best describes you? Circle one

I am eligible to vote in the November election, I am registered to vote, and I intend to vote.

I am eligible to vote in the November election, I am registered to vote, and I do not intend to vote.

I am eligible to vote in the November election, but I am not registered to vote.

I am not eligible to vote in the November election. (Why? _____).

10. In the year 2000, have you:

- Contributed time or money to a political campaign? YES NO
- Posted a political sign or bumper sticker? YES NO
- Talked to others about the Presidential election? YES NO
- Talked to others about the Presidential debates? YES NO

11. What is your primary source of news?

Internet	Magazines	Newspaper
Radio	Television	Other:_____

12. Do you ever get any kind of news online? YES NO

[IF YES:] How often do you go online for this type of information? Circle one.

Everyday	3 to 5 days per week	1 or 2 days per week
Once every few weeks	Less often	Never

13. Do you ever use the Internet to get information about politics or elections?

YES NO

[IF YES:] How often do you go online for this type of information? Circle one.

Everyday	3 to 5 days per week	1 or 2 days per week
Once every few weeks	Less often	Never

14. When you use the Internet to get information about politics or elections, which web site do you visit most often?
_____.

15. Are there any other web sites that you would recommend to others as good sources for information about politics and elections? Name up to three. If you can think of more than three, just write the names of the three that you like best.
_____
_____.

16. For each of the following web sites, please place a check mark in the box that best describes you.

	I've used it to get information *about elections*.	I've heard of it, but I've never used it to get information *about elections*.	I've never heard of it.
AOL.com			
I-Village.com			
MSNBC.com			
MTV.com			
NPR.org			
PBS.org			
Yahoo.com			
CNN.com			
Foxnews.com			
Oxygen.com			
USAToday.com			
Washingtonpost.com			

ABCNews.com			
NYT.com			
Webwhiteblue.org			
Vote-Smart.org			

STOP HERE.
PLEASE RAISE YOUR HAND WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED.

Internet Study Questionnaire – October 2000. Part 2. Version PN.

Please answer every question as carefully as possible.

1. What is your terminal number? PC_____

2. What is today's date? _____

3. At what time did this study begin? _____

4. Of the web sites on your list, from which one did you get the **most *new*** information? _____.

5. Of the web sites on your list, from which one did you get the **least *new*** information? _____.

6. Using 25 words or less, what is the most important thing about the presidential elections that you learned from the web sites you viewed during this study? _____
_____.

7. Which of the sites on your list, which would you recommend to others as places to learn about politics and elections? _____
_____.

8. Here is a list of statements about webwhiteblue.org. For each statement, please circle the category that best applies. If you did not visit this site, check here [ ] and skip to question 9.

- I can use it to find information that I have not seen elsewhere. TRUE FALSE
- I can use it to get the information I want quickly and easily. TRUE FALSE
- It provides accurate information. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me want to learn more about the election. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me more likely to talk about elections with others. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me *more* optimistic about the political process. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me *less* optimistic about the political process. TRUE FALSE

- It makes me think about at least one of the candidates in the presidential election in a new way. TRUE FALSE

    - [IF TRUE:] About which candidates have your views changed most?

    Buchanan Bush Gore Nader Other:_____

    - How does you new view of this candidate compare to your old view?

    More Favorable Less Favorable

- What do you like most about this site? _____.

- In 25 words or less, what is the most important thing that you learned about the presidential election from viewing this site?_____

    _____.

- How would you change the site if you could? _____

    _____.

- Will you visit this site again (for either this election or a future one)? YES NO

9a. Here is a list of statements about the elections pages of msnbc.com. For each statement, circle the category that best applies. If you did not visit this site, check here [ ] and skip to question 9b.

- I can use it to find information that I have not seen elsewhere. TRUE FALSE
- I can use it to get the information I want quickly and easily. TRUE FALSE
- It provides accurate information. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me want to learn more about the election. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me more likely to talk about elections with others. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me *more* optimistic about the political process. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me *less* optimistic about the political process. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me think about at least one of the candidates in the presidential election in a new way. TRUE FALSE

    - [IF TRUE:] About which candidates have your views changed most?

    Buchanan Bush Gore Nader Other:_____

- How does you new view of this candidate compare to your old view?

  More Favorable Less Favorable

- What do you like most about this site?
  _____.

- In 25 words or less, what is the most important thing that you learned about the presidential election from viewing this site?_____

  _____.

- How would you change the site if you could? _____

  _____.

- Will you visit this site again (for either this election or a future one)? YES NO

9b. Here is a list of statements about the elections pages of Yahoo.com. For each statement, circle the category that best applies. If you did not visit this site, check here [ ] and skip to question 10.

- I can use it to find information that I have not seen elsewhere. TRUE FALSE
- I can use it to get the information I want quickly and easily. TRUE FALSE
- It provides accurate information. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me want to learn more about the election. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me more likely to talk about elections with others. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me *more* optimistic about the political process. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me *less* optimistic about the political process. TRUE FALSE
- It makes me think about at least one of the candidates in the presidential election in a new way. TRUE FALSE

  - [IF TRUE:] About which candidates have your views changed most?

    Buchanan Bush Gore Nader Other:_____

  - How does you new view of this candidate compare to your old view?

    More Favorable Less Favorable

- What do you like most about this site?
  _____.
- In 25 words or less, what is the most important thing that you learned about the presidential election from viewing this site?_____

  _____.
- How would you change the site if you could? _____

  _____.
- Will you visit this site again (for either this election or a future one)? YES NO

10. Now for some questions about the Federal Government. Which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington? Circle one.

Democrats Republicans Don't Know

11. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to override a presidential veto? Circle one.

50% plus one vote Three-fifths Two-thirds Three-quarters Don't Know

12. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not? Circle one.

The president. Congress The Supreme Court Don't Know.

13. What political office is now held by Joe Lieberman? Circle one.

Governor U.S. Congressman U.S. Senator Don't Know

14. What political office was once held by Dick Cheney? Circle one.

Secretary of Defense Secretary of Education Secretary of State Don't Know

15. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, and Independent or what?
_____.

[If you answered DEMOCRAT:] When you vote, how often do you vote for Democrats? Circle one.

All the time. Most of the time.

[If you answered REPUBLICAN:] When you vote, how often do you vote for Republicans? Circle one.

All the time. Most of the time.

[If you answered NEITHER Democrat or Republican:] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic Party or closer to the Republican Party or closer to neither?

Democratic Republican Neither

16. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Conservative or a Liberal?

Conservative Liberal Neither

17. What is your current marital status? Circle one.

Married Living together but not legally married Separated
Divorced Widowed Never Married

18. The next time you use the Internet to find news and information about the presidential election, which site will you visit first?

_____.

19. Are there any other web sites that you would recommend to others as good sources for information about politics and elections? Name up to three. If you can think of more than three, just write the names of the three that you like best.

_____
_____.

20. For whom do you intend to vote in the Presidential Election?

Buchanan Bush Gore Nader Other:_____

21. What is your annual income (before taxes)? Circle one.

Under $30,000 Between $30,001 and $70,000 Over $70,001.

22. In today's study, how did you choose which web sites to view?_____
_____.

STOP HERE. PLEASE RAISE YOUR HAND WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED.

Appendix 3 to Chapter 7: Sample Recruitment Flyer.

Participate in a UCSD Research Study Tonight!

Earn $35

What is the study about?

A Political Science professor is conducting a groundbreaking new study that will help researchers learn about the impact of the Internet. During the study you will be asked to find certain types of information on the Internet. You will then fill out a questionnaire about what you found.

What do I get for participating?

We pay you $35 for completing questionnaires. Each session lasts about an hour.

When do the sessions begin?

Friday, November 3: 12:00, 1:30, 3:00, 4:30.
Saturday, November 4: 4:00, 5:15, 7:00.
All sessions are held in Room 263 of CLICS at Galbraith Hall

Who can participate?

To participate you must be:

- At least 18 years of age.
- A U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
- Able to use Netscape Navigator without instruction.

If you do not satisfy all of these requirements, then you are ineligible for this study. You must present a government-issued ID as proof of age.

Where do I go?

The study is being held at the Center for Library and Instructional Computing Services. The center is housed at Galbraith Hall in Revelle College.

How do I sign up?

Set up an appointment at psexper@weber.ucsd.edu or by calling 858-822-4414.

We hope to see you tonight!

Appendix 4 to Chapter 7: Sample Sign-up sheet.

Experimental Schedule October 28, 2000

11:00am Session V-2
Galbraith Hall 263- Center for Library and Information Services

Name Qualifications Verified E-mail/phone

1._____
2._____
3._____
4._____
5._____
6._____
7._____
8._____
9._____
10._____
11._____
12._____
13._____
14._____
15._____
16._____
17._____
18._____
19._____
20._____
21._____
22._____
23._____

Appendix 5 to Chapter 7: Sample Consent Form

University of California-San Diego
Consent to Act as a Research Subject

Dr. Arthur Lupia is conducting a research study to find out more about how people use the Internet. You have been asked to participate because you are a member of the UCSD community.

If you agree to participate in this study, the following will happen to you:

1. You will be given a questionnaire about politics and the Internet.
2. You will be asked to use the Internet to find certain types of information.
3. You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire about what you found.
4. We will use the data gathered during the experiment to test hypotheses about how people use the Internet.

To participate, you must be an American citizen or a permanent resident, at least 18 years of age, and either a current UCSD student, a current UCSD staff member or the spouse or adult child of a current UCSD student or staff member.

You will be paid $35 for participating in this research and completing the questionnaires.

You may call the UCSD Human Subjects Office at (619) 534-4520 to ask about your rights as a research subject or to report research-related problems.

There will be no direct benefit to you from these procedures. However, the investigator may learn more about how to design more effective web sites in the future.

Dr. Lupia has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have questions or research-related problems you may reach Arthur Lupia at (858) 534-5799.

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty.

Research records will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep. You agree to participate.

Sign here:_____

Date:_____

Appendix 6 to Chapter 7: Sample Viewing Period Instructions

All partners treatment.

INTERNET STUDY INSTRUCTIONS

During the next thirty minutes, we want you to use the Internet to learn as much new information as you can about the candidates in the upcoming Presidential election.

Please use the following sites:

- election2000.aol.com,
- abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/
- www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/
- chooseorlose.excite.com/
- webwhiteblue.org
- pbs.org
- npr.org
- www.foxnews.com/elections/
- www.ivillage.com/election/
- www.mtv.com-choose or lose
- www.nytimes.com/pages/politics
- befearless.oxygen.com/politics
- www.usatoday.com/news/politics/campfront.htm
- washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/politics/

- politics. Yahoo.com/politics/

Use the site or sites that you think will teach you the most.

In 30 minutes, we will ask you to stop browsing. At that time, please turn your browser off and listen for subsequent instructions.

(No instruction treatment.)

INTERNET STUDY INSTRUCTIONS

During the next thirty minutes, we want you to use the Internet to learn as much new information as you can about the candidates in the upcoming Presidential election.

You can use any web site. Use the site or sites that you think will teach you the most.

In 30 minutes, we will ask you to stop browsing. At that time, please turn your browser off and listen for subsequent instructions.

About the Author

- Arthur Lupia, 36, is Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego. He holds Ph.D. and M.S. degrees from the California Institute of Technology and an undergraduate degree from the University of Rochester.
- He conducts research on how information and institutions affect policy and politics.
    - His books -- *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?*, *Stealing the Initiative: How State Government Reacts to Direct Democracy*, and *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality* -- are read around the world, his articles appear in influential political science, economics, and law journals, and his editorials are published in leading newspapers.
- His work has received multiple honors, including the National Academy of Sciences' Initiatives in Research Award for 1998. He is the only political scientist to whom the National Academy has ever granted such an award.
- He presents lectures on his research regularly, having made over 130 professional presentations in 11 countries since 1990.
- He serves on the Board of the National Election Studies and is a member of the American Political Science Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.
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- Professor Lupia, a native of Buffalo, NY, currently resides in La Jolla, CA.