

Fibber: A Seriously Funny Game with a Serious Message

With Election Day, November 6, 2012, less than two months away, many voters are looking for ways to learn about the current presidential nominees. In politics fibbing has become the social norm, but many voters are searching for these fibs in order to get a clearer picture of the Democrat and Republican candidates. Ralph Vacca is the designer of a serious game call *Fibber*. A “serious game” is a game that has some other goal in mind other than entertainment. Vacca found a way make a game that uncovers some of Barack Obama’s and Mitt Romney’s fibs while showing its players where their political biases may lie.

In *Fibber*, the player is first asked to label themselves as conservative, liberal, or other as well as give several pieces of information about themselves such as name, age, and



The directions given at the beginning of the game

sex. These elements are to help the game interpret where the player’s political bias may lie. The game then takes the form of a classic quiz game and asks its players to determine if a statement made by Obama or Romney is fact or a fib. The interesting twist to this game is the stripping. If the player catches one of these political figures’ fibs Obama or Romney has to remove an item of clothing. If the player is wrong, then they have to remove and item of clothing. In order to win the game, a player must catch Obama or Romney in six fibs. After each fib the player finds, the candidate

will have to remove a piece of clothing. When the Obama or Romney has taken off their tie, jacket, shirt, under-shirt, pants, and underwear, the player wins. At the end of the game, whether the player wins or loses, *Fibber* interprets where political biases are by showing the amount of times that each candidate were suspected of lying. Ralph Vacca uses Aristotle’s three Appeals: pathos, logos, and ethos, to effectively persuade *Fibber*’s players into seeing that they may be politically biased towards one candidate.

Vacca used pathos to entertain the game’s players. Pathos is when emotions are used in order to persuade the intended audience. The creators of the games we all love so much use pathos every chance they get. Whenever a game makes you laugh, you have been affected by the pathos of that game. When I was looking for a serious game to play, this game caught my eye immediately. I did not know what its purpose was, but the idea of key political figures stripping was immensely funny. I was affected by the pathos. In the game, whenever the player catches Obama or Romney fibbing they have to strip. A disco ball comes out of the ceiling and music is played while these important government officials take off a piece of clothing.



Humor is often used to help players deal with the seriousness of a topic. Politics are something people can get very worked up about very quickly. Pathos was used in *Fibber* to tone down the seriousness of politics, so that the player could enjoy the game while still learning in the process.

In Vacca's *Fibber*, logos, the reasoning that is used to persuade the audience, is used in several different ways including facts, percentages, and the end assessment. *Fibber* is a game riddled with facts and fibs. It is the player's job to determine which is which.



Romney says, "The people of Massachusetts like (the state healthcare plan) by about a 3-1 margin." Would you guess fact or fib? This one is a fact. The game then gives you the reason why this is a fact. The picture shown on the left shows the reasoning behind the quote's truth. Percentages are also used to reason with the audience.

During game play, a percentage of fibs caught remains for each president remains on the screen. This helps to remind the player of how many fibs he or she has caught. The end assessment is the most important aspect of logos in this game. The end assessment describes the player's end result. The assessment at the end shows the player's over all fib detection rate for each candidate, a key fib that the player missed, and gives the player something to think about. The game asks the player two simple questions which are targeted to them based on their results. The questions are: "Is there a reason you may have been unbiased in your perception of who would be more likely to lie" and "Or why you may have felt Obama/Romney was more likely to be truthful?" These questions are meant to make the player think about what their political biases may be.

In *Fibber*, ethos is used to show the player the credibility of the information in the game. Each time Obama or Romney was quoted the game tells the player when and where the statement was made. This makes the game, and therefore the assessment at the end, seem more credible. Another way ethos is used in *Fibber* is the facts provided. After the player decides if something is fact or fib, the game will give an explanation of the quote and describe the truth. The game overview also makes *Fibber* seem like a credible source for information. The overview says, "(the player is) being asked to take part in a study, which seeks to understand judgments of political statements...The study should take about 15-20 minutes of your time. This study is completely voluntary and you can skip questions you don't feel comfortable with and you may opt out at any time. All responses will be kept confidential." Calling *Fibber* a "study" instead of a "game" makes the game seem very official. Taking part in a study seems important and therefore makes the game seem very credible.

Fibber achieved its goal. It made me think about the political bias I may have. The first time I played this game, I didn't really know the ultimate goal other than to make Obama and Romney strip. After playing and reading the explanations the *Fibber* provided I felt a little more knowledgeable about the candidates fibbing techniques and I think I may be politically biased to some extent. The pathos, the use of emotions to persuade, made me want to keep playing the game: it was hilarious to see a cartoon Barack Obama stripping under the light of a spinning disco ball. The logos, the use of logic to persuade, made me want to learn more about the candidates: I now plan to research other fibs that the Republican and Democratic candidates might be telling. Finally the ethos, the use of establishing credibility to persuade, made me as a player feel important: I can now say I contributed to a study on political bias. *Fibber* is an effective serious game. It makes players, myself included, think about our political bias and how it might influence the way we perceive presidential candidates.

This experience has prompted me to reflect on my own potential bias.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

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