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

By
Tommi Hurme

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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 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.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The 2008 Election and Web 2.0 as a tool in the campaign process

The 2008 United States Presidential election was indeed a landmark election that will be studied and remembered for decades, if not longer. The conclusion of the election saw the rise of America's first African American President, Barack Obama. Obama and his campaign team executed one of the most well planned campaigns of the modern era. They minimized serious mistakes, never got trapped in John McCain's talking points, and most importantly they made substantial use of new media and new technologies, particularly new online tools to attract and mobilize large numbers of supporters. In contrast, the McCain campaign made serious mistakes and was slower and less pro-active in terms of adopting newer forms of online communications in its online strategy. How did the Obama campaign execute an online, Web 2.0 based strategy so much more effectively than the McCain campaign? Did they do it purposefully? And to what extent did it aid them in the election process?

While numerous factors affected the results of this election, it is becoming increasingly evident that engaging voters online through new technologies and Web 2.0 applications provides many more voters with information about candidates, engages them to try and gain support from others, and inspires them to actually 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 and engage with millions of voters. If a campaign recognized the potential of Web 2.0 tools, then it would benefit hugely in terms of voter mobilization and reinforcing support among their core. This research will help to demonstrate that campaigns and campaign strategies that are 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.

Additionally, this research hopes to demonstrate that a successful campaign must not only acknowledge the benefits of new technology but must also use that technology to its full potential if it hopes to gain an advantage over its opponents. Druckman et al. (2007: 427), writing on the role of technological development for congressional campaigns, summarize quite well the increasing impact of Web innovations in elections: "The Web's growing prominence in American political campaigns affects candidates who must decide how to use this relatively new medium and the emerging technologies it offers. It is important to understand how candidates make these decisions because the technologies they select will ultimately affect how voters and journalists receive and process campaign information." Because traditional methods of campaigning and electioneering are increasingly becoming obsolete, candidates who do not innovate their campaigns will undoubtedly lag behind their more technologically superior peers in terms of fundraising, engaging and mobilizing supporters, and gaining more votes (Panagopoulos, 2007: 423-4).

Firstly this project seeks to add to the existing literature on the importance of campaign effects and move further away from traditional political science models of voter behavior which assign essentially no importance to campaigns in determining elections. Secondly, this project aims to stress the importance of 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. By analyzing the Obama and McCain campaigns and their strategy in the 2008 election scholars, campaign

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professionals, and candidates can learn which strategies worked, how exactly they worked, why they worked, and what results they achieved. This research demonstrates that a campaign which adopts a strategy with a heavy emphasis on Web 2.0 tools that takes advantage of current and popular technological advancements to effectively spread a candidate's message to supporters will greatly increase its partisan support more than other traditional methods of campaigning and aid the campaign in gaining a crucial advantage over its opponents.

1.2 Previous Research on Online Campaigns

Due to the recentness of the 2008 Presidential election along with the recent development of many Web 2.0 tools, there has been only a limited amount of scholarly material published on the role of online strategies in Presidential elections. Most recent studies include an examination of why congressional candidates use Web innovations in their campaigns (Druckman et al., 2007), a study of the spread of the use of technology between federal and state elections in the United States (Rackaway, 2007), a study on the ineffectiveness of e-mail communication on voter turnout (Nickerson, 2007), and two studies on foreign elections: one examining online strategy in the 2002 South Korean Presidential Election (Joyce, 2007) and the other examining the 2007 Australian Federal Election (Kissane, 2009).

The studies present different views on the precise role of the Internet and online tools in elections. Nickerson (2007) and Kissane (2009) assign no effect to online tools for influencing election results. Druckman et al. (2007) and Rackaway (2007) recognize the potential of online tools but focus mostly on their particular use by candidates and less on the effectiveness of influencing voter mobilization or preferences. Joyce (2007),

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however, claims that a particular Web site in South Korea did help to unseat an incumbent President but claims it was not the primary variable in achieving that result.

The potential for new technology and online tools to act as effective campaign communication and the role of campaigns effects (a campaign's ability to influence voter preferences) for Presidential elections have not been recognized in the existing academic literature. The media, bloggers, citizens and the campaigns themselves have all recognized the importance of campaign activities so why have political scientists, who instead focus on election forecasting models that assign little to no importance to campaign effects, also not recognized this importance? This research will fill a hole in the existing literature on campaign research by examining the 2008 Presidential election with polling data from the Pew Research Center to understand the effectiveness of a Web-based campaign strategy on partisan support and voter mobilization. In addition, the research will add to the current literature in support for the effectiveness and importance of campaign effects in determining the results of an election.

1.3 Structure

The project will begin in chapter 2 by explaining the role of new technology in elections and how they have the potential to create an advantage for one campaign over another. The professionalization of campaigns and their evolution towards business-like models of marketing will provide insight into the motivations for choosing campaign strategies. Then, once the role of technology is established in the existing literature on campaigns and elections, 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.

Moving from the role of technology in elections, a brief analysis of the precise effect of campaigns in influencing elections will be given in chapter 3. Many scholars have assigned very little importance to the actual campaign in determining an election outcome. Why then do candidates spend hundreds of millions of dollars on campaigns if they do not work? Campaigns certainly have the potential to influence an election and the third chapter will examine authors who help contribute to that argument.

The fourth chapter will provide 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 that particular strategy. The fifth chapter will provide an in-depth look at each campaign Web site, its development, and the effectiveness of the Web 2.0 tools.

The sixth chapter will present a logistical regression analysis of polling data conducted by the Pew Research Center. The logistical regression provides us with concrete empirical evidence for the effectiveness of an online strategy in substantially solidifying partisan support for candidates.

The aim of this project is not to explain one candidate's overall success over another but instead to help us gain insight into the effectiveness of online campaign strategies. There are innumerable factors at work to determine the outcome of an election and the seventh chapter will present a few of these alternate explanations for Obama's success. During the campaign most media outlets focused on candidate popularity, campaign events, speeches, and debates and only briefly focused on the impact of the online strategy. In the seventh chapter a brief history of the campaigns will situate the reader within the 2008 Election and include some additional explanations for election

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outcomes and potential voter preferences. The chapter will finish by arguing that campaign effects can nonetheless interact with these variables and have an impact on election outcomes.

1.4 Methodology

Due to the recentness of the 2008 Presidential Election 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. For this reason I have had to take an innovative approach to gathering information on campaign strategies and events primarily by relying on journalistic and industry accounts of the campaigns and their strategies. These sources range from The New York Times to case studies from Blue State Digital, the company responsible for creating Obama's Web site "MyBarackObama.com".

There were innumerable journalistic and professional articles written about the election which include benchmarks for social network popularity throughout the campaign. These figures provide information about the number of Facebook supporters and social network popularity at different moments throughout the campaign. Polling data from polls 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. Lastly, in order to obtain information on campaign finance and fundraising I will rely on information gathered by the Web site and blog Opensecrets.org which compiles and aggregates financial information on candidates directly from sources published by the Federal Election Commission.

In order to determine if there is an effect on voter preferences by their Web usage I will perform a logistical regression 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". Data from this analysis will help to demonstrate, among other things, whether visiting any candidates Web site affects partisan voter choice and level of support for candidates.

Campaign analysis will begin from the moment that the candidates declared their intention to run for President to provide a clear and comparable starting point: Obama announced his bid for presidency on Feb 2, 2007 in front of a crowd of supporters in Springfield, Illinois while McCain announced his bid for presidency a few weeks later on February 28 during an appearance on the "Late Show with David Letterman".

CHAPTER 2: WEB 2.0 AND THE ROLE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY AS POLITICAL MARKETING IN ELECTIONS

This chapter begins by making an argument that incorporating new technological innovations into campaigns as part of a deliberate campaign strategy helps to increase campaign communications and the effectiveness of their message to voters. It will begin with examples of the advantages of new technology from the 1960s and JFK and will then consider some more recent examples such as the early success of Howard Dean's campaign in the 2004 Presidential primaries. Following these brief case histories there will be a discussion on some of the potential pluses and minuses of using new media to reach out to supporters based on recent studies conducted on the use of new online strategies in elections. The chapter will finish with a section on "Web 2.0" by defining it and then discussing several ways it can be incorporated into an effective campaign strategy.

2.1 New Technology and Political Marketing in Elections

Throughout the past century technological advancements have created numerous forms of *new media* and new ways for campaigns and politicians to interact with the public. The telegraph, the radio, the television, and now the Internet have all influenced political communication and political marketing in some way or another and campaigns have had to adapt their strategies accordingly. In the 2008 Presidential Election, candidates had to acknowledge the advantages of using the Internet to reach voters and incorporate it effectively into their campaign strategies. There are significant advantages to using the Internet to reach voters. Druckman et al. (2007: 425) write that the Internet

"provides candidates with unmediated and inexpensive access to voters while also offering new technological options for communication and information presentation." This chapter argues that by successfully taking advantage of technological advancements and incorporating those advancements into an effective campaign strategy, a candidate can gain an advantage over his opponents in the quest for political office.

The adoption of new technology in a campaign can also be seen as a distinct advantage in campaign strategy and the increasing importance of what Bruce Newman (1994) calls *political marketing*. Candidates no longer need to satisfy the needs of party bosses who used to run the show back in John F. Kennedy's day but can instead focus more directly on satisfying the needs of voters to get elected (Newman 1994: 14-5). New technologies can aid in this marketing of a candidate to the public. More specifically, through political marketing, campaigns present a crafted campaign platform and a proper image of the candidate to promote their message using modern day marketing tools such as push marketing, pull marketing, and polling (Newman 1994: 13). The potential for new technology to influence elections is certainly a viable possibility following the rise in importance of the "media, pollsters, consultants, political action committees and voters" (Newman 1994: 14) and the simultaneous decline in power of the party bosses.

Taking advantage of new advancements in technology can provide a candidate with a great advantage over his opponents in a race. For instance, even though Ross Perot lost the Presidential race in 1992, he managed to capture 19% of the popular vote, a huge amount for a third party candidate in a U.S. Presidential race, through his use of "high tech tactics" describes Newman (1994: xiv). In a much earlier contest, writes Newman (1994: 2), John F. Kennedy used the new television medium more adeptly during the

Presidential debates of 1960 than did Richard Nixon, appearing "more relaxed and at ease than Nixon", conveying an image of success to the American public which helped him win the office. David Nickerson (2007: 494) summarizes the use of technology by candidates by asserting that "It took years for politicians to utilize television as a campaign tool, and candidates are just now beginning to figure out how to use the Internet."

2.2 The Prevalence of New Technology in Recent Elections

Candidates in more recent history have, in fact, taken advantage of technological advancements, particularly Web advancements, to help them raise large sums of money and to help gain an advantage over their opponents. "The low transaction costs and the massive economies of scale of the Internet," writes David Nickerson (2007: 494) make it a highly desirable tool for campaigning. Writing about the role of the Internet as new technology in elections, *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" (Nagourney, 2006).

Though the Internet had been around for several years it was not until 1999 that a Presidential candidate attempted to take advantage of the Internet as a campaign tool. Democrat Bill Bradley was the first to make use of online fundraising with matching funds in a presidential race and he was quickly followed by Sen. John McCain as they sought to gain their respective party nominations (Bimber and Davis, 2003: 38-9). 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 (Gulati and Williams, 2007: 452). While the percentage of money raised online was minimal in comparison to the rest

of Bradley and McCain's fundraising efforts, and despite the fact that neither won their party's nomination, their efforts 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 used 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 people in real life as a way to organize supporters, and also to raise large amounts of money in the early stages of the Democratic primary. *The Washington Post* reported that Dean raised much of his $41 million through online contributions and gained 185,000 supporters on Meetup.com. Nevena Rsumovic (2009: 2) argues that Dean's campaign "pioneered political fundraising on the Internet by drawing small amounts from many." There was a tremendous amount of press about the early success of Dean's campaign and the innovative use of new Web technologies by his campaign. Despite Dean's early lead over John Kerry, however, Dean would inevitably end up losing the Democratic nomination. Despite his loss Dean had demonstrated to politicians, the media, and campaign professionals the tremendous potential of the Internet to not only attract attention among supporters and the mainstream media, but also to raise significant amounts of money to help jumpstart his campaign. While technological advancements in campaigns may not be the determining factor for success, they certainly have the potential to influence the course of a campaign and their prominence in electoral campaigns is steadily increasing year after year (Nagourney, 2006).

2.3 The Role of New Media in Campaign Communication

New media, particularly from Web-based technology, assume the functions of classical forms of media like television, newspapers and magazines for political communication in elections as their use continues to become more widespread in society. What older forms of media lacked, new media took advantage of and built upon. In *The Handbook of New Media* (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002: 35), an excellent summary of Denis McQuail's (1987: 20-6) interpretation of new media and its effect is given:

> New media, [McQuail] suggests, generally involve decentralization of channels for the distribution of messages; an increase in the capacity available for transferral of messages; an increase in the options available for audience members to become involved in the communication process, often entailing an interactive form of communication; and an increase in the degree of flexibility for determining the form and content through digitization of messages.

Through new media, candidates have new ways to reach supporters and to tailor particular messages to be more entertaining and to engage particular segments of society so as to garner the greatest effect. Once these supporters receive an engaging message it then becomes easier for them to respond to the message and to spread that message to others on the Internet through social networking Web sites or by e-mail at little to no cost. The effects of new media on campaign strategy are therefore very beneficial, particularly in Presidential races where the highest level of expertise and the most resources are available to make the best use of new forms of media and to use them to their full potential.

Not all technology advancements are necessarily ubiquitously beneficial for a campaign. Druckman et al. (2007: 425) claim in a study on the use of technology in congressional candidate Web sites that: "Candidates must carefully weigh practical and

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political considerations before incorporating new technologies into their Web sites because each innovation has advantages and drawbacks." To determine the extent of technology used, the researchers examined congressional candidate Web sites (both House and Senate) and investigated whether candidates were using particular presentation and interactive features that were significantly different from a traditional printed static brochure (Druckman et al., 2007: 427). The researchers focused on factors that contributed to campaign Web site presentation and interactivity.

The reasons that the researchers provide for using Web technology, while focusing only on congressional campaigns, appear to be applicable in the case of presidential campaigns as well. Druckman et al. (2007: 436) conclude that: "the decision to keep a candidate's Web site fresh and dynamic is driven by office level, incumbency status, and race competitiveness." The race between Obama and McCain was for the highest office and was remarkably competitive. Incumbency status, however, was not an issue for the 2008 election because George W. Bush was not eligible to run for a third term.

In their study the researchers determined the feasibility of incorporating new Web features into their Web sites based on campaign funds. For instance, Druckman et al. (2007: 437) assert that, "the odds of using two-way communication increase by 17.1% for every million dollar raised". The researchers also found that as campaign competitiveness increased, the odds of using two-way communication dropped by 43%, which, claim the authors, "confirms the hesitancy that candidates in tight races have for relinquishing control over their Web site's central message" (Druckman et al. 2007: 438). Generalizing from these findings, therefore, we should also find that both presidential

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campaigns were driven to keep their Web sites updated and interesting, to include personalized interaction features, and to be somewhat hesitant in using two-way communication because the race was viewed as being very close. While these findings are interesting for understanding the choices campaigns have in adopting new technologies, we are more interested in discovering whether these particular strategies can aid in attracting and engaging more voters who use these new technologies.

So then, what particular effect can the use of new technology as a strategy by a campaign have on election results? Several publications have attempted to address this issue in some form and have produced mixed results. Chapman Rackaway (2007), writing about the use of technology in state legislative campaigns, claims that variables such as "legislative professionalism, party affiliation, professionalism of a campaign, and money raised were not significantly related to technology use in campaigns" (Rackaway, 2007: 466). Rackaway (2007: 479-80), however, did find significant results for the use of online fund-raising technology for earning votes in state legislative campaigns. However he concludes his study by stating "technology in and of itself does not bring more votes to a candidate" (Rackaway, 2007: 480). While Rackaway's findings are certainly interesting, it remains unclear whether his findings can be generalized to Presidential campaigns, which he asserts "are the cutting edge of technological use because of their professionalism and large fund-raising base" (Rackaway 2007: 467).

Another study hoping to link the connection between new technology and election results was conducted by Dylan Kissane (2009) who 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

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efforts played a role in winning the majority of voters for the Australian Labor Party, a subsequent analysis of polling data indicated that voters were not influenced by the campaign's online strategies. Instead, the polling data indicated that most people changed their preferences after there was a drastic shift in party leadership.

Other studies, however, have found some effect for new technology on voter turnout and support. In an article written for the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, Mary Joyce (2007) 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. 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 effectiveness of new technology for increasing candidate support in Presidential races remains unanswered and this project hopes to shed light on the particular role of new technology, particularly Web-based technology. The Internet as a form of new technology and new media for political communication has become, according to Costas Panagopoulos (2007: 424), "a formidable medium that has inspired tremendous and influential innovations in campaign communications." Therefore, if a campaign wishes to succeed, then candidates and campaign strategists must recognize this increasing capacity for communication with the electorate using new Web-based media. The next section will describe these new forms of media, particularly Web 2.0 media, and how they can be used as campaign tools.

2.4 "Web 2.0"

In order to understand the possible effect of using *Web 2.0 applications* as tools on voters during a campaign the term "Web 2.0" must first be elaborated. There is no hard and true definition of "Web 2.0" but Tim O'Reilly (2005), one of the first to popularize the term, does provide some basic principles that all Web 2.0 applications need in order to be successful. Before these principles are elaborated it is worth noting that initially the very purpose of using the term Web 2.0 was for industry professionals to try and understand why some Internet companies failed and others succeeded. These professionals eventually discovered that most of the successful companies had incorporated several innovations and strategies that made them uniquely Web 2.0.

What are some of the consequences of these new Web 2.0 innovations for the Internet? Firstly, it meant the triumph of Internet platforms over individual applications, the increase of user participation, the harnessing of collective intelligence, the use of the wisdom of crowds, the use of specialized databases, the delivery of Internet software as a service, 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 and other mobile devices (O'Reilly, 2005). In sum, Web 2.0 refers to a second generation of Web development that helps to make possible increased communication, information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the Internet. These principles have thus led to the development of Web-based communities, hosted services, and applications in the form of social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, and blogs. In addition to the music industry, newspapers and retailers, candidates and campaign professionals sought to take advantage of the

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Internet as its influence spread throughout and saturated American society (Nagourney, 2006).

The number of Web 2.0 applications and companies are growing rapidly and it is difficult to keep track of them all. At the present moment the primary and most popular Web 2.0 applications and Web sites include Google, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Wikipedia, and EBay. For the purpose of this project I will focus primarily on campaign Web sites and social-networking Web 2.0 applications 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 particularly valuable for a political campaign in helping *to increase the number of supporters, engage with those supporters, and promote the campaign message*.

This prominent Internet-based Web technology is constantly evolving. This evolution creates increasingly numerous ways for candidates to interact with voters; whether through e-mails, sms notifications, or twitter posts. New media platforms offer candidates' direct access to increasingly larger number of voters. Druckman et al. (2007: 425) write that: "Candidates now have the opportunity to create Web sites with features such as multiple media, personalized information, and even two-way communication." New and influential trends in Web technology have also helped change the way candidates reach the public. Two new noteworthy additions include Twitter, a free social networking Web site and micro-blogging service that enable its users to send and read others' updates known as tweets, and the capability of sending text messages to thousands of supporters' mobile phones. Both services are prominent within the new Web 2.0 paradigm but are also dependent on these new Web-based programs and

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databases which in turn grant campaigns wide access to a large portion of the general public.

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. What exactly is viral marketing? "Viral marketing", writes Ralph Wilson (2005), "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." Viral marketing is not strictly relegated to the Internet realm. It can also be spread by "word-of-mouth" (Wilson, 2005). Web 2.0 applications, however, provide the best environment for viral marketing as a result of the ease of message transmission (often just simply clicking and sending the message online), the vast reach of the message (you can potentially reach anyone connected to the Internet all across the United States), and the ability of the message to expand exponentially to reach many Internet users very quickly (Wilson, 2005). Additionally online viral marketing can help to reinforce offline viral marketing and grassroots mobilization. If electoral campaigns are to take advantage of this online engagement, they must first craft sophisticated and comprehensive online strategies designed to attract interest, spread the campaign message, and ensure that those supporters cast their ballots on Election Day.

Now that we have explained the importance of new forms of technology for elections, we must identify some categories for the particular use of Web 2.0 tools in an election campaign. While there are many online techniques to choose from, I will focus on techniques that are more closely associated with Web 2.0 applications and are

characterized by 1) the interaction between users and publishers, 2) user-generated content, 3) social networking, 4) freedom of information, and 5) collective intelligence (O'Reilly, 2005). Later on in this project we will examine more closely how each campaign performed in promoting these Web 2.0 techniques.

Besides Dylan Kissane's (2009) publication on the use of Web 2.0 technologies in the 2007 Australian Federal Election, there has been no recent scholarly literature published on the direct use of Web 2.0 technologies. Other studies have incorporated the use of new Internet technology that does include some of the same aspects of Web 2.0 technologies mentioned earlier. For instance, in a study on the spread of the use of technology between federal and state elections, Rackaway (2007: 470) created a comprehensive categorization for campaign technologies focusing on 4 major categories: 1) voter identification and location, 2) communication technologies, 3) direct communication, and 4) fund-raising. Unlike state-level campaigns, Presidential campaigns have the resources available to make use of all of these techniques. If both Obama and McCain were using these broad techniques, than why did Obama gain so much more support and raise so much more money online than McCain? Perhaps Obama's supporters have more of a presence online than McCain but I argue in the rest of this project that Obama's campaign made much better use of a Web 2.0 strategy than the McCain campaign did.

This chapter laid the foundation for the positive role of new technology, innovation, professionalization, and marketing in contributing to an effective campaign strategy. New media and new technologies, particularly those present in the new "Web 2.0" paradigm, are particularly effective at engaging users online and candidates and

campaigns are rightly interested in taking full advantage of these new developments. Before we understand the ways in which the Obama and McCain campaigns attempted to incorporate these new developments into their own strategy a pressing issue must be addressed: do campaign effects matter in elections? The next chapter will present some key arguments in favor of both sides of the scholarly argument and argue how this project will contribute to the existing literature on campaign effects.

CHAPTER 3: CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

The foundation of this project rests in the concept that campaign effects can influence voter behavior in some way and thereby have an affect on election outcomes. The chapter will begin by describing traditional theories of elections by political scientists who put particular emphasis on the explanatory power of forecasting models to predict elections. Some of the pluses and minuses of such an approach will be given but an argument will be given in favor of the latter. The next section will provide an explanation for campaign effects and the ways in which campaigns and campaign strategies can and do influence elections. Following that there will be a discussion on the decline of party identification among voters and also of the role of campaigns as information disseminators and the ways that these factors can influence voters' preferences. The chapter will conclude by explaining the role that campaign communications have in setting the agenda, framing issues, and priming voters in their judgments of candidates and their issues.

3.1 Forecasting Models

It remains disputed whether campaigns have an effect on the outcomes of elections or not. If you only relied on network and cable television news—as most Americans do for their election information—one might think that campaigns have a tremendous effect on election outcomes and that one minor mistake by a candidate or a campaign could lose the whole election. Most political scientists disagree with this notion and have created elaborate forecasting models that can often predict election results very

closely 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, and the length of time that the president's party has controlled the White House" (Abramowitz, 2008: 691). Indeed, Thomas Holbrook (1996: 1) echoes this sentiment by noting that much previous research on elections in political science favors the view that campaigns do not have a major effect on voter behavior and that what does matter are these numerous other factors which also include "long-term political attitudes." Through these forecast models political scientists often view elections merely as a referenda on the performance of the previous administration. If voters were satisfied with the administration and the state of the economy they will likely then select the candidate from the incumbent party, if they disapprove then they will tend to vote more for the opposition.

The forecasting models created by political scientists, however, offer some compelling evidence for their case. Abramowitz's (2008: 695) 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: 53% for Obama and 46% for McCain (CNNPolitics.com, 2009). Finding a compelling alternative explanation is indeed a difficult task but, despite the success of many of these models, there still exist some dispute among communication scholars and social scientists about the actual role of campaign effects.

3.2 The Interaction Between Forecasting Models and Campaign Effects

Elections are not as cut and dry as political scientists make them seem. The role of campaign communication in elections can in fact interact with many of these variables, as

Johnston et al. (2004) claim in their seminal work on the 2000 Presidential election. They acknowledge the disparity between the two research traditions and summarize the controversy quite well. The first tradition, put forth by communications scholars, claims that campaigns and campaign communication have a major effect on the electorate by providing them with information which in turn has effects on voter mobilization. The second tradition, articulated primarily by political scientists, claims that there are numerous factors that drive their models of voter behavior including: social structure, geography, party identification, ideology, incumbent popularity, and the state of the economy (Johnston et al., 2004: 1).

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 (Johnston et al., 2004:3). Therefore, something else must have influenced the course of the election and they contend that campaign communication influenced and perhaps activated many of these crucial variables in the forecasting models. In their theory, Johnston et al. (2004: 1) 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."

The authors' essential claim is thus that campaign "communication is critical in determining whether and if so how the economy, candidate traits, and issues function in a campaign" (Johnston et al., 2004: 2). 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 (Johnston et al., 2004: 4). Additionally, the success of George W. Bush in the local television ad wars gave him an advantage in swing states such as Ohio and Florida. However, Gore managed to win the popular vote in part by getting more positive coverage in network news. Gore's win of the popular vote, however, was inconsequential in the overall strategic contest (Johnston et al., 2004: 13).

In their study Johnston et al. (2004: 7) provide a direct test of a view of political cognition first espoused by Lodge and his colleagues (Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh, 1989; Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau, 1995) called the *on-line view* (not to be confused with being online or being on the Internet). According to this view, instead of voters returning to their original view once they have been influenced or shocked by a message or an 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 (Johnston et al., 2004: 7). 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 then by assessing the impact of television ads on this data (Johnston et al., 2004: 3). 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, the authors argue that they have demonstrated shifts in public perception based on campaign persuasion (Johnston et al., 2004: 7). 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.

3.3 Campaign Effects: The Decline of Partisanship and the Role of Information Dissemination

In addition to the work done by Johnston et al. (2004) there is a growing body of literature arguing that campaigns do indeed have an effect on voter preference. Many political scientists simply align voter preferences with *party identification.* Holbrook (1996: 13) contests this claim by writing that "one of the most significant changes has been the decline in the number of people who consider themselves partisans and the increase in the number who consider themselves independents." Previous research on electoral behavior (Campbell et al., 1966) has shown that voters vote in line with their partisan preferences, however, the number of people who identify with one party or the other has been steadily decreasing with each election (Holbrook, 1996: 13). Therefore, the number of people with predisposed party identification is shrinking, which allows for more voters to be potentially influenced by campaign messages and strategies. In close elections these undecided voters can carry a lot of influence, just remember how Florida was lost by only a miniscule amount of votes in the 2000 U.S. Presidential election.

Another critical factor in the argument for the effectiveness of a campaign in influencing public opinion is its role—and more recently in the form of new media technology—as a *disseminator of information.* Research by Carpini and Keeter (1996: 224) has demonstrated that the more knowledgeable voters are, the more likely they are to vote. Increased knowledge, writes Carpini and Keeter (1996: 224), "promotes a number of civic attitudes and behaviors (such as political interest and efficacy) that

motivate participation." Learning about politics helps voters to understand its importance and to understand how it affects their lives. Recognizing this link between knowledge and voting, campaigns act as information disseminators in ways that are aimed at increasing the knowledge of their supporters. And in the past decade campaigns have begun recognizing the increasing impact of campaign Web sites and Web 2.0 tools as methods of disseminating information directly to their supporters in more efficient and targeted ways.

In a study on both European national and parliamentary elections Gábor Tóka (2007) adds empirical evidence to the claim that information provided by campaigns can influence voter behavior if voters have fixed preferences. Tóka's (2007: 154) findings support his "different-campaign-information account" which states "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 (Toka, 2007: 167). Tóka's (2007: 167) 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 information. The accelerated campaign efforts by small parties to inform voters, therefore, can and do influence vote gains. Campaign effects theoretically have the potential to increase vote gains not only in European elections but also in all elections, including the American Presidential election.

3.4 Agenda-Setting, Framing, Priming and Reaching Voters Online

The theoretical concepts *priming* and *agenda-setting* are also crucial concepts in understanding the impact of information on public opinion and voter preferences. Shanto Iyengar (1991: 133) describes the differences between both concepts:

> The so-called "priming effect" refers to the ability of news programs to affect the criteria by which individuals judge their political leaders. Specifically, researchers have found that the more prominent an issue is in the national information stream, the greater will be the weight accorded it in making political judgments. While agenda-setting reflects the impact of news coverage on the perceived importance of national issues, priming refers to the impact of news coverage on the weight assigned to specific issues in making political judgments.

If an issue is presented to voters through the media or directly by a campaign, they will use that issue to base their decisions on elected officials and their positions. As we saw in the previous chapter, the role of television as the primary agent of information dissemination is steadily decreasing with each election as more and more Americans go online to receive information about elections and politicians. It remains unclear whether the Internet, particularly campaign Web sites, can perform the same roles as television in priming voters and setting the agenda.

In addition to *priming effects* and *agenda-setting effects*, Iyengar (1991: 11) also emphasizes the importance of *framing effects* in influencing the way a voter makes a decision. "Framing" writes Iyengar (1991: 11), "refers to subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems, and the term 'framing effects' refers to changes in decision outcomes resulting from these alterations." Framing is a method of persuasion and it is a direct attempt by campaigns to influence the way voters think about issues and candidates. In the presentation of information, an issue can become framed and judgments by individuals can become shifted. By engaging voters online, candidates have opened up a new and influential platform for influencing voters'

choices, decisions, and opinions through *priming*, *agenda-setting*, and the *framing of issues*.

As more voters begin to venture away from television and become increasingly engaged online, campaigns must change and evolve the way that they can most effectively communicate with voters. The goal remains the same, however. Popkin (1991, 70) 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." Salmore and Salmore (1998) 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. Instead, *campaigns* are replacing parties as a source of information about candidates (Salmore and Salmore, 1989: 9).

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" (Johnston et al., 2004: 3). The campaign effects from competing campaigns, however, have the potential to interfere with the effectiveness of the other. Gelman and King (1993, 449) argue that if both campaigns are waged seriously, then the information dissemination will cancel each other out. Holbrook (1996, 17) concludes from this that a campaign will only have a real effect if there exist an information asymmetry, which could arise from one campaign being run better than the other. 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.

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This chapter has established that there is indeed a place for understanding campaign effects in elections in terms of mobilization, vote gains, and information dissemination. The particular strategies chosen by candidates and the campaign staff, therefore, have a role in determining a campaign's success. The millions of dollars raised by campaigns are therefore not spent in vain and the news media are right in following candidates so closely along the campaign trail. 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 those essential variables. Lastly, this chapter helped to argue that the role of the Internet is becoming more and more influential as a means of disseminating campaign information to voters and supporters.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYZING WEB 2.0 STRATEGY: THE OBAMA CAMPAIGN VS. THE MCCAIN CAMPAIGN

Why did Obama and McCain choose and pursue their particular Web 2.0 strategies in the 2008 Presidential Election? Why was Obama so much more successful than McCain in the online arena? What were some of the successful Web 2.0 strategies used by the candidates? Are voters who visit a campaign Web site more likely to vote for a particular candidate? This chapter aims to look closely at the two campaigns and some of their online strategies to answer these questions. The chapter begins by trying to understand some of the motivations and reasons for why a candidate pursued 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. Following this argument the chapter will conclude by focusing on Obama's online success will account for some explanations for that success.

4.1 Candidate Differences/Campaign Differences: a Four-tiered Argument for Online Campaign Success

Both the Obama and McCain campaigns used very aggressive online campaigning strategies. Large differences, however, still existed between the two camps in both their attitudes toward online campaigning and their strategies. Many of these crucial differences 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 in addition to their *attitudes* towards the Internet and new technologies.
John McCain for instance was purportedly unable to even check his own e-mail, while
Barack Obama was almost addicted to his mobile Blackberry device, sending and
receiving e-mails to his close friends and family (Parsons and Puzzanghera, 2009;
Harnden, 2008). Even after Obama was elected President he made sure that his
Blackberry was given security clearance so he would not have to go without it (Parsons
and Puzzanghera, 2009).

Indeed, much of Obama's past helped to shape his attitudes toward the Internet
and develop his prowess as an organizer. "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" (Stelter, 2008). Obama's personality is so akin to social networking that
"Mr. Hughes and other Obama aides say…that he even filled out his own Facebook
profile two years ago" (Stelter, 2008). Joe Rospars, Obama's "New Media" director also
attributed Obama's community organizer background in helping to shape his campaign's
technology strategy, its fundraising strategy, and its organizing field strategy
(Newsmax.com, 2009). Obama, like Clinton, was successful because he had the drive
and, as Newman (1994: 14) describes it, the "ability to set up an organization that could
successfully implement and communicate his vision for the country to the voters."
Obama's was a vision of "Hope" and "Change" that people grabbed onto and spread to
others both in person and through the Internet.

It is also evident that candidate personality was a primary reason for McCain's first venture into the Internet realm as an outsider and a self-proclaimed "maverick" back in 2000. Despite his initial successes, personality remains only one of many significant factors for adopting a successful online strategy and he, along with the Republican Party, lagged behind the Democrats in Web innovation. Much of Howard Dean's initial success on the Internet was a result of his personality, argues Gary Wolf (2004) in an article on Howard Dean's rise via the Internet. Wolf (2004) writes that: "He listens to the technology – and the people who use it." Dean, however, claims that his online success was a complete accident. "I wish I could tell you we were smart enough to figure this out," claims Dean. "But the community taught us. They seized the initiative through Meetup. They built our organization for us before we had an organization" (Wolf, 2004). While Dean may have promoted the online campaign strategy in some way, it appears that much of his campaigns online success was accidental and executed by the supporters themselves. By grabbing hold of this new sensation and acknowledging the benefits of technology, Dean experienced a level of success in the early primaries that he would not likely have enjoyed otherwise.

Despite Dean's early success he failed to capture his party's nomination because, argues Dean McSweeney, he had "a lower level of support, narrower lead and less name recognition [than John Kerry]" (McSweeney, 2007: 109). While candidate personality certainly is a driver of a campaign's particular strategy, these factors that propelled Kerry to his party's nomination and caused Dean's fall cannot be neglected. Since Dean the influence of the Internet has increased in society candidates and campaigns have

recognized the tremendous potential, if not the necessity, of a successful online campaign strategy. Where Dean failed, Obama and his team were determined to succeed.

Besides personality, a candidate's *party affiliation* also seems to influence the nature of their online strategy. The party links candidates together by ideology but they also remain associated if one segment of the party is perceived negatively. These negative perceptions spread to the entire party. A criticism which may begin with the President can filter down to Congressional candidates and even city council candidates who all identify with the same party. Unless they break their ties with a party, these politicians are all 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.

The Republican strategy in the 2002 and 2004 elections was to "put great emphasis on house parties and personal contact to turn out their vote" (Gulati and Williams, 2007: 457). These house parties were grassroots mobilizing events that brought together supporters into a volunteer's house to discuss outreach and volunteering efforts but were not directly linked to the use of the Internet. Gulati and Williams (2007: 457-8) found that in 2006, Democratic House[1] candidates were more likely to use the Web to mobilize voters than Republican candidates. One possible explanation offered by Gulati and Williams (2007: 459) for this partisan difference was perhaps that "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." These Republican candidates thought that pursuing an online strategy

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[1] "House parties" refer to events organized by candidate supporters in their homes and House candidates refer to politicians running to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

would be costly for them and would not help them disassociate themselves from the unpopular Bush administration. There clearly was a difference among parties for making use of online strategies in elections that could be linked to the public's perception of the incumbent administration's party. This difference had the potential to affect the initial strategies for the Obama and McCain campaigns because Obama already had an edge against McCain who was fighting an uphill battle due to the fact that he belonged to the same party as the unpopular Bush administration.

Additionally it could be argued that Democrats had more preferential access than Republicans to some of the industries best Web strategists. Blue State Digital (BSD), the company hired by Obama's campaign to help develop and implement its online strategy, was founded by four members of Howard Dean's campaign including Joe Rospars who became the New Media Director for the Obama campaign (Lowry, 2008). BSD was a shrewd contribution to Obama's campaign because, as Tom Lowry (2008) in an article for Business Week explains, "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]. This firm had tremendous 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. Additionally, the low costs gave Obama an advantage by giving him a superior online strategy at a very reasonable expense. Unfortunately for many Republican candidates and John McCain, the firm apparently catered only to Democratic candidates – much in line with their founders' notion of "progressive idealism", a motto reminiscent of Democratic Party ideals (Lowry, 2008).

The third next crucial factor that influenced campaign strategy development was, in agreement with the previous paragraph, *the role of direct involvement of Internet industry professionals in electoral campaigns*; or rather, in the Obama campaign. Unlike McCain, Obama's campaign managed to recruit some significant professionals to help to both develop and manage his online strategy in conjunction with BSD. Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook, the most popular social networking Web site on the Internet, left his job to help develop Obama's new-media campaign (Stelter, 2008). In addition Google CEO Eric Schmidt was brought on as a technology advisor for the campaign (Rsumovic, 2009: 3). That is some serious industry firepower to have working with a campaign. McCain's campaign, on the other hand, 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 social network Web site—"My.BarackObama.com"—that not only improved as the campaign progressed, but also became more locally oriented and accessible (PEJ, 2008: 2) .

Despite McCain's previous experience with online campaigning and fundraising back in 2000, his 2008 online campaigning and early attempts at creating a social network faltered from the start. In July 2008 Adam Ostrow, the editor of Mashable, a blog about social networking, said that McCain's social network McCainSpace was "virtually impossible to use and appears largely abandoned" (Stelter, 2008). 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" (Stelter, 2008). When Hughes began his work on the Obama campaign, his focus was solely on winning the Iowa caucuses. Obama won,

perhaps with help from his campaigns Web 2.0 social networking features. "Obama's win", reports Stelter (2008) "drove new supporters to the MyBo [My.BarackObama] site in droves." From the start it seems clear that Obama had a substantial advantage over McCain in terms of online campaigning, employing a strategy that helped him to mobilize voters and supporters.

The final essential reason for the success of the Obama campaign in pursuing their online strategy was *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, said a McCain figure, "went from a great big campaign down to about 35 people trying to run a national campaign" (Talbot, 2008). The Web strategy, however, helped McCain's campaign survive the tough times and carry them through the summer to the New Hampshire primary on January 8th, 2008. Talbot reports "The Web team ran most of the fundraising and organizing functions" (Talbot, 2008). McCain's success demonstrates that even in times of trouble, a Webcentric campaign has the potential to help a candidate through tough times because of the low costs of Web campaigning tools, their tremendous outreach potential, and their efficient organization capabilities.

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 outpaced the McCain campaign's early

fundraising efforts which were crucial for building an effective campaign and online strategy.

While there are no official numbers for the size of the staff for each campaign, interviews with campaign officials portray very asymmetric campaign numbers. In a recent conference hosted by George Washington University's Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet on the use of online campaigning, Michael Palmer, McCain's "eCampaign" chief argued that the Obama campaign had "10 times the staff we had and outspent us five to one online, three to one everywhere else" (Newsmax.com, 2009). "We basically had 1.5 guys full-time on graphics and not just for the Web," Palmers complained. "It was very difficult with such a limited staff" (Newsmax.com, 2009). 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 and widespread online strategy that was far superior to the McCain campaign's strategy. In the next section we will see how both candidates fared in online support during the campaign process.

4.2 Online Support

Obama's personality, the legacy of his political party in pursuing online strategies, help from top industry professionals, and the large amount of staff and resources at his disposal enabled him to pursue an ambitious online strategy, the likes of which no political candidate had ever seen before. In terms of online support, Obama's concentrated online efforts paid off big time. During the course of the campaign Obama received considerably greater support among people online in terms of campaign Web

site hits, youtube videos watched or uploaded, or numbers of friends and supporters on social networking Web sites like Facebook and MySpace. 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. And 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.

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

	Facebook	**MySpace**	**YouTube**		**Twitter**
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. http://www.Web-strategist.com/blog/2008/11/03/snapshot-of-presidential-candidate-social-networking-stats-nov-2-2008/ (accessed May 14, 2009).

Data from the Pew Internet & American Life Project's study "The Internet and the 2008 election" conducted in June 2008 highlight some of the reasons for Obama's greater online support. Pew 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 (Smith and Rainie, 2008: 15). 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 (Smith and Rainie, 2008: 15). The differences in these percentages translate directly into numbers of substantial supporters that each candidate can rely on. The Pew report claims that much of these differences can be attributed to "the relative youth of those who self-identify as Democrats" (Smith and Rainie, 2008: 12). 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 constituting the party than there are for the Republican Party (Smith and Rainie, 2008: 12). The focus of the Obama campaign on Web 2.0 tools and online campaigning was aimed at capturing and influencing these young voters who are active and present online. A similar strategy for the McCain campaign simply would not have been as effective because there are not as many young Republicans as there are Democrats.

Interestingly enough though, are the basic measures of Internet use by party reported by Pew. According to these measures, 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

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Democrats) (Smith and Rainie, 2008: 12). 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 supporter and to join his unique social network—My.BarackObama.com—than Republicans visiting John McCain's Web site and his social network –McCainSpace.com. I will elaborate this argument further in the next chapter when I will directly compare many aspects of each campaign's Web site, including the effectiveness of their online approach and the success of their use of Web 2.0 tools which can help in attracting and engaging users online.

There are several factors that can help contribute to a candidate's successful online strategy including his personality; his party affiliation; the presence of industry professionals; and the amount of supporters and resources available. Obama was superior to McCain in each of these factors and his campaign therefore pursued an ambitious online campaign that benefited not only from these advantages but also benefited from having more young, tech-savvy Democratic supporters online. These benefits are clearly seen in the increased number of online supporters presented in Table 1. Obama's team recognized the advantages of an online campaign strategy and then executed their strategy with great success.

While the campaign messages of each candidate were both uplifting and certainly had the potential to inspire supporters to venture online to visit a candidate's Web site or register as a supporter in a social network, the next chapter will instead focus on the particular effect of Web 2.0 tools to potentially attract supporters to a candidate, the development of each campaign's Web site, and lastly, each candidate's presence in social

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networks. These findings will help to illuminate some of the successes and failures in each candidate's use of Web 2.0 tools to attract supporters and spread the campaign message as part of its online campaign strategy.

CHAPTER 5: CAMPAIGN WEB SITES AND WEB 2.0 STRATEGY

This chapter examines each candidate's online strategy in more detail by looking at the relevant characteristics of each campaign Web site, their successes and pitfalls, and how the campaigns developed their Web sites in conjunction with their online strategies. Following this analysis the chapter will explain particular Web 2.0 tools and features of the campaign Web sites designed to attract and engage users and to spread the campaign message. Several features include, but are not limited to: online organizing for offline events, supporter interaction between campaign Web sites and other social networking sites, the ability of campaigns to send text message updates to supporters' mobile phones, and the ability of volunteers to online phone-banking tools to call potential voters. The success of a candidate's Web site and their online presence depended in large part on whether their campaign made these tools and features interactive and easy to use for their supporters or not.

5.1 Online Strategy Development: A Comparison of Campaign Web Sites

The backbone for each campaign's online strategy was the campaign Web site. 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, spreading the message, and several other sections[2]. From the beginning of the campaign season McCain's Web site was not always as fine-tuned as Obama's. Earlier versions of the Web site were considered ugly[3]—Vanity Fair (2008) claims it "looked like death"—and had very few interactive features. By the end of the campaign, however,

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[2] Refer to Appendix C for screenshots of each campaign's Web site.
[3] Refer to Figure 1 in Appendix C.

McCain had caught up with the Obama team in terms of soliciting donations, registering supporters and volunteers, and overall Web site design. "The [Obama] campaign's successful new-media strategy", writes Brian Stelter (2008) for The New York Times "is already being studied as a playbook for other candidates, including the presumptive Republican nominee, Senator John McCain." The McCain team certainly used the Obama strategy as a playbook for their own operations. By the end of the campaign, McCain's Web site looked remarkably similar to Obama's and included many of the same features. So to begin, how exactly did the Obama team develop such an excellent Web site laden with easy-to-use interactive features and Web 2.0 tools?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Obama and his campaign received technical and strategic support from Blue State Digital (BSD) the company Obama and his team hired to build their state-of-the-art Internet campaign operation for his Presidential primary run. In a case study of Obama's campaign Web site given by the company, BSD reports "the campaign of President Barack Obama knew they needed to build an unprecedented community outreach program" (Blue State Digital, 2008). Obama and his team, notes BSD (2008), used the 2004 Presidential race as a guide and saw the importance of "online contributions, online activism, and online community-building." BSD claims that the campaign needed a powerful technology platform that could power these Web 2.0 features and that's why they were chosen by Obama and his team (Blue State Digital, 2008). Brian Stelter (2008) reported that the Obama campaign also took many cues from other social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. They realized the power of Web 2.0 tools in social networking sites and sought to harness them as a formidable political tool.

The McCain campaign also recognized the power of the Internet to engage voters on core issues, however, much later in the game and with much less success than Obama. As was mentioned earlier, McCain's early attempts at social networking (McCainSpace.com) were clumsy and difficult to use. The Pew Research Center discovered in a preliminary study of 19 candidate Web sites in July 2007 that Obama's Web site had the most advanced interactive communities and McCain's Web site fell far behind (Journalism.org, 2008). To further their online strategy McCain's campaign employed the company New Media Communications, a company specializing in campaign Web sites for conservative candidates, including former President George Bush. The company described their operation for McCain as follows:

> New Media Communications worked in tandem with a strategic team of designers, political experts, and online strategists to develop the Web site for presidential candidate Senator John McCain. The backend to the site included a custom built extranet allowing the campaign to manage volunteer activities, reporting, communications and project collaboration with minimal effort. The campaign also had unique satellite sites for states and McCainSpace pages allowing users to create their own unique user space and network with other supporters (New Media Communications, 2009).

The McCain campaign maintained a serious Web site, albeit slightly later than Obama, and remained determined until the final moments of the campaign not to be left in the dust by their tech-savvy opponents.

In Mid-September the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) found that both campaign's official Web sites were far more advanced than any campaign Web site in previous years but noted that for much of the campaign Obama clearly had an advantage in the Internet realm (PEJ, 2008: 1). 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. McCain's Web site "has substantially improved its customization and socialization tools to

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encourage online networking with fellow supporters and offline grassroots activity" (PEJ, 2008: 1). By the final months of the campaign McCain's Web site even had a video game called Pork Invaders where users could shoot pigs that represented "pork", or wasteful spending in America (Shreeve, 2008). Despite the advances of McCain's online campaign, his official campaign Web site still lagged behind Obama's in many ways. The numbers of visitors reflects this asymmetry between the two sites. Of the all the visitors to campaign Web sites, PEJ reports using numbers from Hitwise, an Internet usage research company, that 72% of visitors went to Obama's page while only 28% visited McCain's (PEJ, 2008: 2). What were some of the particular features of Obama's Web site, in contrast to McCain's, that attracted so many more unique visitors?

5.2 Online Campaign Tools

As was mentioned before, Barack Obama had a superb social network site (My.BarackObama.com) incorporated into his official campaign Web site that was "extensive and active for months" (PEJ, 2008: 3). 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 (PEJ, 2008: 4). McCain's site included basic functions for grassroots support—donate and raise money, create or find a local event, volunteer for the campaign, and share talking points with others—but Pew reports that because of the poor design of many of these functions it was often difficult for the user to become involved (PEJ, 2008: 8).

In contrast, MyBarackObama.com allowed users to join groups, connect with other users, plan events, raise money, and volunteer (PEJ, 2008: 7). 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 states in 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 (Sifry, 2008). In addition to planning offline activities, users on Obama's Web site had several tools at their fingertips to help them engage with Obama's campaign effort. Once users were registered on Obama's Web site, Rsumovic (2008: 4) explains that they could *set up their own personal fundraising goals and, more importantly, get neighborhood walking guides with maps and scripts for approaching prospective voters with.* Through MyBarackObama.com users could also track their progress and report it back to the campaign to earn "points" for their achievements as an added incentive (PEJ, 2008: 8). McCain also included a "leader board" that ranked the top activists on his site for the week. Ultimately, though, the kind of online support for grassroots mobilization on Obama's site was unprecedented in electoral politics and greatly helped to organize Obama's ground operation, another of the key reasons for his eventual victory in November 2008.

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

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

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

Not only was Obama's campaign better at *presenting targeted information* to demographic groups but it also did so sooner and more comprehensively than McCain's campaign (PEJ, 2008: 5). Each Web site was updated very frequently and offered RSS feeds to alert users of those updates via e-mail. Another resource Obama provided to his supporters was an *online phone-bank* that enabled users to make calls to potential voters from their very own homes. How the Obama campaign obtained these names and numbers and ensured their privacy was not disclosed by Obama's campaign Web site or from any other official sources. McCain never added such a feature to his Web site.

Obama took another uniquely Web 2.0 approach to updating his supporters by *crossing platforms from the Internet to mobile phones*. His campaign sought to notify supporters of Obama's Vice-Presidential pick via a text message. The message read as follows:

> Barack will announce his VP candidate choice through txt msg between now & the Conv. Tell everyone to text VP to 62262 to be the first to know! Please forward (Ruffini, 2008).

While the success of this tactic was debatable it could have helped drive people to check the official Web site for more detail and have people alert their friends and family as well.

The prevalence of candidates on *social networking Web sites* was also very asymmetrical and could be due, in large part, to 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—added in September—LinkedIn. But is it up to supporters to find these pages on their own" (PEJ, 2008: 10). As demonstrated in Table 1, Obama maintained a substantial advantage in

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numbers of supporters on social networking Web sites and also had official presence in many more social networking sites than McCain. This deliberate attempt to be active in social networking sites comes from a desire among Obama and his campaign to be active in the social networking world. His team took deliberate steps to maintain their presence in social networking sites ranging from Facebook to BlackPlanet and AsianAve (PEJ, 2008: 9). In addition both candidates made use of their Web sites as platforms for informing their supporters about issues (Obama gives positions on 23 issues while McCain offers his views on 17) and also news about the campaign in similar ways (PEJ, 2008: 12-14).

Lastly, each campaign Web site offers 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 supporters and political action committees such as MoveOn.org to use video as a *viral marketing tool* to spread Obama's message. For instance 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 ads[4] "that will engage and enlighten viewers and help them understand the grassroots energy that's driving Barack Obama's campaign" (MoveOn.org, 2008). Celebrity judges including Ben Affleck and Steve Buscemi helped decide the winners along with 5.5 million votes for 1,100 videos (MoveOn.org, 2008).The second video[5] was humorous and, as Rsumovic (2009: 6) explains, "prompts the user to personalize it by adding a name of the recipient, who would then be featured throughout the video as

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[4] The winning videos can be viewed at http://obamain30seconds.com/ (accessed May 22, 2009).
[5] The video can be viewed at http://www.cnnbcvideo.com/?referred_by=10960978-RuXw.3x&combined=Sherri%20Freeman&first=Sherri&name_id=3753325&last=Freeman&id=&nid=Dd XHoqe..1fan1VFgsuTcTM3NTMzMjU- (accessed May 22, 2009).

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the single person whose failure to vote brought about Obama's alleged election defeat."

Clever videos such as these gained a lot of attention and incentivized people to pass them along to others, thus helping to spread Obama's message virally.

From the beginning of the Presidential primaries to Election Day, it seemed apparent that the Obama campaign dominated the McCain campaign in nearly every aspect of online campaigning. The Obama team's 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, donating money, calling other potential voters from their own homes, organizing events, and interacting 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 lastly, they lacked the innovative and effective new online Web 2.0 based tools for organizing their supporters that the Obama team had at their disposal. In the end McCain's social networking site—McCainSpace.com—was never as popular or engaging as Obama's site—My.BarackObama.com. While one candidate was clearly superior to other in the Internet realm, can a significant effect be demonstrated from being an Internet user, receiving campaign e-mails, or visiting a campaign Web site on a voter's actual preferences? Does interacting with campaigns online solidify support among voters or weaken it? In the following chapter I demonstrate that yes, these variables can and do have an impact on voter's preferences.

CHAPTER 6: LOGISTICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS: CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

Using the Pew Research Center's Mid-October Political Survey, a comparison of several variables was used to try to understand the effect of the Internet and Web 2.0 tools present in official campaign Web sites on voter preferences in the 2008 Presidential election. The Pew Center's poll asks numerous questions[6]; such as whether respondents had viewed any of the candidates' Web sites on the Internet or not, which candidate the respondents preferred, and several other questions about Internet use, e-mail use, and social network use. Using these variables I set up 6 unique models of voter behavior including my dependent variable—voter preference for either McCain (0) or Obama (1)—and three independent control variables that are typical indicators of voter preference: age, party ID, and education level[7]. I then added additional independent variables to each model. All the findings are presented in Table 3 with the B coefficients placed on top of the Exp (B) coefficients. Among the findings from this analysis, the most substantial discovery is that Democratic and Republican voters who view any candidate's campaign Web site are around 30 times more likely to indicate an intention to vote for their party's candidate than voters of each party who reported not viewing a campaign Web site.

The control variables performed as expected. Each model produced consistent and reliable results for each of the variables. The negative B coefficients for the age demographic variable indicate that as voters get older, they become more likely to

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[6] For a list of questions and variables found in Pew's survey please refer to the Appendix.
[7] Descriptions for the variables in each model are given in the Appendix.

indicate a preference for McCain. The results are all statistically significant. For many decades in the United States, younger voters have been much more likely to vote for the Democratic Party and older voters, particularly those 65 and over, have tended to vote for the Republican Party. In the 2008 Presidential election, CNN exit polls reported this very trend with 66% of voters aged 18-29 voting for Obama and only 45% of senior citizens voting for Obama (CNNPolitics.com, 2009).

For the Party ID variable, the results in each model are similarly consistent with preexisting notions regarding voter preference. Of course people who identify themselves as Democrats would favor Obama and those who identify as Republicans would favor McCain for President and we see that indeed Democrats were between 160 and 305 times more likely to prefer Obama than McCain. The results were also statistically significant.

The final control variable for respondent's education level indicated that as voters gain more education, they become slightly more likely to prefer Obama, however, the results were not statistically significant in this case. Nearly all of the constants performed as was expected. Most scholars agree that age and education are solid predictors of voter preference and party ID is by definition practically a predictor for candidate preference. In sum, the control variables provide a good foundation for the analysis of additional experimental independent variables that ask respondents various questions about their use of the Internet during the campaign process.

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

Variables	Model 1 (iuser)	Model 2 (q421)	Model 3 (q43e1)	Model 4 (q441)	Model 5 (partyWeb)	Model 6 (RepWeb)
	B Exp (B)					
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
R^2	.808	.828	.823	.820	.831	.831
Chi Squared	148.2***	1238.7***	1235.8***	1229.6***	1256.1***	1256.1***

*Significant at .1. **Significant at .05. ***Significant at .01.

The Internet user variable in the first model of voter behavior provides us with a

peculiar result that is difficult to explain. Unlike the other preceding models, the first

model reports that people who use the Internet are 1.7 times more likely to prefer McCain

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to Obama. The result is significant to .92 and the model is accurate at predicting 93.9% of voter's choices[8]. Fortunately each of the other models disproves the results from model 1. Model 2, which asks "Have you received e-mails about the candidates or campaigns from any groups or political organizations, or not?" reports that people who responded yes are 1.65 times more likely to prefer Obama. This finding is consistent with the hypothesis that an effective Web 2.0 based online strategy helped to attract more voters.

Additionally, this finding could reflect the notion that Democrats are more Internet-savvy than Republicans and therefore more Democrats signed up to receive e-mails than their Republican counterparts even though the percentage of Democrats and Republicans online is roughly equivalent (Smith and Rainie, 2008: 12). This increased likelihood for preferring Obama could also be from the online campaign efforts by the Democratic Party and the Obama campaign and the result end result was that these Democratic groups or political organizations simply sent more e-mails and, unlike Republican groups and political organizations, preferred it over other methods of communication.

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. While the question asked whether voters viewed any Web site we can likely assume that most Democratic respondents primarily viewed Obama's Web site while Republicans view McCain's.

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[8] For the full statistics report for each model including significance levels, chi squared, and R-squared please refer to Appendix B.

The logistical regression analysis of the third model thus finds that any person who visited a candidates' Web site is thus 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 in general than Republicans. The Pew report comparing campaign Web sites in mid-September notes that Obama's "draws almost three times as many unique visitors each week" (PEJ, 2008: 1). This asymmetry of visitors could be responsible for skewing the likelihood of preferences but 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.

The fourth model asks respondents if they ever use social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook. The results from this model, which reports that people who do use social networking sites are 1.35 times more likely to prefer Obama, does not tell us the effect of Web 2.0 tools or strategy by the campaigns but reinforces the perception that Democrats have more online presence than Republicans. The results, however, are not that enlightening because they are not statistically significant and merely tell us that people who use social networks are only slightly more likely to prefer Obama.

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 question variable. The interaction variable is included in the model with the other variables (as is shown in Table 2) and the coefficients for the new variable show the impact of being a Democrat for those who visited campaign Web sites on their preference for Obama. The variable is both interesting and significant: when the coefficients from the party ID

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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.

Therefore, 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 tremendously 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 to busy to support the campaign effort than voters who did view the campaign Web site. Or perhaps these voters simply did not have Internet and could not access the same tools that online supporters had for engaging with the campaign effort which could help to increase their level of support for Obama. Clearly many voters, however, are very responsive to online

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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 with Democrats coded as 0 and Republicans coded as 1 to analyze the effectiveness of visiting a campaign Web site with their preference for John McCain. A second interaction variable was created by multiplying together the second party ID variable with campaign Web site question variable in the same manner as the fifth model. 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 greatly solidify partisan support for candidates. It is very rare to see voters from one party switching sides, particularly over the quality of their candidate's Web site. 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.

CHAPTER 7: ADDITIONAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO OBAMA'S VICTORY

The goal of this project was not to provide a complete explanation of Obama's electoral victory but instead to show how a successful online campaign strategy can positively affect a campaign's efforts. While the success of Obama's online campaign certainly assisted him in his campaign efforts and gave him an advantage over McCain in this facet of campaign strategy, he also triumphed over McCain in several other crucial ways as well. The number and diversity of explanations for Obama's victory by journalists, pundits, bloggers, and scholars demonstrates how no single factor can determine an election. An election is instead the result of an aggregate of these factors coming together in some form to persuade voters to vote in higher numbers for one candidate over the other. Additionally, different factors can influence different voters so the explanatory power of a single factor appears limited at best.

In the 2008 Presidential election there were numerous factors that accounted for Obama's victory and McCain's defeat. Highlighting some of the most obvious and important reasons will help to situate the reader in the complexity of the election. While several factors combined can contribute to a candidate's success, gaining an advantage in any one of those factors can indeed help give a candidate an edge in a closely fought election. Furthermore, if one factor can also influence other factors it can multiply that effect.

In offering some alternative explanations for Obama's success we can see how other factors played a crucial way and understand how they interacted with Obama's online strategy to facilitate his victory. I will begin by offering a few reasons for Obama's

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victory that could be attributed to the factors most prevalent in forecasting models and will then argue for factors that could be attributed to campaign effects. The chapter will conclude by synthesizing a possible connection between some of these campaign effects and Obama's online Web 2.0 strategy.

7.1 Election Forecasting Model Explanation

The factors that are crucial for forecasting models are present and visible in a society months before an election and therefore proponents of these models assign very little importance to campaign effects. Political scientists must also assume for their models to be relevant that both candidates undertake an extensive campaign, however, so they do indirectly assign campaigns some importance. In the 2008 election there were several key variables which seemed to foreshadow Obama's victory according to Abramowitz's (2008) time-for-change model 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.

The second factor, Bush's unpopularity in the months (and even years) leading up to the 2008 election, provides more support for Abramowitz's model. In mid July 2008, he reports, Bush saw only a 31% approval rating vs. a 61% disapproval rating (Abramowitz, 2008: 695). 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?

Lastly, voters tend to shift their preferences over time, becoming dissatisfied with the incumbent party power and then shifting their allegiance to the other party. So if a Republican President is in office for two terms, then voters are more likely to prefer a Democratic candidate. Obama's message of change and hope resonated with millions of Americans who were deeply dissatisfied with the current administration. With all of these factors accounted for in Abramowitz's (2008: 695) model he predicted that Obama would win with 54.3% of the major-party vote vs. 45.7% for McCain, which, as mentioned in chapter 3, demonstrates the potential power of these factors in predicting and explaining election results. The role of the campaign effort throughout the many months of the campaign cannot be discounted though, and there were several events and strategies that many professionals and journalists argue could have swayed the results of the election.

7.2 Campaign Effects Explanation

There are two basic lines of reasoning involved in 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. In reality all of these factors in combination with voters ideological and party identifications help voters decide on whom they will vote for. 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 and voters who do

not affiliate themselves with any party and they are more susceptible to campaign persuasion.

The number of individual events that occurred during the course of the campaign that were covered by the press is almost innumerable and it seems that the press assigns a tremendous amount of importance to nearly each and every event. Regardless of this sort of coverage, 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 (James 2008). McCain sought a more moderate candidate for the position but he had to cater to the more conservative elements in his party to gain support and this second-guessing made him appear weak and more unpopular. Furthermore, there was significant and outspoken doubt among many in the media about Sarah Palin's lack of credentials and qualifications.

McCain's second major error, according to Patrick James (2008), occurred when McCain did not oppose the unpopular bailout bill in Congress. Both Bush and Obama were supporting the bill and James (2008) argues that if McCain had opposed it he would have differentiated himself from Obama and taken away some of his votes. In addition, many viewed McCain's decision to suspend his campaign and return to Washington to serve the people of the United States as a Senator as a huge political mistake. While McCain appealed to Obama to do the same, Obama declined and wound up looking superior. To compound this effect, Michael Palmer, McCain's 'eCampaign' chief, also believed that, at the end of the day, the media portrayed Obama more favorably than McCain (Newsmax.com, 2009).

While these events may have changed voters' minds, longer term trends that are visible throughout the campaign such as strategy or a candidate's personality will generally have a more sustained effect on influencing voters' preferences. In an analysis of campaign strategy Patrick James (2008) asserts on the one hand that Obama was "a very alive and adaptive thinker" never letting his campaign get involved in serious mistakes. He describes McCain on the other hand as having lousy political instincts. "He made choices," argues James (2008), "including floundering around with attack ads, trying to please the base. None of it worked." Obama was seen as the cool, calm and collected candidate who already exuded a Presidential aura. McCain seemed unsure and desperate at times and the press and voters were able to pick up on these differences between the two candidates.

Lastly, the Obama campaign was run in superb fashion, severely limiting mistakes, staying focused, and creating tremendous amounts of support through grassroots mobilization. In an intricate article for the Huffington Post, Zach Exley (2008) laid out the key elements for Obama's superior field campaign strategy. This strategy refers to his campaign's unprecedented reach and thoroughness to contact voters. Their field campaign had an uncanny ability to 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 to organize more supporters and spread the campaign message. These splinter cell volunteer groups then reported their progress back to the campaign headquarters and were then

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given advice and directions but, most importantly, they were also given considerable independence in their campaigning efforts.

The motto of Obama's field campaign was "Respect. Empower. Include." (Exley, 2008) Taking this motto to heart, Obama's field campaign empowered volunteers, gave them significant responsibilities, and turned them into effective organizers. Exley (2008) concludes his article by explaining 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. For anyone who knows how many times this has failed to happen, this is practically an apocryphal event.

The success of this organization was made evident throughout the campaign by the tremendous amounts of money raised over the course of the campaign (the campaign raised nearly $600 million) and was made particularly evident by Obama's substantial victory on Election Day, November 4th, 2008.

While there are many reasons for the success of the Obama campaign, it appears overall that his campaign more expertly run on many different levels, starting from the top with the man 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 and these efforts not only succeeded in significantly increasing partisan support and support among all voters, but aided in other crucial aspects of campaign strategy as well. Obama's field campaign made substantial use of the Internet and Web 2.0 tools to both 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. One volunteer, Glenna Fisher, who

became an organizer in Middletown, Ohio explains to Zack Exley (2008) in his article that after filling out the online form on Obama's site listing the ways she wished to volunteer she was soon contacted by the field organizer assigned to her town to determine how she could best help the campaign. Once volunteers demonstrated interest on the Internet this sort of interaction was brought off-line to incorporate, mobilize, and include supporters in the campaign effort. By working in tandem with both successful online and offline strategies Obama's campaign managed to build a vast and end extensive network of volunteers and supporters that proved crucial in his eventual victory.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Main Findings

The amount of room given to campaign effects and campaign strategy with regard to technological innovation is much more influential than is currently espoused in the mainstream 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 showed 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 directly with campaign information to make them more knowledgeable and thus more likely to vote. An effective online strategy focusing on the use of Web 2.0 tools has the potential to substantially increase partisan support for a candidate by informing supporters of the campaign message and engaging them to contribute to the campaign effort by spreading that message to others across the Internet and into the real world.

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 was so successful at pursuing this strategy partly because of Obama's personality, the large amount of staff and resources available to his campaign, the incorporation of Internet industry professionals into the campaign effort, and the opportunity to contract out Blue State Digital, one of the leading Market Research/New Media Hybrid companies, to work on the Web

strategy. 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 that enabled users to accomplish these offline activities. 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, among other things, the increasing power and influence of the Internet as a form of new media in political communications. The Internet is quickly overtaking the role of Television and Newspapers as an agenda-setter, particularly during campaigns, as candidates are bypassing traditional media outlets and sending their message directly to supporters. In addition, Obama's success will be studied and copied by candidates in upcoming elections and this will thus level the playing field for Democratic and Republican candidates. Campaigns in other countries besides the United States can also learn from Obama's success and adopt innovative online strategies

that can also help to promote 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 form of campaign communication in political elections.

8.2 Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Due to time and length constraints this project was unable to accomplish several things that would have helped to further substantiate its findings. Theories of campaign fundraising and campaign mobilization were only briefly touched upon in this analysis. A greater emphasis on fundraising can help to demonstrate how Obama's online effort helped him to raise so much more money than McCain and helped to strengthen his campaign. By elaborating on theories of mobilization, future researchers can help to 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 closer look at the interaction between Obama's field organizing efforts and his online strategy could also 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, akin to the research conducted by Johnston et al. (2004) on the 2000 Election, could help show more a more precise 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

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directly increases voter turnout, and if so, what effect this increased turnout has on election results.

This project focused primarily on Republican and Democratic voters and future studies could research the effect of online strategies for third party candidates and if this strategy can help increase their vote share. The role of undecided voters and independent voters was only briefly touched upon and future research could demonstrate the growing effect these voters have in determining election outcomes and campaign strategy and in what ways they are affected by online campaign efforts. Lastly, a greater synthesis should be created between election forecasting models and theories of campaign effects to provide greater understanding of election results now that the impact of campaigns and online strategies on election outcomes has been established in the literature.

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: VOTE MODELS AND SPSS RESULTS

Model 1: 3 control variables with internet user (iuser)

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	1482.917	4	.000
	Block	1482.917	4	.000
	Model	1482.917	4	.000

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	724.525(a)	.605	.808

a Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Classification Table(a)

			Predicted		
			Presidential Choice		Percentage Correct
	Observed		Republican Ticket	Democratic Ticket	Republican Ticket
Step 1	Presidential Choice	Republican Ticket	689	54	92.7
		Democratic Ticket	44	811	94.9
	Overall Percentage				93.9

a The cut value is .500

Model 2: 3 control variables with q421

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	1238.649	4	.000
	Block	1238.649	4	.000
	Model	1238.649	4	.000

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	532.543(a)	.620	.828

a Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Classification Table(a)

			Predicted		Percentage Correct
			Presidential Choice		
	Observed		Republican Ticket	Democratic Ticket	Republican Ticket
Step 1	Presidential Choice	Republican Ticket	579	36	94.1
		Democratic Ticket	34	630	94.9
	Overall Percentage				94.5

a The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	agedem	-.329	.135	5.913	1	.015	.720
	newparty	5.720	.252	514.366	1	.000	305.035
	Edu	.026	.089	.089	1	.766	1.027
	q421	.501	.263	3.643	1	.056	1.651
	Constant	-2.303	.578	15.881	1	.000	.100

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: agedem, newparty, Edu, q421.

Model 3: 3 control variables with q43e1

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	1235.777	4	.000
	Block	1235.777	4	.000
	Model	1235.777	4	.000

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	549.293(a)	.617	.823

a Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Classification Table(a)

			Predicted		
			Presidential Choice		Percentage Correct
			Republican Ticket	Democratic Ticket	Republican Ticket
	Observed				
Step 1	Presidential Choice	Republican Ticket	580	40	93.5
		Democratic Ticket	34	635	94.9
	Overall Percentage				94.3

a The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	agedem	-.300	.134	5.024	1	.025	.741
	newparty	5.623	.249	509.659	1	.000	276.660
	Edu	.064	.085	.568	1	.451	1.066
	q43e1	.797	.275	8.403	1	.004	2.218
	Constant	-2.621	.574	20.872	1	.000	.073

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: agedem, newparty, Edu, q43e1.

Model 4: 3 control variables with q441

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	1229.589	4	.000
	Block	1229.589	4	.000
	Model	1229.589	4	.000

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	557.090(a)	.614	.820

a Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Classification Table(a)

			Predicted		
			Presidential Choice		Percentage Correct
	Observed		Republican Ticket	Democratic Ticket	Republican Ticket
Step 1	Presidential Choice	Republican Ticket	582	40	93.6
		Democratic Ticket	34	634	94.9
	Overall Percentage				94.3

a The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	agedem	-.296	.150	3.872	1	.049	.744
	newparty	5.623	.246	523.097	1	.000	276.702
	Edu	.093	.085	1.214	1	.271	1.098
	q441	.307	.312	.964	1	.326	1.359
	Constant	-2.636	.639	17.036	1	.000	.072

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: agedem, newparty, Edu, q441.

Model 5: Interaction between Party ID (newparty) and Candidate Web site (q43e1)

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	1256.049	5	.000
	Block	1256.049	5	.000
	Model	1256.049	5	.000

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	529.021(a)	.623	.831

a Estimation terminated at iteration number 8 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Classification Table(a)

			Predicted		Percentage Correct
			Presidential Choice		
	Observed		Republican Ticket	Democratic Ticket	Republican Ticket
Step 1	Presidential Choice	Republican Ticket	580	40	93.5
		Democratic Ticket	34	635	94.9
	Overall Percentage				94.3

a The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	newparty	5.079	.261	379.291	1	.000	160.648
	q43e1	-.387	.466	.691	1	.406	.679
	PartyWeb site	3.559	1.117	10.156	1	.001	35.145
	agedem	-.319	.135	5.593	1	.018	.727
	edu	.047	.085	.312	1	.577	1.048
	Constant	-2.166	.578	14.044	1	.000	.115

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: newparty, q43e1, PartyWeb site, agedem, edu.

Exp (newparty) = 160.648
Exp (newparty + PartyWeb site) = 5642.034

Model 6: Interaction between Party ID (Rep) and Candidate Web site (q43e1)

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	1256.049	5	.000
	Block	1256.049	5	.000
	Model	1256.049	5	.000

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	529.021(a)	.623	.831

a Estimation terminated at iteration number 8 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Classification Table(a)

			Predicted		
			Presidential Choice		Percentage Correct
	Observed		Republican Ticket	Democratic Ticket	Republican Ticket
Step 1	Presidential Choice	Republican Ticket	580	40	93.5
		Democratic Ticket	34	635	94.9
	Overall Percentage				94.3

a The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	agedem	-.319	.135	5.593	1	.018	.727
	edu	.047	.085	.312	1	.577	1.048
	q43e1	3.173	1.017	9.723	1	.002	23.870
	Rep	-5.079	.261	379.291	1	.000	.006
	RepWeb	-3.559	1.117	10.156	1	.001	.028
	Constant	2.913	.583	24.966	1	.000	18.417

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: agedem, edu, q43e1, Rep, RepWeb.

Exp (Rep +RepWeb) = 0.000177
1/0.0001777 = 5,649.7
Rep (for McCain) -> 1/.006 =166.7

APPENDIX C: SCREENSHOTS OF CAMPAIGN WEB SITES

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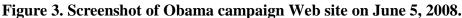

http://www.bivingsreport.com/2007/campaign-design-review-mccain-for-president/
accessed May 25, 2009.

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

http://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.

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

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