

REVISITING THE 2012 US PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

John M. Mankelwicz, Troy University

ABSTRACT

The study utilizes psychologist James Pennebaker's Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) system to analyze the styles, strategies, and interactions of candidates in the 2012 US Presidential Debates. Descriptive and inferential analyses of the LIWC outputs indicate stable, significant differences (statistically and practically) in the candidates' styles, strategies, and delivery. Further analyses, which included an original application of clustering techniques, revealed both differences and important, stable similarities. Also, there was considerable interaction among the candidates and the debate moderators – more than might be rationally expected. Many of these patterns were *not* discussed at all in media coverage at the time, and thus they challenge popular interpretations of the debates. This non-partisan presentation also provides a simple, lucid, hands on demonstration of the practical use of *archival* data in psychology and social psychology.