ONLINE MEDIA AS GATEKEEPERS
IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

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ABSTRACT

The third Republican presidential debate on CNBC attracted lots of coverage because of controversial performance of both moderators and candidates. I studied the coverage of the debate from the New York Times, USA Today, Politico and Slate, by analyzing 156 stories on the four publications. Under the framework of gatekeeping theory, I found that digital platforms enhanced the diversity of stories' genres, but presentation in digital media is more dramatic, which reinforced gatekeeping bias. Journalists in the digital era had better to find a balance between original reporting and aggregating. Meanwhile, reporters in digital media tend to find more unconventional and interesting angles, while reporters in traditional media preferred more comprehensive stories.