Bard, Mitchell; Bode, Leticia; Carr, Jasun; Edgerly, Stephanie; Johnson, Courtney; Mie Kim, Young; Shah, Dhavan; & Vraga, Emily. “The Correspondent, the Comic, and the Combatant: How Moderator Style and Guest Civility Shape News Credibility.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, August 2010.

Collection Permanent Link: hdl.handle.net/10822/557390

© 2013 AEJMC

This material is made available online with the permission of the author, and in accordance with publisher policies. No further reproduction or distribution of this copy is permitted by electronic transmission or any other means.
The Correspondent, the Comic, and the Combatant:
How Moderator Style and Guest Civility Shape Media Credibility

ABSTRACT

Tailored within the increasingly competitive news environment, televised interview programs have adopted a range of moderating styles, heralding a rise in “combatant” and “comic” moderators to complement the conventional “correspondent” interview style. Little research, however, has investigated these moderator styles and their implications for media accountability. This study examines how three moderator styles — the correspondent, the comic, and the combatant — influence the perceptions of media credibility and evaluations of the program. The findings of this experimental study indicate that among the three moderator styles — correspondent, comic, and combatant — the correspondent moderator produced the highest ratings of media credibility and program evaluations without limiting entertainment value, while the use of humor mitigates the negative impact on these outcome in the presence of an aggressive interviewer. Notably, the tone of participating pundits did not directly or indirectly affect perceptions of the media in general or the program in particular, suggesting judgments of media credibility are compartmentalized and driven by moderator styles as journalistic choices. The implications for media accountability in a democracy are discussed.
The Correspondent, the Comic, and the Combatant:  
How Moderator Style and Guest Civility Shape Media Credibility

The way Americans get their news is changing. With the rise of the Internet, the growth in cable news outlets, and the advent of technologies that make it easier to watch “what you want, when you want,” news producers compete in an increasingly cluttered media environment. This competition, coupled with the drive to cut costs within news divisions, has given rise to different formats in which to present news. Among the most popular are moderated debate programs — i.e., exchanges among guest pundits prompted by questions from the host — which have the dual “virtues” of engaging the audience while being cheap to produce. Combative interviewers (typified by the aggressive style displayed on The O’Reilly Factor and Hardball) and comedic moderators (exemplified by the humorous style on The Daily Show and The Colbert Report) now occupy a place alongside the conventional news correspondent as moderator.

This shift in news formatting should influence audience evaluations about the news. Research on “new video-malaise” has grown in response to the emergence of political commentary and debate shows. Previous research has demonstrated that incivility in political shows, such as an altercation between political foes on a televised program or hostile nonverbal cues during a presidential debate, has been linked to decreased trust in politicians and politics (Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Cho, Shah, Nah, & Brossard, 2009) and less tolerance for oppositional viewpoints (Mutz, 2007). High-conflict television shows like CNN’s Crossfire and late-night comedy shows have both been shown to have similar effects, decreasing trust in political institutions and the political system in general (Forgette & Morris, 2006; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Tsfati, Tukachinsky, & Peri, 2009). Communication scholars also have been concerned with how aggressive, uncivil political debates are related back to perceptions of the media itself.
For instance, Mutz and Reeves’s (2005, Mutz 2007) study found that while uncivil guests do not alter the perceived informational value of the program, they do increase its entertainment value.

While prior research heavily focused on democratic values of political commentary or debate shows, especially civility (or incivility) of “guests” or debate participants, little research has investigated how the style of those moderating these exchanges influences audiences’ evaluations of media credibility. As noted above, three different moderator styles are most prominent in the contemporary media environment. Some political debate hosts conform to the traditional dispassionate model of journalism, sedately mediating between debate participants. Others opt for a humorous approach when questioning guests and poking fun at them, using comedy as a vehicle to discuss serious issues. Many adopt an aggressive mode of challenging their guests to elicit information, functioning as combatants in the exchange. As these moderator styles have gained prominence, it becomes increasingly important to examine their implications for evaluations of the news media and its credibility.

This study, therefore, sets out to investigate the effects of these three prominent moderator styles — the correspondent, the comic, and the combatant — on audiences’ perceptions of media credibility in general and evaluations of the program in particular. Given that prior research suggests the behavior of the guests can influence trust in political institutions, this study also examines how the civility/incivility of the guests interacts with moderator style to shape these outcomes. To test these questions, this study employed an experimental approach. Specifically, a professional director, experienced film editor, and paid actors produced six different versions of a moderated political debate show in a 3x2 design (correspondent, comic, or combatant interviewer by civil or uncivil guests). This design allowed us to examine key elements of political news production on perceptions of media performance.
Moderator Style and Debate Performance

Moderators play an important role in political discussions. According to Janssen and Kies, moderators “organize” and “rule” discussion spaces (2005, p. 321) and therefore, act either as gatekeepers of information or promoters of high quality information exchange. Moderators operating under the deliberative framework are trained to acknowledge minority opinions, offer background information, ask for clarifications, and keep discussion moving forward (Ettema, 2007; Janssen & Kies, 2005). Furthermore, moderators are expected to perform these functions while “encouraging an atmosphere of mutual respect” (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2004, p. 66).

Moderators have been utilized in deliberative polls (Ackerman & Fiskin, 2004), in online settings (Iyengar, Luskin, & Fishkin, 2004; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2006) and classroom settings (Durrington & Yu, 2004; Kosnoski, 2005) to facilitate controversial issue discussions.

Moderator-As-Correspondent

Moderators are also used to direct mediated discussions. Journalists have been given the responsibility of encouraging public debate while acting as a “fair-minded moderator” (Ettema, 2007, p.145). The television news moderator generally ensures that guests are allotted equal ‘face time’, asks for clarifications or follow-up responses, and moves the discussion forward. Moreover, a round table or split screen is typically used, with the moderator between or opposite the guests (CITE?). When media outlets adopt a conventional moderator-as-correspondent approach, they strive to illuminate the debate at hand through critical questioning and reiteration of positions. In recent years, the advent of cable news has caused the role of news moderators to become more prominent. During the 2008 election, the talk show format dominated primetime cable news (State of the News Media, 2009), and as a result, the correspondent-moderator may have been replaced by more sensational styles of facilitating discussions (Baym, 2010).
Moderator-As-Combatant

Understanding this traditional, correspondent model of moderation requires an acknowledgement of the constraints in journalistic practices. While journalists are formally autonomous, the realities of newsgathering make them dependent on officials, businesses, and interest groups as authoritative sources of information and opinion (Cook, 1994; Fishman, 1980; Molotch & Lester, 1974; Tuchman, 1978). Although some research challenges the ability of journalists to serve as an effective counterweight to official power, especially when they are serving as “objective” correspondents of official positions (Cunningham, 2003), alternative models exist for the role of the moderator. Aggressive interviews have long been identified as significant components of news programming, though some have characterized this approach as barbaric and combative (Cohen, 1987). Aggressive interviewing has been a well-established check and balance against the powerful (Schudson, 1994). Despite the continued prominence of official sources, news content has become more interpretive and critical of both officials and their policies (Clayman et al. 2006; Entman, 2003; Hart, Smith-Howell, & Llewellyn, 1990).

However, the moderator-as-combatant also reflects a broader shift, in which structural, economic, and audience conditions have eroded the boundaries between news and entertainment (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2000). Consistent with this, researchers have reported a change away from the traditional interviewing practices toward more combative forms of interviewing (Patrona, 2009). When adopting this approach, the media have been viewed alternately as a relentless "attack dog" (Tannen, 1998), an out-of-control "junkyard dog" (Sabato, 1991), or as a "burglar alarm that just keeps ringing" (Bennett 2003). As a result, some scholars (i.e., Clayman, Heritage, Elliott & McDonald, 2007) have argued that static models of journalism are inadequate to capture the current state of journalistic practice, which has seen the rise of a more aggressive
and targeted assertion by the moderator.

*Moderator-As-Comic*

The changes in media content are not limited to more overtly aggressive moderators. In recent years, a substantial body of work has emerged debating the effects of political humor and satire on perceptions of media credibility and governmental trust. This research focuses largely on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*, as these programs’ popularity has prompted researchers to consider the implications of this style of programming (see Baumgartner & Morris 2006, 2008; Morris 2009; Bennett 2007; Hart & Hartelius, 2007). In fact, *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart was voted America’s “most trusted newscaster,” in a TIME Magazine online poll. While informal, the widely reported poll sparked debate about what makes a “fake journalist” like Stewart such an appealing and trustworthy source for “real” news.

One of the most important roles that humor can play is it may allow moderators to ask pointed and aggressive questions while maintaining a less charged atmosphere. As Peter Ustinov famously said, “comedy is simply a funny way of being serious.” In other words, viewers may gravitate to hosts like Stewart and Colbert because humor has been shown to reduce levels of hostility and aggression by distracting people and redirecting anger (Sternthal & Craig, 1973; Baron & Ball, 1974; Miron et al. 2008). Furthermore, the anger-diffusing technique of “cracking jokes” may lead viewers to evaluate humorous moderators in a more favorable manner. Thus, we consider a humorous moderator to fall between the correspondent and the combatant in terms of aggression. While the comic can be nearly as aggressive as the combatant, the moderator tempers that aggression with humor, which may make the brand of journalism more palatable.

Not only can humor diffuse hostility, humor in and of itself can boost credibility. Self-effacing humor – used commonly not only by Stewart but also by many late-night talk show
hosts like Letterman and Leno - can heighten the credibility of the show and the host (Lyttle, 2001; Morris, 2009). Another explanation for the credibility of comedic moderators relates to likeability — humor puts viewers in a good mood, creating a rosy glow that extends to the messenger, especially when the message is dull (Kuiper et al., 1995; Sternthal & Craig, 1973).

However, not all researchers agree that entertainment-oriented political media lead to increased media credibility. Some scholars argue The Daily Show “has a negative influence on trust and overall ratings of the news media” among young people (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; see also Hart & Hartelius, 2007). It is possible that a diet heavy in political humor and satire leads to increased cynicism toward news media as a whole, if not the program or the host.

**Incivility of Debate Participants**

Changes in news formats have not only applied to the roles assumed by the moderator. The steady rise in popularity of cable news channels in the last decade has led to a boom in low cost, high drama politically themed talk shows. Programs like The O’Reilly Factor, Hardball with Chris Matthews, and Countdown with Keith Olbermann, for example, have regular audiences in the millions (Nielsen 2010). As Forgette and Morris (2006) documented, it is not unusual for these shows to turn nasty, with participants including personal attacks in their arguments. This pugnacious media environment has led scholars to question whether increasing incivility has a deleterious effect on the political process, especially the public's trust in government and politicians (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Mutz & Reeves, 2005).

On the other hand, recent polls show that Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC, known for these types of programs, are among the most trusted sources of news in America (Public Policy Polling 2010), despite their contentious nature (Ibelema & Powell 2001). While part of this may be part of a broader dynamic characterized by the increasing polarization of cable news
audiences and the electorate, much is left to understand in terms of how viewers respond to varying degrees of civility present in news exchanges (Morris 2005; 2007).

Experimental research has allowed for more precise understanding of the nature of these effects. Mutz and Reeves (2005) produced the seminal study on the topic. Manipulating the civility of two purported candidates for Congress in a political debate show, they found that uncivil debate decreased political trust. Subsequent work has confirmed these findings while extending it to decisions made by media outlets. In a follow-up study, Mutz (2007) demonstrated that when a television program used close-up shots of an uncivil guest, viewers holding opposing opinions were less likely to respect the guest's arguments. Likewise, conflict-heavy cable coverage of a presidential State of the Union address leads to decreased trust and lower approval of political institutions and the political system (Forgette & Morris, 2006), while the modality of presidential debates, whether a split-screen format highlighting the candidates’ nonverbal reactions to one another or single-candidate focus, which minimized inferences about candidate incivility, work in combination with talk and commentary to influence evaluations of political trust and news credibility (Cho et al., 2009). Therefore, the incivility that now pervades many political shows – and the choices made by the programs’ producers to highlight or downplay such conflict – have implications for governmental trust and ratings of media credibility.

**Media Credibility as a Situational Judgment**

Despite the growing body of research on new formats of political media, the question at the center of this study’s focus — whether shifts in the moderator style and tone of debate participants affect audiences’ perceptions of media credibility — remains underexplored. Although scholars have worried about a decline in the credibility of news outlets for decades (Gaziano, 1988; Kiousis, 2001; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003), these concerns merit renewed
investigation in a changing media environment. Credibility itself can be understood and examined from a variety of viewpoints: the credibility of a source of information, the credibility of the message, or the credibility of the medium (Austin & Dong, 1994; Metzger, Flanagan, Eyal, Lemus & McCann, 2003; Kiousis, 2001). But when considering news media credibility specifically, credibility emerges as a multi-dimensional concept, encompassing norms of fairness, completeness, accuracy, bias, trustworthiness, and balance (Meyer, 1988; Fico, Richardson, & Edwards, 2004; Cho et al., 2009). Taken together, these dimensions contribute to a single understanding of what it means to find the news media and its messages “credible.”

Past research has found that perceptions of media credibility depend on contextual and situational cues. Central to the focus of this study, Newhagen and Nass (1989) found that credibility judgments of television news focused on evaluations of the newscaster, while evaluations of newspaper credibility focuses on the media institution (e.g. The New York Times, USA Today). For television news in particular, judgments of credibility may be especially moved by production and display features—camera angles, cuts, screen size—but also newscaster-specific features—facial gestures, vocal inflection, gender, engaging in “happy talk” (Bracken, 2006; Burgoon, 1978; Hutchinson, 1982; Newhagen & Nass, 1989). For example, Markham (1968) found that source credibility for television news was largely based on newscaster “showmanship” and “personality.” It appears that television news represents a rich content to further explore the nuances of credibility judgments and news presentation. These assessments are of particular interest given that individuals tend to consume news media from sources they trust (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Drawing upon the literature, this study considers the formats of televised political debate shows, the moderator styles and guests’ tones in particular, should influence audiences’ credibility judgments.
Hypotheses & Research Questions

As the news environment becomes more complex—with increased market competition, niche news programming, and the blurring of news and entertainment—news producers are experimenting with different styles of presenting news (Baym, 2010). This experimentation, however, is not without repercussion. This study set out to test a series of hypotheses examining the effects of moderator style and guest tone on ratings of the credibility and value of a political debate program. Drawing from the use of a formal moderator in deliberative settings, we expect that respondents will react most favorably when seeing a moderator-as-correspondent upholding the traditional tenets of dispassionate engagement: peace-keeping, turn-taking, and unbiased questioning (Ettema, 2007; Jenssen & Keis, 2005). Given that perceptions of program and media credibility are largely driven by perceptions of on-camera personalities (Newhagen & Nass, 1989), we also expect that this dispassionate arbitrator lead to higher ratings of program credibility and gains in media trust overall. Furthermore, because perceptions of credibility are tied to perceptions of the completeness and value of the information (Meyer, 1988; Fico et al., 2004), a dispassionate moderator should also encourage beliefs that a program has more informational value. However, as media sources explore alternative understandings of what it means to moderate a political debate, and especially with the increased blending of soft and hard news (Baym, 2010), a dispassionate and controlled delivery on the part of the moderator may also be linked to lower ratings of entertainment value in the program. Therefore, we predict:

**H1:** A moderator-as-correspondent will lead to higher ratings of a) moderator credibility, b) program credibility, c) change in media trust, d) program informational value and lower ratings of e) program entertainment value compared to both the moderator-as-combatant and moderator-as-comic.
Turning next to a comparison of different models by which political news programs have sought to address this potential limitation – that a dispassionate arbitrator would be seen as less entertaining – we compare the effects of a humorous moderator to an aggressive moderator. Although some research has suggested that viewing political humor shows like *The Daily Show* has been shown to lower trust in the media (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006), the ability of humor to lessen hostility (Sternthal & Craig, 1973; Miron et al., 2008), to heighten the appeal of the comic (Kiuper et al., 1995), and to boost message credibility (Lyttle, 2001; Morris, 2009) all suggest that a moderator-as-comic should boost perceptions of moderator, program, and media credibility compared to an moderator-as-combatant, although the comic should never produce the same levels of trust and credibility as the correspondent.

**H2:** A moderator-as-comic will lead to higher ratings of a) moderator credibility, b) program credibility, and c) change in media trust, compared to a moderator-as-combatant.

However, while the use of humor should compare favorably to aggression for ratings of credibility, the effects on perceptions of the value of media content is less clear. While a comic may be more likeable, it is not clear whether the informational value of the program is equally boosted – and aggression has long been seen as an effective mechanism for journalists to pursue the truth in interviews (Patrona, 2009; Schudson, 1994). Similarly, although humor is by its very nature amusing, aggression is also often entertaining and arousing (Forgette & Morris, 2006; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Mutz, 2007). Thus, we ask:

**RQ1:** Does the moderator-as-comic lead to higher perceptions of program a) informational value and b) entertainment value compared to a moderator-as-combatant?

While the effects of incivility on political trust have been closely examined (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Forgette & Morris, 2006; Mutz & Reeves, 2005), its impact on media credibility is
less clear. Comparison theory suggests that when the guests are uncivil – thus not meeting norms of discussion (Mutz & Reeves, 2005) – the moderator may look even better for upholding these norms (Authors, 2010; Mussweiler, 2003). However, this same benefit should not extend to the program or to the news: the willingness of the media to invite and condone such incivility may decrease trust in the media, which is also negatively affected by media decisions to highlight incivility through split-screen debate coverage (Cho et al., 2009). At the same time, incivility among political figures on a debate show has been linked to higher ratings of entertainment value for that program (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Thus, we propose:

\textbf{H3}: Uncivil guests will lead to higher ratings of a) moderator credibility and b) program entertainment value but lower ratings of c) program credibility and d) change in media trust compared to civil guests.

We also re-examine Mutz & Reeves (2005) finding that incivility among political guests did not affect ratings of the informational value of the program (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Because we are examining pundits, rather than politicians, the differences between these sources of information make this question worth revisiting. Therefore, we ask:

\textbf{RQ2}: How will uncivil guests affect ratings of program informational value compared to civil guests?

Finally, we examine whether the effects of moderator styles are conditioned on the tone taken by the guests. Humor has been shown to defuse aggression (Baron & Ball, 1974; Miron et al. 2008; Sternthal & Craig, 1973), so it is possible that the moderator’s style will become even more important as the guests devolve into incivility. However, previous work has suggested that once politics descends into name-calling and political gamesmanship, people are turned off from the process (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Building off that research, we expect that when guests
adopt an uncivil tone, they mute differences caused by moderator style – once a debate has
descended into incivility, individuals will be turned off despite the efforts of the moderator.

**H4:** *The effects of moderator style will be conditioned by the tone of the guests, such that we will see larger differences in ratings of a) moderator credibility, b) program credibility, c) change in media trust, d) program informational value and e) program entertainment value depending on moderator style when guests are civil compared to when they are uncivil.*

**Methods**

The data in this study were collected over a two-week period during February 2010, using an experiment embedded in a web-based survey. All of the respondents were enrolled in undergraduate courses at a large Midwestern university and received extra credit for their participation. Of the roughly 1200 potential subjects contacted via email, 719 students (61.3% female; mean age = 19.50 years) completed the survey. Of these, 477 (61.4% female, mean age=19.49 years) were randomly assigned to the conditions analyzed in this study, which uses six of the nine cells in the larger design. No factors in the omitted cells crossed into this design.

All students viewed a simulated political talk show, with a moderator questioning two guests about their positions on the issue of cap-and-trade and other strategies designed to address global warming. The talk show involved an expert on each side of the issue debating the merits of a fictional proposed government policy. The script was designed to mirror television programming: the host opened the program with a short introduction of each guest and a summary of the topic, questioned the guests on their stances, moderated the discussion in a neutral manner, and closed the segment with a transition to a commercial break – all of which was maintained across conditions, as were all attendant facts.
To produce the stimuli, professional actors were hired to fill the roles of a neutral host and two topic experts. A television studio with a green screen was used to tape a mock program, allowing the creation of stimuli in line with modern television “talking head” programming, with the moderator placed in an in-studio environment and the two guests appearing via video transmissions from remote locations. A professional director and experienced video editor assisted in the development and production of the scripts and stimulus materials, maintaining consistent quality and realism across the different takes and conditions.

The experiment used a 3 (moderator style: correspondent, comic, or combatant) x 2 (guest tone: civil or uncivil) between-subjects design. To manipulate moderator style, we adjusted the approach adopted by the moderator in the televised debate program: moderator-as-correspondent, moderator-as-combatant, or moderator-as-comic. The correspondent focused on asking questions of his guests to promote a high-quality exchange, in the style of Meet the Press or Face the Nation. While this dispassionate-style moderator probed for additional information and offered clarification of the guests’ positions, he did not critique the guests’ response (i.e., “So I think you’re saying corporations can be a key part of the solution”). Meanwhile, the moderator-as-combatant not only ensured both of his guests had an ability to participate in the debate, but asked pointed questions designed to elicit more information or to refute their claims. This aggressive-style moderator, in the style of Chris Matthews or Bill O’Reilly, remained neutral, but also critiqued the guests’ positions in his transitions (i.e., “So you want these corporations you call incompetent to help solve the problem”). Finally, the moderator-as-comic used humor but remained pointed in his questioning of the guests. The humorous-style moderator provided summaries and self-referential asides, while offering quips about the guests’ positions or their rationale, often undercutting their remarks in his jokes, similar to Jon Stewart (i.e., “So
the folks that got us into this mess are supposed to get us out of it? Okay…like that could fail”).

All facts remained constant and the run time for the different conditions was roughly equivalent, ranging from 3 minutes and 44 seconds to 4 minutes and 27 seconds.

To produce the civility/incivility manipulation, the debate participants’ interactions included either respectful references to the opposition and their policies or derogatory remarks about their abilities and position including name-calling (Brooks & Geer, 2007). We also manipulated the politeness of the interaction: using Mutz & Reeves’ (2005) definition, we adjusted whether the guests waited politely for the other to finish speaking, or whether they used a more interruptive pattern of speech. The uncivil conditions focused on shifting the references to the opposition and adding violations of the norms of interpersonal discussion. As with the moderator manipulation, in this experimental shift, all facts and opinions remained constant.

Measures

Moderator Credibility. To test how perceptions of the moderator changed depending on experimental condition, respondents rated their level of agreement on an eleven-point scale for a series of statements about the moderator, including his credibility, fairness, reasonableness, open-mindedness, professionalism, and truth-seeking intentions. These items were averaged to create an index (Cronbach’s alpha=.94, M=4.91, SD=2.20).

Program Credibility. To test perceptions of the credibility of the political talk show, a battery of six items is used. These items include the standard measures of news credibility, with respondents rating their perceptions on an eleven-point scale of bias, accuracy, completeness, fairness, trustworthiness, and balance (Meyer, 1988; Fico et al., 2004). These items are averaged to create an index (Cronbach’s alpha=.88, M=4.93, SD=1.83).

Change in Media Trust. To measure whether exposure to the video shifted respondents’
perceptions of trust in the media, individuals were asked to rate their agreement with a series of three statements in both in the pre-test and post-test. Respondents provided on an eleven-point scale their agreement with statements that the media provides accurate and trustworthy information, and deals fairly with all sides. These items were combined and the pre-test ratings of media trust were subtracted from the post-test measures to create a single measure of change in media trust (Cronbach’s alpha=.66 (pre) and .63 (post), M=-.40, SD=1.18).

*Perceived Informativeness of Political Program.* This battery was adapted from Mutz & Reeves’ (2005) analysis of a political debate program. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of four statements that asked them to rate the informational value and their perceived learning from the political program on an eleven-point scale. These items were combined to create an index (Cronbach’s alpha=.77, M=4.08, SD=1.97).

*Perceived Entertainment Value of Political Program.* This battery was also adapted from Mutz & Reeves (2005) and asked respondents to rate their agreement with a series of four statements on an eleven-point scale about the entertainment value of the program. These items were averaged to create an index (Cronbach’s alpha=.74, M=3.72, SD=1.85).

*Ideology.* To control for the political ideology of the respondents, we included two items in the pre-test to tap into individuals’ ideological leaning in terms of social issues and people’s behavior and in terms of economic issues. Respondents reported their position on a seven-point scale from 0 “Very liberal” to 6 “Very Conservative.” These items were averaged to create an index (inter-item correlation=.52, p<.001, M=3.45, SD=1.39).

**Results**

*Manipulation Checks*

Before testing our hypotheses, we performed a series of manipulation checks to ensure
that our adjustments of moderator style and guest tone were effective. We used two-way ANCOVAs controlling for political ideology to limit the possibility our results are driven by differences in perceptions produced by the topic of the show. Respondents rated moderator aggression on a single item, measured on an eleven-point scale. The ANCOVA is significant and the contrast tests suggest that the manipulation check is consistent with our expectations (see Table 1 for significance levels and means of the moderator style manipulation). Specifically, significant differences arise between the three conditions, with the combatant rated as the most aggressive ($M=4.52$), followed the comic ($M=3.53$) and finally by the correspondent ($M=2.40$), who was seen as the least aggressive.

To validate these results, we also used a single-item indicator of the likeability of the moderator, which can influence credibility ratings (Kuiper et al., 1995; Sternthal & Craig, 1973). The ANCOVA is again significant and the contrast tests show the expected pattern, with the correspondent being rated the most likeable, followed by the comic and then the combatant.

A separate manipulation check was performed to gauge perceptions of guest tone. Subjects were asked to rate the civility separately for both of the guests on an eleven-point scale. These two indicators were averaged to form a single measure of guest civility, as the civility manipulation occurred for both of the guests concurrently. The ANCOVA is significant for guest tone (see Table 2 for significance levels and means of the guest tone manipulation), with the civil guests indeed being rated higher in civility ($M=5.38$) than the uncivil guests ($M=4.61$). Thus, we conclude that our manipulations of moderator tone and guest civility were both effective in altering perceptions of the relevant target.

**Hypothesis Testing**

Turning to our central hypotheses and research questions, a series of two-way
ANCOVAs again controlling for political ideology were used. We first examine the influence of
shifts in the moderator’s role: H1a-H1e suggest that viewing a program with the moderator-as-
correspondent will lead to significantly higher ratings of moderator credibility, story credibility,
change in media trust, and program informational value, but lower ratings of entertainment value
compared to programs employing the moderator-as-combatant or the moderator-as-comic.

Our results suggest that the correspondent did produce the highest ratings of credibility,
both in terms of the moderator, the program, and trust in the media overall. The omnibus test for
moderator credibility is significant (see Table 2), and the contrast tests support our H1a: the
moderator-as-correspondent was seen as significantly more credible ($M=6.05$) than the
moderator-as-comic ($M=5.48$) and the moderator-as-combatant ($M=3.34$). These results are
replicated for H1b: a significant main effect of moderator style on ratings of program credibility
emerges, with the correspondent producing significantly higher ratings of program credibility
($M=5.45$) than the comic ($M=5.01$) and the combatant ($M=4.38$). Finally, the pattern is similar
for H1c, which examined the effects of moderator style on change in media trust. The omnibus
test is significant, but H1c is only partially supported: whereas no significant difference emerges
in negative change in general media trust between the correspondent ($M=-.255$) and the comic
($M=-.298$), the correspondent produces less negative change than the combatant ($M=-.64$).

Moving beyond the ratings of credibility to examine perceptions of the informational and
entertainment value of the program, we test H1d and H1e, which predicted the moderator-as-
correspondent would lead to higher ratings of informational value than the moderator-as-comic
or the moderator-as-combatant, but a lower entertainment value. We support for H1d: the
omnibus test of moderator style is significant and the contrast tests support our expectations: a
correspondent produced higher ratings of program informational value ($M=4.51$) than a comic
moderator ($M=3.95$) or a combatant ($M=3.83$). However, H1e is not supported: not only is the omnibus main effect of moderator style insignificant in affecting judgments of the program’s entertainment value, the contrast tests reveal no significant difference between moderator styles: correspondent ($M=3.71$), comic ($M=3.54$), or combatant ($M=3.92$). Thus, moderator style influenced perceptions of the program’s informational value, but not the entertainment value.

We next examine the comparison between the comic and the combatant moderator on these same dependent variables. As noted above, the omnibus tests for moderator styles are significant for H2a, H2b, and H2c (see Table 1). Examining the contrast tests reveals that, as suggested by our hypotheses, a moderator-as-comic style leads to significantly higher ratings of moderator credibility ($p<.001$), program credibility ($p<.01$), and change in media trust ($p<.01$) than a moderator-as-combatant, providing support for H2a, H2b, and H2c. However, differences between the comic and the combatant are muted when answering RQ1a and RQ1d: the comic does not lead to higher ratings of the informative value of the program, nor of the entertainment value than the combatant. Therefore, while the comic limits the negative impact of a combatant moderator on perceptions of news credibility and trust, it does not affect perceptions of the value of the program, either in terms of informational content or entertainment assessments.

Moving beyond the role that moderator style plays in predicting shifts in perceptions of media content, we next examined how the tone of the guests impact these same evaluations. H3a & H3b predicted that uncivil guests would lead to higher ratings of moderator credibility and higher perceptions of entertainment value of the program, whereas H3c and H3d proposed that incivility would also lower ratings of program credibility and change in media trust. Finally, we ask how incivility among the guests would affect ratings of the informational value of the program. Our results suggest that none of these outcomes are affected by guest tone: the omnibus
test on each of these dependent variables is not statistically significant (please see Table 2). Therefore, we find no support for H3a-d, and answer RQ2 by suggesting that guest tone does not impact ratings of media credibility or perceptions of the program.

Our final set of research questions examined the relationship between guest tone and moderator style for its influence on perceptions of the story and of the media. We had proposed that the effects of moderator style would be muted when guests devolve into incivility in H4a-e. We again find no support for these hypotheses: the interaction term between guest tone and moderator style does not achieve significance for any of the dependent variables (please see Table 3). Thus, we conclude that shifts in guest tone did not influence perceptions of credibility or program value, either directly or by strengthening the effect of changes in moderator style.

Additional Analyses

To interpret the empirical evidence observed here more closely and to rule out alternative explanations, we conducted additional analyses. The first set of analyses addresses the question of whether audience evaluations of the moderator are drawn from their normative expectations of what media ought to do or are affected by social desirability. Our findings indicated that the moderator-as-correspondent outperformed the moderator-as-combatant or the moderator-as-comic in audiences’ ratings of media credibility and informational values, without hurting entertainment ratings. One might argue the normative values of dispassionate and unobtrusive journalism have been well established in society for many years, so individuals may be loath to admit they prefer more combatant or comic styles even in less newsy programs. We explore this possibility, using a series of two-way ANCOVAs as described previously.

Our additional analyses indicate this is not the case. Individuals reported that they paid equal attention to the program, regardless of moderator styles. The omnibus test for a single item
asking respondents to report their agreement with the statement “This program held my attention” was insignificant, $F=1.577$, $p$=n.s., as were the contrast tests. Moreover, audiences who saw the correspondent reported the highest intentions to watch the program in the future. Respondents rated their agreement with the statement “I would watch this program again,” which produced a significant main effect varying by moderator style, $F=9.555$, $p<.001$, partial $\eta^2=.035$. The contrast tests indicate that it is the correspondent ($M=2.87$) producing significantly higher scores compared to both the comic ($M=1.86$) and the combatant ($M=1.94$), but no significant difference emerged between the combatant and the comic. These results provide evidence that a commentator did not decrease individuals’ attention to or enjoyment of the program.

Another set of additional analyses explores our null findings for the effect of guests’ tone. We examined the influence of guest incivility more closely, testing whether the null findings only applied to media credibility and values, or applied more widely to trust in the political system. If the null findings emerge even in testing the effect of civility/incivility of the guests on trust in the political system, repeating the patterns we observed for media credibility, our study does not replicate Mutz and Reeves’ (2005) research, upon which our study was built. We tested the effects of guest incivility an additional battery of questions from Mutz & Reeves’ experiment, but we observed no effect of guest incivility on audiences’ ratings of trust in the political system, $F=.113$, $p$=n.s.. Given that we did not find the entertainment value of guests’ incivility as well, our findings appear to substantially differ from Mutz and Reeves’s (2005).

**Discussion**

The present study set out to investigate the implications of prominent formats of televised political programs featuring moderated debate among pundits. In particular, we examined the role that moderator style plays in shaping audiences’ impression of media credibility as well as
media values. As the adoption of these new formats continues to spread, it becomes increasingly important to assess the normative value of such programs in bolstering media accountability.

The findings of this study indicate that among the three moderator styles – i.e., the moderator-as-correspondent, the moderator-as-combatant, and the moderator-as-comic – the correspondent performed the best for audiences’ perception of media credibility. Not only was the correspondent seen as the most credible, viewers also rated the program as more credible and showed less of a decline in media trust, especially when compared with a moderator-as-combatant. Furthermore, the correspondent affected perceptions of the value of watching the program. Audiences found the debate mediated by the correspondent more informational but not any less entertaining than a program with moderators using different styles, including the comic.

It is worth noting that the moderator-as-correspondent in this study followed a deliberative ideal: facilitating a sometimes contentious debate, ensuring that the guests each have an opportunity to speak, maintaining neutrality during the debate, and ultimately seeking the truth (Ettema, 2007; Janssen & Kies, 2005). The results suggest that audience members have developed their expectation about a debate moderator’s role in accordance with this media ideal, which they apply when judging media accountability. Furthermore, such impartial and truth-seeking political debate programs may be well-able to attract the attention of news grazers without reliance on highly sensational styles. At the very least, this study demonstrates that political commentary or pundit debate programs sustain perceptions of media credibility when moderators remain dispassionate in advancing the debate between their guests.

On the other hand, the moderator-as-combatant, which was modeled after the adversarial media in this study, consistently lowered perceptions of media credibility. Furthermore, the combatant style failed to portray the program as more informational and entertaining in
comparison to other styles. Although the adversary model might be the best strategic choice for ensuring the perception of independence, journalistic expertise, and professionalism (Clayman et al., 2007; Schudson 1994) and has become widespread in various types of political media, it appears that the adversarial style does not conform to audiences’ standards of “accountable media.” Perhaps, as Bennett (2003) points out, the ideal of inquisitive, aggressive, watch-dog media might have gone too far (also Sabato 1991).

Interestingly, the moderator-as-comic appeared to attenuate some of the negative effects of the combatant’s aggressive style on media credibility. Just as with the correspondent, the comic inhibited the sharp decline in general trust in the media when compared to the combatant, and, despite their use of aggression and pointed jokes at the expense of the guest, still maintained higher credibility ratings for both the moderator himself and the show when compared to a combatant. These findings support that the use of self-effacing humor on the part of the moderator leads to increased credibility (Kuiper et al., 1995; Lyttle, 2001; Morris, 2009). Our manipulation checks suggest this increased credibility – at least compared to a combatant – may occur in two ways: through increasing the likeability of the host, as well as distracting them from aggression (Kuiper et al., 1995; Sternhal & Craig, 1973). However, it is worth noting that the comic did not outperform the correspondent on any indicator, and did significantly worse in boosting perceptions of the credibility and the informational value of the program. Furthermore, the comic was not seen as more entertaining compared to other moderators with different styles. The findings suggest that a humorous approach might mitigate some of the negative affects aroused by the debate and by a somewhat aggressive style of questioning, yet not be enough to live up to the audiences’ standard of the role of moderator ought to have.

The moderators’ styles in the debate shows appear to be the single most important factor
in understanding media credibility and program evaluations. Further, we focused on whether uncivil guests can also contribute to negative perceptions of media – or at least make the moderator and the media look better in contrast (Authors, forthcoming). Our results suggest this is simply not the case. The uncivil guests did not contribute to perceptions of credibility for the moderator, the program, or the media at a more general level. Nor was a main effect observed of the uncivil guests regarding the evaluation of the entertainment and informational value of the program. Thus, our study failed to replicate Mutz and Reeves’ (2005) findings that uncivil guests boost program entertainment values and limit trust in the political system in general.

Not only did the tone taken by the guests fail to produce a main effect on perceptions of media credibility and program value, it also did not produce differences in the effects of moderator style. While it seems logical that the approach taken by the moderator to matter more when the guests maintain civility in their exchange, this is not the case. Uncivil guests do not mute differences in moderator style nor produce a growth in cynicism towards the program or the media (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), suggesting that the tone taken by the debate participants are completely separate from respondents’ evaluations of media credibility or program evaluations.

The divergent findings from prior research can be interpreted several different ways. Unlike Mutz and Reeves’s (2005), our “guests” in the debate shows were political pundits making points on a proposed government policy, not political candidates running for legislative office. Therefore, audiences’ separation of perceptions of media credibility and trust in the political system makes sense or are even encouraging. Individuals are able to compartmentalize their perceptions of debate participants – guests and moderators – in a political debate program. Individuals are well-equipped to distinguish the sources of negativity and examine only the
behavior of the moderators in evaluating the programs and media credibility. With this in mind, the media may breathe easier---uncivil or combative behavior on the part of the guests is not held against the program, in terms of its credibility or likelihood of tuning in. It is the moderator who determines the value of the program and media credibility (Newhagen & Nass, 1989).

The divergence of this study from previous research also points to the notable changes that have been occurring in the media environment. While our experimental manipulations of guest tone remained consistent with previous understandings of incivility – for example, we adopt the definition of gratuitous insults that add little to the debate used in previous research (see Brooks & Geer, 2007) – the media environment in which our experiment was embedded has been dramatically changed since the embark of this type of research. When prior research (e.g., Mutz & Reeves, 2005) was performed, incivility in debate shows was an emerging style of political debates and subsequently heightened both scholarly and public concerns about the role of media playing in our political system. However, in recent years, the conflict and discord among political pundits, commentators, spin doctors, and rivalry between political groups has been widely adopted in news shows and increasingly accepted as part of the political dynamic. Incivility has become the “norm”, rather than an exception in media outlets. In coverage of political issues, therefore, uncivil guests may have lost their ability to engender the same arousal and entertainment value as seen in prior research (Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Mutz, 2007). If this is the case, incivility of political debate shows has lost its potential power to encourage citizens to engage with media and politics. Of course, future research needs to re-examine the effects of incivility on these variables.

This study is an important step in understanding the role moderators plays in the changing media environment. But while we strove to create a realistic and believable
experimental manipulation, we are still limited by the constraints of any experiment. The attention given to our stimulus by our respondents was probably greater than that of the average political news consumer, and external validity is still a concern. Moreover, in everyday life people are exposed repeatedly to the same moderators, building an overall reputation that may be different than what is reflected in our single-exposure study. Having said that, this experiment comes very close to mimicking televised political discussion shows on the air today, thus mitigating some of the concerns regarding external validity, and provides a more nuanced understanding of how incivility, aggression, and humor function in the realm of political media.

The widespread political commentary and pundit debate shows have important implications for media accountability. The growing adoption of “engaging” moderators—either inquisitive and aggressive or self-effacing and humorous, may cost media institutions – lowering media credibility while offering few gains in informational and entertainment values. The propensity toward sensationalism, entertainment, and the conflict of discord, indeed, does not live up to audiences’ standard for media. The media is a powerful institution that brings together policymakers, political experts, and ordinary citizens to engage in public deliberation. Democracy will suffer if media is not accountable to the public and the normative standards are not upheld. If this research is any indication, trends in news production do not bode well for future judgments of news credibility as more and more outlets opt for combatants and comics.
### Tables & Figures

**Table 1: Results For Moderator Style**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANOVA F-value</th>
<th>Partial $\eta^2$</th>
<th>Moderator-as-Respondent</th>
<th>Moderator-as-Combatant</th>
<th>Moderator-as-Comic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manipulation Check</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator Aggression</td>
<td>32.343***</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>2.401$^a$</td>
<td>4.521$^b$</td>
<td>3.533$^c$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator Likeability</td>
<td>20.456***</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>5.254$^a$</td>
<td>3.609$^b$</td>
<td>4.539$^c$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hypothesis Testing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator Credibility</td>
<td>90.507***</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>6.041$^a$</td>
<td>3.340$^b$</td>
<td>5.489$^c$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Credibility</td>
<td>13.742***</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>5.453$^a$</td>
<td>4.381$^b$</td>
<td>5.006$^c$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Media Trust</td>
<td>5.061**</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.257$^a$</td>
<td>-.642$^b$</td>
<td>-.296$^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Informational Value</td>
<td>4.863**</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>4.503$^a$</td>
<td>3.835$^b$</td>
<td>3.948$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Entertainment Value</td>
<td>1.786</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>3.728$^a$</td>
<td>3.917$^a$</td>
<td>3.533$^a$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p<.001$, **$p<.01$, *$p<.05$; different subscripts suggest that the marginal means are significantly different at $p<.05$; all analyses control for conservative ideology
Table 2: Results for Guest Tone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANOVA F-value</th>
<th>Partial η²</th>
<th>Civil Guests</th>
<th>Uncivil Guests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manipulation Check</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Civility</td>
<td>18.783*</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>5.380&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.607&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hypothesis Testing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator Credibility</td>
<td>1.818</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>4.840&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.074&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Credibility</td>
<td>2.132</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>5.068&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.826&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Media Trust</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.422&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.375&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Informational</td>
<td>.541</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>4.162&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.028&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment Value</td>
<td>.886</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>3.645&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.806&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05; different subscripts suggest that the marginal means are significantly different at p<.05, all analyses control for conservative ideology
Table 3: Results for the Interaction between Guest Tone and Moderator Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANOVA F-value</th>
<th>Partial η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderator Credibility</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Credibility</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Media Trust</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Informational Value</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Entertainment Value</td>
<td>1.802</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, all analyses control for conservative ideology
References

Authors, forthcoming

Authors, 2008


Durrington, V. A. & Yu, C. (2004). It’s the same only different: The effect the discussion moderator has on student participation in online class discussions. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education* 5, 89-100.


Appendix A: Script

Moderator Key: Bold: Correspondent;Italic: Combatant; Underline: Comic

Guest Key: Bold Italic: Uncivil;Italic Underline: civil

Moderator: Up next, a topic (that's been heavily debated/that's been deeply divisive/that's been - how can I put this gently? - a giant clusterfuck.). Paul says that cap and trade lets companies decide for themselves how to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Alan says it's just government telling people how to run their own businesses. Paul, (can you explain why you support this policy/can you refute this claim/can you explain why you and your hippie-friends support this policy)?

Paul: Yes I can. Cap-and-trade is a great first step that allows companies to decide how to invest their money, either by developing new technology or buying emissions permits. My opponent is (blatantly) disregarding what the American people want, in favor of (corrupt) special interests. (He knows as well as I do that/According to recent polls) most Americans support cap-and-trade. Big (greedy) corporations got us into this mess, so they should pay to fix it or develop the technology to solve it.

Moderator: (So I think you're saying corporations can be a key part of the solution/So you want these corporations you call incompetent to help solve the problem/?So the folks that got us into this mess are supposed to get us out of it? Okay...like that could possibly fail). Alan, Paul says most Americans support this policy. (Is Paul giving us an accurate picture of public opinion/Are you putting special interests ahead of the American people/Is Paul giving us an accurate picture of public opinion)?

Alan: (Absolutely not! Paul is playing with facts/No. Paul isn’t telling the whole story). (What he won't admit is) the majority of Americans oppose cap-and-trade if it increases their electric bills by (only) $25 a month. What (these flower-power) environmentalists (ignore/forget) is that cap-and-trade hits average folks in the pocketbooks. It's great to care about the environment, (but I care about Americans more/but I am more concerned about keeping costs low for Americans).

Paul: (We're not talking about "who loves America more."/I understand where Alan's coming from, but) we're talking about solving problems. Let's talk costs. Americans are (understandably) concerned about energy costs, but what if their electric bill increases 2 dollars a month? Or 5 bucks? Who,(except for a corporate hack), wouldn’t want to help the environment for the price of a cup of coffee?

Moderator: (Alright, so you're both talking about dollar amounts and who is going to shoulder the costs/Alright, so you're both fighting over imaginary costs and who's going to get stuck with the bill./Are we talking about a cup of coffee or a triple non-fat caramel machiatto?...Not that I drink that) But what about other countries? We're not the first to have this debate - who else can we look to?
Alan: I’m glad you asked. Paul (is obviously ignorant of/may be unaware of) the problems Australia ran into. Their government had to pay the electric bills for low-income families because of the (ridiculous) increases brought about by cap-and-trade.

Paul: (Alan, comparing the U.S. to Australia is just plain wrong/Okay, but the Australia comparison isn't relevant). (You should know) the U.S. plan is modeled after the European system. Under their plan, emissions are falling by 100 million tons each year. And, despite predictions from (nay-saying) opponents, electric bills actually decreased.

Moderator: (Apparently the experiences elsewhere with cap-and-trade have been mixed, but you both seem to agree we need to address global warming/There's a lot of rhetoric here, but few real facts. Since we can't agree, let's just move on/Hmmm... Cap-and-Trade. Australian for Fail...). There's been a lot of talk about creating environmentally friendly green jobs. Will cap-and-trade help? (After all, there are a lot of trees out there that need hugging.)

Paul: Absolutely. Contrary to what Alan (claims/says), moving toward a green economy will create millions of jobs, and not just within (the/large) corporations (Alan answers to) but in small businesses across the country.

Alan: Sure, green jobs seem to be an ideal solution for a nation facing dire economic and energy challenges. (But Paul needs to wake up and face reality/But let's look at this rationally). This (pipe-dream of a) policy makes promises it just can't keep.

Moderator: You know, we've talked a lot about emissions, but haven't talked about the biggest source: cars. What about changing mileage standards or making smaller, more efficient vehicles?

Alan: (Paul keeps trying to force Americans to buy these puny little deathtraps. Americans/Americans may say they want fuel-efficient vehicles but they) have always liked big cars. New standards would end the production of cars Americans love.

Paul: Alan, an increase in standards is only going to help the auto industry. Consumers are demanding fuel-efficient cars; (the auto lobby just doesn't get that it's in their best interest to provide that/it's in the industry's best interest to provide that).

Alan: (Look) (forceful, raise voice), (I don't disagree that fuel-efficiency is important, I just think) an (irresponsible) jump in standards is going to hurt consumers and the auto industry, both of which are already struggling. (This just shows how out of touch Paul is with the average American).

Moderator: (You both offered your opinions/I don't think the average American cares about your opinions/You two have more opinions than Simon Cowell), (but/but c/C/can) either of you provide (any) evidence? Stay tuned; we’ll tackle that question after a short commercial break.