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Crowdsourced News: The Collective Intellig

1. INTRODUCTION

In a reflection of the zeitgeist, *Time Magazine*

bastion of 'profession

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This first aim of t

The second application of the crowdsourcing principle has created some strong news outlets in the new media environment. *OhMyNews--m*

“Like so many status-seeking Americans, journalists in the 1920’s and 1930’s were eager to professionalize. University-based training emerged in these years, along with a code of conduct among professional associations like the American Society of Newspaper Editors (founded 1922) and the Associated Press Managing Editors (1931)...Professionals were authorized to know in the place of citizens who were too busy or overwhelmed to know” (Rosen, 1999: 69).

The last sentence deserves particular attention. During the same period, a certain conception of the public’s capacity for understanding the world emerged—that they were too busy or perhaps even too ignorant to comprehend the increasingly complicated world around them. Rosen (1999) explores how Walter Lippman, co-founder of *The New Republic*, wrote in 1922 that it was foolish to believe that everyday people could have reliable, informed opinions about current events. They were busy earning a living, and therefore relied on stereotypes and first impressions to form their opinions. Lippman voiced the limitations of the average citizen, and instead stressed the importance of well-informed experts. While there were critics of Lippman’s conception of the public—particularly philosopher John Dewey, it became widely-held and influential for the development of journalistic professionalism (Rosen, 1999).

The role of journalist as expert and “trustee for the public” gave rise to authority and credibility in the field.² Rosen (1999: 69) wrote, “The journalist could claim elevated status as an expert commentator...as a superior judge of what counted as news...or as a professional ‘adversary’ keeping the government in check...These became common aspirations in an increasingly professionalized press” (Rosen, 1999: 69).

2.3.2 OBJECTIVITY

Part and parcel with the professionalization of the press in the 1920’s and ‘30’s was the development as objectivity as the “official doctrine” of journalism (Rosen 1999: 70). Mindich (1998: 1) wrote, “If American journalism were a religion, as it has been called from time to time, its supreme deity would be ‘objectivity’.” Described as “the occupational norm

² The phrase “trustee for the public” is taken from “The Journalist’s Creed” of the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. It begins: “I believe in the profession of journalism. I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public...” (Rosen, 1999: 1).

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knowledge is reliable with moral connotations about how one *should* convey reality to the public.

It should be noted, however, while objectivity has been the guiding ideal of journalism since the 1920s, it has been “completely and divisively debated” (Schudson, 1978: 10). Most journalists concede that total objectivity is not attainable, realizing that they “do not operate in a vacuum” of cultural, social and political biases (Mindich, 1998: 133). Still it is considered something to strive for. Critics, however, see it as reflecting the status quo (Tj 45) institutionalized values (Schudson, 1978 & Mindich, 1998). Barnhurst (1998) noted young people especially have a growing skepticism toward the objective reporting of traditional news sources. So, as innovative forms of journalism proliferate, like those produced through crowdsourcing, it is essential to examine if “the maligned but still influential doctrine of objectivity” is being upheld or if alternative values are emerging to produce credibility (Rosen, 1999: 54).

2.4 COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

James Surowiecki

2.5 "THE CULT OF THE AMATEUR"

The majority of the examples of collective intelligence used in Surowiecki's book, however, involve problems with "correct" solutions. Yet Sunstein (2006: 98) noted, "Groups are often asked to answer questions that are not purely factual. Issues involving morality, politics, and law require *judgments of value, not merely fact*" (italics mine). Journalists cover these issues frequently; the doctrine of objectivity advises to separate the two. These sorts of issues present a number of problems for group problem-solving: "when people answer such questions, informational influences and social pressures will almost inevitably play a major role" (Sunstein, 2006: 98).

Social psychologist Irving Janis' *Victims of Groupthink* (1972) explored the concept from which the title is drawn that homogenous small groups are more likely to make decisions and form opinio

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allowing the researcher to reach a large number of people via a medium they used. Additionally, a su

collaboration (see <http://zero.newassignment.net/>). Conveniently, the subject AZ was asking amateur journalists to cover was actually the phenomenon itself: crowdsourcing in

6. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 INTERVIEWS WITH EDITORS/FOUNDERS

The method of analysis of the three

At NowPublic, we think about these concepts differently: Is there a sense of "transparency" - so that readers get a sense they are being told everything?" ("NowPublic News Values", 2007: n.p.). In discussing a controversial story involving a NowPublic contributor, Tippett said "...it's all a little contentious. It's her word against the TSA. So people are asking 'What is the truth here?', and I think that the overall consensus is that it's good to have this kind of transparency." Donley made clear the importance of transparency also when he said, "We are not putting a stamp on this saying, 'This is true.' We are saying, 'This is how people feel.' So in all of our user-submitted stuff, we make very clear to say, 'These are our users'."

Authenticity is also mentioned on NowPublic as something contributors should work towards ("NowPublic News Values", 2007: n.p.). Donley felt that the amateurs' stories of Katrina were inherently more authentic than traditional reporters because of first-hand experience. He said,

I just want to hear people's stories...I want to hear it from them. And I want to hear it without it being filtered through whatever filter the reporter is filtering it through. During the storm we had great journalists from all over doing the best job they could writing about the storm and shooting pictures, but the fact was they weren't up to their necks. They weren't watching people drown. They didn't carry their kids into the attic chased by the water. Getting those stories second-hand is never as authentic as getting it first-hand."

6.1.4 EMPOWERING AND TRUSTING THE PUBLIC

Interviewees saw the Internet as changing the role of the journalist. Rosen said, "Before the Web, they [traditional journalists] saw readers as having knowledge deficits. 'What is it that readers don't know? That's our job.' And now i

"...collectively people have been unappreciated or, as Bush would say, underestimated... If left to their own devices rather than being fed the spoon-fed crap, that they will actually find the good stuff out there." Rosen said:

"Because there's so much stuff, because there are so many more

context...And so its very important to have that traditional voice on the other end of the table to say, "Well, have we heard the other side of the story?" And ask the questions that traditional journalism asks. "

The opinions and attitudes of the three respondents are, however, very much in favor of crowdsourced news, which should come as no surprise considering they are founders and editors of such websites. This study

6.2.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONALISM AND OBJECTIVITY

The researcher was also interested in investigating a possible relationship between those respondents who were professionally employed at a news organization and their feelings towards objectivity and adherence to its conventions. Using employment as the independent variable, several logit regression models were run to determine if there was a significant relationship between employment and dependent variables such as inclusion of personal commentary, use of first-person writing style or perceived importance of objectivity. Unfortunately, the majority of logit regression models did not provide statistically significant relationships. This is most likely due to the small sample size,

spread of participants in their 20's, 30's, and 40's and d

however, may not yet be replacing objectivity and professionalism in the production of trust and credibility in journalism, at least for some participants.

7. DISCUSSION

Returning to the research question *'To what extent is crowdsourced journalism challenging traditional notions of professionalism and objectivity, and what alternative ideals, if any, are emerging to replace them?'*, the researcher found that while traditional notions of professionalism and objectivity are challenged ideologically by the founders of crowdsourced

Williams (2006). The AZ participants who were questioned by email also felt professionals should stay involved in crowdsourced pursuits, even if only for copy-editing. While refined skills are necessary for these roles, one should consider a potential shift in the way jo

had a knack for investigative journalism because of his ability and patience scrutinizing documents.

By aggregating the private information of a diverse crowd, one can see “the big picture” (to quote Donely), creating something similar to Gans’ “multiperspectival” news, as mentioned by Bruns (2006) and Rosen in the researcher’s interview. But in order for these ideals to be achieved, and for the pitfalls associated with ‘*groupthink*’ to be avoided, the crowd should, in theory, be diverse (Janis, 1972). Some of the AZ participants acknowledged these possible pitfalls caused by lack of diversity, yet the editor/founder interviewees only approached the issue of diversity when probed, perhaps because they felt the need to evangelize their site to the researcher.

The demographic information gleaned from the survey showed that the AZ crowd was not particularly diverse, fulfilling the classic “early adopter profile” as described by Jenkins (2006), which Rosen attributed to AZ’s subject matter. All interviewees felt that as the Internet increased its ubiquity, more diverse crowds would rally around these projects, especially if they cared about the subject matter. Donley said he was once asked, “Isn’t it an elitist white medium, you are doing okay getting to the well-off white folks, but isn’t this creating a distance?” and he responded, “Well, when we were getting cries for help, we were getting them from every area of the city.” Rosen felt that diversity’s role in collective intelligence might not be necessary all of the time. He said, “What matters is producing quality work. If a non-representative group produces quality work for the public that’s still

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APPENDIX 1

Interview topic guide for Jon Donley, editor of NOLA.com

Case study: Crowdsourcing during Katrina

- For a little background, describe the chain of events during Katrina that led to the self-publishing component of the site becoming so important?
- Do you remember any specific examples of what were people posting?
- Is that what you expected?
- What motivated people to tell their stories?
- I remember at CNN—where I was working during Katrina—in the weeks following the storm we used the Forum and blog to look for story ideas...did the Times-Picayune do the same?

Crowdsourcing on the website now

- Other than saving lives, what do you think the greatest accomplishment of the Forum has been?
- What has been the most problematic?
- How do you edit it?
- Tell me about the North Shore bloggers feature you are working on...

Amateurs vs. Professionals

- To just your average reader removed from the story, how would the experience of surfing NOLA.com differ from picking up a newspaper or watching CNN?
- What is the biggest difference between citizen journalism in times of breaking news vs. everyday life?
-

APPENDIX 2

Interview topic guide for Michael Tippett, founder of NowPublic.org

Crowdsourcing on the website

- For a little background, describe how project started?
- Crowd-powered vs. crowdsourced?
- What motivates people to contribute?
- With more than 100,000 contributors may be hard to tell but from looking at profiles do you get a sense of a dominant demographic?
- How is the relationship with the AP working out? Does mainstream media often pick up story ideas or breaking news from NowPublic?
- To just your average reader, how would the experience of surfing NowPublic differ from surfing traditional news sites?
- What do you think the greatest accomplishment of the site has been?
- What has been the most problematic?

Amateurs vs. Professionals

- To just your average reader, how would the experience of surfing NowPublic differ from surfing traditional news sites?
- What role do editors play?
- I read Mark Schneider's "News Values", but what do you think makes a great story?
- As you let the "crowd" decide what the top stories are...the last time I checked it was about a diet pill that makes you fart oil...one of the traditional criticisms about these projects is you need journalists and editors to tell the public what to pay attention to if we have any hope of an informed electorate...how would you respond?
- What is the biggest difference between citizen journalism in times of breaking news vs. everyday life?
- Is one more valuable?
- What do amateurs bring to the table that professionals lack?
- Is it still important for professionals to be involved?
- What surprised you the most about your experience with citizen journalism?

Crowdsourcing as an economic concept

- Is there money to be made with crowdsourcing? If so, why will some people work for free so that others can profit?
- Academic proponents of crowdsourcing argue there's wisdom in crowds...do you agree? Can you think of an example from your experience?
- Anything else to add?

APPENDIX 4

Interview Transcript with Jon Donley, editor of NOLA.com

For a little background, describe the chain of events durii

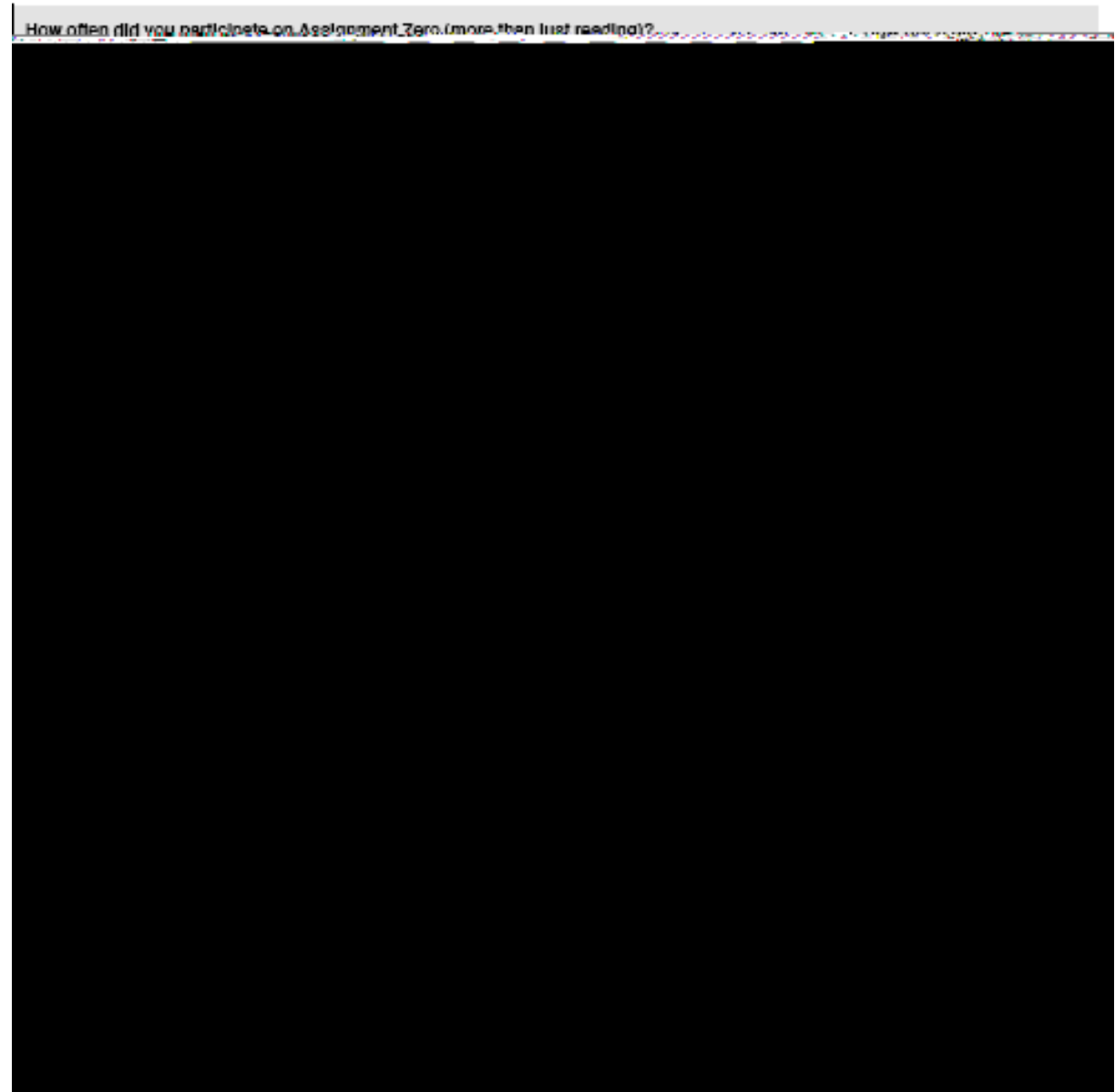
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of subjects and the

know the answer yet. But if we can't... If anyone has the idea, that the general public is going to pay for

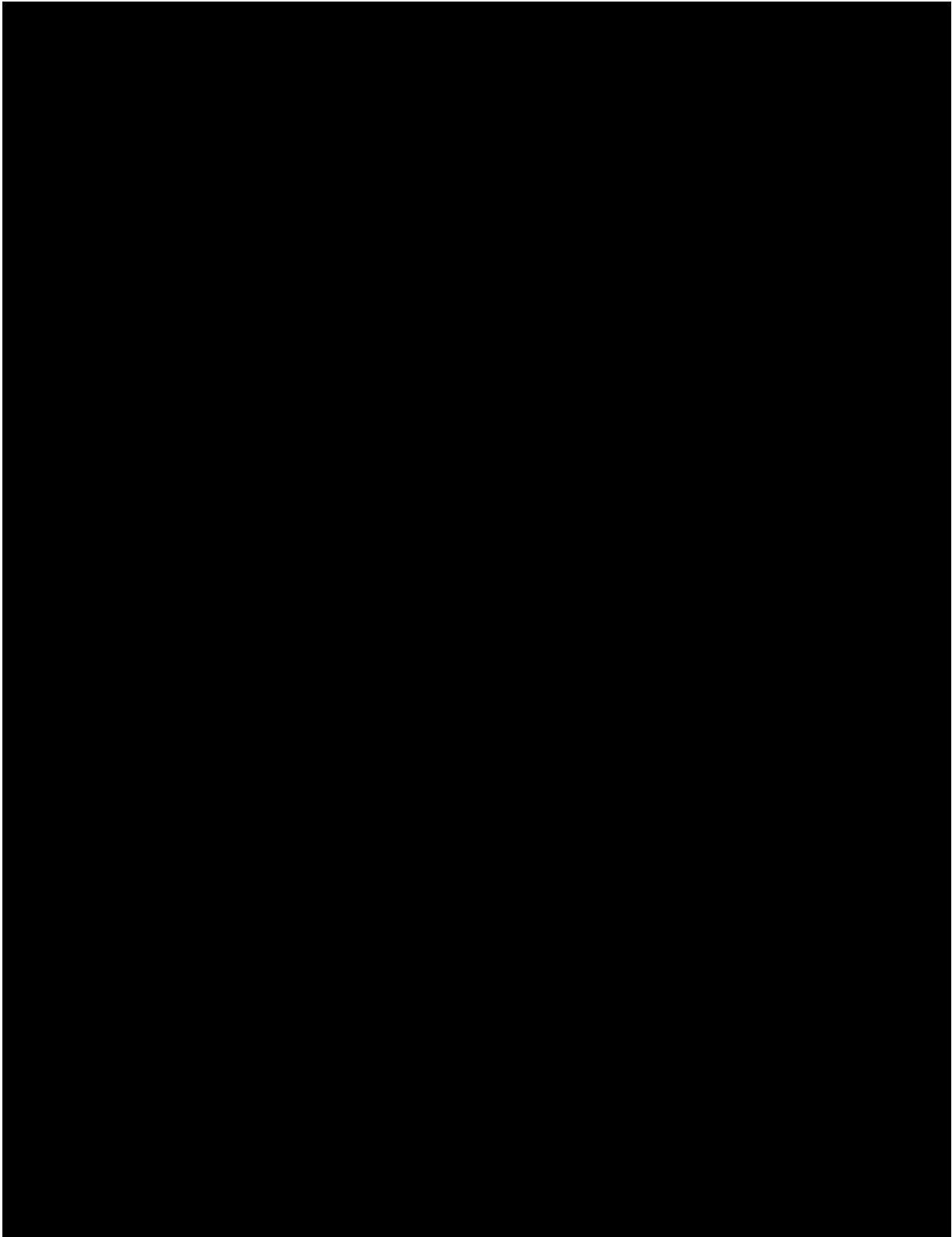
APPENDIX 5

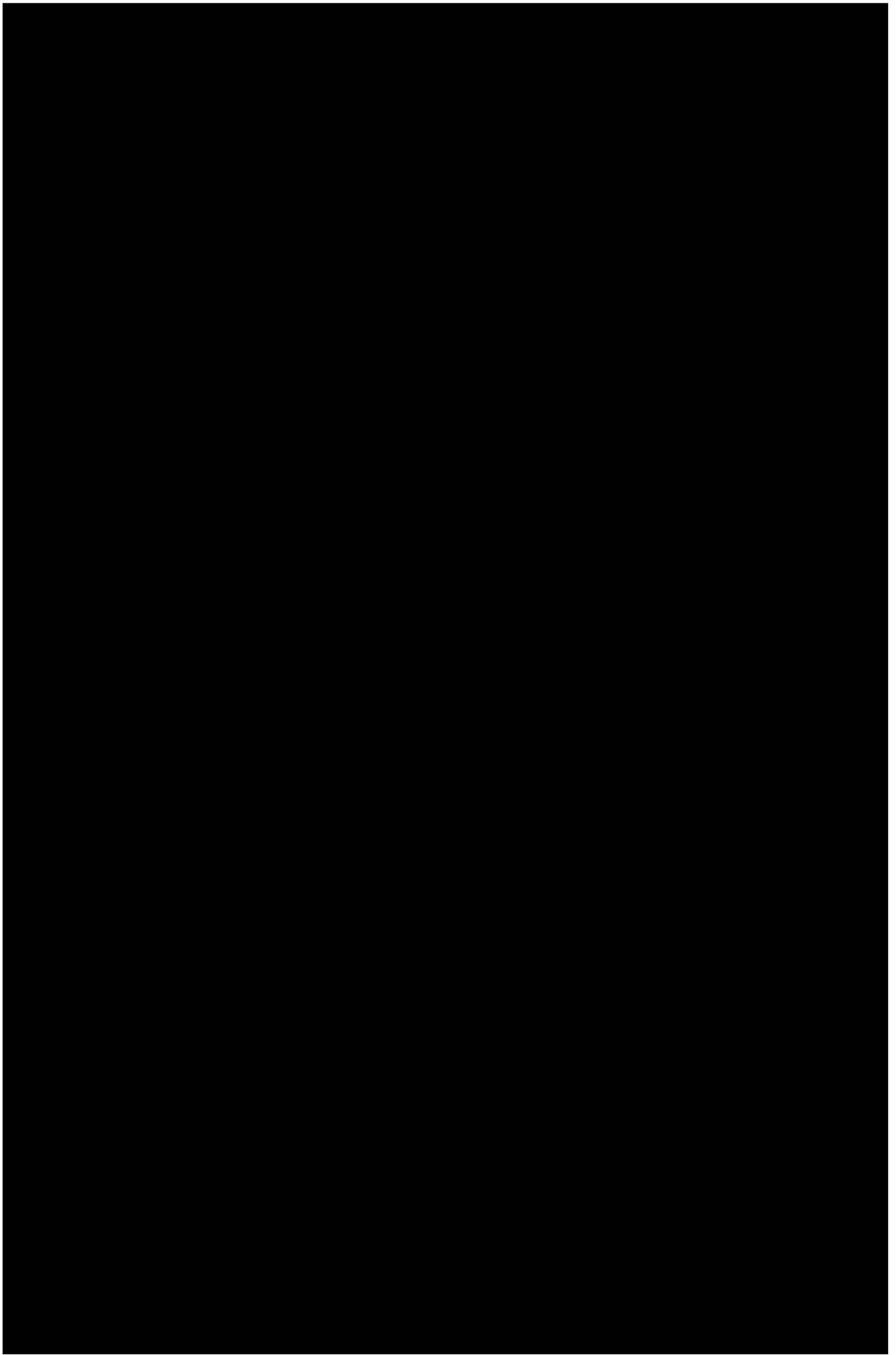


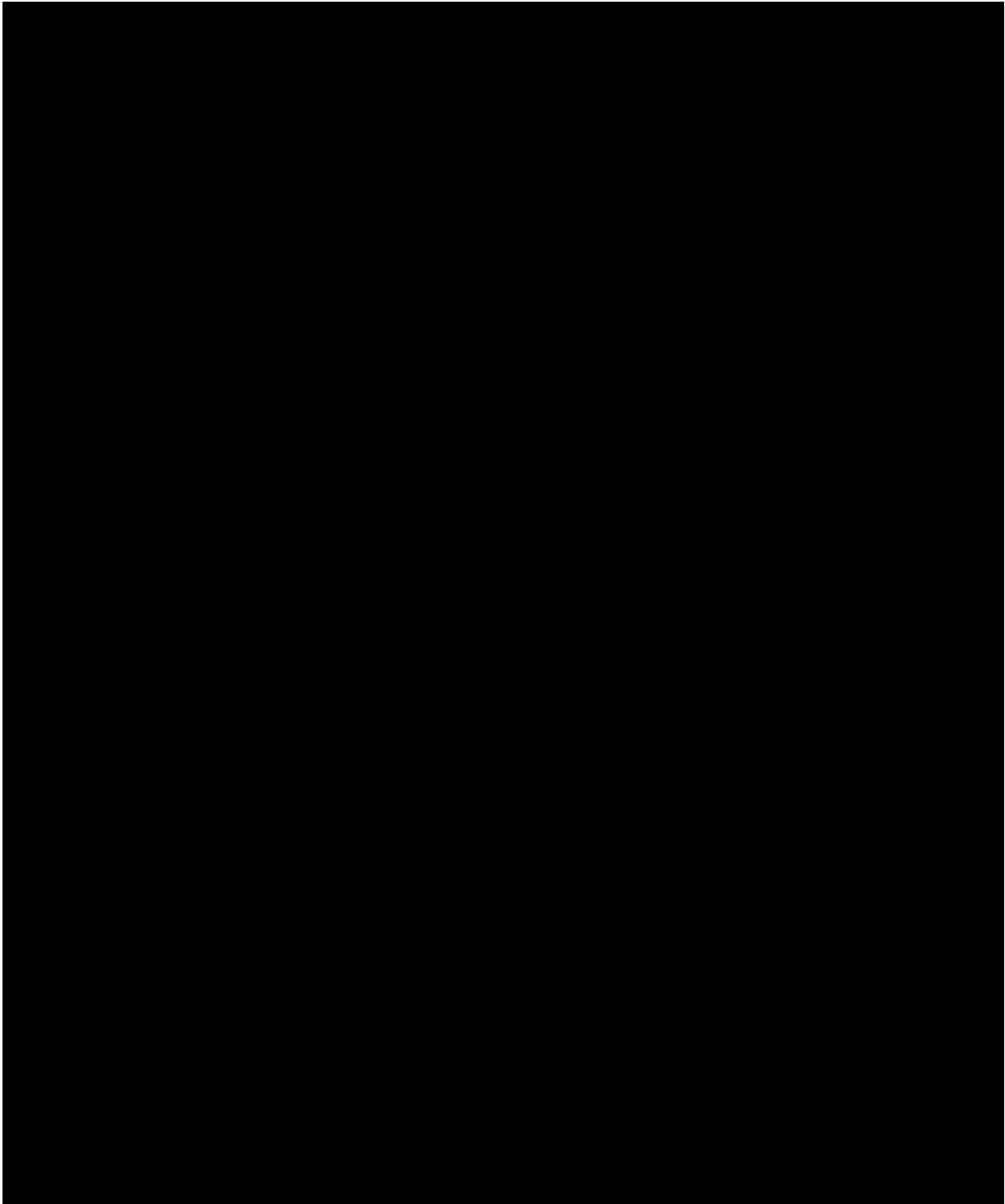
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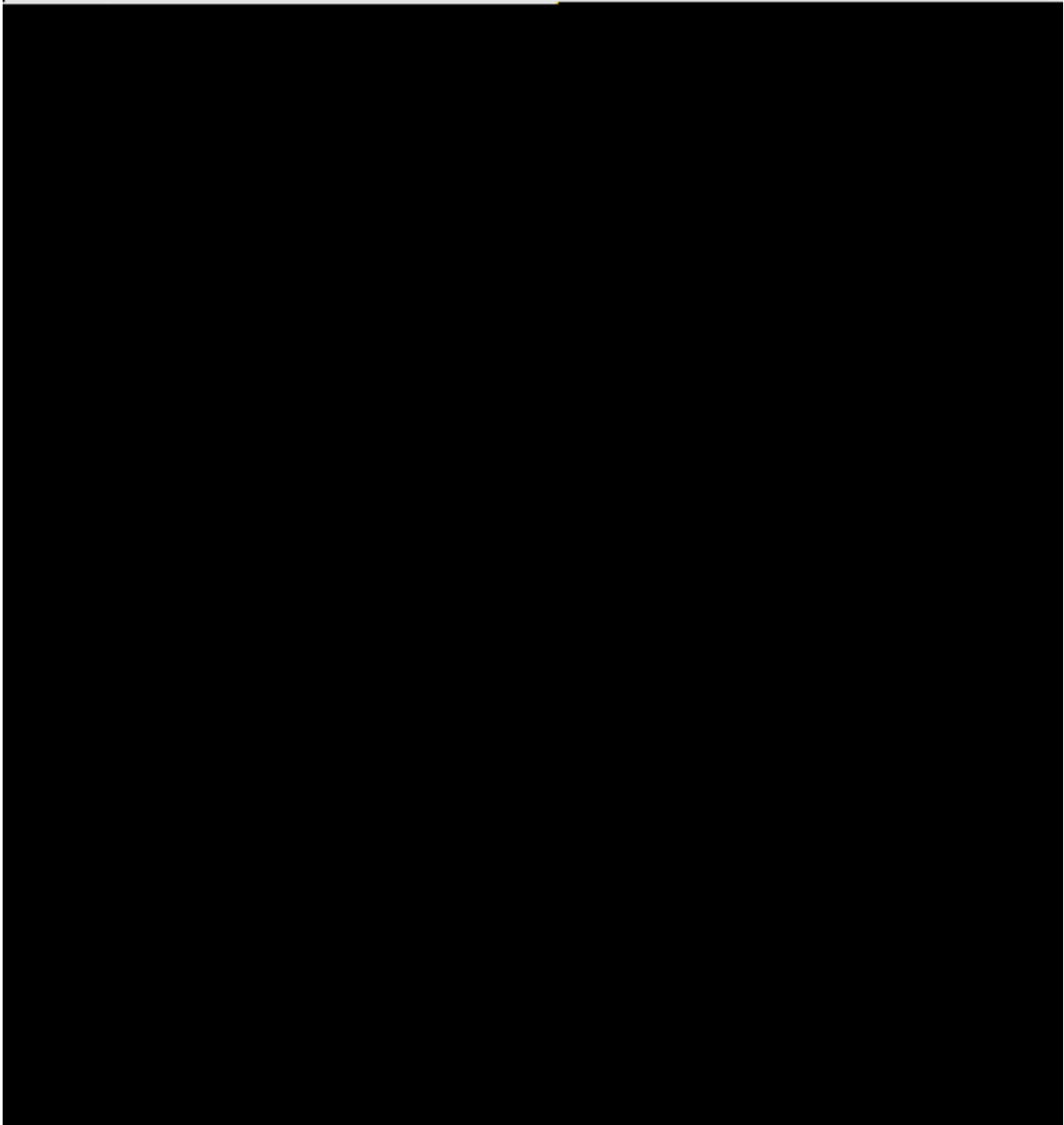
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response
1. I was interested in the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
2. I was curious about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
3. I was bored with the topic.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
4. I was motivated to learn more about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
5. I was interested in the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
6. I was curious about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
7. I was bored with the topic.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
8. I was motivated to learn more about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
9. I was interested in the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
10. I was curious about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
11. I was bored with the topic.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
12. I was motivated to learn more about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response
13. I was interested in the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
14. I was curious about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
15. I was bored with the topic.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
16. I was motivated to learn more about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
17. I was interested in the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
18. I was curious about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
19. I was bored with the topic.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
20. I was motivated to learn more about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
21. I was interested in the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
22. I was curious about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
23. I was bored with the topic.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
24. I was motivated to learn more about the topic.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%









APPENDIX 8

Logit Regression Results for Inclusion of Personal Commentary in R

Electron