Participant Observation/Ethnography

Since you can't go into the voting booth with American voters, a good way to gauge public opinion of Ted Cruz would be to see how people respond to him when he is presenting and defending his platform. For my observation, I would go to a viewing party of the GOP debates and observe for the duration of the debate and until people started to leave the viewing. Perhaps researchers for the campaign could partner with a local Republican Party group to host viewing parties for the remaining debates. They could extend the invitation to registered Republicans and Independents for each debate, which gives the researchers an idea of who they are observing. Have the viewing party in a decently sized common room with chairs so people can sit and watch. Have refreshments and room for participants to stand up, walk around and mingle during commercial breaks. This would allow observers to gather more data from things people might say during the breaks.

An ideal group would be representative of the Republican Party, and more specifically Christian and Tea Party conservatives, because these are the people most likely to consider voting for Cruz. It's also important to have Independents represented because this group of voters could vote in either direction. Knowing what interests independent voters and what they think of the Republican candidates could give Cruz a leg up on how to recruit more independent voters.

It's important to observe participants in different contexts. First, What kinds of messages evoke a response from different demographics? For example, do younger viewers respond more to social issues or foreign policy? How does this compare to older viewers? What messages do men respond to compared to women? What is the response from minority when candidates respond to questions on race relations?

Second, what are the personality traits and/or physical qualities of the candidates that participants are responding to? Is the candidate older or

younger? Is he/she well spoken? Do participants respond to candidates who get into arguments? How do they feel about the candidates that come out on top of an argument, vice versa?

Lastly, it's important to gauge how people feel about Ted Cruz. This can be accomplished by observing the response from viewers during Cruz's airtime. Is it an overall positive/negative response? What messages did people want to hear more about? What did they agree/disagree with?

This data would help the Cruz campaign decide what messages to focus on along the campaign trail. Typically, people interested in watching presidential debates are interested in politics and either are politically savvy or trying to become politically savvy, so there is a general understanding of the political system and what they do or do not want in a candidate. This data could help the Cruz campaign find the issues on his platform that people want to know more about, as well as highlight the points on his platform that people are responding to. It also would allow the campaign to know the demographic they are reaching, as well as demographics that he could reach. This would allow Cruz's team to streamline advertising and to plan speeches depending on who he will be speaking to. This also prepares his team to move forward with research. Observing participants might raise questions about political behavior that could be translated to a focus group or in-depth interview later on.

While this is a good starting point for the campaign, this is a limited group. With participant observation, are analyzing a person's opinion based on their body language and their brief comments (if they speak at all). To add depth to this observation, it would be beneficial to observe undecided voters outside of the 2 hours of a debate. For example, what do they do in their spare time? Do they go to church? If so, what is their behavior during a service? Do they go to church more than once a week? This could information could be helpful because religion and values are an important part of Cruz's platform.