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"Campaigning 2.0": New Media, Messaging, and Grassroots Organization in the 2008 Presidential Election

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“Campaigning 2.0”
New Media, Messaging, and Grassroots Organization in the 2008 Presidential Election

By
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors Requirements for the Department of Political Science

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May 2, 2011
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At the same time we decided to commit to a grassroots strategy, we committed to try and build the best digital presence in political history, because we thought that so many of our early core supporters were living so much of their life online. And why should their intersection with politics be the one exception to that?

–David Plouffe, Obama for America Campaign Manager

Interview with Leonard Lopate, November 5, 2009
Chapter 1

Introduction

President Barack Obama is often heralded as the first presidential candidate to win the White House with new media. However, some political scholars point to the impact of “change versus continuity,” and not media and messaging strategy, as the primary reason for voter choice in 2008. According to political analyst Stuart Rothenberg, if the incumbent party pursues policies that are perceived by the public to be “on the right track,” the American voter will be more likely to vote for the incumbent president or the candidate of the incumbent’s party. If the incumbent party is pursuing policies that the public perceives to be “off track,” American voters are more likely to vote for a candidate of the opposition, or, the change candidate. For this reason, the Abramowitz political forecasting model predicted a victory for the Democrats in 2008 based upon increasingly grim economic conditions and the “record low” job approval ratings of incumbent President George W. Bush. The November 2006 midterm election was arguably a harbinger of the Democratic victory in the 2008 presidential election, as voters demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the Republicans in the

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3 Ibid.
executive and legislative branches by electing a Democratic majority back into the House of Representatives and the Senate. In September 2007, Gallup’s annual governance poll indicated that only 31% of Americans admitted to being “satisfied” with the way the country was being governed. Furthermore, the poll also indicated the American public trust in the executive branch neared Watergate-era levels with only 33% of respondents saying that they placed a “great deal/fair amount” of trust in the executive branch. By January 2008, President Bush’s job approval ratings hit 31%, and the Bush Administration’s approval ratings would never rise above 41% in 2008. The Abramowitz model predicted Obama would win with 54.3%. This ended up being remarkably close to the 2008 “popular vote as reported by CNNPolitics.com: 53% for Obama and 46% for McCain.”

However, this similarity between the predicted and actual popular vote does not necessarily validate the Abramowitz model. As asserted by Tommi Hurme, history has undermined the accuracy of the political forecasting model founded in incumbent approval ratings and the state of the economy, and suggests spurious causal effect. Richard Johnston, Michael Gray Hagen, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, point to the 2000 election as an indication of the unreliability of the Abramowitz model. In 2000, President Bill Clinton’s high approval ratings and the “booming” economy should have led to a comfortable win for Vice President

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10 Ibid.
Al Gore, instead of the tight race ultimately determined by the Supreme Court.\textsuperscript{11} Johnston et al. assert that while incumbent approval ratings and the state of the economy are important variables to consider in the prediction of the outcome of the presidential election, it was the Gore campaign’s improper priming and communication of those variables (the success of President Clinton and the economy) to the public which contributed to his loss.\textsuperscript{12}

Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson make a similar argument, pointing out that the debate over the economy in the 2008 presidential election was less a question of the actual state of the economy itself, but rather “which candidate could break its free fall and fashion a recovery.”\textsuperscript{13} Both candidates used messaging to shape their arguments against each other: Obama claimed McCain was out of touch with the middle class and tax cuts for the wealthy would do more damage to the economy; and McCain argued Obama’s higher taxes would turn “the recession into a depression.”\textsuperscript{14} In looking at the results of the 2008 National Annenburg Election Survey, following the Republican National Convention, both candidates were tied with 45\% of the public indicating they were most able to handle the recession. However, by Election Day, Obama gained a comfortable lead of 50\% to McCain’s 40\%.\textsuperscript{15} Though variance in this data cannot be empirically accounted for, Kenski et al. suggest that some of the variance may be due to messaging.\textsuperscript{16} This is based on the notion that people do not consider all available evidence, issues, or attributes at play before

\textsuperscript{11} Richard Johnston, Michael Gray Hagen, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, qtd. in Hurme, “Online Campaign Strategy,” 574.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 575.
\textsuperscript{13} Kenski et al., 7.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
casting their ballots.\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, campaign messaging has ability to change the way voters perceive candidates, and evaluate their values and platforms.\textsuperscript{18} Obama’s and McCain’s tax policies likely impacted the way voters viewed their ability to handle the recession. This suggests that campaigns are not inherently “tied to incumbents or deserving of credit or blame for the state of the economy.”\textsuperscript{19}

Furthermore, a conventional model like Abramowitz’s may be difficult to apply to the 2008 election, which contained myriad atypical circumstances. Deep dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of the Administration of President George W. Bush had spurred many presidential hopefuls into “testing the presidential waters” as early as January 2006, leading to the longest primary season in presidential campaign history.\textsuperscript{20} Additionally the candidate field for both parties was exceptionally diverse, with former First Lady Hillary Clinton, and a young, inexperienced African American Senator, Barack Obama, leading the race for the Democratic nomination; coupled with a Republican ticket headed by a former prisoner of war positioned to be the oldest man ever inaugurated into the Presidency, who would later choose a young, inexperienced female Governor, Sarah Palin as his running mate.\textsuperscript{21} Questions of politics and economics were often overshadowed by questions of character, and personal characteristics such as race, gender, age, and experience took a central role in defining the themes of the 2008 election.

\textsuperscript{17} Kenski et al., 7.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
Another significant change for 2008 was the increasing presence of new media in the political arena, which overshadowed traditional media and communications technology such as television, radio, newspapers, and direct mailing.\textsuperscript{22} A survey conducted by Pew Research Center, revealed that 40\% of Americans claimed to have used the Internet to gain information about the 2008 election, significantly more than the 31\% of those who used the Internet for this purpose in 2004.\textsuperscript{23} 19\% of Americans said they went online "at least once a week," and 6\% "on a daily basis." With increasing access to online resources and Internet, networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter flourished, and more Americans signed online to discuss election related topics in online communities.\textsuperscript{24} Viral videos and video portal websites such as YouTube accommodated the cheap and easily accessible distribution of campaign footage and advertisements.\textsuperscript{25} According to Pew, election-related emailing also became more frequent and widespread, with 23\% of Americans claiming to have received "emails about or from candidates," and 10\% saying they had used "email to engage in political debate."\textsuperscript{26} New forms of communication, such as mobile phones, made contacting individuals easier, anywhere at anytime, and the introduction of "smart phone technology" allowed users to access the Internet and email from

\textsuperscript{22} Hendricks and Denton, "Preface," xi.
\textsuperscript{23} Princeton Survey Research Associates International conducted a daily tracking survey of Americans' use of the Internet, from April 8-May 11, 2008. Data was collected from landline telephone interviews using random digit dialing (no cell phones were included) among a sample of 2,251 adults, age 18 and older. The sampling error margin is ±2.4 percentage points. For results based on Internet users alone (n=1,553), sampling error is ±2.8 percentage points. Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "The Internet and the 2008 Election," Pew Internet & American Life Project, last modified June 15, 2008, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/The-Internet-and-the-2008-Election.aspx/.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{26} Rainie and Smith, "The Internet."
web platforms on their phones. The Pew survey revealed that a total of 46% of Americans reported using new media (Internet, email, mobile phones) in the 2008 election.\textsuperscript{27} As Robert E. Denton, Jr. and Jim A. Kuypers argue, political campaigns are communication events designed to acquire votes by projecting a certain image, altering a perception, or countering the opposition.\textsuperscript{28} Therefore, “a candidate’s success hinges on his or her ability to convey messages to voters.”\textsuperscript{29} With such importance placed on campaign messaging, the increasingly plugged-in electorate of 2008 directed candidates’ attention to new media as an inexpensive, hyper-efficient opportunity for information dissemination.\textsuperscript{30} This accommodated faster, more efficient fundraising, information distribution, aggregation of volunteers, and instant communication with supporters through websites, social networking, email, and mobile phone technology.\textsuperscript{31}

The Obama for America campaign was the only presidential campaign of 2008 to integrate new media as a strategy rather than as a supplementary tactic. In her book on political strategy and tactics, Laure Paquette defines “tactic” as an action and “strategy” as an overarching goal or single idea, requiring “decisive implementation,” “absolute economy of effort,” and the flexibility to move between abstract and practical concepts.\textsuperscript{32} Strategies may consist of tactics, and tactics are in need of constant adjustment to accommodate the broader

\textsuperscript{27} Rainie and Smith, “The Internet.”
\textsuperscript{29} Hendricks and Denton, Jr., “Preface,” xi.
\textsuperscript{31} Hendricks and Denton, Jr., “Political Campaigns,” 8.
strategy. In 2008, the Obama campaign had an overarching goal of changing the electorate in its candidate’s favor, by bringing less likely voters to the polls who were highly likely to support the candidate, such as younger and minority voters. This would be obtained through a strategy of closing the gap between candidate and voter through the grassroots organizational capabilities of new media technology, and a bottom-up campaign structure, which Obama had become familiar with during his time in Chicago as a community organizer. Volunteering, fundraising, and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) tactics were all constructed to fit within the Obama campaign’s new media strategy. Furthermore, easy voter-to-campaign contact through new media’s constant dissemination of information provided the Obama campaign with the flexibility to respond quickly to current events, questions from supporters, and negative attack advertisements. Through Internet, social networking, viral videos, emailing, and texting, the Obama campaign was able to address current issues rapidly and effectively, and to combat attack advertisements and negative messaging from the McCain campaign.

In contrast, the McCain campaign utilized new media in a traditional sense, as a tactic in a controlled, top-down campaign model. The McCain campaign was by no means unaware of new media technology—in 2000, it dominated the campaign field in terms of email lists and Internet. However, in 2008, it failed to account for the new strategic capabilities accompanying the worldwide web, and instead utilized new media as a tactic

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33 Paquette, 11.
35 Plouffe, Interview by Lopate.
requiring constant readjustment to compete against the Obama campaign. The McCain campaign’s messaging lacked coherence. Its top-down structure slowed online organizing by requiring official campaign approval of all grassroots events. With no central strategy, its flexibility for damage control and addressing negative advertisements was inhibited. By relying predominantly on traditional fundraising initiatives such as direct mailing, campaign events, and public funding, its financial reserves dwindled in comparison to the online Obama fundraising machine. With the support of his base and an array of new media capabilities, Obama was able to out-maneuver and out-spend John McCain, despite being a newcomer to the national political arena, and despite the exhaustive nature of surviving an extended primary season, through a fresh campaign strategy built on the mastery of the televised media, Internet, and grassroots organization.

Chapter 2, of this paper, entitled “The Themes and Setting of the 2008 Presidential Election,” will examine the 2008 presidential election’s setting in terms of the candidates, their histories, support and party demographics, and resulting messages. The discussion on political environment will account for the predominant political candidates, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Sarah Palin, with the focus on the prevailing themes of race, age, and gender, and chosen slogans revolving around traditional themes of change, experience, and patriotism.

Chapter 3, “Media: Delivering the Message,” will describe the evolution of media in presidential campaigning, from newspaper and stump speaking, radio, and television to the
introduction of new media for political communication. Though television ruled presidential campaigning strategy during the second half of the twentieth century, this chapter will account for the breakthrough uses of Internet and new technologies in the presidential campaigns of Bill Clinton (1992), John McCain (2000), and Howard Dean (2004), which would become the foundation for Obama's new media strategy of 2008.

Chapter 4, "BarackObama.com and JohnMcCain.com," will examine the development, strategy and impact of the campaign websites of Barack Obama and John McCain. This chapter will describe in detail the development of the campaigns' online strategy in terms of staff, website capabilities, and voter engagement through their websites.

Chapter 5, "The Social Networking Election," will address the impact of candidates' usage of the social networking and messaging sites, MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. A background on the development and functions of social networking sites, as well as an analysis of their political capabilities will be followed by a comparison of the candidates' profile development, content, and manners in which they used social networking to interact with and engage with supporters, volunteers, and voters.

Chapter 6, "Going Viral: YouTube and Viral Videos," will discuss the rise of viral video and online video portals, such as YouTube. This chapter will present the online video as an inexpensive and readily accessible form of media which holds the audio-visual benefits of television without the intermediation of a third party television network. Additionally, it will discuss online videos' capacities for the distribution of positive and negative campaign advertisements. The impact of online video in 2008 will then be evaluated by comparing the
video strategies of the Obama and McCain campaigns in terms of live-streaming, campaign-generated, and user-generated video.

Chapter 7, “Voter Contact in the Digital Age: Email and Mobile Phones,” will evaluate the evolution of campaign-to-voter contact through email and mobile phones, and compare their uses by the Obama and McCain campaigns. With an aggressive microtargeting email initiative, widespread phone banking operation, and an embrace of new mobile phone technology, the Obama campaign positioned itself among younger demographics and spread its message inexpensively, and effectively to voters.

In conclusion, Chapter 8 will summarize the lessons of 2008 with respect to new media, messaging, and grassroots organization, and evaluate the impact of messaging through new technologies on the electorate. The chapter concludes with a forecast of the implications of 2008 on the future of campaign strategy, and whether the success of the Obama campaign marks a technological paradigm shift in electoral politics, in which campaigns will adopt an “Obama strategy,” transforming modern campaigns into more technologically and socially savvy organizations to cope with growing mass media and increasingly online American voters.

This paper does not argue that new media was the sole contributor to Obama’s election. However, it recognizes new media as a central component to the Obama campaign’s strategy, helping control and distribute messages to voters to overcome political disadvantages and opposition. By adapting campaign tactics of presidential elections past, the Obama campaign transformed the use of new media into an effective, integrated grassroots strategy that John McCain’s more traditional campaign struggled to compete with. Through
concise, consistent messages, projected through new media platforms including websites, social networking, viral videos, email, and mobile phone technology, the Obama team broke down the third wall allowing closer interaction between candidate and voter, in a way that old media had previously prevented. Through “Campaigning 2.0” the Obama campaign targeted and energized its base, including elusive minority and youth voters, and fueled grassroots organization across local, state and national levels.
Chapter 2
The Themes and Setting of the 2008 Presidential Election

With an unpopular incumbent party, candidate diversity, and new methods of mass communication creating a dynamic political environment, both candidates’ worked to find a balance between change and continuity to guarantee their party’s key electorate and reach independent votes. In order to understand the impact of new media on the delivery of campaign messages and resulting grassroots organization, this chapter will outline the development of Barack Obama’s and John McCain’s messaging strategies and their appeal to American voters in the context of the 2008 political climate.

A Change for the Better?

Despite the advantages of being the change candidate of the Democratic Party, Senator Obama’s candidacy faced significant obstacles. When Obama received the Democratic nomination in the summer of 2008, social scientists had doubts about the prospect of a Democrat in the White House. First, as an African American, Obama faced the challenges of racial discrimination. In his article describing the setting of the 2008 presidential election, Michael Nelson describes recent shifts in public attitude towards race and politics, which made the idea of a black President in 2008 a possibility in a way it had not been before. Perhaps due to Colin Powell’s “flirtation with a presidential run” after leaving the Bush Administration, 94% of respondents in a February 2007 poll said they
would be willing “to support a ‘generally well-qualified’ African-American for president.” However, as Richard Wolffe points out, Obama’s background was much more complex than simply race. Obama was not even “conventionally” African American. Born in Hawaii to a Caucasian American mother and a Kenyan father, he was raised in Kansas, and later, in Jakarta after his mother remarried to an Indonesian man. Social scientists predicted race to be an issue on Election Day, based on the country’s “sad historical inheritance of racial discrimination and slavery.” Ironically, Obama also faced racial skepticism from the black community. Several prominent African-American leaders questioned early on in the primary season whether Obama was “black enough” to be a ‘genuine African-American candidate.’ They claimed that because of his youth and unconventional upbringing, Obama had neither “shared” in the civil rights movement nor had the traditional “African-American experience.” Obama campaign manager David Plouffe, recalled, “The biggest race problem we had to start was not with white voters, but with African-American voters [who felt] a deep skepticism.” According to Nelson, many African-American voters “doubted that Obama could receive enough white votes to be elected” and “many were also

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40 Ibid., 28.
43 Ibid.
concerned that Obama would be killed by a racist assassin." In order to win the presidency, Obama would have to win white voters in order to rally the black vote.  

Second, Barack Hussein Obama’s racial challenges were further accentuated by the connotations drawn by his Muslim name: “Asking for votes from a nation that had been attacked by Islamic terrorists” and had waged war against Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, was challenging in and of itself. Political scientists predicted electoral discrimination against Obama as a racial minority, and his perceived (by some) connections to Islam, which some Americans correlated with terrorism (a 2006 poll revealed nearly “6 in 10” Americans believe Islam to be prone to violence). Throughout the course of the election, conservative critics used these characteristics to justify negatively associating Obama with Islam, with one viral email asserting, “Obama takes great care to conceal the fact that he’s a Muslim.” In his first book, Dreams From My Father, Obama recalls his elementary school years at a madrasah in Jakarta. However, opposition distorted facts, claiming that the secular school was in fact a radical Islamic institution.  

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46 Ibid.
perpetuated the myth of Obama as a religious, and even radical Muslim throughout the primary and into the general election.\(^51\)

Finally, compared to McCain, Obama was young at the age of 47, barely four years into his first term as Senator, with no military and limited foreign policy experience.\(^52\) Throughout the general election, the McCain campaign’s popular line of attack against Obama became the question, “Is he ready to lead?” Following the Republican National Convention, the Republican National Committee bought airtime “in fourteen states for an advertisement” targeting Obama and Democrats in Congress as “ready to tax, ready to spend, but not ready to lead.”\(^53\) Concerns over Obama’s inexperience and would ultimately factor into the selection of Joe Biden as Obama’s Vice Presidential running mate, whom as a longtime Senator for Delaware and former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had experience in the national political arena and international relations.\(^54\)

Though race and background, youth and inexperience presented challenges for Obama, they were also qualities that allowed Obama to embody “change in ways that his opponents could not.” According to sociologist Todd Gitlin, Obama represented the “archetype of the new kid on the block, the immigrant’s child, the recruit, fervent but still preternaturally calm, embodying some complicated future that we haven’t yet mapped, let alone experienced.”\(^55\) Representing diversity and a newer generation of politics, Obama

\(^{52}\) Pomper, “Presidential Election,” 45; Wolfe, 5.
\(^{55}\) Todd Gitlin qtd. in Pomper, “Presidential Election,” 58.
owned change during the 2008 campaign season.\textsuperscript{56} Even Hillary Clinton, who represented change both as a Democrat and as a female candidate for the presidency, was labeled by the Obama campaign as an “establishment” candidate during the primary. Clinton had worked inside Washington as First Lady for two terms and as Senator from New York for eight years, whereas Obama offered a new, fresh perspective to the White House. This argument was even more convincing in relation to his Republican opponent in the general election, John McCain, who had served multiple terms as Senator, and was arguably “out of touch” with younger generations because of his age.\textsuperscript{57} With President Bush’s approval ratings at a record low, running as the Democratic candidate of change was the best possible strategic position for a candidate going into the 2008 general election.

Using Obama’s embodiment of change and developing the Obama brand around the benefits of change was the natural choice for the campaign. By the time Obama announced his candidacy in January 2008, “hope” and “change” seemed to already have established themselves as the two catchphrases surrounding the campaign. “Hope” had been a part of their candidate’s mantra since before the start of the 2008 primary season. Immediately following his election to the United States Senate in 2005, Obama established his leadership political action committee, Hopefund.\textsuperscript{58} In November 2006, Obama released his second book, \textit{The Audacity of Hope}. Described by many reviewers as a mandate for his run for President, \textit{The Audacity of Hope} remained at the top of \textit{The New York Times} non-fiction, hardcover bestseller’s list for 30 weeks. This alongside the success of \textit{Dreams From My

\textsuperscript{56} Kenski et al., 33.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 55.
Father and his rousing speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention generated national excitement over the up and coming politician. In late 2007, the Obama team designer Sol Sender released the iconic red, white, and blue Obama “O” logo. The Obama campaign had officially built their brand.

Though both “hope” and “change” both became the words most associated with Obama’s run for the presidency, “change” became the candidate’s “most prominent” message, emblematized by in the campaign’s primary slogan, “Change we can believe in.” During the Democratic National Convention, “change” was the word used “most frequently” by speakers. In a poll done prior to the Democratic National Convention, Gallup determined that the majority of America already perceived “bringing about change” to be one of Obama’s greatest strengths as a candidate. In contrast, a strategic poll conducted by Obama’s lead pollster, Joel Benenson, at the beginning of the general election season determined that “the perception of McCain as a maverick change agent was confined to the Beltway; the rest of America, voters viewed him as Bush redux.” Ultimately, these two direct, simple words (“with their obvious Biblical overtones”) sought to evoke optimism and

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61 Kenski et al., 33.


64 Heilemann and Halperin, 327.
left room for the public to fill in their own positive definitions of hope and change.\footnote{Nancy Snow, “My Fellow Blogging Americans,” in \textit{Communicator-in-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House}, ed. John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 75.} Furthermore the directness and consistency of Obama’s message combated his inexperience by emphasizing his reliability and consistency as a candidate.\footnote{Ibid.} With an unpopular Administration currently in office, it would be difficult for an opponent to argue that hope or change could be a bad thing for the nation. The campaign emphasized a change in government, and hope for a better future.\footnote{Kenski et al., 34.}

\textit{Maverick or “McSame”?}

As a white Vietnam War and Washington veteran from a “prominent military family” who had worked in Congress for over 25 years, John McCain certainly embodied the more typical American presidential candidate.\footnote{Pomper, “Presidential Election,” 57.} According to Gitlin, McCain “represented ‘the known quantity, the maverick turned lawman, fiery when called on to fight, an icon of the old known American story of standing tall, holding firm, protecting God’s country against the stealthy foe.”\footnote{Gitlin qtd. in Pomper, “Presidential Election,” 58.} However, McCain faced obstacles of his own. First, though a history of moderation gave him a comparative advantage with dissatisfied voters over other Republican candidates in 2008, distancing McCain from the unpopular Bush Administration was still a challenge for the campaign. As described by Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy, and Kathleen Jamieson, President Bush “was the albatross circling” McCain’s candidacy.\footnote{Kenski et al., 14.} Throughout the
course of the general election, the Obama campaign would frequently link McCain to President Bush to decrease McCain’s favorability and emphasize Obama’s position as the candidate of change. Bush’s poor approval ratings were toxic to the McCain campaign, which struggled to find the right balance between distancing itself politically from the Administration, and satisfying the needs of the Republican Party’s conservative base. Thus, McCain’s reputation as a Republican “maverick” was both a blessing and a burden. As a “maverick,” McCain “could not be McSame.”71 Yet, as a maverick, McCain risked isolating conservative voters already skeptical of McCain’s history of cooperation with Democrats on issues such as tax reform and energy.

Second, as Nelson points out, the issue of “age” became a constant problem for the McCain campaign. At 71, McCain was older than any other President at the time of their inauguration.72 However, Nelson asserts McCain was “fortunate in his choice of party.”73 According to Gallup, only 38% of Republicans in August 2007 thought 70 or older to be “undesirable in a president.”74 Though the campaign anticipated questions in regard to fitness and health from moderates and opposition (55% of independents and 65% of Democrats thought 70 years or older to be undesirable), the McCain campaign did not anticipate the extent to which it affected the election’s outcome.75 In looking at media stories from 2008, Nelson points out that though pundits did not seem to feel comfortable playing “the race card” with respect to Obama, comments on McCain’s age and health never seemed off

71 Kenski et al., 30.
75 Ibid.
News media speculated the McCain campaign delay in producing the Senator’s medical records as an attempt to cover up his lack of fitness for the presidency. Liberal groups distributed an advertisement “that began ‘John McCain is 72 and had cancer four times.’” Obama even “backhandedly praised him in early speeches ‘for his first half-century of service to his country.’” In the end, age appeared to be a bigger detriment than race. Obama won “44% of the white vote” suggesting that the race had minimal effect on Obama’s success. However, McCain’s age proved to be “a political burden” with 39% of voters indicating in exit polls, “age was a factor in their decision” and thus 66% of them voted for Obama instead.

The McCain campaign adopted several strategies in order to cope with the challenge of the Obama campaign’s domination in messaging and communications. The first lay in the campaign’s messaging strategy, using the themes of “maverick,” “experience,” and “Country First.” Despite the Illinois Senator’s apparent claim to the theme of “change,” the McCain campaign used the depiction of McCain’s political history as a “maverick” in order to attempt to frame “change” to fit McCain’s image, and therefore, disassociate their candidate from the policies of the Bush Administration. However, in their essay regarding issue framing in the 2008 campaign, Karl R. Smerecnik and George N. Dionisopoulos highlight the difficulty the McCain campaign had in framing their candidate as both a “maverick” symbolizing change that could appeal to moderate voters and maintain the more conservative

77 Horsely, “McCain’s Age.”
Republican base. 81 If the campaign spent too much time emphasizing McCain’s more moderate voting record conservatives would reject him. However, if the campaign failed to distance McCain from the Bush Administration, McCain would surely lose the independent votes the campaign depended on receiving in order to defeat Obama. 82 In order to deal with this challenge, the McCain campaign thus highlighted McCain’s history of independent, bipartisan decision-making while depicting Obama as an extreme, unreliable liberal rather than a productive change agent. 83 In fact, the same day that Obama won the Democratic nomination, McCain made a speech that cast Obama “as an out-of-touch liberal who offers a false promise of change.” 84

Furthermore, seeking to redirect attention from public and media questions over their candidate’s fitness to lead, the McCain campaign reinforced age and military service in a positive light through the message of “experience” and the slogan, “Country First.” In a study done prior to the Republican National Convention, Gallup determined that McCain’s perceived strengths amongst the public were “international issues,” “experience,” “terrorism,” and “capable commander-in-chief.” 85 Clearly, McCain’s character and background as a political candidate were capable of being viewed positively by the American public, in crucial qualities that Obama lacked as a candidate such as “experience.” This was particularly in regard to foreign policy which remained a forefront issue for the American public with two ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and increasing concerns over

82 Ibid.
83 Kenski et al., 27.
84 Abramson et al., 43.
85 “Pre-Convention Poll Points,” Gallup, Inc.
terrorism. Though Obama scored well on domestic policy, a July 2008 USA Today/Gallup Poll, showed 22% more respondents were more confident in McCain’s ability to handle terrorism, and 5% more confident in McCain’s ability to handle the war in Iraq.\textsuperscript{86} Though Obama served as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he had yet to sponsor legislation within the Committee or to travel to the Middle East. He had also never served in the military nor dealt with the Department of Defense. Thus, McCain accused Obama of being a celebrity, and a politician without substance. “Experience” drew a stark contrast with Obama, and combated questions over age and fitness by underscoring the benefits of a seasoned politician. “Country First” placed an emphasis on McCain’s patriotism as a former prisoner of war in North Vietnam and substance as a dedicated politician.\textsuperscript{87} As John Heilemann and Mark Halperin describe the McCain campaign’s strategy in developing its slogan, “McCain equaled country first, Obama equaled Obama first.”\textsuperscript{88} However, Kenski et al. explain that this message was sometimes lost upon younger electorate, which did not have a memory of his heroic efforts in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{89}

The second aspect of the McCain campaign’s strategy in combating Obama’s messaging took the form of McCain’s Vice Presidential pick, Alaskan Governor, Sarah Palin. As a young, relatively unknown, and inexperienced politician many political scientists described Palin’s nomination as a contradiction to the McCain campaign’s central message of

\textsuperscript{86} Data for this poll was collected using telephone interviews (respondents either were landline or cell-phone only) with 1,007 national adults, aged 18 and older from July 25–27, 2008 and has a margin sampling error of ±3 percentage points. Jeffrey M. Jones, “Views of Obama on International Matters Little Changed,” Gallup, Inc., last modified August 1, 2008, http://www.gallup.com/poll/109189/views-obama-international-matters-little-changed.aspx/.
\textsuperscript{87} Kenski et al., 27.
\textsuperscript{88} Heilemann and Halperin, 334.
\textsuperscript{89} Kenski et al., 27.
experience. Yet Palin’s candidacy also appeared to be a promising investment. Her nomination had the potential to neutralize the historical nature of America’s first African-American president with the possibility of America’s first female Vice President, appealing to former Hillary Clinton supporters who had hoped to see a woman hold national office.90 Palin’s youth, attractiveness, and charisma drew large crowds and energized audiences, and her conservative beliefs rallied “those on the right still skeptical of McCain’s reputed moderation.”91 News of McCain’s Vice Presidential pick drowned out coverage of the Democratic National Convention, and boosted the Republican ticket in the polls. However, despite the initial hype surrounding Palin, her nomination also proved to be a burden for the McCain campaign as Palin blundered in interviews appearing to have “little knowledge of most national issues,” and speculation into her personal life revealed scandals regarding her teenage daughter’s pregnancy, “spending of $150,000 of party funds for campaign clothing, and the possible abuse of her gubernatorial power in a dispute with her former brother-in-law.”92 Pomper argues that the selection of Palin ultimately contradicted McCain’s accusations against Obama for being not ready to lead, and her inexperience likely “added greater weight McCain’s age.”93 One poll revealed three out of five voters thought Palin not qualified enough to take over the presidency in the event McCain was not longer fit to serve. In comparison, only one in six voters thought the same of Joe Biden.94

91 Ibid.
92 For more on Palin and her interviews with news media, see Chapter 6.; Pomper, “Presidential Election,” 59.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
Applying the Messages

In comparing the backgrounds of the two candidates, McCain and Obama “could hardly have been more different.” McCain fit the mold of the traditional American political candidate: older, white, upper class male with military experience, Obama appeared to be the candidate of change more than just in terms of his political party. However, both candidates sought to prime change and continuity to their advantage. “Maverick” McCain distanced himself from the distrusted Bush Administration, while simultaneously playing up his experience. He downplayed his age with the selection of Palin as his running mate and made the Republican ticket more youthful and anti-establishment. Though this messaging strategy worked to attract moderate Republicans and maintain the conservative base, many voters found it inconsistent and contradictory. Gerald M. Pomper states, “McCain tried many themes, but none worked.” As a result, McCain’s struggle to obtain independent votes was worsened, as moderate voters already disillusioned with the Bush presidency distrusted the confused messages McCain was trying to convey. Though as a Democrat Obama did not have to fight ties to the Bush Administration, he was not without messaging challenges of his own. Obama’s youth, inexperience, and unconventional upbringing fueled opposition attacks. His campaign discovered that groups most likely to support Obama (youth and minorities) were also the least likely to vote. Additionally, a 2007 Gallup poll revealing that “Honesty” was listed as the most important quality at 33%, followed by “leadership” at 16%, and

95 Pomper, “Presidential Election,” 57.
96 Ibid., 66.
“competence or the ability to govern effectively” at 10%. With this in mind, the question remains how a young, inexperienced minority candidate, new to the national political scene was able to ward off opposition attacks, rally his base, and appeal to the American public’s cries for an honest, transparent, strong leader.

In 2008, campaign strategy and the execution of consistent effect messaging assisted Obama into the Presidency. Ultimately, the Obama campaign’s messaging strategy harnessed and branded the idea of “hope” and “change” through a concise, dynamic hi-tech messaging campaign allowed the Obama campaign to develop a grassroots strategy that energized its support base. This was in stark contrast to the lack of consistency and direction in McCain’s messaging campaign. It was through the Obama’s campaign’s exemplary use of technology and a clear (not necessarily detailed) message that Obama was able to use his diversity to his advantage, and create the image of being a personable, fresh candidate with a progressive vision for the future.

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98 Pomper, “Presidential Election,” 64.
The second phase of messaging in a presidential campaign, after the formation of the message or theme, is delivering the message to the voter. To fully understand the transformation and impact of new media in the 2008 election, it is necessary to understand the strategic strengths and weaknesses of all forms of media, how the techniques used by candidates to communicate their messages have evolved, as well as the origins of Campaigning 2.0. First, this chapter will focus on the evolution of old media, including print, radio, and television. Second, this chapter will analyze the origins of new media, including websites, social networking sites, online videos, email, and mobile phones, and its relevance to the 2008 presidential campaigns.

From Print to Television

The evolution of messaging in presidential campaigns clearly follows the evolution of technology. Though candidates during the Revolutionary area predominantly used pamphlets and newspapers to communicate to voters, by the end of the Civil War period candidates sought to achieve greater intimacy with voters through stump speeches. The rhetoric used by stump speakers was more colloquial and concise, and thus significantly easier for the average voter to understand than the more elaborate and educated language used in pamphlets.99

During the Gilded Age, popular participation in the electoral process grew significantly.\textsuperscript{100} According to Jeffrey P. Jones, "parties dominated neighborhoods" and campaigns were conducted as social affairs "designed to invigorate the electorate as much as inspire them" with "public spectacles comprised of numerous rituals, including parades, music competitions, and liberty poles."\textsuperscript{101} However, technological advancement soon stepped between the candidates and voters, drastically transforming the strategy of intimate communication into one of mass communication, reaching out to the majority of the voting public simultaneously with more polished messages. In the 1920s, radio broadcasting became the first form of non-printed media to achieve this. Presidential candidates were able to "cross ethnic and geographic boundaries" and convey their messages without directly interacting with the voter.\textsuperscript{102} President Herbert Hoover was one of the first to capitalize upon the benefits of using radio as a campaign media strategy, making a total of "eight nationally broadcasted radio speeches" during his re-election campaign in 1928.\textsuperscript{103}

Perhaps even more transformative to the political landscape than the radio, was the introduction of television in 1952. With the ability to broadcast speeches, debates, party conventions, and political advertisements visually, television added the imagery to mass communication that radio was lacking. In 1952, Dwight Eisenhower became the first

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 185.
\textsuperscript{102} Hendricks and Denton, "Political Campaigns," 2.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
presidential candidate to buy airtime for campaign advertisements. Television became candidates’ new greatest tool for mass communication and gaining public face time with voters across the country.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson bases the appeal of television as a campaign tool on the idea of a candidate’s ability to simulate the direct communication and intimacy that was desired during activities such as stump speaking and door knocking. Through this “false intimacy,” candidates could appear on screen in voters’ living rooms and appear to speak directly to them through the television. Candidates focused on appearances and styled their language to maximize the effectiveness of simulating intimacy with voters. As Jamieson explains, “shorter speeches, a more conversational tone, and self-disclosure in discourse” allowed “the audience to feel as if they” knew “the official or politician as a ‘dear friend.’”

W. Phillips Shively asserts that the new manner of appealing to the public through television brought a paradigm shift, as party-focused campaign politics of the Gilded Age ended and “candidate-centered” politics of the television era began. No longer were elections contests “between

104 Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 2.
107 Kathleen Hall Jamieson qtd. in Ibid.
the relative strength of the two parties in mobilizing their supporters on behalf of nominees.\textsuperscript{109}

Joe McGinniss’s 1970 book, \textit{The Selling of the President} highlights and builds upon Jamieson’s description of “false intimacy” in televised presidential campaign strategy.\textsuperscript{110} McGinniss uses Richard Nixon’s experiences with television during the 1960 and 1968 campaigns to frame his argument that television has transformed presidential campaigns into advertisement campaigns, essentially treating candidates as products to sell to voters. As a politician well versed in the art of traditional stump speeches, Nixon struggled to cope with the paradigm shift and achieve the friendly physical appearance, intimate tone, and conversational language required by television, that John F. Kennedy had adeptly mastered in 1960. The book notes the painstaking strategies and calculations that went into reforming Nixon’s image into one of a televised “celebrity” for the 1968 election.\textsuperscript{111} McGinniss thus argues, that by focusing heavily on selling a candidate through image, appealing messages, and branding rather than focusing on substantive content, television has removed “political values” from presidential campaign strategy for the sake of “seducing” voters.\textsuperscript{112} Though radio offered new technological opportunities for presidential candidates in the realm of mass communication, the introduction of television initiated a true paradigm shift in the world of presidential politics, creating candidate-centered campaigns that emphasized advertisement, mass messaging, and candidate appeal.

\textsuperscript{109} Aldrich, 252.
\textsuperscript{111} McGinniss, 28.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
Computer-based Systems and the Internet

Political scientists today argue that the next technological paradigm shift in the world of politics will center on the use of the Internet. Political Internet usage throughout the mid-1990s remained primarily in domain of nonprofits, interest groups, and major news networks, which slowly “expanded their online coverage” of elections to contain “video of campaign events” and polling data. Though Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign was the first to use Internet “extensively” as a messaging tactic, online media was predominantly limited to email and the distribution of information through listservs. Additionally, Internet usage by presidential candidates was by no means widespread. According to a study by Dave D’Alessio, before “1996, almost no political candidates were using the Internet for purposes of transmitting messages to large audiences,” and only 6%-10%” of American voters obtained political information from the Internet.

Though Internet campaigning was extremely limited throughout the early to mid-1990s, computer-based communications systems were crucial to campaigns, by gathering citizen data that helped develop general campaign strategy. Voter mapping gathered “voting records, attendance sheets, volunteer assessments, contribution lists, and Internet access of selected sites” and then electronically aggregated data to create profiles of

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113 Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 3-4.
114 Ibid.
individuals, organized by their geographic location. Campaigns could then use the information collected from the profiles to microtarget their messages to certain populations. Most notable of voter mapping programs are Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which became increasingly advanced throughout the course of the 1990s. By taking “information about citizens’ political past, individually or collectively, in combination with information about lifestyle choices,” GIS predicts voters’ political behavior and groups them by region, guiding campaigners use of resources, such as which geographical areas to broadcast candidates’ commercials, which websites on which to place advertisements, where to organize candidate visits, rallies, and other events, where to send mailings, and which individuals receive personal versus robo calls. Voter mapping and microtargeting continue to play a large role in the development of campaign strategy today.

By the end of the 1990s, the transition into online political messaging was well under way with 50%-63% of mid-term campaigns developing websites for their candidates. In 2000, Internet campaigning expanded to include fundraising and organizational tools for GOTV efforts through candidate websites. However, as described by John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr., “the Internet had little impact swaying voters,” instead serving “more for candidate and attitude reinforcement than persuasion.” It was not until 2004 that online media experienced a breakthrough in the world of presidential campaigning. Though Republicans were historically the “first to embrace early technology such as polling,”

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118 Ibid., 230.
119 For more on microtargeting in the 2008 presidential election, see Chapter 7.
120 Denton and Kuypers, 140.
121 Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 3-4.
marketing, computers, and particularly online media during the 2000 election due to financial advantages, it was the Democratic Howard Dean campaign that mastered the use of online media in 2004. Denton and Jim A. Kuypers argue the Dean campaign and, specifically, campaign manager Joe Trippi, were the originators of “the revolution of online campaigning.” Instead of relying solely on the Dean campaign’s website, data banking, and target emailing, the campaign used new social media websites such as MeetUp.com as “virtual and physical organizing” and “fundraising tools.” Trippi and his team focused heavily on user involvement, providing sign-ups and online resources for events and volunteer efforts. Furthermore, the campaign capitalized on rapid online information distribution and mass communication, by “pegging” campaign news stories to requests for donations in order to generate immediate fundraising responses from supporters online. The Dean campaign was not only revolutionary in its use of online resources, but it redefined the Internet’s role in campaigning and set a new standard for online political organization.

After the 2004 election, polls revealed that approximately 63 million Americans “used the Internet for political information,” 43 million “discussed the election by e-mail,” 13 million “used the Internet to make a political contribution,” and 52% indicated that information they had obtained from the Internet influenced their votes. Danielle Weise and Bruce E. Gronbeck explain this profound increase in Internet usage in terms of the emergence of five major developments in “cyber politics” during the 2004 presidential

123 Denton and Kuypers, 141.
124 For more on the Dean campaign and social networking, see Chapter 5. Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 4-5.
125 Denton and Kuypers, 141.
126 Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 3-4.
election: 1) the development and expansion of “database functions” to “enhance e-mail and wireless uses” to better target voters with more personalized messages; 2) the development of social networking sites and interactive features in candidate websites to increase voter participation and grassroots organization; 3) the rise of video websites and online advertising; 4) the technological advancement and standardization of candidate websites to increase site visitation; and 5) the introduction of blogging, which offered highly accessible, public online forums for political dialogue and the sharing of information.  

Though blogs such as the Drudge Report existed as early as 1998 and were key in alerting the public to scandals and political gossip such as Clinton’s Monica Lewinsky scandal, Hendricks and Denton argue that blogging had its first noticeable impact on a presidential election cycle in 2004. The growing “blogosphere” provided users with “hundreds if not thousands of sites” containing political information and commentary, and on election night, several popular political blogs crashed “unable to handle the volume of hits.”

During the 2006 mid-term elections, Democratic candidates continued to outperform and outspend their Republican counterparts in Internet campaign strategy. Whereas the Democratic National Committee spent $7.4 million on online campaigning, the Republican National Committee spent only $600,000 “during the same timeframe.” The Democrats’ investment in new Internet media was wise. A poll taken after the conclusion of the 2006 election revealed that online media “ranked among the top sources of information for campaigns” with the number of Americans seeking campaign information online doubling

127 Danielle Weise and Bruce E. Gronbeck qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 4-5.
128 Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 4-5, 6.
129 Ibid., 5.
between 2002 and 2006.\textsuperscript{130} Between 2007 and 2008, “the digital revolution multiplied exponentially the ways in Americans” were accessed by political campaigns.\textsuperscript{131} Messages became nearly constantly accessible to voters through Internet access and email on both their computers and cellular phones.\textsuperscript{132} Social networking sites and blogging only increased in popularity. Voters could be contacted more frequently and more efficiently by campaigns in terms of time and cost through expanding Internet exposure.\textsuperscript{133} By 2008, continually advancing online technology and increasing Internet usage by the American public introduced the “second stage of the web,” Web 2.0.\textsuperscript{134} Thus, the stage was set for the most “plugged-in” election year in presidential campaign history and the birth of Politics and Campaigning 2.0.

\textbf{Patterns in 2008}

During the twentieth century, campaigning moved from a party-centered to a candidate-centered communication process. By the start of the twenty-first century, the political process saw suggestions of a paradigm shift into citizen-centered campaigning, with the rise of new media in full swing.\textsuperscript{135} According to Stephen Coleman and Jay Blumler, “The 2008 presidential campaign was the first to occur with the existence of an online media platform that offered the would-be presidents the reach of a mass medium, but a markedly

\textsuperscript{130} Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 5.
\textsuperscript{132} Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 6.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Gronbeck, “The Web,” 228.
different architecture and aesthetics than radio and television.”

Recent progress in Internet provided easier data and program transfer, mass communication, and political discussion through email, instant messaging systems, social networking sites, and blogs. The increasing popularity of online forums and mobile phones provided new avenues for candidates to reach out to the public. While in previous presidential election years, the Internet was static with “rarely updated Web sites” conveying fundraising opportunities and candidate position papers, new media in 2008 “was used strategically and dynamically to motivate, involve, and generate enthusiasm among the electorate… more than any prior presidential campaign in history.” Furthermore, rapidly spreading information through easily accessible new media outlets exposed individuals who were not necessarily interested in politics to political information. Thus, the Internet quickly became an easy tool for gathering and distributing political news amongst the American public. An October 2008 poll done by Pew Research Center found that when asking what news source they use for campaign news, individuals mentioned the Internet “first or second” 33% in 2008, versus 10% of the time in 2004. Since Internet is typically most used by younger generations it is unsurprising that Pew also found the Internet to be used most as a campaign news source in the 18–29 age demographic at 49%. The younger generation’s enthusiasm helped give shape to the 2008 online political climate by fueling the growth of online social networking and messaging platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, and spread of viral videos and video portals like YouTube.

137 Jones, “Pop,” 172.
138 Hendricks and Denton, “Preface,” xii.
139 Jones, “Pop,” 172.
Though both the Obama and McCain campaigns were successful in their use of traditional media in 2008, there was a distinct difference between the ways in which they used new media. The Obama campaign used new media “to fact-check information, counter attacks, strengthen its connection with supporters, and have an ‘always on,’ 24/7 presence,” maximizing its voter mobilization, grassroots organization, and mass communication capabilities.\(^{141}\) This was primarily accomplished by devoting a significant amount of resources and staff to developing and expanding upon Internet and cellular phone technology to create a highly effective, cost-efficient mass communication campaign.\(^ {142}\) In comparison, the McCain campaign’s strategy focused most of its attention on traditional forms of media, using only “some of the bells and whistles of online communication, but not with the same remarkable effects as Obama.”\(^ {143}\) Though the 2000 McCain campaign was considerably successful in creating an online campaign, it failed to update its techniques in 2008 to compete with the younger, more technologically savvy Obama campaign that had familiarized itself with the most cutting edge online technological advancements. The McCain campaign’s comparatively diminutive efforts to use new media demonstrated the campaign’s failure to understand new media’s capabilities and strategic benefits, further exaggerating the success of the Obama campaign in this realm.

To demonstrate the Obama campaign’s superior usage of new media and subsequent advantaged position throughout the campaign, this paper has broken down following chapters

\(^{141}\) Hendricks and Denton, “Preface,” xiii.

\(^{142}\) Jones, “Pop,” 185-185.

to address each form of new media and its uses during 2008 individually in the categories of campaign websites, social networking, online videos and voter contact through new media using email, cellular phone applications, and text messaging, respectively.
Chapter 4
BarackObama.com and JohnMcCain.com

By the end of the 2008 election, the Obama campaign was credited for creating the most visited and most advanced candidate website, BarackObama.com.\(^{144}\) Though the 2004 Dean campaign was the first to incorporate Internet effectively as an organizational tool, it was the Obama campaign that revolutionized the use of candidate websites in presidential campaigning. This chapter will argue that BarackObama.com was used as a central component of the campaign’s new media strategy, serving as a hub for information distribution, fundraising, canvassing, voter registration, and grassroots organization via interactive and networking platforms. The Obama campaign succeeded where previous campaigns had failed: turning its online community into actual votes. In contrast, JohnMcCain.com was developed as a tactic within the McCain campaign’s strategy, with website capacities limited to supplementary information distribution and fundraising. This was consistent with its previous campaign strategy in 2000, rather than updating to compete with the Obama campaign. Though the McCain team eventually attempted to redesign JohnMcCain.com to mimic the success of BarackObama.com, the site remained noncompetitive as it failed to understand the process of online campaigning. This chapter will focus on the strategies of both the Obama and McCain campaigns in developing their candidates’ websites, and analyze the composition of the Internet teams, website features,

and online strategy that set BarackObama.com apart from any previous presidential candidate website.

**The Birth of the Obama Strategy**

Though the Obama campaign saw the benefits of reflecting “change” through the development a cutting-edge media strategy, its primary reasons for investing in online campaigning were for practical, monetary purposes, and changing the electorate in Obama’s favor. First, the young Senator lacked the name recognition and financial backers of the Democratic favorite for the nomination, Hillary Clinton.\(^{145}\) The Internet offered a solution to this problem, giving the campaign an efficient, low cost, easily accessible venue for reaching out to voters, raising funds, and generating a well-organized grassroots movement that could support Obama during the primary against his stronger, more popular opponents. The second reason for the Obama campaign’s investment in online campaigning was its strategy of “changing the electorate.”\(^{146}\) Attempting to bring formerly unregistered individuals and demographics with traditionally low turnout into the electorate, such as youth and racial minorities, was a risky and challenging strategy.\(^{147}\) However, the campaign had confidence that this would be possible through an online, peer-to-peer recruitment process. The campaign recognized that many of its core supporters were frequent Internet users.\(^{148}\) Thus, as the Obama team decided to run and commit to a grassroots strategy, the campaign

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\(^{147}\) Ibid.

\(^{148}\) Ibid.
simultaneously committed to building the best new media campaign in presidential history to achieve their goals.\textsuperscript{149} “Operational the day that Obama announced his candidacy,” BarackObama.com became the online campaign office, fundraising mechanism, and grassroots machine of the Obama campaign.\textsuperscript{150}

Fully committed to the anticipated financial and organizational benefits of online campaigning, the Obama campaign took particular care and attention in organizing each aspect of its online strategy, including the creation of its campaign Internet team. In 2007, the Obama team hired the “small, privately owned” market research and media company, Blue State Digital (BSD). “Formed in 2004 by four members who worked on” the highly successful online strategy team for the Dean campaign, BSD was responsible for designing the layout and interactive features of BarackObama.com.\textsuperscript{151} BSD founder and Director of the Obama New Media team, Joe Rospars, became a central part of the campaign’s decision-making process, reporting “directly to campaign manager David Plouffe.”\textsuperscript{152} The Obama campaign’s second major hire in early 2007 was Facebook co-founder and engineer, Chris Hughes.\textsuperscript{153} As Eric Boehlert points out, “unlike previous campaign strategists, such as Karl Rove, James Carville, and Lee Atwater,” Hughes was not a member of the political arena or a figure who appeared in the media. His work behind the scenes as an online media and

\textsuperscript{149} Plouffe, Interview by Lopate.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Colin Delaney qtd. in Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 58.
social networking specialist was "arguably the central reason" why the Obama campaign showed such command of online campaign strategy.\textsuperscript{154} By early 2008, Rospars had fully formed Triple O, the Obama campaign's online and social media team. Functioning as a department within the campaign, Triple O's "sole responsibility" was to maintain Obama's website, to "create and post Obama campaign propaganda on the Internet," and use other online resources to direct voters back to BarackObama.com.\textsuperscript{155} The innovative nature of Triple O was reflected in its equally innovative staff, including Hughes as Director of Online Organizing; Kate Albright-Hanna, a former CNN.com producer as head of online videos; Scott Goldstein, an owner of a public relations firm in Washington, DC as Director of External Online Organizing and Mobile Technology, and Eric Schmidt, the CEO of Google as a technology advisor.\textsuperscript{156} Through the Obama campaign's impressive hires and the important placement of BSD and Triple O within the campaign team, the Obama campaign heavily invested in and placed clear importance on the development of an effective, coherent online strategy.

\textbf{My.BarackObama.com}

In addition to its innovative staff, the success of BarackObama.com is attributed mostly to its use of online social networking tools within the candidate's website. Seeking to increase interaction between the campaign and online users, and between Obama supporters

\textsuperscript{155} Hendricks and Denton, "Political Campaigns," 7.
“offline and online,” a social networking feature was designed and added to the website by Hughes.\footnote{Boehlert, 253.} Operating under the URL My.BarackObama.com, “MyBO” allowed users create online accounts,\footnote{See Appendix A, Image I for an example of a MyBO user’s account.} friend other users, and send invites to friends online requesting that they join the MyBO community, spurring along huge, low-cost online voter recruitment for the campaign.\footnote{Boehlert, 256-257.} According to Hughes, the team sought to use “online tools to make real world connections” by creating “an environment in which supporters left their computers and went to a locally sponsored Obama house party, interacted with other supporters face-to-face, and then returned to their computers to share stories about the event, sign up for the next event, donate money, or all the above.”\footnote{Ibid., 253.} The site “contained every kind of conceivable local and national group (e.g., Texas Business Women for Obama)” for users to join and connect with likeminded users.\footnote{Ibid., 256-257.} Through MyBO networks, users could sign up for and create events, write and comment on blog posts, and discuss campaign related topics and news stories.\footnote{Ibid., 256.} As Jenn Burleson Mackay explains, “the ability to have an individual page on a candidate’s Web site allowed users to feel connected to the campaign in a personal way.”\footnote{Mackay, “Gadgets, Gismos,” 25.} A study by the Pew Research Center revealed that this was especially important to the 18-29 age demographic, with 38% agreeing that the Internet helped them feel “more personally connected to [their] candidate or campaign of choice,” and 32% agreeing that they “would not be as involved in this campaign as much if it weren’t for the Internet” (the 30-49 age
demographic came second at 29% and 22% respectively). By the end of the 2008 campaign, BarackObama.com had over 1.5 million user accounts and was used daily by campaign staff, volunteers, and supporters to organize over 150,000 events and create more than 35,000 groups.

However, MyBO’s success was not simply in social networking capabilities. MyBO allowed the Obama campaign to recruit quickly an army of voters, fundraisers, and volunteers through online grassroots organization. As described by Rospars, this online grassroots organization and commitment to the cause was “electrified” by Obama himself who, as a former community organizer, placed importance on community activism. This energy, conveyed through the posted news stories, available interactive features, and networking tools of MyBO, spread from the senior staff down through to the online users. Through MyBO, Obama supporters were encouraged “to actually DO something, besides donate money” which had been the traditional function of campaign websites. Instead of waiting for instruction from a field director, supporters obtained information and materials from MyBO, and organized “among themselves,” allowing users to set up personal fundraising pages on their accounts and ask for donations from friends and online connections. Canvassing was made easy with downloadable and printable literature.

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167 Ibid.
168 Boehlert, 252.
169 Ibid.
posters, and position papers. "Neighbor to Neighbor" (N2N) was MyBO’s online phone banking platform. Through N2N, phone lists organized by state, swing state, and other target regions, could be accessed by users for phone banking from the comfort of their homes. Volunteers made 3 million calls in the last four days of the campaign alone.

Obama supporters could also sign up to receive Obama email or text message updates, and downloadable Obama news widgets that listed the most recent campaign news and progress.

The Internet also provided the Obama campaign with the perfect venue for its grassroots fundraising strategy. The fact that the Obama campaign raised more money than any previous campaign (as well as the McCain campaign) was arguably due to the viral nature of MyBO’s peer-to-peer recruitment. Online fundraising was low cost for the campaign, and easily accessible to contributors who could donate smaller sums of $10, $20, $50 or more at a time or sign up for monthly donations. This strategy became important to the campaign during the primary season when large-sum donors were preoccupied with bigger name candidates such as Hillary Clinton. Though bigger donors entered the pool during the general election, Obama supporters continued to donate in smaller sums. The campaign empowered the public to make a difference, appearing to be owned by the people

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170 For more on the phone banking strategy of the Obama campaign and N2N, see Chapter 7; Rahaf Harfoush, *Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand* (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2009), 92.

171 Harfoush, 92; Boehlert, 256-257.


173 For more on the Obama campaign’s text messaging strategy, see Chapter 7.

174 Boehlert, 256.

rather than the large donors that typically dominated national campaigns. The Associated Press reported that by May 2008 “90% of Obama donors” had given “less than $100,” and “41%” had given “$25 or less.” By November 4, a total of $30 million was raised through 70,000 users’ personal fundraising pages. By Election Day, a total of “four million people contributed to Obama’s campaign.” Out of the $750 million raised in total by the Obama campaign, $500 million (approximately 66%) was raised online. In comparison, out of the $360 million raised by the McCain campaign, only $75 million (approximately 20%) was raised online. 

However, by appealing primarily to the Internet-using, predominantly younger demographic, the Obama campaign recognized that the majority of Obama’s supporters might not be registered to vote. If the campaign was to pursue its strategy of changing the composition of the electorate, it needed a fast and easy way for supporters in the youth and racial minority demographics (the two demographics within Obama’s pool of support least likely to be registered) to register to vote. In 2004, the Dean campaign had succeeded in online grassroots organization, but failed to turn the numbers within an “enthusiastic” online community “into actual votes.”

The Obama campaign was aware of this risk and sought to avoid a similar fate. Voter education and registration thus was added to MyBO’s list of capabilities. In May 2008, the Obama campaign launched a 50 state voter registration drive, “Vote for Change,” in

176 Jones, “Pop,” 186.
177 Associated Press qtd. in Jones, “Pop,” 186.
179 Jones, “Pop,” 186.
180 Harfoush, 51.
181 Ibid., 48.
anticipation of the general election. To maximize accessibility, the campaign paired an on-the-ground voter registration effort with an online website established within the BarackObama.com domain, VoteforChange.com. Through the website, users were saved a trip to their town halls or other voter registration centers by simply registering online. The site also included sections where voters could search for their polling locations, and obtain information on how to vote, early voting, and their rights as voters. VoteforChange.com was an innovation of the Obama online media team, serving as a mechanism to provide the campaign with reassurance that the supporters it gained online via BarackObama.com were both registered to vote and knowledgeable about where to go on Election Day. Furthermore, if the site was used by non-Obama supporters, users gained a favorable impression of the transparency and usability of the Obama website and were exposed to Obama propaganda implicitly through its ties with the campaign. Though it is difficult to measure the exact success of VoteforChange.com, polls and online data reveal trends in favor of the Obama campaign’s effort. By October 6, the final day of voter registration, the site had received over 5 million visitors, and Google Trends revealed that “register to vote online” was the second most popular search term. This indicated that the Obama campaign’s final push to encourage online voter registration resonated with supporters. By the end of the month, Gallup reported that the proportion of individuals identifying as first time voters in 2008

184 Vargas, “Obama Campaign Urges.”
(though not larger than in 2004) were overwhelmingly within the 18–26 age demographic (62%), and supportive of Obama (65%).

Perhaps the least acknowledged, yet still remarkably effective capability of BarackObama.com was its data-mining capabilities. The millions of users who filled out donation forms at BarackObama.com instantly had their names and contact information stored online by the site. The Obama campaign could then generate thank you notes and follow-up requests for donations and distribute them to contributors via email. Data could be collected from online users through a single site visit. As soon as a user went onto BarackObama.com, the site gathered information on the user’s browsing habits by looking at a “cookie,” a “small hidden file that collects information from the user’s computer to be used by Web sites.” Between contact information and browsing habits, the campaign gathered enough information for microtargeting. The Obama campaign personalized its advertisements during users’ subsequent visits to the Obama website, and specified its emails to individual’s interests. Through these methods of online data collection, the Obama campaign could gather supporters’ contact information, and even design online campaign strategies catered to their individual interests.

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185 Data for this poll was collected as part of Gallup Poll Daily tracking using telephone interviews with 3,030 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted Oct. 17-19, 2008, and has a sampling error margin of ±2 percentage points. Results based only on the 2,774 registered voters have a sampling error margin of ±2 percentage points. Results based only on the sample of 197 registered voters who will be voting for the first time have a sampling error margin of ±8 percentage points. Jeffrey M. Jones, “No Increase in Proportion of First-Time Voters,” Gallup, Inc., last modified October 23, 2008. http://www.gallup.com/poll/111331/No-Increase-Proportion-First-Time-Voters.aspx/.


187 For more on microtargeted emails, see Chapter 7; Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 58-59.
The Shortcomings of JohnMcCain.com

During the 2000 Republican primary, the McCain campaign was regarded as an innovator of online organization using its email and website to facilitate communication with online supporters. In February 2007, at the start of the Republican primary, the McCain campaign launched a “glossy” looking JohnMcCain.com that appeared to hold the promise of the previous McCain presidential campaign. Released a month after BarackObama.com and MyBO, the McCain site sought to compete with its Democratic counterparts, including online video and even an online organizational tool comparative to MyBO, called McCainSpace. However, as the election wore on, praise for the McCain website declined, and it became clear that the Obama campaign had usurped the McCain campaign’s position as online innovator. First, JohnMcCain.com was outdated, lacking the highly interactive and viral features of its Obama counterpart, and failing to recruit an army of users. Second, financial troubles encouraged the McCain campaign to cut down on funding to online initiatives. Though it would have seemed likely for the McCain campaign to get a head start on online networking for the general election after locking up the Republican nomination, JohnMcCain.com never was capable of evolving in same capacity as BarackObama.com. Instead of recognizing the potential of online organizing and integrating its website into the central strategy of its campaign, the McCain campaign kept JohnMcCain.com as a tactic and continued to invest in more traditional forms of campaigning such as television and phone

188 Hurme, "Online Campaign Strategy," 570.
190 All, “McCain Launches.”
banking.\footnote{Hendricks and Denton, "Political Campaigns," 8.} While Obama campaign’s comprehensive online fundraising strategy supported a $16 million Internet budget throughout the course of the 2008 election, the McCain campaign spent only $1.9 million general “web service.”\footnote{The CBS article reports that the McCain campaign vaguely describes that the $1.9 million was invested in “web service.” CBS suggests that this likely includes web advertising “among other things.”; “Can McCain Compete with Obama Online?” CBS News, last modified June 26, 2009, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/06/16/politics/politico/main4183930.shtml/; Hendricks and Denton, "Political Campaigns," 8; Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 58.} By the time the McCain campaign recognized the importance of Internet and reformed its website in August 2008, the Obama campaign already dominated the online sphere.

From the start, JohnMcCain.com was underfunded, underappreciated, and not competitive with the resources and capabilities of BarackObama.com and MyBO. This was first reflected its choices in staffing. According to Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris, the McCain campaign’s lesser commitment to online campaigning was obvious in the fact that the Obama Internet team had ten times more employees than McCain’s.\footnote{Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 56.} Additionally, the McCain Internet team lacked the big name media experts that Obama was careful to hire to lead his team.\footnote{Hurme, “Online Campaign Strategy,” 580.} Furthermore, the McCain online team lacked the status within the campaign hierarchy that the Obama team enjoyed. The Obama Internet team’s importance within the campaign and involvement in decision-making was unique and unusual from the traditional placement of other campaigns’ new media staff members, typically “buried in a basement” with the campaign’s tech team.\footnote{Delaney qtd in Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 56.} Colin Delaney notes that this exclusion “from the communications planning process” is a severe strategic error for political campaigns in
the digital age, which are increasingly dependent on Internet to reach out to voters.\footnote{Delaney qtd in Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 56.}

Problems generated by a lack of support from senior staff, were likely exacerbated by the fact that the McCain campaign was forced to cut down on staff and resources during the financially difficult primary season.\footnote{Hurme, “Online Campaign Strategy,” 581.} As David Talbot describes, through the course of the primary the McCain team went from massive operation to “about 35 people trying to run a campaign.”\footnote{David Talbot qtd. in Hurme, “Online Campaign Strategy,” 581.} Underfunded and under supported, the McCain Internet team fell behind by relying on online tactics that worked in the past, but could not compete with the progressive Obama team.\footnote{CBS News, “Can McCain Compete.”}

The lack of support and strategy within the McCain campaign’s Internet team was reflected in the design and content of JohnMcCain.com. Early in the general election, the McCain team attempted to remain competitive with the Obama campaign, by launching its own version of the Obama website’s social organizing device, MyBO. However, according to Tommi Hurme, McCain’s social network, McCainSpace, “faltered from the start.” In July 2008, Adam Ostrow, editor of Mashable\footnote{Founded in 2005, Mashable.com is a website for social media news, trends, and advice. As one of the most “prolific sites for breaking web news,” it receives more than 40 million site visits per month. “About Mashable,” Mashable, accessed April 25, 2011, http://mashable.com/.} reported that McCainSpace “was virtually impossible to use and appear[ed] largely abandoned.”\footnote{Hurme, “Online Campaign Strategy,” 581.} Additionally, the McCain campaign’s counterpart to MyBO’s N2N online phone banking tool, called “Voter to Voter” was significantly less popular with the online community. Though usage is difficult to gauge, TechPresident.com’s Micah Sifry measured N2N and Voter to Voter in terms of Google hits,
indicating the volume of online discussion for each platform. An October 20, 2008 search for N2N “returned 479,000 hits” whereas the same search for Voter to Voter “returned only 325 hits.”\textsuperscript{203} Furthermore, out of the 425 sites featuring links to MyBO, 396 of them were blogs. In comparison only 18 sites listed links to JohnMcCain.com, none of them blogs.\textsuperscript{204} Though Sifry acknowledges that user numbers for the two campaign websites’ organizational tools are difficult to determine, the amount of Google hits, linkages, and blog mentions certainly gives a clear indicator of discussion regarding the two tools in the online community.\textsuperscript{205} Obama’s N2N was overwhelmingly more popular.

Recognizing its online disadvantage, the McCain campaign eventually made a series of tactical reforms to its website at the initiation of the general election in August 2008.\textsuperscript{206} In a study comparing JohnMcCain.com and BarackObama.com, Pew Research Center observed that the McCain website had “steadily improved” since the Republican Convention “in terms of applications, tools, and appearance, mirroring the online networking the Obama campaign mastered during the primary season.\textsuperscript{207} Since Republicans had not waged competition online as heavily the Obama campaign during the primary season, the McCain campaign arguably felt the need to catch up to the success of BarackObama.com in anticipation of the general election.\textsuperscript{208} However, reforms to the McCain website were too little, too late, as several significant differences between the two sites continued to prevail.

\textsuperscript{203} Sifry, “Not a Fair Fight.”
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{206} See Appendix A, Image 3 for a screenshot of JohnMcCain.com’s homepage as of October 9, 2008.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid.
The biggest difference between the two websites was that, even in its improved form, McCain’s site still lagged behind Obama’s in design and capabilities. Pew determined BarackObama.com to be “more usable with more features allowing greater online networking and canvassing abilities such as literature, scripts, news, and volunteerism opportunities” and “text.”²⁰⁹ Based on interviews with “seven interaction designers and information architects” specializing in website design, Steven Heller (Chairman of the MFA Design program at the School of Visual Arts) found that McCain’s website was consistently described as messy and distracting, lacking consistency, with too many colors, fonts, and places to for users to click.²¹⁰ In comparison, the Obama website was cleaner, with a consistent theme of blue, red, and white coloration.²¹¹ Another difference was in regard to the depiction of the candidates’ running mates. Pew reported that the McCain website featured Sarah Palin much more frequently than BarackObama.com mentioned Joe Biden.²¹² Whereas Obama was popularizing enough on his own, the McCain campaign recognized the intrigue and hype Palin brought to the campaign, and thus featured her frequently to attract more traffic to the website. Additionally, whereas the Obama fundraising webpage was consolidated under the same website, the McCain fundraising webpage was located under a different URL name, potentially creating difficulty in accessibility.

One area where the McCain website excelled was in the easy accessibility of the candidate’s position on specific issues. One engineer remarked that Obama’s issue

²¹¹ Ibid.
information “was completely hidden” and had to be found on Google. This might have been purposeful, reflecting the Obama campaign’s tendency to focus on general themes (“hope” and “change”), rather than building on issue content. Nevertheless, as asserted by Pew, the McCain campaign felt compelled to change its online image significantly, “deploy new tactics such as mentioning ‘change’ more frequently,” and integrate “Palin into the appearance of the website” to compete with BarackObama.com. However, in the end, Pew concluded that the August changes to McCain’s website did not seem to draw more users to the site. Website traffic in August 2008 stayed consistent with that of June, with BarackObama.com receiving 72% of the website traffic between the two candidate’s sites, and JohnMcCain.com receiving only 28%.

Summary

From 2007 to 2008, BarackObama.com served as an online campaign headquarters for the Obama campaign, central to the campaign’s strategy. Accessible to any supporter at any time, website capabilities such as MyBO, N2N, and VoteForChange.com encouraged grassroots organization and facilitated online information dissemination, volunteer recruitment, fundraising, and GOTV efforts across the country. The Obama campaign maximized its time and resources by going directly to supporters, engaging with them online on a daily basis and enabling them to own the campaign through easy contributions, and their own initiatives and ideas. The Obama campaign even extended its strategy to account for the

213 Heller, “Web Site?”
215 Ibid.
many online users who tended to be younger, and less likely to vote, by providing a simple online platform to ensure that they were registered and educated. In comparison, JohnMcCain.com operated as a supplementary tactic to the campaign’s overarching strategy. Immediately inhibited by the McCain campaign’s understaffed and less innovative online team, and the lack of investment in online organizing, website features such as McCainSpace and Voter to Voter were never able to compete with the grassroots machine of BarackObama.com. Furthermore, JohnMcCain.com’s redesign and attempts to mimic features of BarackObama.com indicated weakness and inconsistency in its messaging. However, as will be explored in following chapters, BarackObama.com and JohnMcCain.com often were not an online user’s first encounter with the presidential campaigns in 2008. In order to gain a broader view of the Obama campaign’s prowess in online organizing, Chapter 5 will explore the impact of independent social networking platforms, MySpace and Facebook. The Obama campaign excelled at using BarackObama.com in tandem with its profiles on social networking sites, to ensure messaging consistency and maximize the effectiveness of voter outreach and recruitment in its new media strategy.
Chapter 5

The Social Networking Election

Despite the success of MyBO, it is important to recognize that the impact of social networking and messaging on the 2008 election originated and extended far beyond the capabilities of the candidates’ websites. In 2004, the Howard Dean campaign collaborated with the social networking site MeetUp.com.\textsuperscript{216} Founded in 2000 as an online “meeting space” where users could connect with likeminded individuals, the founders of MeetUp.com never intended the site to be utilized for political organization.\textsuperscript{217} However, suffering from a low standing in comparison to the front-running candidates in the Democratic primary, the Dean campaign found an already established, low-cost mechanism for organizing support on MeetUp.com.\textsuperscript{218} By the end of his campaign in February 2004, Dean’s MeetUp.com registration had reached 180,000 members and inspired other candidates such as John Edwards and John Kerry to join MeetUp.com and the online social networking scene.\textsuperscript{219}

However, Dean’s loss during the 2004 primary indicates that his campaign’s use of MeetUp.com was not a social networking success story. In 2008, the Obama campaign found itself in a similar predicament. Needing an inexpensive way to gather organizers and funds to compete with front-runner candidates, the Internet offered a solution, but the Obama campaign had no successful precedent to follow. Nevertheless, the Obama campaign decided

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
to build upon where the Dean campaign had failed, and fold independent social networking websites into its online MyBO grassroots strategy. MySpace (founded in 2003), Facebook (founded in 2004), and Twitter (founded in 2006) had expanded the market for online social networking and messaging opportunities since the 2004 presidential election.\textsuperscript{220} By 2008, independent social networking sites offered a separate, yet equally important, online venue for candidates to appeal to their supporters, based upon the sites’ already established, popular, pre-existing networks. According to a study conducted by Pew Research Center’s in June 2008, 10\% of respondents said they used social networking websites to gain political information or get involved with campaigns.\textsuperscript{221} This medium was particularly important to the younger voter, with over two-thirds of respondents under the age of 30 claiming to have a social networking profile, and one-half of those respondents claiming to use “those networking sites to get or share information about politics or campaigns.”\textsuperscript{222}

This chapter argues that the Obama campaign successfully utilized its Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter profiles as a means of reaching out to supporters, distributing information, and drawing users (even those less politically inclined) from Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter to BarackObama.com. Like the development of JohnMcCain.com, the McCain campaign treated its social networking profiles as a supplemental aspect of its

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\textsuperscript{221} Data for this poll was collected by Prince Survey Research Associates International using random digit dialing to conduct landline telephone interviews with 2,251 adults age 18 and older between April 8–May 11, 2008, and had a sampling error margin ±2.4 percentage points. For results based only on the sample of 1,533 Internet users, the sampling error margin is ±2.8 percentage points. Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, “The Internet and the 2008 Election,” Pew Internet & American Life Project, last modified June 15, 2008, \url{http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/The-Internet-and-the-2008-Election.aspx/}.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.
\end{tabular}
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campaign strategy rather than a central one. Furthermore, Obama appealed more through social networking than John McCain, as a younger, “hip” candidate who offered transparency into his campaign through regular posts that maintained a two way conversation with his supporters, informing and acknowledging them. Though McCain also had Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter profiles, his campaign’s utilization of those profiles reflected their lack of understanding towards the medium and the generation that used them.

The Social Networking Website

Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison define “social networking websites” as sites which “allow users ‘to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” However, major social networking systems are constantly evolving to include new organizational capabilities and features to attract a larger membership, distancing it farther away from the rudimentary MeetUp.com standard. According to multiple political scholars, constantly expanding online communities, give major social networks such as Facebook and MySpace newfound weight as meeting places that facilitate political discussion. In their analysis of the impact of social networking on the 2008 presidential election, Scott P. Robertson, Ravi K.

Vatrapu, and Richard Medina argue that social networks are “public spheres.” To defend this assertion, Robertson et al. reference political theorist, Jurgan Habermas, who defines public spheres as forums which allow individuals to participate in discourse; question any proposal; introduce any proposal; express attitudes, wishes, and needs. Brandon C. Waite agrees with this sentiment, including that in these forums politically minded individuals who create profiles on social networking sites “naturally emerge as” the online “discussion leaders in politics.” John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr. add that these “politically minded individuals are sought out in online social settings just as they would be in the real world if their friends who were not politically minded needed political information.”

Furthermore, social networks provide users with mechanisms to create organized forums for discussion. According to Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris, the most valuable feature for political campaigns on social networking sites are the “group” and “event” pages, typically run by an administrator, where users can connect with other users and access pictures and message boards. Users and campaigns may create these in support of a candidate, or to advertise a rally, fundraising, or other campaign-related event. These groups allow a quicker and easier way for people who are in search political information or not necessarily politically minded themselves, to connect with individuals who are. This

225 Ibid., 14.
227 Ibid.
lends to the easier and faster spread of political information across the Internet, Politics 2.0. Since politics is based in communication and social interaction, Bruce E. Gronbeck points out that social networking websites are an inherently beneficial tool for political campaigns.\textsuperscript{229} Thus, the online exchange of information and ideas through social networking websites is a perfect example of Politics 2.0.\textsuperscript{230}

\textit{“Friending” the Candidates}

In 2008, Techpresident.com tracked presidential candidates’ usage of social networking websites.\textsuperscript{231} By the end of the election, Obama had 3,176,866 supporters on Facebook and more than 987,923 friends on MySpace.\textsuperscript{232} Furthermore, additional studies revealed that “there were roughly 500 unofficial Facebook groups dedicated in support for Obama.”\textsuperscript{233} According to one estimate, if the members of all of these groups were counted as online “friends” of Obama, over 24 million people supported Obama on Facebook alone.\textsuperscript{234} Additionally, Obama gained approximately 400,000 of his Facebook friends “in just the last two weeks of the campaign.”\textsuperscript{235} In contrast, McCain had 620,000 supporters on Facebook, and only 217,000 on MySpace.\textsuperscript{236}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{229} Gronbeck, “The Web, Campaign 07-08,” 235.
  \item \textsuperscript{230} Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{233} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{234} Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{236} Mackay, “Gadgets, Gismos,” 26; Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 58.; See figures 1 and 2.
\end{itemize}
Wall posts are also another indicator of online popularity. Robertson et al. conducted a study comparing the Facebook walls of the three major candidates of 2008, Obama, McCain, and Hillary Clinton. Like the Facebook “friendship” numbers, the study determined that “participation on the three walls was not equal, with Obama’s wall containing 324,780 postings (47.2%), Clinton’s wall containing 316,330 postings (46%), and McCain’s wall containing 46,516 postings (6.8%).”

Robertson et al. also account for “wall crossing,” or individuals who posted on more than one candidate’s wall, in order to gauge which candidate was most frequently discussed by users and in what capacity a candidate was evaluated against the other candidates. According to this data analysis, 88.7% (total) posted to Obama’s wall, 10.5% posted to any combination of two candidates’ walls, and 0.8% posted to the walls of all three. Additionally, “the largest number of people (59.7%) were participating in the Obama conversation only, the next largest (18%) in the Clinton conversation only, and the next largest (11%) in the McCain conversation only.”

In looking at candidates’ numbers of friends, wall posts, and wall crossings, several conclusions can be drawn. First, Facebook was the most used social networking platform with MySpace following in second place, and that the use of social networking in presidential campaigns had boomed since 2004. Second, Obama was overwhelmingly popular on social networking websites. He had the most friends, wall posts, and wall crossings.

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237 The data for this study was collected by examining the wall posts from the Facebook sites of U.S. Presidential candidates Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain from September 1, 2006–September 30, 2008. In this time period, a total of 76,045 individuals created 687,626 postings on the three walls.” Robertson et al., 17.
238 Robertson et al., 17.
239 Ibid.
240 See Appendix B, Figure 3; Ibid.
241 Ibid.
crossings. This means he was the most sought out and his supporters interacted more frequently with each other, most likely using his wall as a forum. In looking at the same data, it is also clear that Clinton was more effective at competing with Obama on social networking websites than McCain. Without Clinton’s competition during the general election, Obama clearly faced even less online competition, and likely had a sum of Clinton’s former online supporters join his online campaign. As Robertson et al. summarize, data was “skewed” with Obama “(the ultimate winner) receiving the bulk of attention.” In order to determine the reasons for the vast differences between Obama and McCain’s “friendship” numbers and wall posts, the remainder of the chapter will compare the methods used by the campaigns to formulate their Facebook and MySpace profiles.

**The Obama Profiles**

Obama had several factors working in his favor when it came to online social networking. First, one of Obama’s key groups of supporters, the 18–35 age demographic, were most likely to be online. According to Baumgartner and Morris, as a younger candidate with a well-developed Internet presence, Obama was “well suited to a social network candidacy” and “a natural Facebook politician.” Additionally, a large amount of its supporters were already frequent Internet users. Recognizing this distinct advantage, the Obama campaign’s senior staff decided it made strategic and financial sense to reach out and

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242 Robertson et al., 17.
243 Ibid.
245 See Appendix A, Image 4 for an image of Obama’s Facebook profile as of May 21, 2007; Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 57.
enable supporters through the online media where they were already engaged.\textsuperscript{246} Tasked with monitoring and maintaining Obama’s profiles, Scott Goodstein\textsuperscript{247} of Triple O formed a formal strategy: to have a presence on every major social network, make a connection to every social networking supporter, and then use social networking connections to “drive everyone” to the Obama campaign website. As a result, the campaign established profiles on a diverse array of social networks, including AsianAve, Asian American community; Black Planet, African American community; Digg, website and information sharing; DNC Party Builder; Eons, baby boomer community; Eventful, entertainment and live events; FaithBase, Christian community; Flickr, professional photographers and enthusiasts; GLEE, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community; LinkedIn, professional networking; and MiGente and MyBatanga, Hispanic communities.\textsuperscript{248}

Though Obama seemed to be everywhere with Goodstein’s strategy, the Obama campaign was not solely responsible for the establishment of its entire social networking movement. In accordance with the social networking public sphere theory of Robertson et al., Obama’s MySpace and Facebook following were largely the product of an organic grassroots organization movement produced by enthusiastic supporters who disseminated information, posted, blogged, created groups, and hosted events. As campaign manager, David Plouffe hoped, the Obama campaign merely had to go where the supporters were.


\textsuperscript{247} For more on Scott Goodstein, Director of External Online Organizing and Mobile, see Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{248} Rahaf Harfoush, Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand, (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2009), 140.
In 2004, young blogger and Obama supporter, Joe Anthony sought out Obama’s profile on MySpace only to discover that Obama did not yet have an official page. However, inspired by the Senator’s speech at the Democratic National Convention, Anthony created a profile for Obama himself. Throughout the course of next several years, Anthony’s Obama profile collected an early following of 10,000 supporters. However in January 2007, following the announcement of Obama’s presidential exploratory committee via online video (“A Message from Barack”), Obama’s MySpace following jumped to “nearly 30,000 friends.”

By mid-March, the Obama campaign endorsed Anthony’s page, which operated under the valuable URL “www.myspace.com/barackobama” as the unofficial, yet “go-to” Barack Obama profile. According to New Media Director, Joe Rospars in a blog post describing the development of the Obama MySpace page, the campaign versed Anthony in the legal and strategic manners of operating a candidate’s website page and incorporated him as a volunteer member of the campaign team.

After MySpace received approval from the campaign, Obama’s profile was featured on “the MySpace homepage” in “the ‘Cool New People’ box, and Obama’s friendship rocketed from 100,000 to 140,000 friends in one week.” By April, Obama had 160,000 friends. With friend requests increasing at an overwhelmingly rapid rate the Obama campaign finally approached Anthony about taking full control of the profile and folding “it

\[\text{References:}\]
251 For more on Joe Rospars, New Media Director for the Obama Campaign, see Chapter 4.
252 Rospars, “MySpace Experiment.”
253 Boehlert, 34-35.
into the campaign’s online operation” without Anthony’s administration. According to Rospars, the campaign’s goal in the MySpace sphere was “to combine the organic support and community-building of a grassroots effort with the official campaign outreach efforts.” Complications in drawing up an agreement for a formal Obama campaign takeover eventually led to a transfer of the popular URL, but not the profile and friends itself. Micah Sifry of TechPresident.com was immediately critical of this move, claiming that operating under the new profile, the Obama campaign would have to wait for all of the friends on Anthony’s page to friend Obama again under the official page. Obama’s friendship numbers would fall behind other candidates. However, the MySpace support for Obama proved resilient, as friendship numbers bounced back on the new Obama profile in a matter of weeks. Though the Obama campaign eventually capitalized upon Anthony’s work, Obama’s MySpace following was acknowledged as a clear product of Anthony’s online grassroots organization.

The story of Obama’s viral Facebook presence is also best demonstrated through an online grassroots case. Farouk Olu Aregbe created his Obama Facebook group, “One Million Strong for Barack Obama” on January 16, 2007, the day Obama announced his presidential exploratory committee. Aregbe’s group attracted 100 members within an hour, 10,000 members within five days, and 200,000 members by the end of the week. Furthermore,

254 Boehlert, 36.
255 Rospars, “MySpace Experiment.”
258 Rospars, “MySpace Experiment.”
Agrebe’s group was not the only pro-Obama group that had popped up on Facebook, and Obama had yet to announce his candidacy officially. Though hundreds of groups existed on Facebook supporting presidential hopefuls, none grew as fast or contained so many members so early in the election season. By the end of the Democratic primary, ‘One Million Strong for Barack’ had approximately 565,000 members. Despite the fact that McCain secured his nomination earlier than Obama, a similar pro-McCain Facebook group had 146,000 members. Another impressive Facebook group supporting the Democrat was “Students for Barack Obama” (SFBO), created by Bowdoin College student Meredith Segal in 2006. Initially beginning “as an online petition to encourage the senator to run for president,” the group gained over “60,000 members from 80 different colleges and universities by February 2007.” By the start of primary season, SFBO had become a full-fledged Political Action Committee, encouraging students to start grassroots chapters their colleges and universities all over the country, and work with local and statewide Obama campaign offices.

In May 2007, the Obama campaign’s use of Facebook was further enhanced by the introduction of “Platform.” Platform “allowed programmers to build applications (e.g., date books, trivia quizzes, etc.) for Facebook pages” allowing “greater customization of users’ pages compared with MySpace.” Describing how the Obama campaign released its application within weeks of the release of platform, Baumgartner and Morris suggest that the

261 Ibid.
262 Harfoush, 7.
264 Harfoush, 8.
hiring of Facebook engineer Chris Hughes\textsuperscript{266} was beneficial to the Obama campaign since it allowed the campaign to keep a Facebook insider under its payroll.\textsuperscript{267} Furthermore, Obama application was extremely hi-tech, both allowing users to keep up with campaign events through its news feature and the rapid distribution of information.\textsuperscript{268} However, regardless of whether this advantage for the Obama campaign was fair or not, Baumgartner and Morris point out that other campaigns were “slow to recognize the viral potential of this feature.” Clinton did not have her application until February 2008.\textsuperscript{269}

\textit{Comparing the Profiles}

In comparison to the social networking success stories of the Obama campaign, the McCain campaign failed to appeal nearly as well to the Facebook and MySpace communities (let alone establish grassroots organization) through social networking platforms. Additionally, not only did McCain’s age prevent him from connecting to the younger, Internet using generation but his character, likes and dislikes translated poorly through his social networking profiles. Whereas Obama “named his favorite musicians as Miles Davis, Stevie Wonder, and Bob Dylan and listed his pastimes as basketball, writing, and ‘loafing w/kids’ (note the hip shorthand aimed at appealing to young voters),” McCain “gave one of his pastimes as fishing and listed Letters from Iwo Jima among his favorite movies.”\textsuperscript{270} As Baumgartner and Morris note, these are “not the most popular things among frequent social

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{266} For more information on Chris Hughes, Director of Online Organizing, see Chapter 4. \\
\textsuperscript{267} Baumgartner and Morris, “Who Wants,” 56. \\
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid. \\

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Rather than attempt to appeal to the younger online demographic most likely to encounter his profile, McCain maintained an online image that appealed to older voters, who were unfortunately much less likely to view his profile. Furthermore, the Republican’s online following was already narrow. In June 2008, Pew Research Center reported that 36% of online Democrats had a profile on a social networking site, whereas only 21% of Republicans were social networking. The McCain campaign’s disadvantage in online support allowed the Obama campaign to reinforce McCain’s image as too old and out of touch to its younger online support base.

Though the McCain Facebook profile was not as consistent in its message, or as appealing to the average social networker as the Obama profile, the McCain campaign did make several attempts to reach out to young voters on Facebook. In one of the few videos posted to McCain’s profile by the campaign, footage from a campaign event shows a student asking McCain whether he is too old to run for president. McCain responds, “I’ve out-campaigned all of my opponents, and I’m confident that I will...Thanks for the question, you little jerk.” The 1950s song “Johnny B. Goode” then plays in the background. One article in The New York Times summed up the McCain campaign’s failure to appeal in the video’s dialogue and song choice: “the implication is clear: the Facebook McCain is a 72-year-old whippersnapper.” In a transparent attempt to address younger voters’ concern over McCain’s age and seemingly out-of-touch persona, McCain instead appears to be

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272 Rainie and Smith, “The Internet,” Pew Internet.
274 Ibid.
condescending and dated by his music. In comparison to the McCain campaign’s fewer, ill-advised Facebook video posts, the Obama campaign posted a multitude of videos on a variety of different subjects.275

Another example of McCain’s lagging Facebook strategy was the campaign’s decision to post a video game to its profile called, “Pork Invaders.” Meant as an attempt to emphasize McCain’s “determination to take on Washington pork barreling,” the premise of the game was lost in translation.276 In the game, players simply hit the space bar to fire “vetoes at pudgy pink pigs who stand for wasteful government spending.” Players are rewarded with a fact sheet that states, “Barack Obama has requested $740 million in earmarks...where McCain has $0 in earmarks.”277 In an age of advanced online video games with multiple players, complex levels rewards, and engaging storylines, “Pork Invaders” came across as technologically obsolete and poorly disguised political propaganda. The Obama campaign also used video games as part of its advertising scheme, but instead opted to place advertisements on the most popular video games on the market instead of creating their own.278 The campaign took its advertising to its supporters instead of exerting resources on drawing supporters to them, meanwhile maintaining its candidate’s “hip” persona.

275 Heffernan, “Facebook.”
276 Fraser and Dutta, “The Facebook Election.”
277 Heffernan, “Facebook.”
The Rise of Twitter

In addition to MySpace and Facebook, the introduction of the “social-messaging and micro-blogging” application Twitter offered political candidates new opportunities to connect with supporters and rapidly distribute news updates and information about their campaigns. On Twitter, users create accounts and subscribe to other users, becoming “followers” of that user. Users are then able to post “tweets,” messages containing 140 characters or less, onto their pages for their followers.\(^{279}\) Founded in 2006, Twitter was regarded as an online tool for “media savvy politicians” such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, who, with over 65,000 followers, was known regularly to “communicate with his constituents” via tweets.\(^{280}\) Unlike MySpace and Facebook, Twitter was first used by presidential campaigns in 2008. In particular, the development of “applications allowing access to Twitter” for smart phones such as Blackberries and Apple iPhones led to an increase in Twitter usage throughout the 2008 election.\(^{281}\) Frederic I. Solop argues that with users able to “monitor Twitter posting and author tweets while travelling throughout the day” on their phones, an environment “where information” was “posted instantaneously on a 24/7 schedule” was quickly developed through the application.\(^{282}\) This allowed campaigns quick, easy contact with their supporters at virtually any time.

The Obama campaign recognized that with over 6 million users, Twitter was a valuable outreach venue. Throughout the course of the 2008 election, Obama gained over

\(^{279}\) Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 11.

\(^{280}\) Ibid.

\(^{281}\) For more on mobile phones in the 2008 election, see Chapter 7.

100,000 followers. As Hendricks and Denton assert, like the typical Facebook and MySpace user, the average Twitter user also tended to be younger: "One in five people with Internet access between the ages of 18 and 34 had accessed Twitter to update their profiles at least once."\(^{283}\) Popular with the youth demographic, this gave Obama a huge advantage against McCain in the Twittering realm. Furthermore, Obama’s campaign also recognized the value of investing time and attention to the medium. According to Eric Boehlert, the Obama campaign tweeted "nearly 10 times more" than McCain, had 2,254% more Twitter followers and 1,029% more searches for Obama on Twitter.\(^{284}\)

Solop argues that the Obama campaign’s usage of Twitter evolved through the election as it grew to understand more of the platform’s strengths and potential.\(^{285}\) To evaluate this strategy, Solop refers to one research project that “employed a content coding strategy” for all of Obama’s 262 tweets from throughout the course of his campaign, from April 29, 2007 to November 5, 2008.\(^{286}\) During the study, “thirteen codes were utilized in this process with multiple codes being assigned to tweets as appropriate. Codes were then aggregated and analyzed to represent changes in posting strategy over time.”\(^{287}\)

The results depicted several recurring themes in the Obama campaign’s tweets. First, 79% “of all tweets included a reference to location [Detroit Economic Club- May 7, 2007; Des Moines- May 10, etc].” Second, 63% of the tweets “included a reference to a campaign

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\(^{283}\) Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 11.
\(^{284}\) Boehlert, 259.
\(^{285}\) Solop, “RT @BarackObama,” 41.
\(^{286}\) Ibid.
\(^{287}\) Ibid.
Third, 23% of the tweets “included an announcement of some type” such as when Obama was “delivering critical speeches, when the presidential debates were being held, and which primaries were taking place next,” as well as “critical endorsements and won primaries.” For example, on January 23, 2008, Obama tweeted, “Meeting folks in South Carolina today. Excited to have received Columbia’s The State, Rock Hill Herald & Greenville News endorsements.” The Obama campaign’s strategy to cultivate grassroots support was also evident in Obama’s tweets itself, with GOTV as the fourth most prevalent theme (8%). Obama’s last three tweets before the 2008 election were a last minute get-out-the-vote effort:

Asking you to help Get Out the Vote in these last few critical hours of our campaign for change. Visit www.barackobama.com (November 4, 2008).

Asking for your vote today. For polling location info visit www.barackobama.com or call 877-874-6226. Make sure everyone votes! (November 4, 2008).

Asking you to vote Nov. 4th. Visit www.barackobama.com, call 877-874-6226 or text VOTE to 62262 to find your polling locations. (November 3, 2008).

288 Solop, “RT @BarackObama,” 41.
289 Ibid.
291 Solop, “RT @BarackObama,” 43-44.
292 Obama Tweets, November 3-4, 2008, qtd. in Solop, “RT @BarackObama,” 44.
Solop’s study suggests that the main purposes of the Obama Twitter page were to alert people of campaign events and news, as well as direct traffic to Obama’s website where they could utilize Obama’s social networking application, MyBO, link with other supporters, sign-up to volunteer, and contribute to the grassroots organization. In comparison, the McCain campaign did not tweet news as frequently nor offer its users incentive to follow their candidate on Twitter.

Summary

Popularization of social networking platforms in the early 2000s provided presidential campaigns with a new venue for voter outreach and campaign advertising. In 2008, the Obama campaign succeeded where the Dean campaign failed in 2004. Utilizing Facebook, MySpace, and the new social messaging site, Twitter, the Obama campaign reached out to its online support base, fed off of the grassroots organization already occurring online without official campaign facilitation, and redirected supporters to BarackObama.com and MyBO. As demonstrated by its hi-tech Facebook Platform, as well as the number of friends, followers, and wall posts on each of Obama’s profiles, it is clear that the Obama campaign owned the social networking sphere. In contrast, the McCain campaign was unable to bridge the generational gap between its candidate and the average social networker. Furthermore, in failing to expand McCain’s small social networking audience, the campaign’s investment in social media likely wasted time and resources. The contents of his profiles reinforced McCain’s image as dated and out-of-touch, rather than attempting to relate to younger users.
However, online campaigning was not strictly limited to social media—audio-visual media and advertising was needed to attract and energize supporters both on candidate’s websites and social networking platforms. Chapter 6 will address one of the most effective mediums for bringing candidates to life through the Internet—online videos.
Chapter 6

Going Viral: YouTube and Online Videos

The online video medium is unique in that it combines two forms of media: Internet and television. Up until the twenty-first century, television served as the only modern medium capable of delivering an audio-visual message to millions of voters. As Micah Sifry and Andrew Rasiej describe, politicians became talented at "sticking to their talking points, speaking in sound bites, and avoiding gaffes or detailed conversations as much as possible." They were required to either "buy expensive airtime for 30 second" televised commercials, or "get free time by saying something memorable (and not damaging unless aimed at your opponent)." With the rise of the digital age, the audio-visual capabilities television and inexpensive online communication combined into one medium with online video sharing. The benefits were obvious: a low-cost way of circulating political advertisements, speeches, and news clips without paying for commercial airtime or going through "the established media." In a matter of hours a video containing a positive campaign message (or an attack against the opposition) could go "viral" through email or posting across the Internet by users on websites, blogs, and social networking platforms. The videos took dozens of forms, including advertisements, speeches, news clips, mash-ups,

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294 Ibid.
music videos, and parodies. When containing positive messaging, these videos are effective, inexpensive advertising for political candidates, which are readily available to users whenever they choose to seek the video out online. However, if issuing an attack or negative imagery of the opposing candidate, the circulation of viral videos is equally devastating and equally accessible. A National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) found that “during a typical week in the general election,” as high as “20 percent” of their respondents “reported getting political information from Internet sources such as YouTube.” As Sifry and Rasiej astutely observe, 2008 was no longer in the era of the televised sound bite—the Internet was bringing forth the age of the “sound blast.”

This chapter does not contend that online videos are a replacement for televised media, but rather an effective, easily accessible supplementary media that frequently intersects with and increases the viewership of televised media. This chapter will describe the positive and negative implications of online video sharing in campaign strategy, as demonstrated through the cases of the Obama and McCain campaigns in 2008. Additionally, this chapter will demonstrate the advantage Obama held over McCain in online video sharing according to three major points. First, the Obama campaign did not limit online video sharing for entertainment, propaganda, and advertising purposes. It communicated with volunteers via online video sharing, posting strategic and motivational messages. Second, the Obama campaign’s understanding of online social media and its potential troubles allowed the campaign a more proactive strategy than the McCain campaign in insulating itself against

296 Johnson, 15.
298 Sifry and Rasiej, “Sound Blast.”

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negative attacks. It capitalized upon Obama’s charisma and the viral nature of video sharing. Third, Obama’s advantage in attracting supporters among the younger, Internet-using demographic, gave him an edge over McCain. As an older candidate, McCain did not translate across the video screen as well as Obama, and online videos attacking McCain and particularly his running mate, Sarah Palin, received more hits than those attacking Obama. The advantage in appealing to the online demographic and manipulating viral videos gave the Obama campaign virtual domination of online video portals. According to Boehlert, “Obama generated twice as many search results of McCain” on YouTube, “posted five times as many videos, and boasted 117,000 YouTube subscribers along with 25,000 friends.”

With these statistics in mind, it is unsurprising that the press ultimately dubbed 2008, “The YouTube Election.”

The Rise of YouTube Politics

The 2004 presidential election was the first to experience the widespread popularity of online political videos, perhaps most famously with JibJab.com’s “cut-out cartoon” comedy short featuring George W. Bush and John Kerry. The video, in which the candidates sang “a political version of ‘This is Land Is Your Land,’” received over 65 million online hits all over the world. Its popularity attracted national media, and following features on news and other televised shows, received an even broader online and televised

301 Johnson, 15.
In 2005, the launch of the online video portal, YouTube, introduced the world to easier online video production, viewing, and sharing. By 2006, over 100 million videos were being watched on YouTube per day, and other video sites such as Dailymotion.com, MetaCafe, and MySpaceTV further expanded the online video environment. By 2008, the popularity of online video sharing was formally acknowledged by the political arena and YouTube was the online video portal that took center stage in March 2007, with the creation of “YouChoose,” a space where presidential hopefuls could post their videos. During the primary, YouTube partnered with CNN to help host two special presidential debates (one Democratic and one Republican), in which “citizens were invited to videotape” their questions for the candidates. CNN would then select the video questions to play to the candidates during the live debates. By enabling viewers to use YouTube for political purposes, CNN and major news networks contributed to the viral spread of online political videos. The intersection of televised media and online videos would take other forms in 2008. As with the 2004 JibJab parody, broadcasters found news online, dedicated segments to popular online videos, and directed viewers to online videos.

Robert E. Denton, Jr. and Jim A. Kuypers use the 2006 senatorial mid-term elections in Virginia as an example of the “political power and influence” of online video sharing.

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302 Johnson, 15.
304 Johnson, 15.
“networks.”

During the campaign, a video of incumbent Senator George Allen making a questionable racial slur was posted on the website and YouTube site of Democratic challenger Jim Webb. The video went viral, received “hundreds and thousands of views,” and “intense criticism” from the online public, eventually forcing a formal apology from Senator Allen on MSNBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Regardless of whether the incident was a primary or supplementary contributor to the outcomes of the election, Allen was not re-elected. From this incident, Denton and Kuypers draw three conclusions: 1) online video sharing networks had the power to detract attention away from “mainstream media outlets;” 2) video sharing sites created a forum “to share opposition research and attack information that ... feed material to sympathetic bloggers;” and 3) these networks provided “a platform for candidates to share video statements or commercials without cost to be viewed by thousands of people.”

Videos which were once only available through pre-scheduled television programs or as campaign advertisements run sporadically during daily programming, were now readily available to the public 24/7 through online video portals.

Mainstream media were able to use online discussants as “diggers and aggregates” of public opinion, building on the online dialogue following videos, and broadcasting it as news. If containing a negative depiction of a candidate, an online video was easy fuel for opposition research. The introduction of online video gave campaigns more control over the direction of

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308 Kuypers and Denton, 149-150.
309 Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 32.
the political dialogue than the mass media. Campaigns could eliminate the third party traditionally involved in televised advertisements by bypassing news networks, or manipulating media into picking up positive or attack messaging they had distributed for free online. In 2008, campaigns “called press conferences to announce a new” online video advertisement, “hoping that reporters would” dedicate airtime reporting on the advertisement, thus providing “free coverage” of the commercial even if it “was rarely showed in paid media spots.”

However, Hendricks and Denton point out that political campaigns are not the only parties gaining greater control in steering political dialogue, since they are not the only parties capable of producing and distributing online videos. As an open forum, online video portals allow individual voters to get more involved in political campaigns. Now with popular websites such as YouTube in widespread use, online users who were “previously... unable to participate in the system [can] be a part of it now.” According to one commentator in Hendricks and Denton, “the development of cheap new editing programs and fast video distribution through sites like YouTube” has created “a new generation of largely unregulated political warriors who can affect the campaign dialogue faster and with more impact than the traditional opposition research shops.” Though this arguably allows greater connectivity between voters and candidates, it also creates questions in regard to the validity of video content since, despite online users’ lack of official affiliation with a campaign, their

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310 Johnson, 15.
311 Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 11.
312 Ibid, 9.
313 Ibid.
videos are being watched “millions of times.” Virginia Heffernan warns against the troubles of deciphering between truth and fiction online, stating that “in the eclectic YouTube interface, all videos—the parodies and the propaganda alike—can simply look like news.”

John Lapp of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee adds to this sentiment and argues, “The likelihood that a video will impact the campaign increases if it approaches or cross some undefined threshold of truthfulness and taste.”

**The Obama Channel**

The Obama campaign recognized that the candidate’s charisma would be a huge asset to its televised and online video media campaign. Compared to the older John McCain, Barack Obama’s youthful appearance and eloquence translated exceptionally well across audio-visual recording. Equipped with the technology to record and distribute video of their candidate easily and cheaply to supporters through the Internet, the Obama campaign carefully invested in its video media strategy. Early in the campaign, Kate Albright-Hanna, “an Emmy award winning producer who had formerly worked CNN political division,” was hired as the campaign’s Director of Video after submitting a proposal to the campaign that broke down the specific ways in which “Obama could effectively leverage video.” The videos created and distributed by the campaign capitalized upon Obama’s telegenic appeal,

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317 For more on Kate Albright-Hanna, Director of Video and Triple O, see Chapter 4.
and supplemented the campaign’s website, social networking profiles, Twitter, blogs, and emails. They helped bridge the gap between supporter and candidate by frequently uploading footage of Obama on the campaign trail and amplified “the feeling of community by showcasing the campaign’s most passionate grassroots organizers,” ultimately bringing the campaign “to life” online for supporters across the country.\textsuperscript{319}

In his book describing the social media strategy of the 2008 Obama campaign, former campaign new media staffer, Rahaf Harfoush, breaks down the online videos used by the Obama campaign in 2008 into three categories: live-streaming video, campaign-created video, and user-generated video.\textsuperscript{320} Live-streaming video typically filmed speeches, campaign stops, and other Obama-related events that would have otherwise “been edited, shortened or not covered at all by the media.”\textsuperscript{321} Using email, Tweets, social media posts, or text messaging, the campaign then notified supporters of the live-streaming video event, which they could then watch online on their computers at home in real time.\textsuperscript{322} Harfoush describes that by providing supporters with live-streaming video coverage of campaign events, supporters had “more opportunities to connect with the campaign and see footage that revealed a side of Obama’s personality that transcended media coverage.”\textsuperscript{323} This all fit within the Obama campaign’s umbrella strategy of building a grassroots network of supporters who saw themselves as closer to the candidate and personally invested in the campaign.

\textsuperscript{319} Harfoush, 148-149.
\textsuperscript{320} Ibid., 149-150.
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{322} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{323} Ibid.
The category of campaign-created videos included campaign advertisements, intended for both television and Internet distribution, and other videos posted on Obama’s website and YouChoose channel such as campaign and event footage, interviews, video messages from the campaign to supporters, and video montages featuring user-submitted photos of supporters and campaign events. Through YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, email and other forms of online communication, the campaign enabled audiences to forward the web addresses of videos to friends and family, “leave comments, and donate money to the Obama campaign.” By the end of the campaign, the Obama team had posted “1,839 videos with an astounding 132.8 million viewers.” With five times the amount of videos posted by the McCain campaign, the domination of the Obama campaign on YouTube was absolutely clear. At the end of October 2008, TubeMogul did the math to prove it, taking each of the candidates’ individual videos, and multiplied the videos’ number of views by their lengths for a total of watched hours. In total, users watched over 14.5 million hours of Obama campaign footage online. Denton and Hendricks assert that if that same amount of online footage were distributed “on broadcast television, it would have cost [the

324 Harfoush 150.
326 Johnson, 15.
327 Boehlert, 259.
328 Tubemogul is a website which collects and researches video viewing data from sites such as YouTube, Metacafe, and Daily Motion. Wallsten, “Yes We Can,” 169.
330 Hendricks and Denton, “Preface,” xii.
Obama campaign] $47 million."\textsuperscript{331} The Obama campaign’s viral videos served as a recruiting, advertising, and fundraising machine.

Out of the 1,839 videos posted during the 2008 campaign by the Obama video team, videos of Obama’s speeches rose to particular popularity. As Harfoush highlights, by uploading speeches to the Internet, the campaign was able to give Obama’s speeches “longevity,” and allowed viewers who “might not have discovered Obama until later in the campaign to review content which otherwise might have been inaccessible.”\textsuperscript{332} The video of Obama’s victory speech after the Iowa Caucus received a total of 3 million hits.\textsuperscript{333} After losing the New Hampshire primary, the video of Obama’s “Yes We Can” speech in Nashua garnered a total of 2.5 million hits.\textsuperscript{334} While the campaign often broke down their candidate’s message “into bite sized chunks” for easier viral distribution, viewers on Obama’s YouChoose page appeared remarkably untroubled by lengthy videos.\textsuperscript{335} As Sifry and Rasiej report, the top ten posted videos from the Obama campaign as of March 2008 were on average 13.3 minutes long.\textsuperscript{336}

Though not all of the video coverage of Obama was positive, the campaign proved to be particularly adept at handling fallout from attacks using viral videos. At the end of March, the Obama campaign suffered a blow when video footage of Obama’s former pastor in Chicago, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, surfaced on the Internet and news networks. The video, which showed “vignettes” of the pastor making racist and inflammatory remarks during a

\textsuperscript{331} Denton, “Preface,” xii.
\textsuperscript{332} Harfoush, 151.
\textsuperscript{333} Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 27.
\textsuperscript{334} Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 26.
\textsuperscript{335} Harfoush, 151.
\textsuperscript{336} Sifry and Rasiej, “Sound Blast.”
sermon, was posted online and picked up by news media, which fueled controversy over Obama’s relationship with Wright.\textsuperscript{337} When Obama’s polling dropped by a significant margin in comparison to primary competitor Hillary Clinton, and Republican nominee John McCain, the campaign was compelled to address the issue. On March 18, Obama delivered his 37-minute “More Perfect Union” speech in Philadelphia, addressing race relations in America to great acclaim. \textit{New York Magazine}, called it “eloquent but also, fearless,” and James Fallows of \textit{The Atlantic} claimed no other speech about race existed “with as little pandering or posturing or shying from awkward points.”\textsuperscript{338}

Within 24 hours, the video of Obama’s speech received 1.2 million hits on YouTube, and by the end of the month it had received 5.1 million hits.\textsuperscript{339} On March 24, Gallup announced Obama’s poll numbers had recovered to tie Clinton and McCain.\textsuperscript{340} Breaking down the favorability ratings of Obama among Democrats and Independents, NAES determined that Obama received a significant bump among Independents in the week following the speech.\textsuperscript{341} Sifry and Rasiej argue that without Internet, the news networks’ replays of “Wright's sound bites” would likely “have deeply damaged Obama's candidacy.” Yet with televised and online media “from across the spectrum” praising Obama’s honest, eloquent, and intellectual appeal, “millions of voters” flocked to YouTube to watch footage of Obama’s response and the candidate quickly rebounded.\textsuperscript{342} As one writer in \textit{The New York

\textsuperscript{337} Kenski et al., 306.
\textsuperscript{339} Kenski et al., 87.
\textsuperscript{341} Kenski et al., 87.
\textsuperscript{342} Sifry and Rasiej, “Sound Blast.”
observed, the event marked YouTube's "emergence as a vehicle for substantive discourse, not just silly clips."  

As Harfoush describes, the third type of online video utilized by the Obama campaign in 2008 was user-generated. The hype surrounding Obama's candidacy made him an easy subject for music videos, mash-ups, and parodies. In June 2007 a music video called "I've Got a Crush on Obama" by commercial website BarelyPolitical.com "set the tone...in which a scantily clad vixen" sang about her crush on "the Democratic hopeful." As Jones notes, unlike other political videos, the video neither "attacked" nor "celebrated" the candidate, but nevertheless became "an enormous hit" and helped increase Obama's online name recognition and popularity as "one of the top YouTube videos of 2007." 

In February 2008, hip-hop singer William "Will.i.am" James Adams of the Black Eyed Peas, and Bob Dylan's son, Jesse Dylan, released a new Obama music video onto the Internet, titled "Yes We Can." The video shortened Obama's 13-minute long New Hampshire concession speech into a "palatable user-friendly four and a half minutes," and mashed it up with a song inspired by the speech, "penned" by Adams, and performed by "an array of celebrities" including Scarlett Johansson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and John Legend. Dylan filmed the video in black-and-white, and created its montage "in the vein of

343 Kenski et al., 86.
other recent all-star video tributes."\footnote{348} Neil McCormack of the *London Telegraph* described the video as "the perfect piece of political propaganda, aimed at exactly the young voters who might be inclined to support a socially liberal black candidate but are often apathetic when it comes to actually turning up at polling stations."\footnote{349} Recognizing the popular celebrities in Will.i.am’s video was easy for the young, Internet-using age demographic, and the celebrity association certainly helped reinforce Obama as the candidate who was most in touch with youth culture and the younger generation. The video became an immediate viral hit. Eventually, the Obama campaign endorsed the video and posted it on Obama’s website as an example of the campaign’s appreciation for supporters’ contributions and ownership of the campaign.\footnote{350} In studying online viewership and the viral spread of the “Yes We Can” video, Kevin Wallsten discovered that each time the Obama campaign mentioned the video in an email or official blog post, the video received more views, more independent blogging, and more media coverage, demonstrating the campaign’s newfound messaging control using Internet as a messaging medium.\footnote{351} By Election Day, Will.i.am’s video had over 26 million views.\footnote{352}

In addition to positive messaging, the Obama campaign was also adept at using YouTube as a vehicle for attack advertisements against John McCain. As Ari Merber of

\footnote{348} Jones, 174-175; Snow, “Blogging Americans,” 67-68.  
\footnote{349} Neil McCormack qtd. in Snow, “Blogging Americans,” 77.  
\footnote{350} Harfoush, 151; Jones, “Pop,” 174-175.  
\footnote{351} Wallsten used TubeMogul to obtain daily viewing data across all major video portals and conduct a study on the dissemination of Will.i.am’s video over the course of its first month from February 2–March 2, 2008. To determine the popularity of the video on blogs, Wallsten used Technorati, a blog data collection site to count the number of times the video was linked to. To count the number of campaign statements about the video, Wallsten recorded the number of times various versions of the video were linked to on the Obama campaign’s official website and tracked the number of times the video’s title and its artist were both mentioned in e-mails from the Obama campaign. Wallsten, “Yes We Can,” 169-170, 170-171.  
\footnote{352} Harfoush, 151. 

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TechPresident.com suggested, with “tech-savvy liberals... ridiculing McCain all over the Internet,” underscoring McCain as an older, “out of touch,” new media non-user was an easy line of attack for the Obama campaign.\textsuperscript{353} Released in September 2008, the YouTube advertisement titled “Still” was constructed around McCain’s responses in a series of interviews.\textsuperscript{354} In January 2008, in an interview with Yahoo News and Politico, McCain admitted to being a “computer illiterate” who depended on his wife to go online.\textsuperscript{355} When asked about his “social media skills set” by The New York Times, McCain admitted again to “computer illiteracy,” but argued that he was “learning” to go online and that, “I use the BlackBerry, but I don’t email. I’ve never felt the particular need to email. I read email all the time but the communications that I have with my friends and staff are oral and done with my cell phone...”\textsuperscript{356} Decorated with “1980s era disco balls, oversized cordless phones, out-of-date eyeglasses and suits, and a Rubik’s Cube,” the “Still” advertisement’s narration states:

1982, John McCain goes to Washington. Things have changed in the last 26 years but McCain hasn’t. He admits he still doesn’t know how to use a computer, can’t send an email, still doesn’t understand the economy and favors $200 billion in tax cuts for corporations, but almost nothing for the middle class. After one president who is out of touch, we just can’t afford more of the same.\textsuperscript{357}


\textsuperscript{354} Snow in Hendricks and Denton, 67-68.


\textsuperscript{356} Snow, “Blogging Americans,” 67.

\textsuperscript{357} “Still” qtd. in Snow, “Blogging Americans,” 68.
The McCain campaign countered the Obama campaign’s attacks by attributing McCain’s inability to use the computer to war injuries incurred during his time as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, and accusing Obama of insensitivity. However, Obama spokesman David Shapiro defended the advertisement, arguing:

Americans of all ages use computers today. Our economy wouldn’t survive without the Internet, and cyber-security continues to represent one our most serious national security threats. It’s extraordinary that someone who wants to be our President and our Commander in Chief doesn’t know how to send an email.  

McCain’s image as an older, offline candidate was reinforced by the advertisement and by Obama campaign staff. Furthermore, McCain’s previous admissions of “illiteracy” remained under scrutiny, and the campaign’s defense of its candidate by emphasizing the nature of his disabilities arguably harmed more than it helped McCain’s assertion that he was fit for the presidency. Addressing the controversy over McCain’s “computer illiteracy,” Snow observes that online competitiveness of the Obama campaign underscored the sentiment that “if you wanted to be the last one standing in the race for the White House you had better have nimble thumbs or have hired someone who was [skilled in] information and communications technology.”

The McCain Channel

In their October 2008 study, TubeMogul found that in comparison to the Obama campaign's over 14.5 million hours of watched YouTube video, the McCain campaign had only approximately 488,093 hours. The Obama campaign dominated the McCain campaign in the realm of campaign-generated videos in both volume and distribution. Though the McCain campaign made attempts to regain ground within the realm of viral videos, the Obama campaign's heavy YouTube presence and appeal to a youthful, tech-savvy online demographic fueled additional blows from the public online community in the form of user-generated videos. Pro-Obama user-made videos, such as Will.i.am's "Yes We Can" music video, inspired anti-McCain parodies such as "John McCain: No You Can't." Clips taken from cable television, including news, entertainment, and talk shows, were additionally posted and virally distributed by online community. Clips of David Letterman mocking McCain and Tina Fey's uncanny performances as Sarah Palin on Saturday Night Live became viral hits, vastly more popular than actual McCain campaign-generated videos. As McCain campaign strategist Steve Schmidt recalled, Obama's presence on YouTube "completely manhandled" the McCain campaign. To evaluate the McCain campaign's shortcomings in comparison to the Obama campaign in the realm of viral videos, the McCain campaign's online video presence will be broken down into the three categories Harfoush used to describe the Obama video strategy: live-streaming, campaign-generated, and user-generated videos.

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360 Sifry, "How Much is YouTube Worth."
361 Jones, “Pop,” 174-175.
362 Kenski et al., 77.
In using live-streaming and campaign-generated online videos, the McCain campaign followed a similar strategy to that of the Obama campaign: first, to allow supporters to follow McCain on the campaign trail, and second, to distribute advertisements inexpensively to the voting public. Following McCain on the campaign trail was typically through “Behind the Scenes” videos posted to his YouChoose channel, which showed McCain making various campaign stops in cities across the country.\(^363\) However, the videos’ extremely low viewership in comparison to those posted by the Obama campaign made the impact of these videos marginal. In April, TechPresident.com reported that despite the McCain campaign’s “diligence” in posting “Behind the Scenes” videos, “the most recent additions—from Little Rock, Arkansas; Inez, Kentucky; and Youngstown, Ohio” had “fewer than a thousand views each.”\(^364\)

The McCain campaign’s YouTube viewership deficiency might have been attributed to both the weakness in the campaign’s online organizing tactics, which could have been used to distribute the videos, as well as its failure to appeal to the younger, tech-savvy online user. In May, the campaign sought to improve the latter with the YouTube exclusive video, “McCain Cribs Exclusive: The Straight-Talk Express.” In a “well-researched and well-edited” parody of the MTV show “Cribs” in which audiences are taken inside celebrity homes, the McCain campaign brought online viewers inside McCain’s campaign tour bus. The exclusive was a comparative success, garnering ten times the number of hits as previous


\(^{364}\) Ibid.
“Behind the Scenes” videos.\footnote{Michael Tate, “McCain: Untapped YouTube Talent?” TechPresident.com, last modified July 2, 2008, http://techpresident.com/blog-entry/mccain-untapped-youtube-talent/} Michael Tate of TechPresident.com praised the video as a tactic the McCain campaign should have employed all along, but noted that the McCain campaign needed to continue this level of success to compete with the Obama campaigns hugely successful YouChoose channel.\footnote{Ibid.}

The McCain team’s most successful and controversial campaign-generated video on YouTube was the attack advertisement, “Celeb,” which garnered 2.2 million hits. Yet despite its popularity within McCain’s YouChoose channel, the video’s audience was dismal compared the millions of hits on Obama’s videos. Worse for the campaign, “Celeb” received an overwhelmingly critical response from the public and news media. In the advertisement, the female narrator states, “He’s the biggest celebrity in the world,” followed by the McCain campaign’s thematic attack against Obama, “But is he ready to lead?”\footnote{For full transcript for “Celeb,” see Appendix C; Foxhole Productions John McCain 2008, “Celeb,” Video file, The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials 1952-2008, last modified July 31, 2008, http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/2008/celeb/} Footage of Obama addressing a crowd of 125,000 in Berlin during his popular nine-day tour of Europe and the Middle East is then juxtaposed with images of popular celebrities Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. The narrator then continues to question Obama’s policy stance on energy and his opposition (then) to offshore drilling. The McCain campaign sought to combat the Obama media hype by labeling Obama as a superficial and overexposed celebrity, not a substantive politician.\footnote{Ibid.}
A second online advertisement, titled "The One," was created in a similar vein, crafting an image of Obama as a self-appointed messiah with a platform based on vague concepts and not concrete policy issues. According to Schmidt, the advertisements used "humor" as "an effective weapon" to bring a halt to what the McCain campaign saw as an overly positive depiction of Obama in the televised and online media, and wrestle back some of the online video space that the Obama campaign had dominated so successfully throughout the course of the general election.

However, the advertisements received a mixed televised and online response. The media called it "trivial and trivializing," and "pathetic," and "Celeb" was even labeled as "race-baiting" as the public scrutinized the McCain campaign's questionable taste in comparing Obama with two tabloid-stricken, white, female celebrities. John Heliemann and Mark Halperin accused the "cash poor" McCain campaign of airing advertisements without ever testing them. The blows became worse when the comedic video website Funny or Die "crafted a satirical response featuring Paris Hilton in a bathing suit claiming she was running for president and citing her (smartly written) policy proposals on energy independence." Hilton's response mocked the McCain advertisement both in imagery and in policy content. The video gained immense popularity, circulating on the Internet and

369 For full transcript for "The One," see Appendix C.
370 Kenski et al., 77.
372 Heliemann and Halperin, 331.
eventually becoming headline news as "McCain had seemingly set himself up by attacking Hilton in the first place."374

Anthony Hamelle of the social analytics company Linkfluence tracked the "meme"375 of both the McCain advertisement "Celeb," and Hilton’s response, throughout the June 2008 "political webosphere," discovering that, in total, Hilton’s response received well over 3 million views, outdoing McCain’s original advertisements.376 The McCain campaign received further backlash when, in addressing a question from an audience member in regard to the attack advertisement during a town hall meeting on July 31, McCain defended the advertisement stating the campaign was "proud of that commercial."377 The Obama campaign quickly followed up on McCain’s statement, releasing an online attack advertisement on August 1 featuring McCain’s statement, and adding a section to MyBO called, "McCain’s Low Road Express," where supporters could report and debunk inaccurate claims and statements made by the Arizona Senator.378 By quickly responding to the advertisement and McCain’s statements, the Obama campaign further fueled media scrutiny towards the campaign’s decision to run seemingly petty attacks against Obama.

375 Term used for a concept or idea that is transmitted virally across the Internet through online discussion, blogs, commenting, etc.
Upon its release on February 11, 2008, the anti-McCain parody music video “John McCain: No You Can’t” had drummed up over 700,000 hits in two days.\(^{379}\) In April, Joshua Levy of TechPresident.com dubbed the mood on YouTube as “anti-McCainia” as progressives continued to post biting satires against the Republican nominee despite the ongoing Democratic primary season.\(^{380}\) At the end of May, in article for the *Los Angeles Times*, James Rainey reported that, “six of the top 10 videos returned by a ‘John McCain’ YouTube search” in the last week “pegged the 71-year-old as inconsistent, extreme, wooden or a combination of the three.”\(^{381}\) Reflecting upon Rainey’s observations, Levy noted, “Where is the voter-generated video in *support* of McCain?”\(^ {382}\) Some of the most popular online videos featuring either member of the Republican ticket were unflattering or comical video clips of the candidates, either recorded or posted by users or taken from news media or cable television shows. The impact of these videos represented pop culture’s growing influence in modern day politics. Since these videos were usually posted by users who recorded news clips from their television and posted them online with the purpose of either garnering support for or against the McCain-Palin ticket, this analysis will include virally spread television show clips in the category of user-generated videos.

One of the biggest talk show debacles for the McCain campaign occurred with *The Late Show with David Letterman*. Though McCain had originally announced his bid for the presidency on the Letterman show, the talk show host eventually became a bane to the


\(^{382}\) Ibid.
McCain cancelled on the talk show host an hour and a half before his scheduled appearance, announcing that he was suspending his campaign to “race back to Washington immediately” to deal with the economic crisis. However, McCain “did not race back to Washington, opting instead to stay in New York and conduct a live interview with Katie Couric at CBS News to discuss his unorthodox move.”384 The incident quickly became a “public relations nightmare” as Letterman proceeded to slam McCain throughout the episode, commenting on his age, wealth, judgment, integrity, fitness for office, and Palin.385 “This just doesn’t smell right. This is not the way a tested hero behaves. Somebody’s putting something in his Metamucil,” stated Letterman.386 The 9-minute long segment, posted on YouTube, of Letterman mocking McCain became the number one video of the day and the most watched political video of the week with 1.4 million views.387 Though McCain returned to the show three weeks later to make amends, footage of McCain’s apologies were not nearly same story as his cancellation.388 The damage on YouTube had already been done.

Perhaps attracting even more online scrutiny than McCain was his running mate, Sarah Palin. Following Palin’s rousing acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention and a bump in the polls, the McCain campaign sought to build off the

384 Ibid., 178-179.
385 Ibid.
386 David Letterman qtd. in Ibid., 179.
388 Jones, “Pop,” 179.
momentum with a series of exclusive interviews for the virtually unknown Vice Presidential nominee with Charlie Gibson and Katie Couric throughout the month of September. However, instead of showing off the well-spoken governor who had spoken at the Convention, the interviews quickly became an embarrassment to the McCain campaign. Though cheery, Palin appeared ill-prepared and poorly versed on key issues during her responses. Though the online segment of Couric and Palin garnered 10 million views alone, matters became much worse. At the end of September Saturday Night Live (SNL) launched a series of skits, featuring actress-comedian Tiny Fey as the “clueless” Governor. Bearing a natural resemblance to Palin, Fey was able to deliver a “spot-on parody” by “repeating much of what Palin had actually said in the interview with only slight deviations for comic relief.” To see the similarities, the following excerpts are given from parallel portions of two dialogues:

FEY: “Like every American I am speaking with, we are ill about this. We’re saying, hey, why bail out Fannie and Freddie and not me? But ultimately, what the bailout does is help those that are concerned about the health-care reform that is needed to help shore up our economic, to help, um, it’s got to be all about job creation, too. Also, too, shoring up our economic and putting Fannie and Freddie back on the right track and so health-care reform and reducing taxes and reinining in spending...”

389 Kenski et al., 156.
390 Jones, “Pop,” 176-177.
391 Tina Fey qtd. in Ibid., 177.
PALIN: “That’s why I say I, like every American I’m speaking with, we’re ill about this position that we have been put in where it is the taxpayers looking to bail out. But ultimately, what the bailout does is help those who are concerned about the health-care reform that is needed to help shore up our economy, helping the, it’s got to be all about job creation, too, shoring up our economic and putting it back on the right track.” 392

Though Fey did not always stick to direct quotes, her resemblance and mastery of Palin’s quirks and intonation blurred the line between the comedic performance and reality. Fey’s delivery of the dialogue was so convincing that even the sound bites from Fey’s interviews, liberally interpreted from the actual dialogue, stuck in the minds of viewers as reality. At one point during the actual interview, Palin remarked to Couric, “As Putin rears his head and comes into the airspace of the United States of America, where do they go. It’s Alaska. It’s just right over the border.” 393 However, according to Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Fey’s infamous exclamation “I can see Russia from my house!” was “quoted more than anything Palin actually said.” 394 Jeffrey P. Jones asserts that the results of the SNL debacle was “a largely negative and damning public perception of the candidate” as “a political and intellectual lightweight who sought to charm her way through a campaign and into an office that she was ill-prepared to fill.” 395 SNL had been previously known for political skits that mocked the idiosyncrasies of politicians rather than their actual political

392 Sarah Palin qtd. in Jones, “Pop,” 177.
393 Palin qtd. in Kenski et al., 156.
394 Kenski et al., 156.
395 Jones, “Pop,” 171; 176-177.
behavior or policy platforms. However, by using Palin’s actual dialogue, Jones argues that Fey produced a true satire of a candidate positioned to become Vice President.\(^{396}\)

Throughout the course of the general election, \textit{SNL} had Fey reprise her role as Palin an additional five times.\(^{397}\) Each skit sent \textit{SNL}’s ratings soaring. According to Jones, the skits became “one of the most influential sites of public commentary” on the Alaskan Governor’s candidacy.\(^{398}\) Adding to the hype, news networks reported on Fey’s performances and directed viewers to video clips circulating on the Internet. On October 19, an MSNBC report indicated that the majority of viewers were watching Fey’s performances online, with “only one third” of viewers claiming to “have watched it first live on” \textit{SNL}.\(^{399}\) NBC also reported that it had streamed the Palin and Couric interview skit on its website more than 13 million times, in addition to the 10.2 million who watched it live on the air.\(^{400}\) With so much hype surrounding Fey-Palin and negative political implications looming on the horizon, the McCain campaign finally made a move to damage control with Patin’s guest star appearance on \textit{SNL} alongside Fey-Palin. Her appearance was lauded and critics praised her humor and ability to laugh at herself. With 15 million on the air viewers plus millions more online in following days, the show received \textit{SNL}’s largest audience in fourteen years. Yet despite this excellent attempt to correct Palin’s public image, damage control appeared to come too little too, too late. According to data taken by NAES in 2008, “exposure to the \textit{SNL} caricatures”

\(^{396}\) Jones, “Pop,” 176.
\(^{397}\) Ibid., 176-177.
\(^{398}\) Ibid., 170-171.
\(^{400}\) Ibid.
made voters “more likely to contend that” Palin was not fit to be president. According to Kate Kenski et. al., this sentiment was “particularly pronounced with independents, a group whose support McCain had to draw to win the election.” According to NAES data, Kenski et al. argues, “as audiences processed [Palin’s] faltering responses to the Couric interview and as the effects of Tina Fey’s impersonation of Palin as cheerily clueless set in, perceptions of her readiness to be president dove.”

Summary

With televised media and online video working in tandem, campaign-related footage and advertisements earned larger audiences and spread faster than they would have on their own. In a June 2008 survey, Pew Research Center reported, 22% of all adults and 29% of all Internet users said they watched campaign commercials online; 20% of all adults and 27% of all Internet users said they watched online video of campaign speeches of announcements online; and 18% of all adults and 25% of all Internet users watched user-made videos about the political campaigns. Whereas other new media such as social networking primarily impacted younger voters, online videos were able to intersect with televised media, which McCain supporters were more likely to watch. An earlier Pew survey taken during July 2007 of the primary indicated that respondents were more likely to have heard of online videos on

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401 Kenski et al., 157.
402 See Appendix B, Figure 4; Ibid.
television, than have watched them online. Furthermore, people aged 50 and older were more likely to have heard about them on television. With interest in the presidential election increasing throughout 2008, it is likely these patterns persisted, if not increased.

Through live-streaming, campaign-generated, and user-generated videos, the Obama campaign supplemented its new media and televised media strategies with inexpensive viral videos supported by portals such as YouTube. By posting videos online instead of relying on televised advertisements alone, the Obama campaign provoked news stories and ensured the easy accessibility of video throughout the course of the campaign. Videos posted during the primary were available online throughout the course of the general election in order to attract and educate new supporters. Furthermore, the Obama campaign’s constant attention to the medium allowed it to use it to use online video for a variety of tactical purposes within its strategy—proactive, positive messaging to support Obama’s image, negative messaging to attack the opposition (McCain in “Still”), and damage control to delegitimize attacks from the opposition (such as in the case of Jeremiah Wright). In contrast, the McCain campaign failed to understand online videos full capacity. Its success in positive messaging was too few and far between (“Cribs: Straight-talk Express”) and even its most popular videos appeared meek (“Celeb”) in comparison to the massive volume of hits received by the Obama YouChoose channel. Worse, the McCain campaign failed to damage control against

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404 Data for this survey was collected by Opinion Research Corporation using telephone interviews with nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, and has a sampling error margin of 3.5 percentage points. The survey used the four most popular online campaign-related videos at the time of the survey, “Obama Girl” (Barack Obama), “The Sopranos” (Bill and Hillary Clinton), “Edwards brushing his hair” (John Edwards), and “Bomb Iran” (John McCain). “Campaign Internet Videos: ‘Sopranos’ Spoof vs. ‘Obama Girl,’” Pew Research Center, last modified July 12, 2007, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/539/campaign-web-video/.

405 Ibid.
the hostile, pro-Obama online community, which supported the viral spread of negative videos such as Fey-Palin’s SNL skits, and McCain’s interviews with Letterman. With online and offline media, and peer-to-peer communication facilitating the viral spread of campaign propaganda and parodies at an increasingly rapid rate, the McCain campaign was harmed by failing to keep up with online trending and dialogue.
Chapter 7

Voter Contact in the Digital Age: E-mail and Mobile Phones

As voters increasingly go online and buy into new phone technologies, the methods in which presidential campaigns are capable of identifying and contacting voters evolves. Whereas door-to-door knocking and phone banking from campaign headquarters once dominated voter outreach efforts, two newer forms of communications technology reached the forefront of the 2008 campaign: email and mobile phones.

First used by presidential campaigns in 1996, email is considered one of the "oldest" yet "most important" new media technologies. "Sent to a defined address," email is easy for receivers "to read" and "respond to," and more difficult "for the press and political opposition to monitor than a website." It even evolved to include microtargeting capabilities as email lists were sorted with demographic information "such as voting history" and "home address." In 2000, McCain showed impressive initiative in developing the use of email as part of his campaign strategy using a website/email campaign package from a company called Virtual Sprockets that provided rudimentary microtargeting capabilities. In 2004, the re-election campaign for President Bush built upon his fellow Republican's initiative to boast an impressive list of "6 million email addresses." According to political scientist, Michael Cornfield, with its low cost, mass messaging capabilities, email could

407 Ibid.
outperform a candidate’s website “ninety-nine days out of a hundred.” Email quickly became “the weapon of choice” for presidential candidates.

In comparison to email technology, presidential campaigns did not “begin to understand the potential of cell phones as communication devices” until “the mid-2000s.” As an increasing number of Americans purchased cell phones, more voters had phone on hand at all times. Technology such as Short Message Service (SMS) or “texting” became increasingly popular, allowing voters to send and receive brief, email like messages to and from their mobile devices instead of sitting in front of a computer or participating in a full phone conversation. In 2004, Howard Dean campaign became one of the first presidential campaigns to send “regular campaign updates” to subscribers through text messaging services. As Jenn Burleson Mackay describes, texting and emailing were recognized as two of the least expensive ways for a campaign to distribute mass messages to voters, sending one message “to droves of voters at a fraction of the cost of a television advertisement or a bulk mailing.” However, texting offered two primary advantages that emailing previously did not. First, emails were “easier to ignore” and always ran “the risk of ending up in a junk mail folder.” Second, campaigns could contact voters through text messages regardless of their location, without waiting “for supporters to be in front of their computer...If the campaign needed a last-minute volunteer to man a post, he or she could be

409 Michael Cornfield qtd. in Johnson, 16.
410 Johnson, 16.
411 Ibid.
413 Ibid., 21, 23.
414 Ibid., 23.
reached immediately.”415 A voter could only receive an email in the same immediate manner as a text message if their mobile phone held smart phone technology—an increasingly popular yet not universal trend.

Though the McCain campaign was a model for email technology in 2000, it failed to update its strategy for the 2008 election. In contrast, the Obama campaign took the methods of the McCain, Bush, and Dean, and expanded them to create an integrative online grassroots machine by investing in voters increasing use of Internet and accommodating new technology. In 2008, for the first time since Pew Research Center began polling Internet and politics in 2000, “over half of the entire adult population” (55%) reported using email during the presidential election.416 The development of “smart phone technology,” or mobile phones capable of storing data, playing software, and using the Internet, also brought new possibilities to the realm of email and online networking. The BlackBerry and the Apple iPhone became an “email vehicle, a written or text device, and a small screen TV in a way that computer-based instant messaging never reached.”417 These “multipurpose devices” brought new opportunities for more personalized contact with “potential volunteers and campaign contributors across the country” through texting, e-mailing, or allowing users to surf the campaign website their phones.418 According to Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “by harnessing the capabilities of new technologies, the Obama campaign delivered traditional messages in nontraditional ways” to maintain the Democratic support base of youth voters, and tap into new frontiers for campaign voter contact that

415 Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 23.
416 Waite, “Email,” 118.
417 Mary Spaeth qtd. in Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 19.
418 Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 19.
supplemented all aspects of the campaigns social media and grassroots organization effort.\textsuperscript{419} This chapter will assess the scope and strategy involved in the Obama campaign’s investment in email, mobile phone, and “Peer-to-Peer” technology in comparison to that of the older model used by the McCain campaign.

\textbf{The Obama Email Campaign}

Though email had served as a primary form of voter contact for campaigns since the 1990s, the Obama campaign succeeded in creating a more intricate, personalized, and integrated strategy. Instead of hiring speechwriters to manage email, the Obama email team was headed by Stephen Geer and his team of writers. According to former Obama social media team employee, Rahaf Harfoush, the Obama team treated email on “an equal footing” with other communications technology such as phone banking and texting, in order to ensure consistency and integration between the mediums.\textsuperscript{420} Additionally, unlike some communications departments, the Obama team recognized speed as email’s greatest asset.\textsuperscript{421} As Geer recalled, some of the writing included in the campaign’s emails came “right from Obama’s mouth,” which according to Harfoush, made “the campaign more agile and current,” and voter contact more personal.\textsuperscript{422} With so many different online medias operated by such a “large, decentralized staff,” maintaining a consistent strategy and coherent

\textsuperscript{420} Rahaf Harfoush, \textit{Yes We Did: An Inside Look At How Social Media Built the Obama Brand} (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2009), 100.
\textsuperscript{421} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{422} Stephen Geer qtd. in Harfoush, 100.
messaging in its communications with voters was no small feat.⁴²³ Discipline ruled the email strategy of the Obama campaign.

The first initiative of the Obama campaign’s email messaging strategy was drafting “compelling content” to encourage financial contributions and voter recruitment.⁴²⁴ Geer and his team maintained email content based on short-term and long-term themes, which the campaign would drive home throughout the course of the day or week.⁴²⁵ Most important to the campaign’s messaging was an effective deliverance of the “ask,” or call to action for door knocking, phone banking, or donating to the campaign. Asks were always “clear and concise,” stating simply “what needed to be done.”⁴²⁶ Content from Obama’s speeches was used in emails to enhance the eloquence and intimacy of the message, aspiring to reflect the way Obama would speak to supporters.⁴²⁷ Furthermore Greer emphasizes that asks typically operated on an “escalating scale involvement strategy that was metered out and had triggered frequency,” meaning volunteers were asked to do a little bit more over time with each following email.⁴²⁸ However, the team also utilized asks as a way for donors or volunteers to respond to attacks from the opposition. The most impressive example of this followed Sarah Palin’s speech at the Republican National Convention, during which the Vice Presidential nominee mocked Obama’s experience as a community organizer.⁴²⁹ Immediately, the campaign responded by sending mass emails to supporters accusing the McCain ticket of “belittling ordinary Americans” and asking supporters to fight back with a small donation to

⁴²⁴ Harfoush, 101.
⁴²⁶ Harfoush, 102.
⁴²⁷ Ibid., 101.
⁴²⁸ Ibid., 102.
⁴²⁹ Waite, “Email,” 110.
Obama. In 24 hours the Obama campaign raised over $10 million, "the single biggest day of fundraising in the history of politics." 430

A second initiative of the Obama campaign was growing the campaign’s email list—a “constant priority.” 431 Immediately after Obama’s announcement of his candidacy, users could log onto BarackObama.com and sign up for emails. Peer-to-peer recruitment was also used on a massive scale, asking supporters to email friends and family about supporting Obama and signing up for campaign emails. 432 Additionally, the campaign provided incentives for signing up for emails, giving away free items such as bumper stickers, or withholding information and telling supporters to sign up for emails to receive a major campaign announcement would be made by email. 433 Geer even established the concept of "non-tests," 434 lottery-type contests in which small donors were selected “to meet and interact with Barack Obama directly” at dinners, rallies, or major campaign events. 435 According to Brandon C. Waite, the strength of the campaign’s strategy was its “groundbreaking steps to make everyone on their email list feel like a valued asset and reward them as such.” 436 By the end of the election, Obama campaign boasted over “13 million names of supporters in its email files” and had “sent over 1 billion emails.” This was a huge accomplishment over Bush’s 6 million names in 2000 and the 3 million names

430 Waite, “Email,” 110.
431 Harfoush, 100.
432 Johnson, 16.
433 Harfoush, 100.
434 “Non-test” initiatives were named thus since state lottery rules prevented the Obama campaign from referring to them as “contests.” Harfoush, 108.
435 Harfoush, 108.
436 Waite, “Email,” 108.
collected by Democratic challenger John Kerry in 2004. Furthermore, the emails distributed by the Obama campaign clearly succeeded in reaching the voters. As Pew Research Center found during its 2008 Internet poll, “three-quarters of Internet users in the United States went online to collect and disseminate information about” the election. As campaign manager, David Plouffe, recalled, the list of 13 million “essentially created our own television network, only better, because we communicated directly with no filter to what would amount to about 20 percent of the total number of votes [sic] we would need to win.” The massive size of the Obama email list was a strategic advantage in voter contact for the Obama campaign.

Third, the Obama campaign sought to use email to provide its “supporters with meaningful and relevant content that was applicable to their personal situation.” Microtargeting through email lists was essential to the development of this strategy. Headed by Ken Strasma and his firm Strategic Telemetry, the Obama campaign used “the most aggressive testing of microtargeting models” that Strasma claimed to have ever seen. Using huge voter databases such as Catalist, the Obama campaign compiled voter lists that included specific demographic data on the majority of individuals on the email list. According to Waite, this gave the campaign “unbridled segmentation to specifically tailor

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437 Harfoush, 100. 
438 Waite, “Email,” 118. 
439 Kenski et al., 305. 
440 Harfoush, 101. 
442 Waite, “Email,” 108.
their messages based on a recipient’s” demographic characteristics (age, race, etc.), location, degree of interest (known supporter or potential supporter), and donor level (large donor or small donor). This was a beneficial capability since microtargeted emails provided the campaign with ability to customize asks based on recipient’s donor level for maximum effect. Following the strategy of the asks’ timed escalation, “the person who had given $25 to the campaign was asked in a subsequent email to give perhaps $50.” Likewise, the campaign personalized email content to best suit recipients’ interests and habits. Dennis W. Johnson describes, “The Obama supporter interested in environmental issues got emails tailored to that concern; those who open up their email in the morning (there were always ways of knowing thus) got their Obama emails in the morning.” Furthermore, the Obama campaign’s employed an analytics team that tracked which emails recipients were opening the most. This allowed the campaign to develop “an email marketing strategy” that zeroed in on the most effective tactics to maximize campaign donations, voter support, and impact of Obama’s message. Though all 13 million Obama email recipients would occasionally receive the same email, most were microtargeted—catered to the individual’s location, demographic, or interests. By Election Day, the Obama campaign had sent “over 7,000 unique email messages.”

Fourth, the Obama used email to reinforce its the online media strategy, and likewise use its online media to increase the effectiveness of its emails. The ask and text of the email’s

443 Ibid.
444 Johnson, 86.
445 Ibid.
446 Waite, “Email,” 108.
448 Johnson, 86.
message was frequently enhanced by media and visual graphics. According to Harfoush, "each email was crafted to be a perfect mix of text, pictures, and hyperlinks." Following a strategy employed by the 2004 Dean campaign, most emails contained a large, red "donate" button for voters to click on, in order to get redirected to BarackObama.com where they could make contributions to the campaign. Online video was also integrated into the strategy, with hyperlinks to Obama’s YouChoose channel or actual videos provided in the content of the email itself. According to Johnson, campaign research revealed "that viewers looked at the email for a longer time (and perhaps absorbed in its message better) when it was accompanied by a video." The Obama campaign enhanced recipients’ contact experiences by integrating the interactive features of other aspects of its online strategy into its email campaign.

The McCain Email Campaign

In 2000, the McCain campaign was viewed as exceptional and innovative in the production of its Internet and email strategy. However, it managed to fall far behind in 2008, due to its failure to remain competitive with the Obama campaign’s voter engagement strategy and technological capabilities. Compared to Obama, McCain was viewed as a candidate that was “out of touch” with new technology and thus disadvantaged in the realm of new media communications. His interview with The New York Times, in which he described his computer illiteracy and rejection of email, suggested that he did not embrace

449 Harfoush, 101.
450 For more on the effect of campaign-related online videos, see Chapter 6.
451 Johnson, 87.
452 For more on McCain’s interview with The New York Times, see Chapter 6.
new technology on a political or personal level. Whereas Obama appeared personally involved with his email team, the McCain tech team was “heavily criticized for the lack of apparent strategy in their emails” and disconnect from its candidate. Though McCain once was considered the candidate of cutting edge technology in 2000, compared to the Obama campaign’s embrace of new technologies in 2008, the McCain campaign’s online communications and phone strategy appeared to be relics of the past.

Throughout the course of 2008 TechPresident.com frequently discussed the confusion of McCain campaign’s online and offline tactics. According to Patrick Ruffini, the best online strategy is a “good reflection of [how your] candidate” is offline. Pointing to a recent email featuring the header, “From the Desk of John McCain,” Ruffini accused the McCain team of reinforcing their candidate’s image as old and “out of touch.” Though the header was intended to evoke a sense of formality, Ruffini argued it appeared as a “haughty” relic of the “1970s” when compared to the friendly, yet eloquent formats adopted by the Clinton and Obama campaigns. Ruffini explained, while offline McCain was known for his stump speaking talents, “transparent, accessible, and willing to answer any question,” McCain emails were “stilted,” “Tolstoy in my inbox.” Joshua Levy of TechPresident.com, asserted that in addition to poor representation, the McCain emails lacked the ask that was central to the success of the Obama campaign. In contrast to the interactive, colorful, and concise emails of the Obama campaign, McCain emails were “text heavy,” and “image free”

453 Harfoush, 101.
455 Ibid.
456 Ibid.
with messages “as long as five hundred words with one hyperlink.”\footnote{101} In scanning McCain’s lengthy, verbose emails it was “hard to tell what [the McCain campaign] was asking for or how to do what he wants,” stated Levy.\footnote{Levy, “McCain Abuses Email.”} The lack of asks and clarity within McCain emails likely contributed to the McCain’s weak online fundraising campaign.\footnote{As in Chapter 4, the Obama campaign raised $500 million online. In comparison, the McCain campaign raised only $75 million (20% of its total funds raised) online.}

**Obama Goes Mobile**

In June 2007, Obama media team Triple O established its mobile phone program under the leadership of Director of External Organizing, Scott Goodstein.\footnote{For more on Scott Goodstein, Director of External Online Organizing and Mobile, see Chapter 4; Harfoush, 116; John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr., “Political Campaigns and Communicating with the Electorate in the Twenty-First Century,” in Communicator-in-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House, ed. John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 10.} Throughout the course of the 2008 campaign, the Obama mobile phone team integrated its mobile phone program within the general campaign strategy as an effective way to garner support, call volunteers to action, generate dialogue, and draw voters out to the polls. According to Harfoush, the Obama campaign’s mobile phone strategy followed three key rules. First, was to respect supporters’ privacy by waiting for supporters to “voluntarily” offer contact information to “opt in” to the mobile programs.\footnote{Harfoush, 117.} Second, was to “create a conversation” using text messaging, establishing a program in which supporters could send inquiries and feedback to the campaign through texts and receive responses from the campaign.\footnote{Ibid.} The third, was to achieve “portable engagement,” by creating various platforms for mobile

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item Harfoush 101.
  \item Levy, “McCain Abuses Email.”
  \item As in Chapter 4, the Obama campaign raised $500 million online. In comparison, the McCain campaign raised only $75 million (20% of its total funds raised) online.
  \item For more on Scott Goodstein, Director of External Online Organizing and Mobile, see Chapter 4; Harfoush, 116; John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr., “Political Campaigns and Communicating with the Electorate in the Twenty-First Century,” in Communicator-in-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House, ed. John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 10.
  \item Harfoush, 117.
  \item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
phones to make “supporting Obama easy everywhere” a supporter went. According to Pew Research Center, younger voters were not only the most likely to support Obama and be online. According to a series of polls conducted from June to September 2008, respondents who reported using only a mobile phone were 10 to 15% more supportive of Obama. The majority of mobile phone only respondents were under the age of 30.

In August 2008, the Obama campaign announced the release of its new Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), “m.barackobama.com.” Instead of logging onto a website through a mobile phone’s Internet browser, the WAP offered users a cleaner, streamlined version of the Obama campaign website through an online mobile phone platform. Designed by the company iLoop Mobile, the platform had various features and applications including “news content fed dynamically from the main Obama website,” downloadable wallpapers, ringtones that featured remixes of Obama’s “quotes on healthcare and the Iraq War.”

Mackay points out the particularly innovative nature of these downloadable features, stating that while these “features had been popular in the commercial market, they had not previously” been used in the politics, let alone campaigning. TechPresident.com acknowledged the Obama WAP and its various features made the Obama campaign a “vanguard” in mobile technology. With growing mobile phone Internet traffic, the Obama

464 Harfoush, 117.
468 Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 22.
campaign’s WAP was a wise investment, certain to “buy-in with the hip, young crowd” most likely to use the technology and support the candidate. On October 2, the Obama campaign followed up its WAP with an iPhone and iTouch application designed by a team of volunteers lead by iPhone blogger, Raven Zachary. Offered as a free download, featured cutting-edge tools for grassroots organizing. The Call Friends tool organized the user’s personal contacts according to whether they lived in a battleground state. It then “kept track of who had been called to prevent supporters from calling the same person twice,” and after completed calls, offered users “the option of reporting the results” to the campaign. Other tools included Local Events, which located Obama events in the area using GPS technology, and tools to follow Obama in the news, obtain campaign photographs and videos, and even look up Obama’s position on key issues. Though the iPhone/iTouch platform was released with only 33 days until Election Day, “95,000 supporters installed the application and 11,191 of them made 41,075 calls. The Obama WAP and iPhone/iTouch application clearly brought the concept of portable campaigning to the to the next level, boosting grassroots organization by enabling easy, constant voter-to-campaign contact.

**Phone Banking on the Go**

Though phone banking has existed as a primary form of voter contact and outreach

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469 Sifry, “Obama’s New Mobile Platform.”
470 iPhones did not require WAP technology to easily access the Obama campaign’s online content unlike other mobile phones.
471 Raven Zachary, “Obama '08 for iPhone,” Raven.me: iPhone Intelligence, accessed April 1, 2010, http://raven.me/2008/10/02/obama-08-for-iphone/.
472 Harfoush, 121.
474 Harfoush, 120.
for decades, the rise in mobile phone usage in the twenty-first century brought new possibilities for a traditional campaign strategy. The traditional definition of a phone bank is a GOTV effort in which volunteers are organized to work one to two hours making phone calls using a “general script” with callers completing “20 to 30 calls per hour.” Though the Obama campaign ran successful call teams from campaign offices around the country, the campaign sought to encourage grassroots organization by enabling supporters to use online and mobile phone bank features. MyBO’s online phone banking platform, N2N encouraged volunteers to phone bank from the comfort of their homes or with their mobile phones. Phone bank lists were computer generated for users through N2N, typically prioritized by battleground state or the home state of the user. The online database generated new numbers as users completed their calls, kept track of the phone numbers users called, and provided online response forms for users to report findings of the call to the campaign. The iPhone Call Friends Tool allowed users to phone bank without access to a computer. N2N also demonstrated remarkable microtargeting capabilities as phone bank lists were categorized according to dozens of specific demographics in “Peer to Peer” targeted calling groups based on location, demographics, and internets. TechPresident.com’s Micah Sifry reported finding groups as specific as “Italian to Italian Peer to Peer Calling,” “Seniors Peer to Peer Call PA,” and “Greek to Greek Peer to Peer Calling.” By microtargeting populations, Peer to Peer Calling made the phone bank experience more personalized for

476 For more on MyBO and N2N, see Chapter 4.
both volunteer and receiver.

In October 2008, an article in *The New York Times* provided insight on the impact of Obama’s powerful media blitz strategy in swing states. Sally Bradshaw, Republican senior political adviser to former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, had signed up online with the Obama campaign to receive contact from the campaign so she could “stay informed” on rivals’ strategies. However, Bradshaw’s contact with the Obama campaign yielded a telling observation. “I have received seven calls from live Obama volunteers,” but “I haven’t received any McCain calls,” she reported. Florida, which often is regarded as a swing state during presidential elections, was not engaged by the McCain campaign with the same intensity as the Obama call team, even in the critical month leading up to the general election. In comparing the call strategies of the Obama and McCain campaigns, the McCain campaign did not succeed in generating the same volume of calls or grassroots hype as Obama’s “Peer to Peer” Calling, and did not release its own mobile phone applications. TechPresident.com’s Google search for “McCain” and “call team” returned only 8,500 hits in comparison to Obama’s 35,000. Though McCain won Florida by a healthy margin during the Republican primary, Obama campaign manager, David Plouffe remarked, the McCain campaign made “a strategic error” by underestimating the capabilities of the Obama campaign and its call team. In the end, Obama won Florida.

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479 Nagourney, “McCain Looked Away.”
480 Sifry, “Banking on the Phone.”
481 Nagourney, “McCain Looked Away.”
**SMS: Don’t 4get 2 Vote**

Though the Obama campaign collected mobile phone numbers from voters’ offline and online, in traditional and non-traditional ways, one of their strongest collection efforts was based in “text” or SMS messaging. Out of all the 2008 candidates, asserts Mackay, the Obama campaign “placed the most emphasis” on the strategic benefits of text messaging voters.\(^{482}\) The campaign used its “technological know how” and knowledge of its support base to “harvest millions of cell phone numbers of potential voters through text messaging.”\(^{483}\) According to Christopher Stern, “texting is among the most effective and cheapest ways over getting the Democratic Party’s key support base of youth, African-American, and Hispanic voters to the polls since these demographics are also likely to own mobile phones.\(^{484}\) Whereas a text costs a campaign roughly 10 cents per recipient, the “cheapest cost per vote of traditional campaign activities (via a professional, personalized phone bank)” is roughly $19.\(^{485}\) By integrating a mobile texting plan into their new media strategy, the Obama campaign could help procure the votes of key demographics at low cost.\(^{486}\)

In January 2007, the Obama campaign announced its own SMS number, 62262 or “OBAMA,” which supporters were encouraged to text in order to receive news, event announcements, and special offers:

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\(^{482}\) Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 22.


\(^{484}\) Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 10.


\(^{486}\) Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 10.
Please REPLY to this message with your five-digit zip code to receive local Obama campaign news and periodic updates.487

A holiday gift from the Obama store: get a 20% discount on all Store.BarackObama.com items through Dec. 31. Use coupon code: TEXT at checkout.488

The Obama mobile team then gathered the cell phone numbers of each texter and compiled it into a mobile phone database. The database then sorted subscribers into lists “by area code, ZIP code, or other demographic information” for easier, microtargeted contact489. By providing incentives for voters to text the Obama number, the campaign encouraged 3 million of voters to hand over their cell phone numbers via texting.490 One television advertisement offered “a free campaign sticker” if viewers texted “Barack” to 62262.491 In order to access the Obama WAP, users had to text 62262.492 The campaign even built viral software into its mobile phone platforms called “Share the Hope” in which the campaign could “collect additional phone numbers through text-a friend features.”493 Perhaps the campaign’s smartest and most “obvious ploy to sign up mobile users for future campaign communications,” was Obama’s “promise to announce his vice presidential pick by text-message.”494 Reports suggested “approximately 2.9 million people” received Obama’s text announcement of Joe Biden as his running mate.495 Though these were clever tactics to coax

487 Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 22.
488 Ibid.
489 Stelter, “Enticing Text Messagers.”
491 Stelter, “Enticing Text Messagers.”
492 Goodstein, “Announcing the Obama Mobile WAP.”
493 Katrin Verclas qtd. in Sifry, “Obama’s New Mobile Platform.”
494 Sifry, “Obama’s New Mobile Platform.”
495 Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 22.
contact numbers out of supporters, as Harfoush has suggested, the Obama campaign made
the collection of phone numbers via SMS appear as “voluntary” as possible, to reduce
receivers’ aggravation.\textsuperscript{496}

Though SMS message was an inexpensive and quick way to distribute news,
announcements, and report events, the true asset of voters’ mobile phone numbers was in
their potential for increasing the success of pre-Election GOTV efforts. By calling or texting
voters during November GOTV, the campaign called volunteers to action, requested
donations, and drew critical numbers of Obama supporters to the polls on Election Day. As
Goodstein recalled to one journalist, the success of the South Carolina primary helped the
Obama campaign develop its overall strategy, including SMS, for the general election.\textsuperscript{497}

Prior to the primary, the campaign mass texted supporters to volunteer and remember to vote.
Goodstein asserted that Obama’s 28-point lead was supported by the text message blitz
leading up to the election.\textsuperscript{498} An experimental study conducted on the 2006 elections by
Alison Dale of University of Michigan and Aaron Strauss of Princeton University “found
that 26\% of the participants surveyed suggested that text messages increased the likelihood
that they would vote.” In addition, “those who received text messages” one the day before
elections, “cast ballots at 3.2\% higher rate than the participants in a control group who did
not receive the messages.”\textsuperscript{499} These findings support Goodstein’s assertion that texting was
effective in increasing voter turnout. Later on, in the election, calling volunteers to action

\textsuperscript{496} Harfoush, 117.
\textsuperscript{497} Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 22.
\textsuperscript{498} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{499} This field experiment with 8,053 total sample size, with a standard error of 1.1 Dale and Strauss, “Don’t
Forget,” 794, 796; Allison Dale and Aaron Strauss qtd. in Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 21; Stelter, “Enticing
Text Messagers.”
through SMS became a go-to strategy. According to Mackay, “Obama supporters in Democrat stronghold California were recruited to man phone banks and field offices” in more moderate states such as “Colorado and Nevada.” Texting served as a quick and effective device for GOTV efforts and volunteer recruitment.

The Obama campaign also enabled voters to contact the campaign through text messaging by developing a texting system that could operate as not just a notification system but as a “dialogue” between campaign and voter. Voters could text the Obama phone number to find out information regarding voter registration and polling locations, or even to ask questions regarding political issues. Campaign programmed software often would answer with automated responses, and in some cases, general campaign questions were even responded to by campaign staffers, who were trained and “ready to answer questions quickly and efficiently.” Comments and feedback received by the campaign via text message were frequently featured on the Obama website’s blog posts and social networking sites as acknowledging shout outs to supporters’ participation. The Obama campaign sought to constantly emphasize and reemphasize supporters’ ownership of the campaign to maintain the campaign’s relationship with its voters.

Summary

In 2008, the Obama campaign’s integrative strategy expanded digital voter contact methods developed during the 2000 and 2004 elections to include cutting edge new media

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500 Mackay, “Gismos, Gadgets,” 22.
501 Ibid; Stelter, “Enticing Text Messagers.”
502 Ibid.
503 Harfoush, 119.
technology. Using its website’s data-mining capabilities, the Obama campaign created highly microtargeted emails. The campaign engaged its key base of youth and minorities from all new media angles, emailing videos, blog posts, news, and events, and making key asks for small, manageable donations that were answered by supporters in huge numbers. Additionally, mobile phones played an important role in the Obama campaign’s strategy, supplementing traditional phone banking. With more individuals owning mobile phones, there were increased opportunities for contacting voters throughout the day. Mobile phone platforms introduced phone banking on the go, and texting facilitated a constant two-way dialogue between campaign and voter, which studies determined would help drive voters to the polls on Election Day. In contrast, the McCain campaign chose to utilize voter contact methods it had established during the 2000 election such as email and phone banking. It did not develop any smart phone platforms like the Obama WAP or iPhone Application and sent one text to supporters throughout the course of the entire election, on the eve of Election Day reminding supporters to vote.504 By not accommodating new technology, the McCain campaign left the Obama campaign to transform tactics, which the Republican had once dominated in 2000, into strategic, hi-tech art forms that worked to maximize voter turnout of the Democratic base.

504 Johnson, 7.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

In looking at the use of new media in the 2008 presidential election, it is clear that the capabilities of the Obama campaign's strategy significantly outperformed those of the McCain campaign's tactics. Obama's social networking profiles, emailing campaign, attention to viral video, and use of mobile phone technology and texting helped channel users to BarackObama.com and MyBO, lending to massive grassroots organizing which provided the campaign with volunteers, enormous amounts of funding, and guaranteed votes on Election Day. In comparison the McCain campaign struggled to maintain consistent messaging throughout all of the new media, and combat the image of “old” and “out of touch” emphasized by opposition. This chapter will evaluate the turn out results of 2008 in regards to new media changing the electorate, which sat at the center of the Obama strategy. Next, it will address scholarly speculation over a technology paradigm in campaigning and politicking, and a shift towards citizen-centered campaigning, which seemed to characterize the Obama campaign in 2008. Additionally, the significance of the introduction of Campaigning 2.0 extends beyond the use of new media during the Obama and McCain campaigns of 2008. Therefore, this chapter will conclude by presenting the impact of 2008 on current new media use in politics, primarily in the Obama White House and Republican Party, and forecast the future.
Changing the Electorate

With youth and minority voters as the most likely to support Barack Obama, but the least likely to turn out on Election Day, a central aspect of the Obama campaign’s strategy was changing the electorate. In order to achieve this, the Obama campaign engaged in a grassroots strategy focused on registering, empowering, and rallying supporters around the concept of “change,” which as a young, African-American candidate, Obama embodied himself. This was predominantly conducted through new media, which the Obama campaign recognized its support base (particularly youth) was likely to use. A poll conducted by Gallup in October 2008 prior to the election revealed that 47% of new voters were minorities, up from 33% in 2004; 40% Democratic, 37% independents, and 23% Republican; 65% supporting Obama and 31% supporting McCain. Ultimately on November 4, “an impressive 69% of new voters voted for Obama” on November 4. Though the proportion of first time voters did not grow in 2008, the growth of youth and minority voters is considered to be the result of the Obama campaign’s targeting initiatives. The degree to which Obama expanded the electorate, rallied first time voters, and used media to win the expanded minority and youth votes, is revealed in analyzing each case individually.

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505 This poll was conducted through telephone interviews with 3,030 national adults, aged 18 and older from October 17-19, 2008. Based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the sampling error is ±2 percentage points. Jeffrey M. Jones, “No Increase in Proportion of First-Time Voters,” Gallup, Inc., last modified October 23, 2008, http://www.gallup.com/poll/111331/No-Increase-Proportion-First-Time-Voters.aspx/.


507 Jones, “No Increase.”
Being an African American candidate did not guarantee African-American voters for Obama. During the primary, a *Wall Street Journal/NBC* News poll revealed that black voters supported Hillary Clinton over Obama, 46% to 37%.508 Black voters thought highly of the Clinton family and were skeptical of Obama’s ability to win the support of white voters, and feared threats on his life by white supremacists.509 After winning the white vote in Iowa by a healthy margin, Obama rallied African-American voters much more easily. Both Obama’s and Clinton’s internal polling showed overwhelming support in the black community for Obama, with 75%-80% favoring the Illinois Senator.510 However, Obama’s victory in the African-American vote was not just winning it, but expanding it, with the black electorate growing from 11% in 2004, to 13%.511 This made the black vote all the more valuable on Election Day, with Obama securing “95% of the black vote,” 7 points higher than Kerry’s 88% in 2004.512 Based on the American National Elections Survey (ANES), Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde estimate that 23% of Obama’s total vote came from the black community—a greater proportion than any other winning Democratic presidential candidate.513 Pool polls conducted by Edison Research Media/Mitofsky International514 reveal an even greater proportion of 27%. According to Nicole Mellow, such

509 For more on the issue of race and Obama’s candidacy, see Chapter 2. Nelson, “The Setting,” 15.
510 Ibid., 15.
511 Ibid., 17.
514 Abramson et al. use pool polls to supplement ANES data since the number of self-reported voters is very small at ANES. Edison Research Media/Mitofsky International conducts pool polls for news organizations such as ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX, and NBC. Abramson et al., 117; “2008 National Election Data,” Edison Research, accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.edisonresearch.com/2008_elections.php.
overwhelming support from the black community assisted Obama particularly in Southern states that have a high concentration of black voters. This helped shift states such as Virginia and North Carolina in Obama’s favor, which incidentally, were also “among the top states generating greater Democratic turnout.”\footnote{Mellow, “Voting Behavior,” 155.}

Though the Latino vote had traditionally leaned Democratic, there was speculation over a shift in party loyalties in 2004 after news media exit polls indicated President George W. Bush garnered 44% of the Latino vote.\footnote{Ibid., 156; Abramson et al., 120.} Furthermore, on a more superficial level, some pollsters questioned whether an African-American candidate would be able to win Latino votes or whether the black and Latino vote would go in the same direction, based on racial tensions existing between the Latino and black communities.\footnote{Richard Morin, “Do Blacks and Hispanics Get Along,” Pew Research Center Publications, last modified 31 January 2008, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/713/blacks-hispanics/; Jamie Reno, “Black-Brown Divide,” Newsweek, last modified January 26, 2008, http://www.newsweek.com/2008/01/25/black-brown-divide.html/.} According to an ANES poll, Obama won 75% of the Latino vote, a significant improvement upon Kerry’s 67% in 2004.\footnote{Nelson, “The Setting,” 17.} However, like black voters, the pool polls revealed an even greater improvement, with Obama garnering 67% of the Latino vote, a thirteen point difference from Kerry’s 53%.\footnote{Abramson et al., 120.} According to Mellow, this helped Obama win “an additional set of states” that he would not have otherwise in the Mountain West, including Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada, which have well above average populations of Latino voters.\footnote{Mellow, “Voting Behavior,” 156.} Pew Research Center asserts that winning 57% of the Latino vote in Florida was one of Obama’s “biggest breakthroughs” since the Cuban-American population comprising the Latino vote in Florida has historically

leaned consistently Republican. In 2004, Bush won the Floridian Latino vote by 56%. Obama also won California, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, which have substantial Latino populations.

According to Christopher Stern, studies showed that utilizing new media and in particular, texting was one of “the most effective and cheapest” ways getting minority voters, especially blacks and Hispanics, to the voting booth. Thomas Gensemer of Blue State Digital, the DC company which helped the Obama campaign design its new media strategy, elaborated, stating that texting helped the campaign target its “base, inner-city minority communities who are lower on the income scale with less predictability about where they live.” With landline telephones and permanent address harder to determine among these demographics, acquiring cell phone numbers was a much more effective way of ensuring contact with minority (particularly from the inner cities) voters.

Youth voters were the least likely to turn out on Election Day of all three groups, and the most likely to use new media. Therefore, the Obama campaign’s new media strategy was particularly catered to the younger “Millennial” generation. According to Morley Winograd and Michael Hais, “Millennials are community and group oriented and [like to] share their thoughts and activities with each other.” Thus the ease and speed of new media technology such as social networking, email, and texting are extremely appealing forms of

524 Stern, “Obama Counts.”
communication and social interaction.\textsuperscript{526} Winograd and Hais’s study found 50% of Millennials reported they sent or received an email in the past 24 hours, 51% reported sending email and/or cell phone text message, and 30%, an instant message.\textsuperscript{527} A web study of the 2200 college and university students aged 18–27 years, revealed that 92% claimed to have social networking accounts, 60% of these exclusive Facebook users, 3% exclusive MySpace users, and 37% with accounts on both Facebook and MySpace.\textsuperscript{528} According to Michael Cornfield “The sheer size of this subpopulation, along with the traditional role of young people as enthusiastic campaign volunteers, made social networking sites valuable territory to stake out this cycle.”\textsuperscript{529} Winograd and Hais assert that the Obama campaign recognized the community oriented, online tendencies of the Millennial generation and capitalized upon it: “It was that sense of community and staying connected with friends that the Obama campaign successfully tapped into during the 2008 campaign.”\textsuperscript{530} The social networking grassroots stories of Joe Anthony on MySpace, and Farouk Olu Aregbe of “One Million Strong for Barack Obama,” and Meredith Segal of “Students for Barack Obama” on Facebook are clear examples of this.\textsuperscript{531} Additionally, like the GOTV texting efforts for minorities, texting to bring young voters to the polls was highly effective. As the study by

\textsuperscript{526} Winograd and Hais qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 10.
\textsuperscript{527} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{529} Michael Cornfield qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 8.
\textsuperscript{530} The Center for Information and Research of Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) was founded in 2001 by Pew Charitable Trusts, and conducts research on the civic and political engagements of young Americans. “CIRCLE Mission,” CIRCLE, accessed on April 20, 2011, http://www.civicyouth.org/about-circle/.
\textsuperscript{531} For more on Joe Anthony’s creation of the original Obama MySpace profile, Farouk Olu Aregbe’s “One Million Strong for Barack Obama” group on Facebook, and the Meredith Segal’s creation of “Students for Barack Obama,” see Chapter 5.
Alison Dale and Alison Strauss revealed, “those who received text messages” one the day before elections, “cast ballots at 3.2% higher rate than the participants in a control group who did not receive the messages.” Since many elections are often won by small margins, Dale and Strauss suggest that, though small, an increased rate of 3.2% would be a welcomed advantage for political campaigns. As Dale and Strauss’s study determines, texting is capable of being a powerful tool for mobilizing young voters and affecting the outcome of close elections.

Though the white youth turn out did not increase during the 2008 election, youth voter turnout in all other races increased. This was particularly significant in light of the fact that the youth population of American is diversifying with each year. While in 1972, 88% of 18–29 year old identified as non-Hispanic white, in 2008 66% of Americans youth identified as non-Hispanic white, 14% African American, and 13% Latino. According the Center for Information and Research of Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) 58% of African American youth and 41% of Latino youth voted in 2008, up from the 49% and

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534 For more on Dale and Stauss’s findings, and texting as a mobilization tool, see Chapter 7; Dale and Strauss, “Don’t Forget,” 796.


536 Ibid.

537 Ibid.
In total, "an estimated 23 million voters under the age of thirty voted in the 2008 election," approximately 3.4 million more than 2004, and the largest turnout since the voting age was dropped from 21 to 18 years in 1972.\(^{539}\) 66% of voters aged 18-29 voted for Obama, an improvement upon Kerry's 54% in 2004, and significantly higher than the 31% garnered by McCain.\(^{540}\) In *The New York Times*, Peter Levine of CIRCLE claimed this two-to-one margin "striking," certainly contributing to Obama's victory, pointing out that "If you subtracted some of their turnout, or if you raised the voting age to 21, it's a much closer election".\(^{541}\) Mellow also acknowledges contribution of the youth vote to Obama's victory, adding that since youth are attracted to "'youth ideopolises'"\(^{542}\) this phenomenon likely helped Obama in states in the South and West in which Democrats had recently struggled.\(^{543}\) Though Obama won all age groups excepting 65 and over which went to McCain, youth support for Obama indicated a strong shift towards the Democrats. In comparison, the McCain won voters age 65 and over by only a small majority of 53%.\(^{544}\)

Obama's overwhelming popularity amongst minority and particularly, youth voters was likely in his campaigns attention to generational and demographical characteristics, which enabled them to better reach out and relate to supporters and voters through popular mediums. According to Abramson et al., the Obama campaign's messaging strategy reached

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538 Godsay et al., "Fact Sheet."
541 Peter Levine qtd. in Falcone, "Youth Turnout."
542 An ideopolis is a city that is sustained primarily by intellectual enterprises such as education, the media, advertising, and design, with a highly educated workforce (Dictionary.com)
543 Mellow, "Voting Behavior," 158.
544 Abramson et al., 121.
voters and was persuasive. In exit polls, 13% of respondents claimed they were contacted by only the Obama campaign, approximately twice as many as those who said they were contacted by only the McCain campaign (6%). When exit polls asked respondents “which candidate was ‘in touch with people like you,’” 44% indicated only Obama, and only 26% indicated only McCain. Though research indicates that Obama in fact used negative advertising more frequently than McCain, only 10% of respondents said that Obama “attacked unfairly,” compared to the 24% for McCain. Abramson et al. indicate that the Obama campaign’s consistent use of positive messaging and outreach, enhanced by their candidates “cool demeanor and command of details seem to have influenced the voters’ evaluations.”

**Citizen-Centered Campaigns and the Technology Paradigm**

New media was not the sole reason for Obama’s victory in 2008. However, as Solop argues, it was certainly part of the “broader, winning equation.” In a push to raise enough funds to compete with front-running candidates, and garner the votes of the Democrat’s critical minority and youth voters, the Obama campaign heavily invested in a comprehensive new media strategy. By adapting and improving new media strategies used in previous campaigns, such as Internet and email, and accommodating new technological developments within new media like Twitter, YouTube, texting, and smart phone platforms. In a world that

545 Abramson et al., 52.
546 Ibid., 53.
547 Ibid.
548 Ibid.
is increasingly technologically aware, many scholars argue that 2008 was not an exception, but rather the start of citizen-centered campaigning in a technological paradigm shift. This section will assess the various scholarly arguments for citizen-centered campaign and the technological paradigm based on the events of 2008.

Though there is contention on the details and immediacy of the coming technological paradigm, it is clear that many scholars agree that 2008 was a harbinger or even a watershed date for new media in politics. Winograd and Hais suggest that increased citizen participation in the political process is part of a broader “generational transition. “ 550 As discussed previously, Millennials demonstrate generationally unique community and group-oriented behaviors that are often expressed through the rapid, constant communication and networking provided by new media. This “constant and steady state of connection and interaction with friends” allows the transfer and distribution of ideas that will certainly influence political decisions. 551 The large demographic of 18–29 year olds indicating that they receive the majority of their political information online is indicative of this. 552 Girish J. Gulati builds upon this argument and points out that as an increasing number of households gain high-speed Internet access, and as technologically inclined generations (such as Millennials and generations to come) age, new media will become the communications technology of choice for the majority of the electorate. 553 Politicians will eventually have to

551 Ibid.
553 Girish J. Gulati qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 12.
follow the electorate, as Americans use the Internet for an increasing number of daily activities such as checking the news, weather, and interacting with friends and family.\footnote{Hendricks and Denton, "Political Campaigns," 12.}

In order to frame the impact of 2008, some scholars reference the paradigm shift that occurred after the introduction of television to politics in 1960. Since communication is an essential component of political campaigns, the media of the day plays a significant role in the messaging techniques used during a campaign cycle. Several scholars liken Obama’s mastery of new media in 2008 to John F. Kennedy’s use of television in 1960.\footnote{The New York Times qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, "Political Campaigns," 14.} The New York Times claimed, “After Kennedy, no serious presidential contender could succeed without effectively utilizing the medium of television.”\footnote{Richard Nixon’s push to master television in 1968 was a clear result of Kennedy’s technological achievements of 1960.\footnote{For more on Nixon and the television paradigm, see Chapter 3.} Likewise, in 2008, Obama did the same thing with Internet, defining what it meant to be a “twenty-first century communicator,” integrating new media as part of his central campaign strategy.\footnote{Hendricks and Denton, "Political Campaigns," 14.} Bruce Gronbeck also cites 1960 as a historical precedent for a technological paradigm shift. Since the introduction of television in the 1960s initiated a shift from party-centered campaigning to candidate-centered elections,\footnote{For more on party-centered and candidate-centered elections, and impact of television on presidential campaigning, see Chapter 3.} Gronbeck argues that the introduction of Internet gives citizens greater opportunities for participation in the political process, creating citizen-centered campaigning.\footnote{Bruce Gronbeck qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, "Political Campaigns," 3.} This shift from “mediated communication” through

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{554} Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 12.\textsuperscript{555} The New York Times qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 14.\textsuperscript{556} For more on Nixon and the television paradigm, see Chapter 3.\textsuperscript{557} Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 14.\textsuperscript{558} For more on party-centered and candidate-centered elections, and impact of television on presidential campaigning, see Chapter 3.\textsuperscript{559} Bruce Gronbeck qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 3.}
televised news networks, magazines, and newspapers will diminish as citizen-centered campaigning shifted politics into more immediate “electric communication.”560

John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr. reaffirm this argument, starting that since new media affects “the creation, collection, and dissemination of information, [it] promise[s] better citizen issue understanding, and political engagement.”561 In 2008, MyBO demonstrated the Internet’s potential in encouraging the citizen engagement in the political process, as a site providing users with networking, fundraising, and volunteering opportunities at one centralized hub, which allowed users to connect to and participate in Obama’s campaign from the comfort of their homes. Without leaving their computer, users could participate in online discussions, plan an event, post a video, and thereby affect the direction of the campaign through participation or lack thereof. Scholars such as Paul Harris, David Smith, and Lois Kelly argue that this direct line to campaigns and political information will continue to decrease the impact of third party traditional news sources, strengthen the relationship between campaign and voter, and increase campaign control over its own messaging.562 According to Gulati, it is this characteristic of the Internet which makes it “the single best medium for allowing candidates to communicate directly without any filter, to a multitude of constituencies simultaneously while maintaining a great deal of control over their own message.”563 Therefore, campaigns will have to employ new media strategists capable of monitoring messages and online dialogue, “staying abreast of technological

560 Bruce Gronbeck qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 3.
563 Gulati qtd. in Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 7.
advancements” and finding new methods for microtargeting campaign messages to the specific interests of online demographics.\textsuperscript{564} Majorie Randon Hershey adds that the relationship between online user and campaign might strengthen as increased online campaigning enables tech-savvy younger generations to participate in and work on political campaigns.\textsuperscript{565} With voters empowered by campaigns and Internet accommodating horizontal organizing, perhaps this will also increase presence of more grassroots initiatives.

As stated previously, new media was not the only technology that affected messaging and communications during 2008 presidential election. Traditional media such as television certainly had a large role to play in the broadcasting speeches, debates, breaking news, and advertisements to both online and offline demographics. However, the Obama campaign’s success in harnessing new technology, and translating online support into actual votes from key support demographics was a first in presidential campaigning. Furthermore, by comparing the magnitude of the Obama new media strategy with that of the McCain campaigning highlights the ways in which new media has rapidly evolved in campaigning over the course of the last decade. New media’s expanding role in politics will only be further guaranteed as tech-savvy generations encompass an increasingly larger portion of the electorate, and Internet continues to penetrate more aspects of daily life.

\textsuperscript{564} Hendricks and Denton, “Political Campaigns,” 13.
\textsuperscript{565} Ibid.
One way to evaluate the impact of new media in the 2008 election on present day politics, is evaluating present day use of Politics 2.0. This will be evaluated in terms of both the Obama White House and new media improvements within the Republican Party.

During the 2008 election, Obama complemented his sophisticated new media strategy platform with a pledge to improve transparency in the White House through Internet technology. Though the degree of transparency is hard to determine, the Obama team immediately went to work integrating new media into the Administration’s online presence after Election Day, starting with its official and unofficial transition team websites, Transition.gov and Change.gov—the first transition team websites ever created.\(^{566}\) On Change.gov users could submit their “vision for America” to Obama, view transition team blogs, and pages of job listings.\(^{567}\) In December 2008, the transition team made one of its first efforts at transparency by announcing that all policy documents from meetings with government organizations would be posted online for the public to review and post comments.\(^{568}\) In January 2009, Obama announced he would post web exclusive “Weekly Addresses” to Change.gov and later, during his presidency, to the White House website. Using a video blog format, the President delivers a brief address on current events and issues relevant to the week—“a digitized version of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats.”\(^{569}\) The first version of Whitehouse.gov received mixed reviews. Users complained that they were

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\(^{568}\) Harfoush, 177.

\(^{569}\) Ibid., 183.
unable to post comments, which the site eventually changed to accommodate messages up to 5,000 characters. As Rahaf Harfoush describes, “There have been some growing pains.” However, these early and ongoing efforts on behalf of the Obama transition team and White House were certainly meant to continue the sense of transparency and intimacy between the inner workings of the Obama team and the user as it existed during the 2008 campaign.

As Obama transitioned his online operations to government websites, the online grassroots branch of Obama for America’s campaign website, My.BarackObama.com found a new home as Organizing for America (OFA). OFA continued to operate as an online fundraising and volunteer recruiting machine that would certainly contribute to key Democratic campaigns as well as Obama’s re-election campaign. The Obama new media team has also continued its work on venues external to the White House website. The Obama new media team maintains both President Obama’s Facebook profile as well as an official White House Facebook page. “Weekly Addresses” and presidential announcements are posted on Facebook and YouTube in addition to Whitehouse.gov. In the midst of the healthcare debates in July 2009, the Obama Administration added a new feature to the White House Facebook page, “Tweet Your Senator.” When users with Twitter accounts clicked on the icon, they were redirected to their Twitter accounts where a “precomposed tweet” in support of Obama’s healthcare agenda awaited them, addressed to one of their state’s

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570 Harfoush, 182-183.
571 Ibid., 182.
572 Ibid., 179.
573 Ibid.
574 Solop, “RT @BarackObama,” 44.
Users could then choose to send the tweet to their Senator’s Twitter account. The Obama White House has also frequently held “online town meetings” in which users could submit and vote for either written or video questions for the President to answer. In April 2011, the Obama new media team’s embrace of social media was reflected in their choice to hold a town meeting at Facebook headquarters with founder, Mark Zuckerberg, in Palo Alto California. As Washington Post writer, Dana Milbank slyly remarked, “President Obama and Mark Zuckerberg have updated their Facebook status: They are in a relationship.” Having support for new media platforms was critical to the Obama campaign’s new media strategy in 2008. If the Obama team hopes to reach out to online demographics again for the 2012 re-election campaign, maintaining a strong presence on Facebook and other social networking sites will be an asset.

Though the Democratic Party under the leadership of the Obama Administration continued its use of new media in campaigning, it was the Republicans that made huge comparative improvements in their use of new media, both collectively as a party and as individual candidates, since the 2008 election. Former Vice Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin was arguably the one of the leaders in social media for the GOP. From early 2009 into 2010, Palin’s posts on her Facebook and Twitter became the source of online discussion and televised news coverage, as she criticized President Obama on a number of issues including

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575 Solop, “RT @BarackObama,” 44.
his healthcare agenda and troop insurgency in Afghanistan. Her accusations that Obama’s healthcare plan would create “death panels” posted on her Facebook blog received significant national media coverage as news networks picked up the story from online dialogue. Palin also frequently used her Facebook and Twitter accounts “to endorse or talk up her preferred candidates.” Though the political views and language expressed in her posts often generated (and continue to generate) controversy, Palin seemed to like using online media in her political pursuits since it allowed her to bypass mass media, which she believed had been biased against her and McCain in 2008. Between August 2009 and December 2010, Palin posted 307 messages to her Facebook supporters, which Jay Newton-Small of TIME declared, had allowed Palin to reach “her base much as Ronald Reagan reached his in the 1970s with his weekly radio commentaries.” By that point, Palin had garnered 2.5 million friends on Facebook, and over 350,000 Twitter followers. In the weeks following the Republican National Convention in 2008, Palin had only 51,000 Facebook supporters.

Republican efforts to utilize new media became even more pronounced in the months leading up to the 2010 mid-term election as other members of the GOP seemed to follow Palin’s lead. According to Lee Rainie of Pew Research Center, the pronounced growth of

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580 Becker, “Clicking ‘Like.’”
581 Newton-Small, “Palin in Progress.”
582 Ibid.
new media usage in the 2010 mid-term by both parties indicated that new media had become “deeply embedded in the rhythms of campaigning...an inextricable part of the political landscape.”\(^{584}\) Furthermore, the Republicans’ embrace of new media in 2010 seemed to challenge critics in 2008 who claimed that conservative and Republican ideologies were not salient with the online demographic.\(^{585}\) In particular, the right wing, grassroots Tea Party movement was credited with generating lots of online enthusiasm for GOP candidates. As of October 2010, eight of the top ten candidates on Facebook with the most followers were Republican, including John McCain.\(^{586}\) In October 2010, the Tea Party backed candidate competing for Nevada Senator Harry Reid’s seat Sharron Angle, had gained over 6,700 followers in just nine days. Additionally, Minnesota Congresswoman and Chair of the Tea Party, Michele Bachmann, had more supporters than any other US Representative on Facebook.\(^{587}\) By the mid-term election, congressional Republicans had more Twitter profiles and followers than congressional Democrats.\(^{588}\)

Based upon the events following the 2008 presidential election until present day, it is clear that the use of new media in politics has persisted consistently, if not grown. The Obama campaign’s new media strategy has transitioned into a White House online operation, and the grassroots movement initiated by the Obama campaign to capture its Democratic support base in 2008 has become a more permanent addition to the national political scene.


\(^{585}\) Coyle, “In Social Media.”


\(^{587}\) Ibid.

\(^{588}\) Ibid.
under OFA. Additionally, in reaction to the Democrats’ adeptness at utilizing new technologies during the 2008 presidential election, the Republican Party has stepped up its online presence, with more GOP congressional members and political candidates emerging as new media leaders, using Facebook, Twitter, and other networking mediums to rally and communicate with supporters. New media will become increasingly valuable strategic and tactical territory for politicians as the proportion of the electorate using online and mobile technologies continues to grow. Time will tell if new media functions as an equally effective governance tool as future Administrations adapt their new media strategies from campaign operations into efficient government websites. However, the lasting effect of new media as a driving force in campaigning will become easier to determine as presidential campaigns begin to unveil their strategies for the 2012 election. With Republicans now actively engaging in Politics 2.0 and a re-election bid for America’s first “Internet President” on the horizon, it seems that new media will have an increasingly strong presence in the realm of presidential and electoral politics.

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Appendix A

Images

Image 1.
An Example of a My.BarackObama.com User Profile.

Source: Rahaf Harfoush, Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2009), 76.
Image 2.
BarackObama.com (October 9, 2008).


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Barack Obama's Facebook Profile (May 21, 2007).

Appendix B
Figures

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

facebook/2008/.
Figure 3.
“Number of [Facebook] wall posters who commented on each candidate’s wall and across walls (areas approximated).”

Figure 4. “Perceptions of Palin as ‘Ready to be President’ (5-day PMA). Source NAES08 telephone survey.”

Source: Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money, and Message Shaped the 2008 Election* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2010), 156, Figure 7.1.
Appendix C
Text


(Crowd cheering)

CROWD: Obama! Obama!

(Flashbulb)

FEMALE NARRATOR: He's the biggest celebrity in the world. But is he ready to lead?

[TEXT: OBAMA: IS HE READY TO LEAD?]

FEMALE NARRATOR: With gas prices soaring, Barack Obama says no to offshore drilling, and says he'll raise taxes on electricity?

[TEXT: OBAMA: NO OFFSHORE DRILLING. OBAMA: NEW TAXES.]

CROWD: Obama! Obama!


[TEXT: HIGHER TAXES. MORE FOREIGN OIL.]

[TEXT: McCAIN]

McCAIN: I'm John McCain and I approve this message.


(Crowd cheering)

CROWD: Obama! Obama!

MALE NARRATOR [and TEXT]: In 2008, the world will be blessed. They will call him The One.

OBAMA: A nation healed. A world repaired... We are the ones we've been waiting for.

(Cheering)

MALE NARRATOR: And he has anointed himself ready to carry the burden of The One. To quote Barack, [with TEXT:] "I have become a symbol of America returning to our best traditions."

MALE NARRATOR: He can do no wrong.

JOURNALIST: Do you have any doubts?

OBAMA: Never.

MALE NARRATOR [and TEXT]: Can you see the light?

OBAMA: A light will shine down... from somewhere. And it will light upon you. You will experience an epiphany, and you will say to yourself, "I have to vote for Barack!"

MALE NARRATOR [and TEXT]: The world shall receive his blessings.

OBAMA: This was the moment when the rise of our ocean began to slow, and our planet began to heal.

CHARLTON HESTON: Behold his mighty hands!

MALE NARRATOR: Barack Obama may be the one.

[TEXT: HE MAY BE THE ONE]

MALE NARRATOR [and TEXT]: BUT IS HE READY TO LEAD?
WOMAN IN THE AUDIENCE: You have made comments about, like, the mudslinging - how that had been affecting other campaigns, and how you didn't want to do that. And yesterday, with the comparison to Britney Spears and Paris Hilton, like, I was like: Okay?

McCAIN: All I can say is that: We're proud of that commercial, we're proud of that commercial, we're proud of that commercial.