**Twitter Poll: Before, During, and After the First 2016 Presidential Debate: Notes**

Dutton, W.H., with Ackland, R., Blumler, J.G., Reisdorf, B., and Rikard, R.V.

Quello Center, Michigan State University

September 27, 2016

Thanks to those who participated in our Twitter poll conducted before, during, and after the first 2016 US Presidential Debate on 26 September 2016. We sought to investigate citizens' expectations of the debate and the debaters and to what extent they were or were not met by their experience of watching the debate.

We are examining this in detail by capturing tweets from before, during and after the debate for content analyses. But as a complementary add on, we decided to informally poll Twitter users, using Twitter’s free polling function.

We posted five questions through our account @QuelloCenter on Twitter with the main hashtags of the debate: #Debates and #Debates2016. The five questions were framed as expectations (before the debate), perceptions (during the debate), and reflections (after the debate). The questions asked Twitter users about likely democratic benefits that could extend from live presidential debates, including whether the debaters or debate in general:

1. Helped them decide whom to vote for;

2. Showed that the debaters understood people like themselves;

3. Engaged them in issues of the debates;

4. Provided facts to support the debaters’ points; and

5. Clearly stated their points in an understandable way?

At the most general level, what we found was two-fold.

First, there was great skepticism coming into the debates. Most respondents did not expect the debates to help them decide whom to support, and were doubtful about all the potential benefits we posed.

However, secondly, there was some increase in positive perceptions during and after the debate. We did not survey the same individuals throughout as entirely different individuals were likely to have participated in each poll. Still, during and after the debate, more respondents agreed that the debates helped them decide whom to support than before the debates. More Twitter users thought the debaters might understand people like themselves; more felt the debate engaged them in the issues; and more felt the debaters stated their points in an understandable way. An exception was whether the debaters provided facts to support their points, where responses were more doubtful throughout all stages.

There are many limitations to our findings. For example, the sample is a self-selected sample of those who saw and chose to complete the survey. The number of responses ranged from 45-346 people, depending on the timing and question. So there is no scientific significance to the set of figures posted here, but the patterns are nonetheless interesting and encouraging. Maybe our more comprehensive analysis of tweets will support, counter, or refine these early observations from our informal poll.

You can see the results across time on the five questions here.

Results

Figure 1. Did Debate Help You Decide Whom to Support?

Figure 2. Did the Debaters Show They Understood People Like You?

Figure 3. Did the Debaters Engage You in the Issues of the Debate?

Figure 4. Did the Debaters Provide Facts to Support Their Points?

Figure 5. Did the Debaters Clearly State Their Points in an Understandable Way?