

ONLINE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY, Web 2.0 TOOLS, AND VOTER PREFERENCE IN THE 2008 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION¹

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Abstract

Can particular campaign strategies influence voters? How and why do campaigns adopt such strategies and how do these strategies help the campaign effort? Using journalistic and professional accounts to describe Barack Obama's and John McCain's presidential campaigns and their online strategies focused on Web 2.0 tools, the author argues that Obama's strategy was more innovative, comprehensive, and gave him an advantage in online campaigning over McCain. Using polling data from the Pew Research Center's Mid-October Election Survey, the extent to which voter engagement with campaign Web sites in fostering candidate support is presented. The study claims that campaign strategies do have an effect on voter preferences and that engaging with candidates via their Web sites greatly increases partisan voter support for candidates.

1. Introduction: The 2008 Election and Web 2.0 as a tool in the campaign process

The 2008 United States Presidential election was a landmark election. Its conclusion marked the rise of America's first African American President, Barack Obama. To win, Obama and his campaign team executed one of the well-planned campaigns of the modern era. The campaign made substantial use of new media and new technologies to mobilize large numbers of supporters. In contrast, the McCain was slower and less proactive in adopting newer forms of online communications in its

¹ I would like to acknowledge Assistant Professor Levente Littvay's help on my statistical analysis, which could not have been done without his superb guidance and comments. I would also like to thank Professor Miklós Sukosd for his exceptional guidance and recommendations.

online strategy. How did the Obama campaign execute an online, Web 2.0 based strategy so much more effectively than the McCain campaign and to what extent did it aid them in the election process?

While numerous factors affected the results of this election, it is evident that engaging voters online provides numerous voters with information about candidates, engages them to gain support from others, and inspires them to go and vote. Through phenomena such as viral marketing, user-generated content, and online social networks, Web 2.0 tools were able to spread a candidate's message to millions of voters. If campaigns recognize the potential of Web 2.0 tools, then they will benefit hugely in terms of voter mobilization and reinforcing support among their core supporters. This research will demonstrate that campaigns and campaign strategies focused on the use of Web 2.0 tools have the potential to generate large sums of money, to increase voter mobilization, and to solidify partisan support for candidates.

This article seeks to add to the existing literature on the importance of campaign effects and to move further away from traditional political science models of voter behavior which assign little to no importance to campaigns. It also stresses the necessity of candidates to adopt new technologies and new forms of political communication through new media as tools to aid them in the electoral process. A campaign which adopts a strategy with an emphasis on Web 2.0 tools which takes advantage of current and popular technological advancements to effectively spread a candidate's message to supporters will greatly increase and solidify its partisan support.

The potential for new technology and online tools to aid campaign communication and the role of campaign effects (a campaign's ability to influence voter preferences) on Presidential elections has not been sufficiently recognized in the existing political science literature. Media outlets, bloggers, citizens, and the campaigns themselves have all recognized the importance of campaign activities, *so why have numerous political scientists, who focus instead on election forecasting models that assign little*

to no importance to campaign effects, not recognized this importance?

The article will begin by exploring the role of new technology in elections and discuss how they have the potential to create advantages for campaigns. Once the role of technology is established, a definition of Web 2.0 tools will be elaborated and the benefits of an online strategy focusing on Web 2.0 tools will be provided. A brief analysis of the precise effect of campaigns in influencing elections will then be discussed. Then an in depth analysis of both the Obama and McCain campaign strategies, the reasons why each candidate pursued an online strategy, and the effectiveness of each particular strategy will be discussed. Following that analysis there will be an in-depth look at each campaign Web site and the effectiveness of the utilized Web 2.0 tools. A logistical regression analysis of polling data conducted by the Pew Research Center will provide us with concrete empirical evidence for the effectiveness of an online strategy in substantially solidifying partisan support for candidates. The final section will consider a few alternate explanations for Obama's success and will finish by arguing that campaign effects interact with the variables that led to Obama's victory.

2. Methodology

There has not yet been much scholarly information published about this election nor have there been many articles published about the direct role of Web 2.0 tools in voter mobilization and increasing voter support. An innovative approach to gathering information on campaign strategies and events relied on journalistic and industry accounts of the campaigns and their strategies.

There were innumerable journalistic and professional articles written about the election which included benchmarks for social network popularity throughout the campaign. These figures provide information about the number of supporters in online social networks at different moments throughout the campaign. Polling data conducted by the Pew Research Center and CNN will be used to determine voter turnout and the potential for voter

mobilization using Web 2.0 technologies. In order to obtain information on campaign finance and fundraising The Web site and blog Opensecrets.org, which compiles and aggregates financial information on candidates directly from sources published by the Federal Election Commission, will be referenced.

To determine the effectiveness of Web usage on voter preferences a logistical regression analysis on 6 hypothetical models using different combinations of variables including candidate preference, age, education, party affiliation, and Internet usage from the Pew Research Center's "Mid-October 2008 Political Survey Poll" will be conducted. Data from this analysis will demonstrate whether visiting any candidates Web site affected partisan voter choice and a voter's level of support for candidates.

3. The Role of New Technology in Elections

There are significant advantages to using the Internet as a form of *new media* over other forms of communication for reaching voters. The Internet "provides candidates with unmediated and inexpensive access to voters while also offering new technological options for communication and information presentation."² By taking advantage of technological advancements and incorporating those advancements into an effective campaign strategy, candidates gain advantages over their opponents in the quest for political office. "It took years for politicians to utilize television as a campaign tool," writes David Nickerson, "and candidates are just now beginning to figure out how to use the Internet."³ Obama and his campaign understood this importance much more than McCain and his campaign did.

Recently candidates have taken advantage of technological advancements to help them raise large sums of money. "The low transaction costs and the massive economies of scale of the

2 James N. Druckman, Martin J. Kifer, and Michael Parkin, "The technological development of congressional candidate Web sites: How and why candidates use Web innovations," *Social Science Computer Review* 25, no.4 (2007), 425.

3 Nickerson, "The ineffectiveness of e-vites," 494.

Internet," writes Nickerson, make it a highly desirable tool for campaigning.⁴ *The New York Times* reports that politicians view the Internet "as far more efficient, and less costly, than the traditional tools of politics, notably door knocking and telephone banks".⁵

Not until 1999 did a Presidential candidate attempt to use the Internet as a campaign tool. Bill Bradley was the first to make use of online fundraising in a presidential race and he was quickly followed by Senator John McCain as each sought to gain their respective party nominations.⁶ Online fundraising was effective as a party tool not only for *raising money* but also for *enabling supporters to feel directly involved in helping the campaign*.⁷ The percentage of money raised online was minimal in comparison to the rest of their fundraising efforts and neither won their nomination. Their efforts, however, paved the way for future innovations in online fundraising and Internet-based campaign strategies.

In 2004 Presidential candidate Howard Dean changed the way that candidates could use the Internet. Dean, an early front-runner for the Democratic nomination, strategically used the Internet to mobilize a large number of supporters through Meetup.com, a Web site designed to facilitate the meeting of supporters in real life. Dean raised large amounts of money in the early stages of the Democratic primary by drawing small amounts from many.⁸ Despite Dean's early advantage over John Kerry, Dean would inevitably end up losing the Democratic nomination. Dean still demonstrated to politicians, the media, and campaign professionals the tremendous potential of the Internet to attract attention among supporters and the mainstream media, and to

4 Nickerson, "The ineffectiveness of e-vites," 494.

5 Adam Nagourney, "Internet injects sweeping change into U.S. politics." *The New York Times*, April 2, 2006.

6 Bruce A. Bimber and Richard Davis, *Campaigning online* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38-9.

7 Girish J. Gulati and Christine B. Williams. "Closing the gap, raising the bar candidate Web site communication in the 2006 campaigns for congress," *Social Science Computer Review* 25, no.4 (2007): 452.

8 Nevena Rsumovic, "Obama's 2008 election campaign online: Top-down strategy meets social movement" (Final Paper for Political Communication, Central European University, 2009), 2.

raise significant amounts of money. While technological advancements in campaigns may not be the determinant factor for success, they certainly have the potential to influence the course of a campaign and their prominence in electoral campaigns is steadily increasing.⁹

4. The Role of New Media in Campaign Communication

Through *new media* candidates acquire new ways to reach supporters, to tailor particular messages to be more entertaining, and to engage particular segments of society. Once supporters receive an engaging message, they can easily respond to messages and spread them to others through new forms of online media.

What particular effect can the use of new technology as a strategy by a campaign have on election results? Chapman Rackaway claims that variables such as "legislative professionalism, party affiliation, professionalism of a campaign, and money raised were not significantly related to technology use in [state legislative] campaigns".¹⁰ Rackaway, however, found significant results for the use of online fund-raising technology for earning votes.¹¹ His study concludes that "technology in and of itself does not bring more votes to a candidate".¹²

Dylan Kissane analyzed the integration of Web 2.0 technologies into the 2007 Australian Federal election in an attempt to influence voters; particularly voters in the 18-35 demographic. While Kissane hypothesized that the online efforts played a role in winning the majority of votes for the Australian Labor Party, a subsequent analysis of polling data indicated that voters were not influenced by the campaign's online strategies.¹³ Instead, the polling data indicated that most people changed their preferences after there was a drastic shift in party leadership.

9 Nagourney, "Internet".

10 Rackaway, "Trickle-down," 466.

11 Ibid, 479-80.

12 Ibid. 480.

13 Kissane, "Kevin07".

Other studies, however, have found some effect for new technology on voter turnout and support. Mary Joyce argues that the citizen journalism Web site "OhmyNews" in South Korea, an example of a new Web 2.0 application, served as a platform for mobilizing voters during the 2002 Presidential election.¹⁴ While the Internet is just a tool, the author argues that this tool was a significant part of the many factors that enabled a minority candidate to unseat the incumbent candidate in a Presidential election. The Internet has become, according to Costas Panagopoulos, "a formidable medium that has inspired tremendous and influential innovations in campaign communications."¹⁵

5. "Web 2.0"

In order to understand the possible effect of using *Web 2.0 applications* as tools during a campaign, the term "Web 2.0" must first be explained. Tim O'Reilly first explained the term and gave some basic principles for Web 2.0 applications.¹⁶ Firstly, the new Web 2.0 paradigm signaled the triumph of Internet platforms over individual applications, the increase of user participation, the harnessing of collective intelligence, the use of specialized databases, the potential to reach out to all users of the Web, and finally the use of that software on multiple platforms such as cell phones.¹⁷ These principles have led to the development of Web-based communities and applications in the form of social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, and blogs. Campaign professionals sought to take advantage of the Internet and Web 2.0 developments as their influence spread throughout American society.¹⁸

14 Joyce, "The citizen journalism".

15 Panagopoulos, "Technology," 424.

16 Tim O'Reilly, What is Web 2.0. (O'Reilly Media, Inc., 2005); available at: www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html, on May 16, 2009.

17 O'Reilly, What is Web 2.0.

18 Nagourney, "Internet".

This article focuses on campaign Web sites and social-networking Web 2.0 tools that allow users to *interact with each other and with the publisher, to promote viral marketing, and to contribute their own content*. Each of these characteristics is valuable for a political campaign in helping to *increase the number of supporters, to engage with those supporters, and to promote the campaign message*. New media platforms offer candidates' direct access to increasingly larger numbers of voters.

Web-based technology has numerous advantages over older forms of technology. One key advantage that candidates sought to capture in recent elections was the use of *viral marketing* to spread their message. "Viral marketing", writes Ralph Wilson, "describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence."¹⁹ Web 2.0 applications provide an excellent environment for viral marketing as a result of the ease of message transmission, the vast reach of the message, and the ability of the message to expand exponentially which can also help to reinforce grassroots mobilization.²⁰ New media and new technologies are particularly effective at engaging voters online but do campaign effects actually matter in elections?

6. The Interaction between Forecasting Models and Campaign Effects

It still remains disputed whether campaigns have an effect on the outcomes of elections or not. Most political scientists disagree with the media and communication scholars about the effectiveness of campaigns and have created elaborate forecasting models which attempt to predict election results months before an election. These forecast models are based entirely on data for a few key variables that often include the "popularity of the incumbent president, the state of the economy,

¹⁹ Ralph Wilson, The six simple principles of viral marketing. (Wilson Internet Services, 2005); available at: www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles.htm, on March 15, 2009.

²⁰ Wilson, The six simple.

and the length of time that the president's party has controlled the White House".²¹

The forecasting models created by political scientists, however, offer some compelling evidence for their case. Abramowitz's model predicted that Obama would win with 54.3% of the major-party vote vs. 45.7% for McCain and was remarkably close to the actual percentages for the popular vote as reported by CNNPolitics.com: 53% for Obama and 46% for McCain.²² Finding a compelling alternative explanation is a difficult task despite the success of many of these models. Campaign effects, however, are seen as a viable alternative by communication scholars, social scientists, and media outlets.

The role of campaign communication in elections can interact with many of the variables espoused by political scientists.²³ Johnson et al. acknowledge the disparity between the two research traditions and provide their own solution. The first tradition claims that campaign communication has a major effect on the electorate by providing information, which helps increase voter mobilization. The second tradition claims that numerous factors drive models of voter behavior including: social structure, geography, party identification, ideology, incumbent popularity, and the state of the economy.²⁴

In their landmark study, Johnston et al. question the effectiveness of forecasting models. If the models were correct in the 2000 election, they argue, then Al Gore should have won handedly because President Clinton had a high approval rating and the economy was booming.²⁵ Therefore, something else must have influenced the course of the election. They contend that campaign communication influenced and perhaps activated many

21 Alan Abramowitz, "Forecasting the 2008 presidential election with the time-for-change model." *PS-Political Science and Politics* 41 (2008): 691.

22 Abramowitz, "Forecasting," 695.

23 Richard Johnston, Michael Gray Hagen, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. *The 2000 presidential election and the foundations of party politics*. (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

24 Johnston et al., *The 2000 presidential election*, 1.

25 Ibid. 3.

of these crucial variables in the forecasting models. In their theory, Johnston et al. manage to combine elements of both research traditions on elections into one cohesive theory which claims that the traditional variables espoused by political scientists "were activated and...altered by campaign communication – its overall volume, the consistency of messages across communications channels, and the rhetorical sophistication of the messages themselves."²⁶

The authors claim that campaign "communication is critical in determining whether and if so how the economy, candidate traits, and issues function in a campaign".²⁷ Thus, while Al Gore should have prevailed in the 2000 election, he lost support due to his failure to focus on or "prime" the success of the economy, an essential variable in most forecast models.²⁸

In their study Johnston et al. provide a direct test of a view of political cognition first espoused by Lodge and his colleagues called the *on-line view*.²⁹³⁰³¹ Instead of voters returning to their original view once they were influenced or shocked by a message or event, they instead "quickly forget the reason for the reevaluation" and only change their minds about a political object if they receive another compelling message or get shocked again.³² The authors provide direct evidence for this view by relying on rolling cross-section data from the National Annenberg Election Survey for the 2000 election and by then assessing the impact of television ads on this data.³³ When a significant shift in public opinion represented in the data follows close behind an influential message about a candidate in the news or by a large amount of campaign communication in the form of television ads,

26 Ibid. 1.

27 Ibid. 2.

28 Ibid. 4.

29 Ibid. 7.

30 Milton Lodge, Kathleen M. McGraw, and Patrick Stroh, "An impression-driven model of candidate evaluation," *The American Political Science Review* 83, no. 2 (Jun. 1989): 399-419.

31 Milton Lodge, Marco R. Steenbergen, and Shawn Brau. "The responsive voter: Campaign information and the dynamics of candidate evaluation," *The American Political Science Review* 89 (Jun. 1995): 309.

32 Johnston et al., *The 2000 presidential election*, 7.

33 Ibid. 3.

the authors argue that they have demonstrated shifts in public perception based on campaign persuasion.³⁴ Johnston and his colleagues' unique view, therefore, allows room for chance and contingency to impact the outcome of an election and, more importantly, it allows for strategic decisions by candidates and campaigns to affect the results of an election.

7. Campaign Effects: Role of Information Dissemination

The effectiveness of a campaign in influencing public opinion also includes its role as a *disseminator of information*. Research by Carpini and Keeter demonstrates that the more knowledgeable the voters are, the more likely they are to vote.³⁵ Increased knowledge, writes Carpini and Keeter, "promotes a number of civic attitudes and behaviors that motivate participation." Campaigns act as information disseminators in ways that are aimed at increasing the knowledge of their supporters.

In a study on both European national and parliamentary elections Gábor Tóka adds empirical evidence to the claim that information provided by campaigns can influence voter behavior if voters have fixed preferences.³⁶ Tóka's findings support his "different-campaign-information account" which states that the "vote gains of small parties in European elections...stem from the relatively greater campaign effort by small vis-à-vis big parties in EP elections." It is typically perceived that European citizens tend to vote more for smaller parties in European Parliamentary (second-order) elections and then strategically vote for big parties in national (first-order) elections.³⁷ Tóka's empirical findings instead find that citizens are moving towards smaller parties in both national and parliamentary elections and that another factor besides strategy motivations is causing this shift—*campaign*

34 Ibid. 7.

35 Michael X Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter. What Americans know about politics and why it matters. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 224.

36 Gabor Tóka, "Information effects on vote choices in European elections," in European elections after eastern enlargement: Preliminary results from the European election study 2004. ed. Michael Marsh, Slava Mikhaylov and Hermann Schmitt. (Mannheim, 2007).

37 Tóka, "Information," 167.

information. The accelerated campaign efforts by small parties to inform voters, therefore, influences vote gains. Campaign effects have the potential to increase vote gains not only in European elections but also in all elections, including the American Presidential election.

8. Reaching Voters Online

The role of television as the primary agent of information dissemination is steadily decreasing as more and more Americans go online to receive information about elections and politicians. It remains unclear whether the Internet can perform the same roles as television in priming voters and setting the agenda but there is growing evidence that it can.

As more voters become increasingly engaged online, campaigns must change and evolve the way that they communicate with voters. Popkin explains that voters are still "open to influence by campaigners who offer more information or better explanations of the ways in which government activities affect them."³⁸ Salmore and Salmore argue that one of the results of the decline of partisanship is that parties are used less and less as a source of information about the candidates.³⁹ Instead, *campaigns* are replacing parties as a source of information about candidates.⁴⁰

Johnston and his colleagues provide empirical evidence for the role of campaigns as information disseminators by demonstrating that the "correct perception of candidates' positions on issues was greater at the end than at the beginning".⁴¹ The campaign effects from competing campaigns, however, have the potential to interfere with the effectiveness of the other. Gelman and King argue that if both campaigns are waged seriously, then the

38 Samuel L. Popkin, *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential campaigns*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 70.

39 Stephen A. Salmore and Barbara G. Salmore, *Candidates, parties, and campaigns: Electoral politics in America*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1985), 9.

40 Salmore, *Candidates*, 9.

41 Johnston et al., *The 2000 presidential election*, 3.

information dissemination will cancel each other out.⁴² A campaign will only have a real effect if there is an information asymmetry, which could arise from one campaign being run better than the other.⁴³ If this is true then a campaign that adopts a more successful strategy should then create an information asymmetry and thereby influence more voters and increase vote gains.

The particular strategies chosen by campaigns have a role in determining a campaign's success. If campaigns did not perform any of their usual activities, then the forecasting models promoted by political scientists would not predict results accurately because campaign communications play a crucial part in activating the dependent variables.

9. Web 2.0 Strategy: The Obama Campaign vs. the McCain Campaign

This section begins by trying to understand some of the motivations and reasons for pursuing a particular Web 2.0 strategy. A four-tiered argument will be developed for explaining the reasons why each campaign adopted divergent online strategies by focusing on 1) candidate personality, 2) the influence of a candidate's political party, 3) the involvement of industry professionals, 4) and the number of staff and volunteers working on the online strategy.

Many crucial differences between campaign strategies can be attributed to the many factors that differentiated the candidates and their campaigns from one another. The first influential factor is both candidates' *personalities* and *attitudes* towards the Internet. John McCain for instance was purportedly unable to

42 Andrew Gelman and Gary King. "Why are American presidential election campaign polls so variable when votes are so predictable?" *British Journal of Political Science* 23, no.4 (1993): 449.

43 Thomas M. Holbrook. *Do campaigns matter?* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 17.

even check his own e-mail,⁴⁴ while Barack Obama was almost addicted to his mobile Blackberry device.⁴⁵

Much of Obama's past helped to shape his attitudes toward the Internet. "One of my fundamental beliefs from my days as a community organizer is that real change comes from the bottom up," Mr. Obama said in a statement. "And there's no more powerful tool for grass-roots organizing than the Internet".⁴⁶ Joe Rospars, Obama's "New Media" director also attributed Obama's community organizer background for shaping his campaign's technology strategy and organizing his field strategy.⁴⁷ Obama, like Clinton, was successful because he had the drive and the "ability to set up an organization that could successfully implement and communicate his vision for the country to the voters."⁴⁸

Additionally a candidate's *party affiliation* can influence the nature of their online strategy. Candidates not only share the same ideology as other party members but also the negative perceptions created by other party members. Unless they break their ties with a party, these politicians are often grouped together through the good times and the bad. A look at the particular Republican and Democratic strategies in the recent congressional elections demonstrates that party affiliation can have an effect on an individual candidate's campaign strategy.

Democratic candidates as a group were quicker to use the Internet than their Republican counterparts. In 2006, it was reported that Democratic House candidates were more likely to use the Web to mobilize voters than Republican candidates.⁴⁹ One possible explanation for this partisan difference was perhaps that

44 Toby Harnden, "John McCain 'technology illiterate' doesn't e-mail or use Internet," Telegraph, (July 2008).

45 Christi Parsons and Jim Puzzanghera. "In Barack Obama's white house, his BlackBerry is VIP," Chicago Tribune, 22 January 2009.

46 Brian Stelter, "The facebooker who friended obama," New York Times, 7 July 2008.

47 Newsmax.com. "Obama, McCain Web campaign chiefs face off," (2009); available at: www.newsmax.com/politics/rospars_palmer_face_off/2009/04/22/205835.html on May 19, 2009.

48 Newman, The marketing of the president, 14.

49 Gulati and Williams, "Closing the gap", 457-8.

"Web site mobilization was not seen as an effective means to overcome negative perceptions of congressional candidates linked by party affiliation to a now unpopular Republican administration."⁵⁰ These Republican candidates felt that pursuing an online strategy would not help them disassociate themselves from the unpopular Bush administration.

The third crucial factor that influenced campaign strategy development was *the role of direct involvement of Internet industry professionals in electoral campaigns*. Unlike McCain, Obama's campaign managed to recruit industry professionals to help to develop and manage his online strategy in conjunction with BSD, the company hired by Obama's campaign to help develop and implement its online strategy. Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook, left his job to help develop Obama's new-media campaign.⁵¹ Google CEO Eric Schmidt was brought on as a technology advisor for the campaign.⁵² McCain's campaign had no such high-profile industry figures to help with its online campaigning efforts. With the help of such industry professionals Obama's team built a stellar campaign Web site that not only improved as the campaign progressed, but also became more locally oriented and accessible.⁵³

The Obama campaign had an advantage by receiving preferential access to some of the industries best Web strategists. Blue State Digital was founded by four former members of Howard Dean's campaign.⁵⁴ BSD was a shrewd contribution to Obama's campaign because "the firm can do a lot with a little: According to filings, the Obama campaign has paid Blue State not much more than \$1.1 million so far [June 2008].⁵⁵ This firm had tremendous

50 Gulati and Williams, "Closing the gap", 459.

51 Stelter, "The facebooker".

52 Rsumovic, "Obama's", 3.

53 PEJ, "McCain vs. Obama on the Web." (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008), available at:

www.journalism.org/files/CAMPAIGN_WEB_08_DRAFT_IV_copyedited.pdf on May 22, 2009).

54 Tom Lowry, "Obama's secret digital weapon", (Business Week, 24 June 2008), available at:

www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/08_27/b4091000977488.htm on June 1, 2009.

55 Lowry, "Obama's secret".

previous experience in online campaigning and their foresight into recent technological trends enabled the firm to develop Obama's widely successful social networking site My.BarackObama.com.

McCain's 2008 online campaigning and early attempts at creating a social network faltered from the start. In July 2008 Adam Ostrow, the editor of Mashable, said that McCain's social network McCainSpace was "virtually impossible to use and appears largely abandoned".⁵⁶ In contrast, under the leadership of industry professional Chris Hughes, Obama's online social network helped supporters "join local groups, create events, sign up for updates and set up personal fund-raising pages".⁵⁷ From the start it seems clear that Obama had a substantial advantage over McCain.

The final reason for the success of the Obama campaign was *the increased amount of resources and the number of staff and volunteers* they had in comparison to the McCain campaign. In June and July of 2007, as McCain was struggling in the primaries, the organization "went from a great big campaign down to about 35 people trying to run a national campaign".⁵⁸ Following McCain's New Hampshire victory on January 8th he gained much more financial support and his campaign grew back to its "great big campaign" status. The size of his campaign and the amount of resources available to the McCain campaign were still no match for the ever-growing Obama campaign. The Web site OpenSecrets.org reports that in the month of January 2008, Obama raised \$20.2 million vs. \$6.5 million for the month before while McCain managed to only raise \$8.8 million up from \$2.2 million for December 2007. The Obama campaign easily outpaced the McCain campaign's early fundraising efforts.

While there are no official numbers available for the size of the staff for each campaign, interviews with campaign officials

56 Stelter, "The facebooker".

57 Ibid.

58 David Talbot, "McCain's Web win: Campaign strategists and facebook's cofounder discuss the 2008 election", Technology Review, 2008, available at: www.technologyreview.com/web/21810/ on 25 February 2009.

portray very asymmetric numbers. In a recent conference on the use of online campaigning McCain's 'eCampaign' chief said that the Obama campaign had "10 times the staff we had and outspent us five to one online, three to one everywhere else".⁵⁹ "We basically had 1.5 guys full-time on graphics and not just for the Web," his 'eCampaign' chief complained.⁶⁰ By all accounts it appears that, from the beginning until Election Day, Obama's campaign was much more equipped to pursue an effective online campaign than their rivals, the McCain campaign. These advantages in staff and resources helped the Obama campaign pursue an effective online strategy that was far superior to McCain's campaign.

10. Online Support

Obama received considerably greater online support online in terms of campaign Web site hits, youtube videos watched or uploaded, or numbers of friends and supporters on social networking Web sites during the campaign. Table 1 shows numbers of followers and friends on Nov. 3, the day before Election Day. Obama dominates McCain across the board, often having up to 3.8 times more supporters on both MySpace and Facebook.

Obama was demonstrably more popular among Internet users and there are several reasons that could account for this increased popularity. First, Obama's supporters may be more likely to be Internet users than McCain users. Second, Obama's campaign message was more powerful than McCain's and Obama's favorable image in the mainstream media drove more people to support Obama on the Internet. Finally, as a result of the four factors elaborated in the previous section, the Obama campaign simply had more online presence because they had more resources and support to put into a Webcentric strategy, which then translated into greater online support.

⁵⁹ Newsmax.com, "Obama, McCain".

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Table 1. Snapshot of Presidential Candidate Social Network Stats: Nov 3, 2008

	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>MySpace</i>	<i>YouTube</i>	<i>Twitter</i>
Obama	2,379,102 supporters	833,161 friends	1792 videos uploaded since Nov 2006,	Subscribers: 114,559 Channel Views: 18,413,110 112,474 followers
McCain	620,359 supporters	217,811 friends	329 videos uploaded since Feb 2007	Subscribers: 28,419 Channel Views: 2,032,993 4,603 followers
Web Strategy by Jeremiah Owyang. www.Web-strategist.com/blog/2008/11/03/snapshot-of-presidential-candidate-social-networking-stats-nov-2-2008/ (accessed May 14, 2009).				

Data from a June 2008 Pew Report reports that more than one third of online Democrats (36%) have a profile on a social networking site in contrast to only 21% for online Republicans.⁶¹

For the question "Have you signed up as a friend of any of the candidates on a social networking site?" 12% of social network users reported they had signed up as a friend of Obama while only 7% had signed up as friends of McCain.⁶² The differences in these percentages translate directly into numbers of reliable supporters. The Pew report claims that much of these differences can be attributed to "the relative youth of those who self-identify as Democrats".⁶³ While both young Republicans and Democrats use online tools such as online video at nearly the same rates, there are simply more young, tech-savvy Democrats than there are Republicans.⁶⁴ The focus of the Obama campaign on Web 2.0 tools and online campaigning was aimed at capturing and influencing these young voters.

Interestingly though, the basic measures of Internet use by party reported by Pew show that more Republicans go online than Democrats (78% compared to 74%) and roughly the same percentage of Democrats and Republicans claim to use the Internet, email, or text messaging to learn about the campaign and engage in the political process (49% of Republicans and 50% of Democrats).⁶⁵ While Democrats and Republicans are using the Internet in roughly the same numbers, Democrats are increasingly more active in social networking sites. Perhaps Democrats who visit Obama's campaign Web site find it easier to register to become a

61 Aaron Smith and Rainie, Lee, "The Internet and the 2008 election", (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008) available at: www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2008/PIP_2008_election.pdf on February 19, 2009: 15.

62 Smith and Rainie, "The Internet", 15.

63 Ibid. 12.

64 Ibid. 12.

65 Ibid. 12.

supporter and to join his unique social network than Republicans visiting John McCain's Web site and his online social network.

11. Campaign Web Sites and Web 2.0 Strategy

Near Election Day, both McCain and Obama had innovative and well-designed campaign Web sites. Each had sections for volunteering, providing contact information, donating money, and spreading the message among others.⁶⁶ From the beginning of the campaign season McCain's Web site was not always as fine-tuned as Obama's.⁶⁷ By the end of the campaign, however, McCain had caught up with the Obama team in terms of soliciting donations, registering supporters and volunteers, and in overall Web site design. By the end of the campaign, McCain's Web site looked remarkably similar to Obama's and included many of the same features. "The [Obama] campaign's successful new-media strategy is already being studied as a playbook for other candidates, including the presumptive Republican nominee, Senator John McCain."⁶⁸ So how exactly did the Obama team develop such an excellent Web site laden with easy-to-use interactive features and Web 2.0 tools?

A case study of Obama's campaign Web site by Blue State Digital reports that "the campaign of President Barack Obama knew they needed to build an unprecedented community outreach program".⁶⁹ Obama's team used the 2004 Presidential race as a guide, noting the importance of "online contributions, online activism, and online community-building".⁷⁰ BSD claims they were chosen because the campaign needed a powerful technology platform that could power these Web 2.0 features.⁷¹ The Obama campaign also

66 Refer to Appendix B for screenshots of each campaign's Web site.

67 Refer to Figure 1 in Appendix B.

68 Stelter, "The facebooker".

69 Blue State Digital, "Case study: My.barackobama.com" (2008) Available at:

www.bluestatedigital.com/casestudies/client/obama_for_america_2008/ on February 25, 2009.

70 Blue State Digital, "Case study".

111 Ibid.

took many cues from the success of MySpace and Facebook.⁷² Obama's team realized the power of Web 2.0 tools in social networking sites and sought to harness them as a formidable campaign tool.

In Mid-September the Pew's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) noted that for much of the campaign Obama clearly had an online advantage.⁷³ However, the study finds that following the Republican National Convention, McCain's official Web site covered significant ground in catching up with Obama's official Web site by "substantially improv[ing] its customization and socialization tools to encourage online networking with fellow supporters and offline grassroots activity".⁷⁴ Despite the advances of McCain's online campaign, his official campaign Web site still lagged behind in many ways. The numbers of visitors reflects this asymmetry between the two sites. Of the all the visitors to campaign Web sites 72% of visitors went to Obama's page while only 28% visited McCain's.⁷⁵ What were some of the particular features of Obama's Web site that attracted so many more unique visitors?

12. Online Campaign Tools

Barack Obama's social networking site (MyBarackObama.com) was "extensive and active for months".⁷⁶ McCain's social networking site (McCainSpace.com) was clumsy and difficult to use and was only fully operational in August 2008, less than 3 months before Election Day. When it finally did become operational, it enabled users to post videos, pictures, and blogs to their home pages and to forward information to numerous other social networking sites.⁷⁷ McCain's site

72 Stelter, "The facebooker".

73 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 1.

74 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 1.

75 PEJ, "McCain vs. Obama", 2.

76 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 3.

77 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 4.

included basic functions for grassroots support but Pew reports that because of the poor design of many of these functions it was often difficult for the user to become involved.⁷⁸

In contrast, MyBarackObama.com allowed users to join groups, connect with other users, plan events, raise money, and volunteer.⁷⁹ During the primary season, Obama's success at using these online tools to generate offline activities is remarkably apparent in Table 2. In the major cities of upcoming primary contests, the number of events organized by Obama supporters far surpassed the number of events organized by Hillary Clinton and John Edwards supporters.⁸⁰

Table 2. Number of Offline Campaign Events Organized by Online Tools January 15, 2008

	<i>Los Angeles</i>	<i>Denver</i>	<i>New York</i>	<i>Raleigh</i>
Obama	8	87	292	6
Clinton	1	16	13	1
Edwards	0	12	0	0

Data retrieved from techpresident.com/blog-entry/democratic-race-obama-dominating-online-organizing-offline-events (accessed on June 1, 2009).

Users on Obama's Web site had several tools at their fingertips to help them engage with Obama's campaign efforts. Through MyBarackObama.com users could track their progress and report it back to the campaign to earn "points" for their achievements as an added incentive.⁸¹ McCain also included a "leader board" that ranked the top activists on his site for the week. The kind of online support for grassroots

78 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 8.

79 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 7.

80 Micah Sifry. "The democratic race: Obama dominating online organizing of offline events." (TechPresident.com, 2008), available at: techpresident.com/blog-entry/democratic-race-obama-dominating-online-organizing-offline-events on June 1, 2009.

81 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 8.

mobilization on Obama's site greatly helped to organize Obama's ground operation.

Obama took a uniquely Web 2.0 approach to updating his supporters by *crossing platforms from the Internet to mobile phones*. His campaign notified supporters of Obama's Vice-Presidential pick via sms. While the success of this tactic was debatable, it could have helped drive people to check the official Web site for more details and to have people alert others as well.

The prevalence of candidates on *social networking Web sites* was very asymmetrical and reflects the organization of each campaign's Web site. Unlike the Obama Web page in September 2008, Pew reports that "McCain's Web site does not link to any social networking sites on its home page but maintains a presence on six: MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Digg, Flickr and LinkedIn. But is it up to supporters to find these pages on their own".⁸³ Obama maintained a substantial advantage in numbers of supporters on social networking Web sites and also had official presence in many more social networking sites than McCain. Both candidates made use of their Web sites as platforms for informing their supporters about issues and news about the campaign in similar ways.⁸⁴

Lastly, each campaign Web site offered users the opportunity to *watch videos of the candidates' recent speeches, campaign ads, and streaming video from the campaign trail*. The Obama campaign benefited much more from political action committees such as MoveOn.org to use video as a *viral marketing tool* to spread their message. MoveOn.org created two opportunities for the spread of viral videos. The first was a public contest asking supporters to create their own creative 30 second ads⁸⁵ "that will engage and enlighten viewers and help them understand the grassroots energy that's driving

83 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 10.

84 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 12-14..

85 The winning videos can be viewed at obamain30seconds.com/ (accessed May 22, 2009).

Barack Obama's campaign".⁸⁶ Celebrity judges helped decide the winners along with 5.5 million votes for 1,100 videos.⁸⁷ The second humorous video⁸⁸ "prompts the user to personalize it by adding a name of the recipient, who would then be featured throughout the video as the single person whose failure to vote brought about Obama's alleged election defeat."⁸⁹ Clever videos such as these gained a lot of attention and incentivized people to spread Obama's message virally.

For the entire course of the Election the Obama campaign dominated the McCain campaign in nearly every aspect of online campaigning. Their strategy involved creating a user-friendly Web site full of Web 2.0 tools designed to make it easy for supporters to join in the campaign effort from providing contact information and listing the ways they would be willing to volunteer, donate money, call other potential voters from their own homes, organize events, and interact with one another on social networking Web sites. McCain's team made a strong effort to compete with Barack Obama's success but they lacked industry support, an effective user-friendly design for their campaign Web site, and the innovative new online Web 2.0 based tools used for organizing supporters. In the end, McCain's social networking site could never be as popular or engaging as Obama's site. While one candidate was clearly superior to the other in the Internet realm, can a significant effect on voter preference be demonstrated from being an Internet user, receiving campaign e-mails, or visiting a campaign Web site? The following section demonstrates that yes, these variables can have an impact on voter's preferences.

86 MoveOn.org. "Obama in 30 seconds." available at: obamain30seconds.com/ on May 22, 2009.

26 MoveOn.org. "Obama".

87 The video can be viewed at

[www.cnnbcvideo.com/?referred_by=10960978-](http://www.cnnbcvideo.com/?referred_by=10960978-RuXw.3x&combined=Sherri%20Freeman&first=Sherri&name_id=3753325&last=Freeman&id=&nid=DdXHoqe..1fan1VFgsuTcTM3NTMzMjU-)

[RuXw.3x&combined=Sherri%20Freeman&first=Sherri&name_id=3753325&last=Freeman&id=&nid=DdXHoqe..1fan1VFgsuTcTM3NTMzMjU-](http://www.cnnbcvideo.com/?referred_by=10960978-RuXw.3x&combined=Sherri%20Freeman&first=Sherri&name_id=3753325&last=Freeman&id=&nid=DdXHoqe..1fan1VFgsuTcTM3NTMzMjU-) (accessed May 22, 2009).

88 Rsumovic, "Obama's", 6.

13. Logistical Regression Analysis: Campaign Effects

Using the Pew Research Center's Mid-October Political Survey, a comparison of several variables were used to try to understand the effect of the Internet and Web 2.0 tools on voter preferences in the 2008 Presidential election. The Pew Center's poll asks numerous questions⁸⁹ about Internet usage. The variables for 6 unique models of voter behavior include the dependent variable—voter preference for either McCain or Obama—and three independent control variables for voter preference: age, party ID, and education level.⁹⁰ All the findings are presented in Table 3 with the B coefficients placed on top of the Exp (B) coefficients.

All of the control variables performed as expected. The third model gets to the core of the issue of the effectiveness of Web 2.0 tools in a campaign by asking the question: "Thinking about this year's elections, have you visited any of the candidates' Web sites on the Internet, or not?" By using the results of this question as an independent variable we can directly test the effectiveness of visiting a campaign Web site on voter preference for Obama and McCain. The logistical regression analysis of this model found that any person who visited a candidates' Web site is 2.2 times more likely to vote for Obama. This result coincides with the hypothesis that the use of Web 2.0 tools as a strategy has some effect on voter preference. As mentioned before, the result could also reflect the fact that more Democrats are viewing campaign Web sites than Republicans. Pew reports that Obama's "draws almost three times as many unique visitors each week".⁹¹ This asymmetry of visitors skews the likelihood of preferences and also strongly indicates a *positive role for campaign effects*: the Obama team simply did a much better job at attracting and engaging voters through their Web site than the McCain team.

89 For a list of questions and variables found in Pew's survey please refer to the Appendix A.

90 Descriptions for the variables in each model are given in the Appendix.

91 PEJ. "McCain vs. Obama", 1.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Data from Pew Mid-October Poll 2008

Variables	<i>B Exp (B)</i>					
	Model 1 (iuser)	Model 2 (q421)	Model 3 (q43e1)	Model 4 (q441)	Model 5 (party Web)	Model 6 (RepWeb)
Age by demographic	-.389 .678* **	-.329 .720* *	-.300 .741* *	-.296 .744* *	-.319 .727* *	-.319 .727* *
Party ID 1 (Rep/Dem)	5.511 247.3 ***	5.72 305.1 ***	5.623 276.7 ***	5.623 276.7 ***	5.079 160.7 ***	
Education level	.106 1.112	.026 1.027	.064 1.066	.093 1.098	.047 1.048	.047 1.048
Internet user	-.532 .587*					
Have you received e-mails about the candidates or campaigns?		.501 1.651 *			5.079 160.7 ***	
Have you visited any of the candidate's campaign Web site?			.797 2.218 **		.047 1.048	3.173 32.9* *
Do you ever use social networking Web sites?				.307 1.359		
Interaction variable with Party ID 1 and campaign Web site question					3.559 35.2* **	
Party ID 2 (Dem/Rep)						- 5.079 .006*

Interaction variable with Party ID 2 and campaign Web site question							**
							-
							3.559
							.028*
							**
% Correct	93.9	94.5	94.3	94.3	94.3	94.3	
R²	.808	.828	.823	.820	.831	.831	
Chi Squared	148.2*	1238.7	1235.	1229.	1256.	1256.	
	**	***	8***	6***	1***	1***	
*Significant at .1. **Significant at .05. ***Significant at .01.							

The fifth model is unlike the other models and includes an interaction variable created by multiplying the first party ID variable with the campaign Web site variable. The coefficients for this variable show the impact of being a Democrat who visited campaign Web sites on their preferences for Obama. When the coefficients from the party ID variable and the interaction variable are added and the exponent is taken the result demonstrates that *Democrats who also viewed a campaign Web site are 5,642 times more likely to prefer Obama than McCain*. The likelihood of voters choosing Obama based on party ID alone is only 160 times.

A huge increase in the likelihood of Democrats choosing Obama, based on whether Democrats viewed a campaign Web site (5,642 times) or not (only 160 times), is reported. Such a huge difference between these two variables indicates that Democrats who viewed Obama's campaign Web site were much more likely to choose him. These findings demonstrate the insurmountable effect of campaign strategy, campaign communication, and online engagement for increasing the amount of partisan support for candidates. The difference between Democrats who viewed a campaign Web site and those who did not was nearly 30 fold. This substantial increase could be the result of 1) the user's engagement with Web 2.0 tools on the Web site and their interaction with other supporters, 2) donations from users online which helped to

create a stronger connection with the campaign effort, and 3) user's signing up to volunteer on campaign Web sites.

While voters who reported not viewing a campaign Web site are still very likely to prefer Obama, the reason for the considerably lower amount might be an indication that these voters are less engaged, less willing, and perhaps too busy to support the campaign effort than voters who did view the campaign Web site. Clearly many voters are very responsive to online campaign efforts because these efforts had a remarkable role in increasing partisan support among Democrats for Obama. Does the same hold true, however, for Republicans who also visited a campaign Web site?

To test this theory I ran a sixth model with a recoded party ID variable to analyze the effectiveness of visiting a campaign Web site with their preference for John McCain. A second interaction variable was created and the results were consistent with the theory. Identified Republicans were 166.7 times more likely to indicate a preference for McCain and Republicans who viewed any campaign Web site were 5,649 times more likely to prefer McCain as well. These results help to strengthen support for the claim that campaigns and particularly campaign Web sites have an effect in solidifying partisan support for candidates.

Even if an opponent's Web site is more engaging and interactive it will nonetheless fail to convince a Republican to vote for Obama. However, both Democrats and Republicans who did visit campaign Web sites *became considerably more engaged with and supportive of their candidate of choice.*

14. Additional Factors That Contributed to Obama's Victory

No single factor can determine an election. An election is the result of an aggregate of factors coming together in some form to persuade voters to vote in higher numbers for one candidate over the other. In offering some alternative

explanations it becomes possible to understand the successful interaction of these factors with Obama's online strategy.

The crucial factors for election forecasting models are visible in a society months before an election. In the 2008 election there were several key variables which foreshadowed Obama's victory including the state of the economy, the unpopularity of the Bush administration, and the fact that Republican's had been in office for two terms. If people are satisfied with the state of the economy they will be more willing to vote for the incumbent party but, with the onset of the world economic crisis in September 2008, voters were more willing to blame the Bush administration and the Republican Party for the poor state of the economy and to look towards Obama and the Democrats for a viable solution.

Bush's unpopularity in the months (and even years) leading up to the 2008 election provides more support for Abramowitz's time-for-change model. In mid July 2008, he reports, Bush saw only a 31% approval rating vs. a 61% disapproval rating.⁹² If voters disapprove of the job of the incumbent administration, why would they then vote for a new McCain administration that many saw as just a continuation of the Bush administration?

Voters tend to shift their preferences over time, becoming dissatisfied with the incumbent party and shifting their allegiance. Obama's message resonated with millions of Americans who were deeply dissatisfied with the current administration. With all of these factors accounted for in Abramowitz's model, he predicted that Obama would win with 54.3% of the major-party vote vs. 45.7% for McCain, which demonstrates the potential power of these factors in predicting and explaining election results.⁹³ The role of the campaign effort throughout the many months of the campaign cannot be discounted though.

92 Abramowitz, "Forecasting," 695.

93 Ibid. 695.

15. Campaign Effects Explanation

There are two basic lines of reasoning for a campaign effects explanation. The first is that particular events during the campaign can impact public opinion and make voters more or less likely to vote for a campaign. The second is based on the idea that steadfast campaign trends such as a candidate's personality and campaign strategy can also affect voter preferences. Most voters who identify with a particular party are unlikely to shift their preferences based on campaign effects but there is a growing number of undecided voters who are more susceptible to campaign persuasion.

There were a few key events that journalists emphasize contributed to McCain's downfall. For instance, when McCain chose Sarah Palin as his Vice-President at the Republican convention he was lambasted by liberal pundits and but also by the conservative right in his party.⁹⁴ Furthermore, there was significant and outspoken doubt among many in the media about Sarah Palin's lack of credentials and qualifications.

Lastly, the Obama campaign was run in superb fashion, severely limited mistakes, and created tremendous amounts of support through grassroots mobilization. The Obama campaign's strategy incorporated unprecedented reach and thoroughness to contact voters. Their field campaign could call voters and also to go door-to-door to canvass supporters all across the country. Obama's campaign volunteers created an organization focused at the neighborhood level, which gave local volunteers exceptional training to enable them to lead their very own organization efforts. These well-trained volunteers became team leaders who were capable of managing their own field teams, organizing more supporters, and spreading the campaign message. These splinter cell volunteer groups then reported their progress back to the

94 Patrick James, "Campaign strategy: Why Obama won and McCain lost," *Politics and Society* (Nov. 2008) available at: politicsandsociety.usc.edu/2008/11/campaign-strategy-obama-won.html on 14 April 2009.

campaign headquarters and were given advice but also considerable independence in their campaigning efforts.

The motto of Obama's field campaign was "Respect. Empower. Include."⁹⁵ Obama's field campaign empowered volunteers, gave them significant responsibilities, and turned them into effective organizers. Exley explains the significance of Obama's organizing campaign and why it was so effective:

But the Obama campaign is the first in the Internet era to realize the dream of a disciplined, volunteer-driven, bottom-up-AND-top-down, distributed and massively scalable organizing campaign.⁹⁶

It appears overall that Obama's campaign was more expertly run on many different levels—starting from the top with Obama himself to the canvasser going door-to-door in Middletown, Ohio—than the McCain campaign. Obama and his campaign made deliberate and coordinated use of the Internet and Web 2.0 tools to aid them in their campaign efforts which succeeded in significantly increasing partisan support. Obama's field campaign used online technology to recruit and coordinate their volunteers. When users registered on Obama's Web site they had the opportunity to list the ways in which they would be willing to volunteer and the interaction between campaign and supporter was brought off-line to incorporate, mobilize, and include supporters in the campaign effort. By working in tandem with successful online and offline strategies, Obama's campaign built a vast and extensive network of volunteers and supporters that proved crucial in his victory.

16. Conclusion

The effectiveness assigned to campaign effects and campaign strategy with regard to technological innovation is much more influential than is currently espoused in the mainstream

95 Exley, "The new organizers".

96 Exley, "The new organizers".

political science literature. Forecasting models provide some degree of explanatory power but many of the variables active in these models first require priming and activation by campaign communication. This research demonstrated that Obama's campaign deliberately pursued an online strategy to make the greatest use of new media and new forms of technology to generate support among Democrats and undecided voters by engaging voters to easily participate in the campaign process and providing them with campaign information to increase their knowledge and their likelihood to vote. An effective online strategy focusing on the use of Web 2.0 tools can substantially increase partisan support for a candidate by spreading that message to others both online and offline.

Obama and his campaign understood the advantages of having an innovative online campaign strategy early on and pursued this strategy very aggressively. Obama's campaign strategy was successful because of Obama's personality, the large amount of staff and resources available to his campaign, and the incorporation of Internet industry professionals into the campaign effort. The McCain campaign only recognized this advantage much later in the race but was never able to put together the same kind of expertise or dedicate the same amount of staff and resources to its online effort as the Obama campaign.

Both candidate Web sites encouraged users to conduct offline activities, such as volunteering their labor or planning events with the help of online tools. But Obama's Web site did so in a way that was more comprehensive, more sophisticated and easier to use than McCain's. The Obama campaign saw a distinct advantage in online supporters because of this extraordinary effort: voters who viewed a campaign Web site were almost 2.2 times more likely to vote for Obama. He also received significantly more support in major Web 2.0 websites including Facebook, MySpace, and youtube. Lastly, the project demonstrated quite visibly the impact of viewing a campaign Web site in substantially increasing the likelihood of partisan

voters supporting their candidate over partisan voters who did not view campaign Web sites.

These findings demonstrate the increasing power and influence of the Internet as a form of new media in political communication. The Internet is overtaking the role of Television and Newspapers as an agenda-setter. Obama's success will certainly be studied and copied by candidates in upcoming elections. Foreign campaigns can also learn from Obama's success and adopt online strategies that can aid in the promotion of democracy by engaging more voters and increasing their political knowledge. Lastly, this research shows that by engaging voters online, candidates can substantially increase their connection with their supporters and the likelihood of them voting and convincing others to vote as well. No longer will the Internet be a neglected or secondary form of campaign communication in political elections.

Theories of campaign fundraising and campaign mobilization were only briefly touched upon in this analysis. An emphasis on fundraising can demonstrate how Obama's online effort helped him to raise so much more money than McCain. By elaborating on theories of mobilization, future researchers can understand the intricacies behind the rise of partisan support generated from voters interacting with campaign Web sites and what sort of advantage this gives candidates for increasing political support. A detailed look at the interaction between Obama's field organizing efforts and his online strategy could help to contribute to our understanding of how the Internet can help mobilize and engage people offline.

A more precise study of the effects of Web site use on voter support using detailed opinion polls and an in-depth content analysis of campaign Web sites for the 2008 Election could show a relationship between Internet use and candidate support. Future research could also focus on the role that online strategies play in fostering support among young voters, aged 18-29, and whether an online strategy directly increases voter turnout and its effect on election results.

This project focused primarily on Republican and Democratic voters and future studies could research whether online strategies for third party candidates can help increase vote share. Future research can also demonstrate the growing effect of undecided and independent voters on determining election outcomes. Lastly, a greater synthesis can be created between election forecasting models and theories of campaign effects to provide a greater understanding of election results now that there is a clearer picture of the impact of campaigns and online strategies on election outcomes.

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Appendix A: Pew Mid-Oct 2008 Political Survey Variables

Pew Research Center Poll # 2008-10MID: Mid-October 2008 Political Survey--2008 Presidential Election

The variable "age" was recoded into "agedem" to be continuous and to place people into demographic brackets. (1 = 18-29, 2 = 30 - 44, 3 = 45-64, 4 = 65+)

The variable "party" was recoded into "newparty" to include only democrats and republicans. (0 = republicans, 1 = democrats)

EDUC What is the last grade or class that you completed in school?

- 1 None, or grade 1-8
- 2 High school incomplete (Grades 9-11)
- 3 High school graduate (Grade 12 or GED certificate)
- 4 Business, Technical, or vocational school AFTER high school
- 5 Some college, no 4-year degree
- 6 College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree)
- 7 Post-graduate training or professional schooling after college (e.g., toward a master's Degree or Ph.D.; law or medical school)
- 9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

The variable "educ" was recoded into "edu" and changed None, or grade 1-8 to 1, and so forth and eliminated the "Don't know/Refused" choice to make the answers continuous in scale.

The variable iuser remained unchanged. (0 = Not a user, 1 = Internet user)

All of the question variables (q42, q43e, and q44) were recoded and labeled with a 1 at the end so that 0 = no and 1 = yes (q421, q43e1, q441).

Q.42 Have you received e-mails about the candidates or campaigns from any groups or political organizations, or not?

1 Yes

2 No

9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.43 Thinking about this year's elections, have you [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE a THRU d, WITH e AND f ALWAYS LAST] on the Internet, or not?

e. Visited any of the candidates' Web sites {11-07 GP}

1 Yes

2 No

9 Don't know/Refused (VOL)

Q.44 Do you ever use online social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook? {12-07} {QID:qid20240}

1 Yes

2 No

9 Don't know/Refused (VOL)

Appendix B: Screenshots of Campaign Web sites

Figure 1. Screenshot of early McCain campaign Web site March 7, 2007.



www.bivingsreport.com/2007/campaign-design-review-mccain-for-president/ accessed May 25, 2009.

Figure 2. Screenshot of McCain Web site on June 5, 2008.



www.readwriteweb.com/archives/obama_vs_mccain_website_smackdown.php accessed February 25, 2009.

Figure 3. Screenshot of Obama campaign Web site on June 5, 2008.



www.readwriteweb.com/archives/obama_vs_mccain_website_smackdown.php accessed February 25, 2009.