

**Online Debates: Using the Blog to Promote
An Engaged Electorate**

Miles Maguire
Assistant Professor
Department of Journalism
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
maguirem@uwosh.edu

Abstract

In 2004 three organizations in Oshkosh, Wis., embarked on an experiment in using the Internet to encourage public debate and civic engagement. They hoped that by sponsoring a series of online candidate debates using Web logs, or blogs, they could develop a new mechanism for political discussion that could provide benefits for voters, for candidates and for the campaign process. This paper describes the planning and execution of the online debates. It discusses a variety of indicators that were used to gauge the impact of the debates, including data gathered from the Internet using server analytic software, the results of an online survey, and interviews with candidates. Both candidates and voters saw benefits to the blog format, and there were indications that the blog format could enrich and improve local political discourse.

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Introduction

In its typical incarnation, a political Web log, or blog, is an online journal that allows its author to project highly personalized and often caustic comments mixed with assertions that may or may not be supported by facts. But one of the beauties of the blog (besides its low cost and extreme ease of use) is that it is a highly adaptable media form that can take many different shapes. While blogs are most frequently the product of a single voice, they can also be structured so that many individuals contribute their views. Deservedly blogs are known for split-second reactions driven by the rhetoric of attack, but there is no organic reason why they cannot operate at a slower pace or as a mechanism for measured reasoning. While blogs frequently function as an adjunct to traditional political journalism, fueled by news and analysis offered from the perspective of an outside observer, they can also be harnessed to serve as the actual locus of political debate engaged in by political principals, as opposed to their surrogates or acolytes.

This paper describes a pair of experiments in using the blog format as the mechanism for candidate debates. The experiments were conducted in Oshkosh, Wis., during fall 2004 and spring 2005, and sponsored by three groups: the League of Women Voters of the Oshkosh Area, the Oshkosh Public Library and the Oshkosh Community News Network, a 501(c)3 organization that was formed to try out new forms of online journalism. The sponsors of the debates believed that the online debate based on a Web log would provide a number of benefits, including the following:

- First, there would be benefits to voters in that the Web logs would be available at all times so that citizens unable to attend a live debate or watch it on televised

replay could use the online forum to learn about candidates all the way up to Election Day.

- Second, there would be benefits to candidates since the online forums would allow and even encourage candidates to take a longer time to think about their responses, would offer flexibility as to when they would participate, would make it easier for them to respond to other candidates, and would allow them to use hyperlinks to draw citizens' attention to additional research and information.
- Finally, the medium itself would affect both the nature of the campaign and its outcome by encouraging interactivity, creating a greater depth of information, and offering a new communication channel, particularly to younger voters.

The paper begins with background information on the evolution of political debates and media technology, describes the form and substance of the online debates, and concludes with an analysis of the experience of the Oshkosh debate participants, the effects of the debates, and the potential for future use of the Internet in this context. These three areas of expected benefits represent the research questions in this case study, which seeks to identify whether the blog format can provide benefits for voters, for candidates and for the vitality of local campaigning. To answer these questions, a variety of indicators are considered, including data gathered from the Web log using server analytic software, the results of an online survey, and interviews with candidates.

Debate background

Innovations in communications media have had a major impact on the content, format, and effects of political debates in the United States. Jamieson and Birdsell (1988) describe this evolution from print to television. Early face-to-face encounters were

supplemented by printed pamphlets. By doing so, debaters could educate voters about the issues and emphasize differences in competing positions in a way that could overcome the temporal and spatial limits of the actual event. Eventually radio broadcasts and television further altered the nature of political debate. Early radio broadcasts, for example, imposed time restrictions while also opening up the discussion to input from the audience. When it comes to televised debates, the two scholars argue that “the grammar of the televised presidential debates borrows from television’s game shows,” although influences of other television genres can also be seen, including the press conference, the sporting event, and the magazine news show. The choreographed conflict of a televised debate helps to explain its appeal for viewers (presumably voters), candidates, and outside observers such as the news media. As described by Schroeder (2000):

Live televised debates teem with dramatic conflict: interpersonal conflict between candidates; intrapersonal conflict within a debater’s psyche; the conflicts between expectation and performance, preparation and spontaneity. These juxtapositions make irresistible TV, for conflict is the engine that propels all narrative, be it political, journalistic, dramatic, or athletic. Television, with its hunger for personalities and its compulsion to reduce abstractions to particularities, is especially well-suited to the mano-a-mano clash of presidential debates.

In Oshkosh the League of Women Voters has a history of sponsoring televised debates with the local cable access television station, and these forums are a well-established part of the local campaign scene. While popular, televised debates have been faulted for numerous reasons. They can put an undue influence on appearance and personality, and their format is not necessarily conducive to the thoughtful exchange of ideas (Jackson-Beeck and Meadow, 1979). League leaders were well aware of the shortcomings of their format. “The TV format is a sound-bite format, which doesn’t lend

itself to an in depth discussion of an issue or a candidate's position," said Oshkosh League President Kathleen Propp. "Too often our short sound bite isn't fair to the candidate because it doesn't allow a candidate to fully say what they want to say."¹

The newest form of mass communications technology, the Internet, is changing the practice of politics in the United States, but its use is seen mostly in such things as advertising and fund-raising,² and its ultimate effects are far from clear (Tolbert and McNeal, 2003). Similarly the Internet's effects on the news media have been dramatic but are still playing out in a way that makes it difficult to predict their full scope.

Beginning in 1996 the Commission on Presidential Debates has been using the Internet to involve voters in the televised national debates. By 2004 the methodology had evolved to the point where more than 30,000 participants in all 50 states took part after agreeing "to watch the debates, talk about what they learned, and share their feedback" using an online form (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2004). Given that more than 125 million people voted in the 2004 presidential election (Holder, 2006), this relatively modest participation, although dramatically higher than the numbers reported in 1996, suggests that developing the Internet into a truly participatory and influential forum for political debate is still going to take some work.

One of the significant characteristics of the Internet as a communications medium is its decentralized nature. In the last few years it has given rise to a phenomenon known as participatory journalism, heralded in a 2004 book *We The Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* written by Dan Gillmor, a former technology columnist for the *San Jose Mercury News*. Participatory journalism is a form of reporting that has been enabled by the development of Web log software and that allows individual

citizens—whether trained as journalists or not—to take an active role in shaping the coverage of their communities. In 2002 Lasica predicted that the Web log, or “blog” would “drive a powerful new form of amateur journalism as millions of Net users — young people especially — take on the role of columnist, reporter, analyst and publisher.” The beauty of the blog is its extreme simplicity. Bloggers can make use of free software that requires no special computer skill and that allows them to set up an easily customized Web site in a matter of minutes. Once the site has been created, the blogger can make additional unlimited posts around the clock while also adding content in the form of images and links to other news sources. Two years after Lasica’s article, this predicted surge in blog activity had proved to be correct. As of October 2004, when the first online debate was under way, an estimated 12,000 new blogs were being created every day, one every 7.4 seconds (Sifry).

As thousands of citizen-journalists around the world have taken to the Internet, they have used the blog for many different things. McBride has noted that bloggers have taken on a variety of roles, including those of media watchdog, news maker, and story breaker (2004). But it is in the area of political engagement that many observers expect blogs to have their greatest impact. “One of the greatest byproducts of citizen journalism is a sense of civic involvement for people who have felt shut out of their own local politics and media,” argues Glazer. He cites examples of several “hyperlocal citizen media sites” that have sprung up around the country. For all this optimism about the potential of blogs and citizen reporters, however, it is not clear that this new form of journalism will live up to its promise. O’Brien describes a world of political blogging that

is dominated by harsh partisanship, the same kind of diversionary activity that has marked much political reporting of late and that could drive ordinary voters away.

The online debates: form and substance

It was against this backdrop of changing campaign tactics and media technology that the fall 2004 online debate was held. In organizing this debate, there were four issues that sponsors of online debates encountered: gaining participation, designing the site, coordinating the input of candidates, and drawing visitors to the site.

Gaining Participation. The primary sponsor of the online debates in Oshkosh was a newly formed and little known nonprofit organization. One of the keys to its success in getting candidates to participate in the debates was forming a partnership with more established groups, particularly the League of Women Voters. Candidates were contacted by postal mail and asked to participate. In a few cases, follow-up phone calls were made to secure commitments. Candidates were provided with an outline of the rules of the debate and assured that the sponsors would make accommodations for those who were less comfortable with the Web so as to ensure that technology would not unfairly disadvantage any participant. After the successful completion of the fall debate, many candidates in the spring debate were predisposed to participate. Both spring campaigns had large numbers of candidates, and not all chose to participate in the online primary debate. By the time of the general election campaign, all of the remaining candidates agreed to take part in the blog.

Designing the Site. The online debates in Oshkosh were carried out using Blogger software. To allow for multiple participants in the debate, the candidates were registered as “team members.” In addition, the photos of the candidates were inserted into

the template and linked to HTML pages that included background information. One of the limitations of the blog format is that its linear, chronicle design does not lend itself to easy cross comparison of candidate responses. To address this issue, the main debate page was supplemented with a page that featured a table of links allowing users to click directly to candidate answers to a given question.

Coordinating the Input of Candidates. It was very important to establish rules for how candidates can provide responses and then stick to them. There are places where sponsors may choose to be flexible, such as allowing a more technologically savvy staffer or volunteer to provide the actual input. This was the approach that we took, on the assumption that even if the candidate did not write the actual words of a response the candidate was still going to be held responsible for their substance. Some candidates were comfortable making entries directly into the blog, while others preferred to use e-mail and have the debate sponsor post the entry. A major issue was deadlines. Some candidates recognized that it was in their interest to post their response after the other candidates had already responded, and so they would hold back—or even allow a deadline to pass. The Oshkosh sponsors always noted when candidates missed response deadlines and also made the late responses less visible in the blog, by posting them as comments to entries stating that the deadline had been missed.

Drawing Visitors to the Site. Because the Internet is still an evolving medium that competes with traditional media, there may be obstacles to drawing visitors to an online debate site. In Oshkosh the dominant news medium, a local daily newspaper, imposed a news blackout on the online debate. The editor of the paper wrote a column criticizing the role of blogs and saying they were polluting the political scene.³

Fortunately the sponsors of the debate were able to draw coverage from public radio and one of the local television broadcasters. The online debate was also mentioned on the local cable access television outlet. Still the most successful method for drawing visitors to the site was e-mail.

The first debate involved four candidates for the 54th District seat in the Wisconsin State Assembly, a district that includes most of the city of Oshkosh and some adjoining areas. The candidates were incumbent Republican Gregg Underheim and three challengers: independent Dan Carpenter, Democrat Gordon Hintz, and Green Tony Palmeri. The candidates agreed to a format that was largely borrowed from the one used by the League of Women Voters for its televised candidate forums on the local cable access television channel. The blog would begin with written opening statements from the candidates. Then a series of 10 questions would be posed, and each candidate would have 72 hours to post a response to the Web log. Candidates also would have the option to comment on the posts made by their opponents. Originally the questions were to be developed by the three sponsoring organizations, but the incumbent objected to the role of the LWV because of what he called its “public policy agenda.” In response to this complaint, a representative of the local Chamber of Commerce was asked to assist in identifying topics to be discussed. The topics that were addressed in the online debate were legislative priorities, employee compensation, health care, taxes and services, water quality, a proposed Constitutional cap on state spending, Wisconsin’s tradition of good government, social issues, transportation, and the state budget.

The debate ran from Sept. 14 to Oct. 25. The candidates posted, collectively, more than 20,000 words, roughly the size of a small book. While they were encouraged to

comment on each others' postings, they rarely did. During the debate the site recorded 22,873 page views in 7,665 sessions. Users spent an average of 7 minutes on the site. Site visitors recorded an average of 150 sessions each day. Total hits were 65,081. All told 1,984 unique visitors, as measured by IP addresses, came to the site during the debate period.

Although the blog debate format was untried, the candidates in the 54th District needed little persuasion to take part—although their motivations for accepting the invitation were quite different. Incumbent Underheim said he agreed to participate “because it would have been too negative not to.” He said he risked being branded “technologically backward, a Luddite, a Neanderthal” and that he was largely concerned about “the avoidance of bad publicity.”⁴ The challengers, by contrast, saw the online debate as a way to connect with voters in a new way. “I was looking for every opportunity to get my message out and express my position on issues,” said Democrat Hintz. “This provided a clear format for well thought-out answers.”⁵ Green Palmeri said he agreed to participate out of a “basic sense of responsibility.”⁶ He also thought that the blog would be a good way to get exposure and could be a to⁷ol to help him formulate his positions. Carpenter, the independent, said he expected the blog to help him “contact a portion of the electorate that I perhaps did not see otherwise.”⁸

A total of 29,875 voters cast ballots in the race, which was won by the Republican incumbent, with 47 percent of the total. The Democratic challenger received 40 percent of the votes. The Green Party candidate received 9 percent and the independent about 4 percent.⁹ In the presidential race the city of Oshkosh tipped slightly Democratic, with 50 percent of the vote going to John Kerry.¹⁰

The organizers of the fall debate were sufficiently encouraged by its reception and outcome to decide to hold additional debates for the spring municipal elections. The spring debates were for races in the city of Oshkosh, for mayor and for three seats on the Common Council. Because of special circumstances related to a change in city government, the debate sponsors decided to expand the debate format. In April 2005 Oshkosh voters would—for the first time in half a century—directly elect a mayor. This change was viewed as potentially more than a minor procedural shift as it could lead to significant change in city policies and priorities. In addition to issues such as downtown redevelopment, recreational facilities, tax rates, and city service delivery, certain intangibles would be in play since the first person to hold this newly re-established post would create precedents for successors in terms of how the role of mayor is envisioned and discharged. This thinking led to the creation of an online site called the “Voter Information Project.” The site took several conventions of political campaigns (public meetings, debates, endorsements, and insider commentary) and moved them to the Internet. The centerpiece of the VIP was a pair of online debates, one for the mayoral candidates and one for the Common Council candidates.

Both races attracted so many candidates that primaries were required. For Council there were 14 candidates for three seats, and for mayor there were four candidates. A primary election narrowed the field to six Council and two mayor candidates. The six Council candidates included two incumbents, Shirley Mattox and Brian Poeschl, and four challengers: Bryan Bain, Cheryl Hentz, Joe Jungwirth, and Meredith Scheuermann. Both of the mayor candidates were incumbent members of the Council, Paul Esslinger and William Castle, who was finishing out a three-year term.

The spring debates started Jan. 23. All of the candidates were invited to participate, but not all of them did during the primary campaign. None of the nonparticipants, however, survived the primary. Six Council and two mayor candidates took part in the general election phase of blog debates, which ran through April 3, two days before the election. The Council debate consisted of about 28,000 words, and the mayor debate produced about 9,500 words. During just the primary debates, users came to the site for 8,277 sessions and recorded 29,052 page views, which was more activity than was recorded for the 54th District debate in the fall. For the full course of the debate, the site that hosted the blogs had 76,045 page views in 25,677 sessions. Users spent slightly more than six minutes on the site. Site visitors recorded an average of 352 sessions each day. Total hits were 210,106. All told 5,536 unique visitors, as measured by IP addresses, came to the site during the debate period.

Two questions were posed in the primary debates and four in the general election debates. Because of complaints from the fall debate participants about the workload and deadlines created by 72-hour response requirement, the debate sponsors modified their approach in the spring. Questions were posed on Monday, and candidates were given until the end of the week to post their responses. They had the weekend off. In the primary debate, Council candidates were asked to respond to suggestions raised at a town hall forum about making city government more “citizen-friendly,” to discuss how they thought the dynamics of the Council would change with a directly elected mayor, and to identify priorities for capital spending. The mayor candidates also had three questions in the primary debate: about their priorities, about working as a directly elected mayor, and about land use and development in the city. In the general elections, candidates in both

debates were asked to respond to the same four questions, although asked in different order in the respective blogs. One question asked the candidates to pose a question to their opponents. The other three questions dealt with the structure of city government, controlling personnel costs, and a controversial riverfront resort proposal.

In the mayoral race Castle won with a vote total of 5,648. This gave him 53.3 percent of the vote, compared to Esslinger's 4,956 votes and 46.5 percent. In the Council race, two challenges—Bain and Scheuermann—were victorious, along with incumbent Mattox. The top vote-getter was Scheuermann, with 5,808.¹¹

Survey results

To compare reactions to the blog across candidates, campaign cycles, and voters, a survey was constructed. All of the 54th district candidates were surveyed, as were four of the eight general election candidates in the spring campaigns. Two participants, a Council incumbent and a Council challenger, won their elections, and two participants, a Council challenger and a Council incumbent who ran for mayor, lost in the general election. An online version was published, and responses were solicited by e-mail. This was a convenience sample (n=45), and respondents were disproportionately independent, Green or Democrat, perhaps a reflection of Internet usage in Oshkosh. The online survey results, while far from statistically valid, do suggest some commonalities and some differences in opinion between voters and politicians. Selected questions and responses appear in Table 1.

(Table 1 about here.)

Benefits to voters

Perhaps the best indicator that the online debates provided benefits to voters can be seen in the traffic that the debate attracted. The expectation had been that the site would serve as an information resource for voters who may not have had other opportunities to learn about the candidates. While this supposition cannot be proven or disproven in a definitive way, the pattern of traffic to the site as election day approached does suggest that voters were turning to the site to gather information just before making their ballot decision. In the week leading up to the Nov. 2 election, the site registered 181 sessions per day, compared to an average of 150 sessions per day over the entire course of the online debate. In addition the average time per session increased slightly during the final days of the campaign, from 7 minutes, three seconds, to 7 minutes, 13 seconds. For the spring debates, the volume of traffic was significantly higher, and it followed a similar pattern of more intensive use during the final week leading up to the election. In the week leading up to the spring election, the site recorded 438 sessions per day, compared to an average of 345 over the entire debate timeframe. The average length of session increased from 6 minutes, 1 second, to 6 minutes, 34 seconds.

A look at survey results provides further evidence that the debates were beneficial to voters although these results also show differences in perceptions between voters and candidates. Survey participants on average said they agreed with statements that the online debates were an effective way for candidates to express their campaign positions and to differentiate themselves from other candidates. But voters were neutral on statements that the debates addressed the most important issues in the campaigns and provided information that was not otherwise available. Candidates were more positive on

both of these statements. Voters also differed with the candidates on the amount of effort that the online format required, saying they were neutral on this statement while the candidates made it clear the online debates required more work on their part.

Benefits to candidates

The sponsors of the debate expected that the blog format would provide benefits to candidates by giving them the opportunity for fuller responses to questions and by allowing them greater flexibility in their campaign schedule. These projections turned out to be half right. The candidates said they appreciated the expanded potential for communication of their positions that the blog provided, but some also complained about the burdens that the blog imposed.

All of the candidates found some aspects of the blog format attractive. “I think the questions were substantive. I think that helped provide substance to the campaign,” said Underheim, the incumbent in the 54th District debate. “Oftentimes in the traditional debate format, you are limited to a one-minute answer to a question that has multiple levels to it and that simply can’t be answered in that time. And you realize that people for the most part are only going to hear it once,” said Hintz. By contrast, “reading text allows for greater absorption and greater detail.” According to Palmeri, “With the online debate, there really was no excuse not to make a well-reasoned argument. It allowed me to be more thoughtful and complete than I might otherwise.” The blog format gave candidates “a chance to think about your answer,” said Carpenter. “You were not put on the spot right away. Many times I wished I had said this or not said that.”

The debate participants also saw problems, notably the amount of time it took to respond. “I didn’t think it was worth the effort to expend on this,” said Underheim. “The

volume of questions was a problem. They were very lengthy, frankly very difficult questions. They really take time from the stuff candidates want to do to further their own campaigns.”

The spring campaign’s modified schedule, with fewer questions, more time allowed for responses, and designated days off, addressed some of these concerns. “One thing for sure I liked was putting the question out early enough in the week that it gave people ample time to answer,” said Hentz. “Being able to respond at our leisure as our schedules permitted and having the ability not to conform to a certain word count is good. Our message isn’t stifled then.”¹²

Benefits to local campaigns

The organizers of the debates had hoped that the Internet medium itself would affect both the nature of the campaign and its outcome by encouraging interactivity, creating a greater depth of information, and offering a new communication channel, particularly to younger voters. Not all expected benefits were realized, but some unexpected ones were. One of the effects that did not materialize was greater interactivity, either among the candidates or between candidates and voters. Further there is no hard evidence that the Web-based debates involved younger voters or increased voter participation.

But the candidates in both debates did note that the blog medium brought some positive effects. According to Palmeri, “The civility in the blog carried over into other parts of the campaign. I can’t prove that it had a positive impact on the general level of civility. But in many ways the blog represented what campaigns should ideally be about: What do these candidates stand for? What arguments are they making? What evidence do

they have?” While the candidates expressed criticisms of the debate, they also made it clear that they expected future debates to be waged on the Internet and they offered suggestions for improvement. “As campaigns become more dependent on the Internet, there will be a price to be paid for not participating” in online activities, said Underheim. But he also noted that if an online debate is too disruptive to candidates, they will be resistant to participating. Palmeri, a communications professor at the local university, suggested that future debates take the form of scholarly paper presentations, where one candidate would be designated as a discussant or respondent to critique the answers provided by the other candidates.

The candidates were also unsure of what effect, if any, the online debate had. “I don’t know how many voters were swayed. My guess it was minimal,” said Underheim. But the candidates were also aware that there were indirect effects that had an impact on the campaign. “It wasn’t just individual voters who were consumers of this,” said Hintz. “We were all viewing each others’ answers for the best sound bites, the best ideas.” He noted that local media, including the city’s daily newspaper and a news/talk formatted radio station, were likely watching the online debate closely.

Several candidates said the blog format added substance affected their own thinking about issues. “In the end my respect for some of the candidates really increased,” said Mattox, a Council incumbent who won re-election. “I was impressed how my thinking had to be not only tempered but expanded. In the end I think we all came out better than we were at the beginning because the blog made us examine the answers from the others and gave us the opportunity to examine our own answers.”¹³

Discussion

A political debate necessarily involves multiple constituencies with often conflicting agendas. What works well for candidates may not work well for the media. Similarly, what suits the media or debate sponsors may not well serve the public (Jackson-Beeck and Meadow). As demonstrated in Oshkosh, the Web log has the potential for bringing these agendas and priorities into greater alignment. Because, like the rest of the Internet, it can be a disintermediating force, the Web log can create an arena where candidates and voters interact directly without the distorting effects of the traditional news media or the formats that may be favored by traditional debate sponsors.

Nonetheless the Oshkosh debates can best be described as a qualified success. There is scant evidence that the blog format either increased voter participation or affected voting decisions. But the blog debates demonstrated a willingness among candidates and voters to engage with new technology as a way of furthering political debate. Both candidates and voters saw benefits to the blog format, and there were indications that the blog format could enrich and improve local political discourse. Because of its low cost and ease of use, the Internet provides enormous opportunities to address complaints about political debates. In addition to the blog format, debate sponsors should consider experimenting with other possibilities provided by the Internet, including chat rooms, video, and audio.

Notes

1. Kathleen Propp, telephone interview, 30 September, 2005, Oshkosh, Wis.
2. Adam Nagourney, "Politics Is Facing Sweeping Via the Internet," *New York Times*, 2 April 2006, sec. A.
3. Stewart Rieckman, "Blogs Pollute the Political Process and Election Discussions in Oshkosh," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, 13 February 2005.
4. Gregg Underheim, telephone interview, August 16, 2005, Oshkosh, Wis.
5. Gordon Hintz, telephone interview, August 15, 2005, Oshkosh, Wis.
6. Tony Palmeri, personal interview, August 2005, Oshkosh, Wis.
7. Dan Carpenter, telephone interview, August 15, 2005, Oshkosh, Wis.
8. Alex Hummel, "GOP Keeps 54th," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, 4 November 2004, sec. A.
9. Bethany Warner, "Voter Turnout Tops 80 Percent in Most of City," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, 4 November, 2004, sec. A.

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Table 1. Reaction to the blog-based debates

Survey participants were asked to rank these statements on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. Results are shown in three columns to the right, candidates who participated in the fall 2004 blog (F04), candidates who participated in one of the spring 2005 blogs (S05), and members of the public (P). The words in parentheses indicate slight change in phrasing for the survey of members of the public.

Statement	F04	S05	P
The online debate was an effective way for me (candidates) to express campaign positions.	4	5	4
The online debate was an effective way for me (candidates) to differentiate myself from other candidates.	4	5	4
The online debate was an effective way to get my (candidates') message across to the community.	3	4	4
The online debate stimulated community interest in the campaign.	3	5	3
The questions in the online debate addressed the most important issues in the campaign.	4	4	3
The online debate provided information to voters that was not available in other ways.	4	4	3
The online debate provided a level playing field for all of the candidates.	4	5	4
The online debate served to encourage voter turnout.	3	4	3
The online debate had an impact on the outcome of the election, i.e. who won.	2	3	3
The online debate helped to shape discussions and debates in other forums.	3	4	4
The online debate required more effort than other debates during the campaign.	5	4	3
The online debate would have been more successful if there had been more input from voters.	4	3	4
