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Cyber-Politics: How New Media has Revolutionized Electoral Politics in the United States

Abstract

This paper addresses the impact new media tools have on different segments of the electoral process in the United States. Specifically, it looks at the impact new media has by providing information, influencing the news cycle and setting agendas, shaping public opinion, providing more fundraising opportunities, increasing political participation and youth voter turnout, and changing election results. This paper does so by drawing on systematic studies, data from the Pew Research Center, and case studies, specifically that of the 2008 Presidential Election. This analysis is unique in that it uses very current information, focusing on the 2008 election, as this was the first election in which new media was fully integrated into campaign strategies. It is also unique in that it analyzes several types of new media including social networks, blogging, campaign websites, and Internet fundraising. These findings suggest that new media does influence and shape the course of the electoral process in the United States through the six aspects of the electoral process presented in this paper.

I. Introduction

The impact of new media once again rose to the spotlight in 2011 when it helped fuel the Egyptian Revolution. New media served as a forum in which Egyptians were able to tweet, blog, and Facebook their way to a political revolution while grabbing the attention of the rest of the world. In a time of political unrest, Egyptians were able to turn to this online forum in order to plan protests and communicate with others around the world. In Egypt as well as in America, new media has been a platform for self-expression, civic engagement, political participation, and citizen journalism. It has revolutionized democracy and the electoral process around the world by increasing political awareness and amplifying the right to free speech. It has been a source of information, which has led to a more participatory culture by making the political process more democratic and less elitist.

Political campaigns have always seized upon new modes of communication to reach voters. This was especially the case in the 2008 presidential election with the candidates embracing Internet technologies to market their campaigns. Many have drawn parallels between President Barack Obama's innovative use of the Internet in 2008 and President John F. Kennedy's pioneering use of the television in the 1960 presidential race. However, today's new media is arguably very different from those of earlier periods because of the scope and speed with which communicated. Using this new media for political purposes is a tool to reach voters, especially the youth who are not typically turning out to vote. However, as new media specialist, Jessica Vitak states, "little is known about the impact that sites such as Facebook have on the political behavior of young people."¹ In fact, little is known about the impact this new media has on the political behavior of voters in general. Many pundits and politicians have suggested that social media will play a major role in all future campaigns. This paper will explore the impact of new media on the electoral process in the United States.

¹ Jessica Vitak and others, "Poking People to Participate: Facebook and Political Participation in the 2008 Election," *Conference Papers – International Communication Association* (2009), Communication and Mass Media Complete.

This paper is unique in that it addresses several types of new media and it has very recent information, focusing on the latest 2008 presidential election. New media team member for the Obama Campaign, Rahaf Harfoush, identifies what he sees as the impact new media has on campaigns. He states, “Through the internet and other digital technologies a group of young people changed just about everything: how money is raised, how people campaign, how organizers organize, and how the electorate comes to understand the issues, make choices, and become engaged in political action.”² It is difficult to pinpoint the specific effects of new media, but I will attempt to do so. This paper focuses on evidence which suggests that new media sources such as blogs, social media, and internet fundraising do exert some effects on campaigns in terms of providing information, impacting the news cycle and focuses of campaigns, shaping public opinion of candidates, increasing fundraising opportunities, and boosting political participation and youth voter turnout. While this new media can significantly influence local elections, congressional elections, and presidential primaries and caucuses, it is not as influential with regard to national presidential election outcomes.

There are a number of ways one could examine the impact new media sources have on different aspects of the electoral process. In this paper, I consider six aspects in particular. This paper will first define what is new media and will identify how it has been used in past elections. It will also give an overview of the available literature. This paper will then turn to impact and will address impact in six sections. First, I will address the impact new media has on the electoral process by way of providing information. Secondly, I look at the impact new media has on the success of campaigns by influencing the news cycle and focuses of campaigns, as well as the impact it has in increasing fundraising opportunities. I also address the ways new media shapes the public’s opinion of candidates, as well as the impact new media has on increasing political participation and youth voter turnout. Finally, I will analyze the impact new media has on election results. To do so, I draw upon all major existent studies, using over 38 studies along with 45 other sources.

II. What is “New Media”?

Due to its ease of access, interactive quality, large number of users, and speed, new media has the potential to be used as a political tool and therefore impact the electoral process in the United States. “New Media” for the purpose of this paper is defined as Internet technologies such as campaign websites, blogging, Internet fundraising tools, and social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. A social network is a set of people, organizations, or other social entities connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships. When a computer network connects people, it is a social network. Online social networking allows users to contribute and control content as well as to initiate contact with other users.³ In general, young adults dominate social media usage. Online advertising through social networks and other new media channels is appealing to political campaigns because it is low-cost and targeted to their candidate. Additionally, it is a tool campaigns can use to reach these young voters.

The most prevalent social networking site is Facebook and there are a number of ways in which it can and has been used for political ends. Founded in 2004, Facebook is a social utility that connects people with others and allows them to post photos, videos, and links. Its

² Rahaf Harfoush, *Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand* (Berkeley: New Riders, 2009), VIII.

³ Christine B. Williams and Girish J. Gulati, “Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections,” *American Political Science Association* (2007): 3-4.

membership encompasses more than 500 million active users and more than 18 million young people between the ages of 18 and 29.⁴ Additionally, Facebook has facilitated political mobilization by including a link to Rock the Vote, which provides voter registration and other election information targeted at the youth.⁵ In 2006, Facebook sponsored an “Election Pulse” project, which allows politicians to have their own political groups. Since then, there has been an explosion in the number of politically oriented user-generated groups. In 2008, Facebook gave political candidates pages instead of profiles, which enabled them to post various kinds of campaign material. They also released their U.S. Politics Application, which lets users join debate groups, receive up-to-the minute political news, and track election results.⁶ The Obama campaign recognized the importance of Facebook to their campaign strategy and hired Chris Hughes, a cofounder of Facebook, who helped to develop Obama’s own social networking site – mybarackobama.com. As Political Scientists Julia Woolley and Anthony Limperos remark, “Even though there has been little empirical work published thus far that assesses if this widespread use of Facebook was effective, anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that using Facebook is beneficial in the campaign process.”⁷ In other words, campaigning on Facebook can add to or give a boost to one’s electoral success.

Another new media source that has often been used for political purposes is a blog. A blog is a type of website that is usually maintained by an individual who uses this outlet to publish editorials, commentary, or descriptions of events. They also are interactive in that they allow visitors to leave comments on the postings and often the author of the blog will respond. In recent years, blogging has been used for political purposes, broken news stories, and shaped the news cycle. They can enter new issues into discussion and amplify news stories. Specifically, political blogs have helped to shape the media agenda and have therefore affected political campaigns. The rise of political sites such as blogs with their ‘supersonic speed’ has tested many traditional news outlets, “which must grapple with whether to pursue this kind of micro-scoops and quick-hit articles that political sites specialize in, or ignore this and risk losing readers.”⁸ As the national editor for *The Washington Post*, Kevin Merida states, “The world wants information quickly and instantly. In our business, you have to shift to accommodate that. And if readers don’t get what they want where they’re looking, they’ll go someplace else and look.”⁹ The political blog has the ability to impact the news cycle by publicizing a story that may then get picked up by the mainstream media. As Professor Richard Davis points out, “the blog’s attention to the issue offers some form of legitimacy for the press that might move the story beyond the blogosphere and out into the mainstream media and the public sphere.”¹⁰

⁴ Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/>.

⁵ Christine B Williams and Girish J. Gulati, “Closing the Gap, Raising the Bar: Candidate Web Site Communication in the 2006 Campaigns for Congress,” *Social Science Computer Review* 25 (2007): 461.

⁶ Facebook.

⁷ Julia Woolley and Anthony Limperos, “The 2008 Presidential Election, 2.0: A Content Analysis of User-Generated Political Facebook Groups,” *Mass Communication and Society* 11 (2010): 635.

⁸ Jeremy Peters, “Political Blogs Are Ready to Flood Campaign Trail.” *New York Times*, January 29, 2011.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Richard Davis, *Typing Politics: The Role of Blogs in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009): 17.

Another social network site that has been used as a tool for political campaigns is YouTube. Founded in 2005, YouTube now attracts over 190 million visitors a month.¹¹ It is a leader in online video and also in the sharing of original videos worldwide via the Web. It has played major roles in political elections by serving as a platform for political videos. Political Scientist Vassia Gueorguieva identifies how it can impact the election cycle, “YouTube impacts several critical areas in the planning and execution of election campaigns: access to voters, advertising, fund-raising, and budget. The ability of campaigns to access voters through YouTube is potentially unlimited.”¹² As editor Ryan Lizza states, “In statements to the press, the company has been quick to take credit for radically altering the political ecosystem by opening up elections, allowing lesser known candidates to have a platform.”¹³

Twitter is a free website that also has been used for political and electoral purposes. It blends social networking with the ability to post short messages – also known as micro-blogs or ‘tweets.’ It debuted in August 2006 and began to be used by political leaders and members of Congress in April 2007. Twitter reaches over 27 million people in the United States per month. It has served as a popular platform for users to ‘follow’ political candidates and read their tweets. ‘Followers’ are people who chose to be connected to others and can then see their profile and read all of their updates. All this new media has an instantaneous quality that transmits news and publicizes events constantly. Reporter Kali Schmitz remarks, “whenever someone ‘likes’ a candidate on Facebook, follows him or her on Twitter or signs up for an e-mail newsletter, that gives a campaign more opportunities to turn a voter into a donor or volunteer, local campaign staffers say. It also makes it easier for supporters to voice their support of a candidate with friends.”¹⁴ In this way, online political participation through this new media can translate to offline political participation.

III. History and Comparisons of New Media Usage in Campaigns

This section points to contemporary examples that indicate the possibility of new media’s impact on electoral politics, rather than the potential to be used. It also examines discrepancies in the new media usage of President Obama and his main rivals in the 2008 election, Secretary Hillary Clinton and Senator John McCain, in order to hypothesize about the kind of impact this discrepancy may have had. With each passing election cycle since 1994, the proportion of political candidates using online media as an integral part of their campaign strategy has steadily increased. The first political campaign to utilize the Internet was in 1996, but its use was extremely limited. The first significant use of websites occurred during the 2000 presidential campaign with both the Bush and Gore campaigns having sophisticated websites. All of the major social network sites allow their members to form “groups” centered on almost any topic or theme. By 2004, several thousand groups had been organized along a political theme.¹⁵ By 2008,

¹¹ Williams and Gulati, “Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections,” 3-4.

¹² Vassia Gueorguieva, “Voters, MySpace, and YouTube : The Impact of Alternative Communication Channels on the 2006 Election Cycle and Beyond,” *Social Science Computer Review* 25, no. 288 (2007): 237.

¹³ Ryan Lizza, “The YouTube Election,” *The New York Times*, August 20, 2006.

¹⁴ Kali Schmitz, “Popularity of Social Media Adds ‘New Layer’ to Political Campaigns,” *Fairfax Times*, September 21, 2010.

¹⁵ Williams and Gulati, “Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections,” 5.

new media features were much more developed and widely used than in previous elections, “The online political experience was qualitatively different this year than it was in 2000, 2004, or even 2006, as many social media features that were in their infancy during the previous presidential race had become commonplace by 2008.”¹⁶ Professor Emily Metzgar points out that the failure to integrate new media into a campaign strategy can hurt a campaign. She remarks, “Social media can function as a highly relevant and cost-effective campaign tool when properly employed. And conversely, failure to exploit those resources can have serious, negative consequences.”¹⁷ For example, the candidate may lose opportunities to mobilize certain voters, spread his or her message, or raise money.

The 2004 presidential election saw the first significant employment of the Internet as a campaign tool and illustrated evidence of the possibilities of new media. As Professor Timothy Pollard, James Chesebro, and David Studinski state, “The 2004 presidential campaign clearly demonstrated the potential power of the Internet in influencing campaign processes, if not election outcomes.”¹⁸ Specifically, Howard Dean’s 2004 campaign was a pioneer campaign in the way it used the Internet to raise money and rally supporters. Many authors, including Stephen Frantzich, find that the main advantage of the Internet is for fundraising. The Internet takes fundraising to a new level, allows for more efficiency, and for immediate results.¹⁹ Additionally, the Internet is extremely cost effective with direct mail fundraising costing forty cents for every dollar raised and Internet appeals costing less than a penny for every dollar a campaign receives in contributions.²⁰ However, Dean failed to use it as a way to win elections, “Howard Dean’s failed run for the Democratic nomination was the first instance of a fringe candidate using the Internet to rise to the top tier of competition, but Dean’s campaign ultimately failed for traditional reasons; he used the internet to make money, but not to address questions of electability and extremism.”²¹ His use of the Internet later served as an example and a foundation for the Obama campaign’s Internet presence.

The 2006 midterm elections expanded upon the Internet use in the 2004 election and was the first election in the age of easily accessible Internet video. In this election, 85% of Senate candidates maintained a web site and 79% of House candidates had an online presence, which was up from 55% in 2000, 61% in 2002, and 74% in 2004.²² Additionally, 20% of the general public reported going directly to a candidate’s website to learn about the campaign.²³ As part of a 2006 election feature, Facebook created pages for all U.S. congressional and gubernatorial candidates. Facebook displayed the number of supporters for each candidate and calculated the percentage of “votes” that the candidate had in their race. Overall, 1.5 million Facebook members were connected either to a candidate or to an issue group. Hillary Clinton had the most

¹⁶ Pew Research Center, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008,” April 2009, 20.

¹⁷ Emily Metzgar and Albert Maruggi, “Social Media and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election,” *Journal of New Communications Research* IV, no. 1 (2009): 151.

¹⁸ Timothy D. Pollard, James W. Chesebro, and David P. Studinski, “The Role of the Internet in Presidential Campaigns,” *Communication Studies* 60, no. 5 (2009): 578.

¹⁹ Frantzich, “E-Politics and the 2008 Presidential Campaign: Has the Internet ‘Arrived’?,” 137.

²⁰ Dick Simpson, “Campaigns and Democracy – Into a New Era,” in *Campaigns on the Cutting Edge*, ed. Richard J. Semiatin (Washington, D.C: CQ, 2008): 197.

²¹ Laurence Strait, “The Effect of Political Efficacy on Web 2.0 Usage: The 2008 Primaries,” *Annual Meeting of the NCA 94th Annual Convention* (2008): 5.

²² Williams and Gulati, “Closing the Gap, Raising the Bar: Candidate Web Site Communication in the 2006 Campaigns for Congress,” 447.

²³ *Ibid.*, 443.

support, with 12,038 Facebook users having registered themselves as her supporters.²⁴ In this election, Internet usage in political campaigns started to become a mainstream campaign tool.

The usage of new media tools in political campaigns was solidified as an integral part of campaign strategy during the 2008 presidential primaries and general elections thus demonstrating the possibility that it was influencing the electoral process. As Woolley remarks, “social media stormed onto the scene as a viable political communication tool in almost viral fashion during the 2008 presidential election. Although there were many different social media venues for individuals to express their political beliefs and garner support for their candidate of choice, political Facebook groups emerged as an influential forum for political expression.”²⁵ New media also revolutionized the way money is raised, allowing easier access to a wider spread of small money donors, “technology has created more direct communication between constituents and their elected officials, allowed groups of small donors to compete with the influence of big money in Washington, and helped millions to get involved and make a difference in the most critical election in modern history.”²⁶ The use of Facebook during the 2008 presidential election demonstrated its ability as a tool for political communication. All of the frontrunners in the 2008 primary election had a personal Facebook page including Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Mike Huckabee. This platform was a tool they could use to build a fan base.

The Obama campaign was particularly successful in its usage of new media. It built upon the Dean campaign’s use of new media and further developed their tools. Journalist Kathy Jackson identifies how new media was developed by the Obama campaign:

The Obama campaign believed it could revitalize the Democratic Party or even democracy itself by building on the lessons learned in the 2004 presidential campaign, particularly Howard Dean’s groundbreaking fundraising techniques, and from MoveOn.org and MeetUcom, which used social networking sites to translate Internet friendships into real-life action. Despite these successful innovations, the potential of new media as a political tool remained largely untapped until Obama made it a central priority.²⁷

Obama’s social networking site, my Barack Obama, rebuilt and improved versions of tools created for the Dean Campaign such as allowing supporters to donate money, organize meetings, and distribute media. The Obama campaign’s use of both traditional and new media tools impacted the election cycle by building a strong fundraising machine, registering voters, and increasing the youth voting bloc. Journalist Jose Vargas writes in the *Washington Post*, “This year’s [2008] primary season, spanning six months, proved that online buzz and activity can translate to offline, on-the-ground results. Indeed, the Web has been crucial to how Obama raises money, communicates his message and, most important, recruits, energizes and turns out his

²⁴ Williams and Gulati, “Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections,” 2.

²⁵ Woolley and Limperos, “The 2008 Presidential Election, 2.0: A Content Analysis of User-Generated Political Facebook Groups,” 646.

²⁶ “People Powered Politics 2008: Post-Election Report,” *MoveOn.org*, February 1, 2011.

²⁷ Kathy Jackson, Harold Dorton, and Brett Heindl, “A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama’s Historic Victory of the US Presidency,” *Journal of American Culture* 33, no. 1(2010): 43.

supporters.”²⁸ Peter Daou, the Internet advisor for Clinton agrees with Vargas’ assessment, “Virtually every online venue that played a role in the ’08 race provided a platform for public dialogue. Blogs, boards, news sites, YouTube, Twitter, and social networks large and small were inundated with millions of individual comments, the aggregate effect of which was to determine how voters viewed the candidates and the race.”²⁹

Throughout the 2008 election, there was a wide discrepancy between how well the major candidates used new media. It is plausible to speculate this may have had an impact on the election results, with Obama taking a wide lead over Clinton and McCain on this platform. The Clinton campaign failed to clearly develop an online presence and did not even come close to matching Obama’s. Political Scientist David Talbot identifies the weakness in Clinton’s Web strategy, “While it’s hard to tease out how much Clinton’s loss was due to her Web strategy... it seems clear that her campaign deemphasized Web strategy early on. Even if you have all the smartest bottom-up, tech-savvy people working for you, if the candidate and the top of the campaign want to run a top-down campaign, there is nothing you can do. It will sit there and nothing will happen. That’s kind of what happened with the Clinton campaign.”³⁰ As of March 14th, 2008 Senator Obama had 350,522 MySpace friends compared with 189,737 for Senator Clinton while Senator McCain had 48,251. Obama also clearly out numbered Clinton in terms of Facebook friends and YouTube subscribers.³¹ This also may have had something to do with the demographic of their supporters with 74% of wired Obama supporters getting their political news and information online compared with 57% of online Clinton supporters.³²

There was a similar difference between Obama and McCain’s online presence. While both campaigns employed new media as a part of their campaign strategy, there is a consensus that the Obama campaign was much more effective in using new media than McCain, which the following numbers illustrate. McCain, ironically, was the big Internet story of 2000 when he quickly raised \$1 million online, but his social network site in 2008 was ineffectual and he lacked a cohesive social networking strategy.³³ However, there is not a big difference in how many of their supporters were active online as 68% of McCain supporters were online political users compared to 61% of Obama supporters. The divergence came from the fact that independent voters who go online were more likely to vote for the Obama/Biden ticket, while those who do not go online were relatively more likely to vote for the McCain/Palin ticket.³⁴ Throughout the election cycle, 30% of all Internet users visited the Obama/Biden campaign website (up from 18% who visited the Kerry/Edwards website in 2004) and 21% of Internet users visited the McCain/Palin site (compared with the 14% who visited the Bush/Cheney site in 2004).³⁵ By Election Day 2008, Obama had 844,927 MySpace friends compared to McCain’s 219,404 (just between November 3rd and November 5th, Obama gained over 10,000 new friends,

²⁸ Rashid K. Shabazz, “Obamania: Media Tactics Drawing Youth to the Voting Booth,” *Youth Media Reporter* 2, no. 5 (2008): 239.

²⁹ Metzgar and Maruggi, “Social Media and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election,” 142.

³⁰ David Talbot, “How Obama Really Did It: Social Technology Helped Bring Him to the Brink of the Presidency,” *Technology Review* 111, no. 5 (2008): 82.

³¹ Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski, “The Role of the Internet in Presidential Campaigns,” 583.

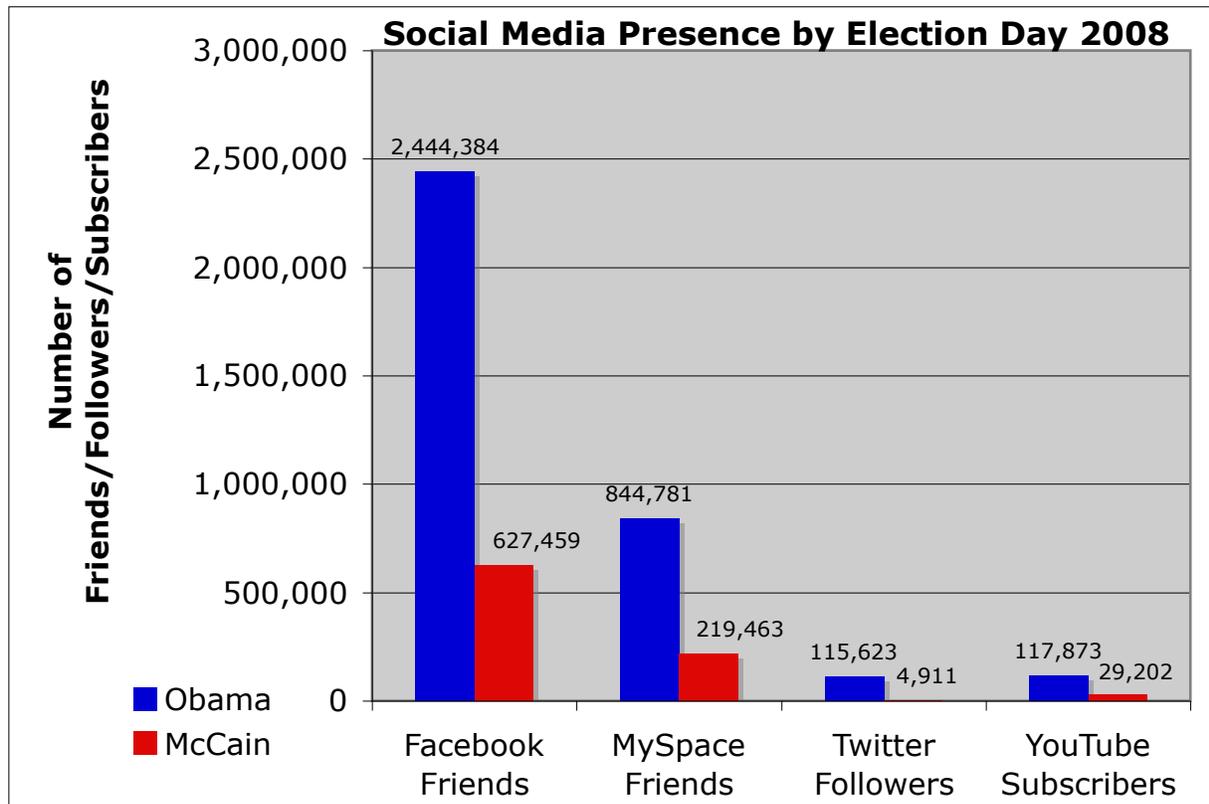
³² Pew Research Center, “The Internet and the 2008 Election,” June 2008, 51.

³³ Talbot, “How Obama Really Did It: Social Technology Helped Bring Him to the Brink of the Presidency,” 82.

³⁴ Pew Research Center, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008,” April 2009, 73-74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

while McCain only gained 964). On Twitter, Obama had 118,107 followers while McCain only had 4,942 followers in total.³⁶ On Facebook, over 2 million users signed on as Obama supporters while McCain had 600,000 Facebook supporters.³⁷ Obama had a similar lead in the blogosphere with 500 million blog posts mentioning Obama between the Conventions and Election Day whereas 150 million mentioned McCain.³⁸ Obama's online video presence also far exceeded that of McCain with metrics identifying a total of 104,456 videos pertaining to Obama and 64,092 related to McCain.³⁹ The following graph illustrates these discrepancies:



Source: Pete Quily, "Barack Obama vs. John McCain Social Media and Search Engine Scorecard," November 5, 2008

Woolley and Limperos assessed 1,000 Facebook group pages that focus on Obama and McCain to see how they were portrayed across this space. They found that group membership and activity levels were higher for Obama. Additionally, Obama was portrayed more positively across Facebook groups than John McCain.⁴⁰ They remark, "Overall, the most significant finding here is not just that Barack Obama seemed to have more positive support than John McCain within Facebook groups but that groups which featured McCain were overwhelming negative.

³⁶ Jackson, Dorton, and Heindl, "A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama's Historic Victory of the US Presidency," 44.

³⁷ Bianna Golodryga, "Facebook Changes Dynamics of Race," *ABC News*, November 3, 2008.

³⁸ Frederic Lardinois, "Obama's Social Media Advantage," *Read Write Web*, November 5, 2008.

³⁹ Diana Owen, "The Campaign and the Media," in *The American Elections of 2008*, ed. Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier and Steven E. Schier (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009): 23

⁴⁰ Woolley and Limperos, "The 2008 Presidential Election, 2.0: A Content Analysis of User-Generated Political Facebook Groups," 632.

Although this might not be surprising given the fact that younger demographics of people more heavily supported Obama, it leads to greater questions about the use of social media as a tool for promoting dialogue between people of different political allegiances.”⁴¹

As indicated by the above data, Obama clearly dominated social networking sites and had a greater online presence than either of his main two rivals. Additionally, he was portrayed more positively across this space. This social media dominance indicates that there may be a noticeable impact of his lead on the electoral process of 2008, which will be examined throughout the rest of this paper.

IV. Literature Review

The existent literature has found that new media sources such as blogs, social media, and internet fundraising affect the success of campaigns in terms of shaping public opinion of candidates, increasing youth voter turnout, impacting the news cycle and focuses of campaigns, and overall fundraising efforts. Existing studies show that while this new media may be able to impact local election results, it may not be able to change election results at a presidential level. However, much of the literature available is also outdated since online political activity is rapidly changing. Specifically, the majority of the literature does not take into account the 2008 election, in which new media was used more extensively than in any other election.

There are three schools of thought emerging from the literature regarding the role of the Internet in politics. These are the ‘optimism or mobilization theorists’, the ‘pessimism or reinforcement theorists’, and the ‘skepticism theorists’. Optimism or Mobilization Theorists as defined by Political Scientists Hun Park and James Perry (2009) are theorists who believe the role of the Internet is positive. They hold a “utopian view” that the Internet will get people more involved in public life, reduce the cost of information and communication, and increase voter turnout.⁴² Professor Stephen Frantzich (2009) identifies the two main schools of thought, one of these being the “mobilization theorists” who see the Internet as a democratizing tool that is expanding involvement and supporting more informed decision making.⁴³ Professors Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis (2003) also fall into this category. They believe with the advent of modern information technology including the Internet, monopolies are weakening. For example, with the rise of the television in the famous Kennedy-Nixon debate in 1960, there were only three channels of television available. However, today there are hundreds of mediums where people can get political news thus preventing a monopoly on political information.

The opposing school of thought is the pessimism or reinforcement theorists. As defined by Park and Perry (2009) the pessimism or reinforcement theorists are those who believe that the role of the Internet is negative in that the Internet reinforces the existing power relationships and patterns of political participation. It does this by providing more information and engagement for those already informed while not changing the involvement of those who are

⁴¹ Woolley and Limperos, “The 2008 Presidential Election, 2.0: A Content Analysis of User-Generated Political Facebook Groups,” 647.

⁴² Hun Myoung Park and James L. Perry, “Do Campaign Web Sites Really Matter in Electoral Civic Engagement? Empirical Evidence from the 2004 and 2006 Post-Election Internet Tracking Survey,” in *Politicking Online: The Transformation of Election Campaign Communications*, ed. Costas Panagopoulos (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2009): 103.

⁴³ Stephen E. Frantzich, “E-Politics and the 2008 Presidential Campaign: Has the Internet ‘Arrived’?,” in *Winning the Presidency 2008*, ed. William J. Crotty (Boulder: Paradigm, 2009): 136.

disenfranchised.⁴⁴ Professor Matthew Hindman (2009) falls into this category as his thesis is that Internet politics seem to nurture some democratic values at the expense of others, which leads to exclusion. He believes the Internet is not eliminating exclusivity in political life; instead, it is shifting the bar of exclusivity from the production to the filtering of political information.⁴⁵ As Frantzich states, “The potential to change the users’ minds by confronting them with powerful new information is highly unlikely. In political campaigns, the Internet is used more for reinforcement of existing predilections and commitments than for a source of comprehensive analysis.”⁴⁶

Finally, a third school of thought, skepticism is identified by Park and Perry. Skepticism is the belief that the role of the Internet is reflective and socially constructed. The Internet does not facilitate or destroy civic engagement but instead reflects ‘politics as usual’. The Internet may reduce costs of obtaining information, but this is not substantially related to voting and political engagement.⁴⁷ This paper mostly falls under the optimistic school of thought in arguing that the Internet expands political participation and increases political involvement by providing information. However, at times, I recognize the validity of the skepticism school of thought in recognizing the Internet’s limits.

Given that these three schools of thought disagree on the consequences of the Internet for public and political life, it is necessary to look directly at the ways new media can impact the election cycle. New media sources impact elections by changing the discussion, increasing fundraising efforts, and increasing political participation. These sources, which deal with a similar question, prove that it is possible to see the impact of new media in several ways. However, there are some gaps and limits in the literature, which this paper will address. For example as Park and Perry conclude:

Campaign Web sites cannot replace but instead supplement traditional electoral activities. Therefore, there may be limitations to the extent that use of campaign Web sites will influence electoral engagement, although information technology continues to progress over time. The limitations do not come from information technology itself but rather from the ways that people (both politicians and constituents) use information technology.⁴⁸

The results of this study proving that those active online are likely to be active off-line will be useful for my thesis, but it is limited in that it does not discuss how online politics affect the general population. For example, it does not address how much of the general population will take part in online political activities.

Additionally, these studies mostly focus on just one type of media. For example, Davis focuses on blogging and Williams and Gualti focus on Facebook. This paper offers a more comprehensive view by considering the impact several types of new media can have on several aspects of the election cycle. Throughout the paper, blogs, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook,

⁴⁴ Park and Perry, “Do Campaign Web Sites Really Matter in Electoral Civic Engagement? Empirical Evidence from the 2004 and 2006 Post-Election Internet Tracking Survey,” 103.

⁴⁵ Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009): 13.

⁴⁶ Frantzich, “E-Politics and the 2008 Presidential Campaign: Has the Internet ‘Arrived’?,” 139.

⁴⁷ Park and Perry, “Do Campaign Web Sites Really Matter in Electoral Civic Engagement? Empirical Evidence from the 2004 and 2006 Post-Election Internet Tracking Survey,” 104.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

campaign websites, and Internet fundraising will be addressed. Another critique is that there are limited date ranges in many of these studies and since Internet politics is developing rapidly it is very important to have current studies and updated information. For example, Bimber and Davis ask a similar question, “What is the influence of Internet-based campaigns waged by candidates on voters’ knowledge level, attitudes, and behavior (including voter turnout and vote choice)?”⁴⁹ However, their research is outdated as it is focused on the 2000 election. Many of these studies have limited date ranges including David Tewksbury’s study, which is also focused on the 2000 elections and is very early in the development of Internet politics. Since Internet politics has been developing rapidly in the past ten years, it is important to look at the most recent elections, which this paper will do. In the next sections, I will attempt to address some of the gaps in the literature by evaluating the impact these media sources have had on election outcomes, the news cycles, public opinion of candidates, political participation, information, and fundraising through the use of existing systematic studies and my own case studies of the 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 elections.

V. Methodology

To complete this analysis, the question of how to prove impact must be addressed. In this paper, impact will be viewed and measured in terms of how new media is influencing, changing, or boosting components of the electoral process. To answer this question, case studies, systematic analyses, and primary data will be employed.

Case studies and raw data from the 2004, 2006, and 2008 elections will be employed to look at how new media has influenced the news cycle, fundraising, political participation, and election results. The 2004 election is an important case study since it was the first election in which the Internet was integrated as a key component of campaign strategy. Another important case study is the 2006 election as it was the first election where almost every candidate integrated new media into their campaign strategy. Finally, the most important case study is the 2008 election. In this election, the Internet revolutionized the ways campaigns are run, how the general public participates, and how money is raised. These case studies present persuasive examples of how new media can make a difference. However, they are limited in that it is impossible to tell what would have been different without new media.

In order to demonstrate the impact of new media numerically, this paper will draw on primary data from the Pew Research Center and Gallup Polling. The Pew Research Center is a highly respected, non-partisan “fact tank” that provides information on the issues and attitudes shaping America and the world. The projects used in this paper are a combination of data collected from public-opinion surveys and reports. Pew data will be used throughout the paper to prove impact on information, the news cycle, public opinion, fundraising, political participation, and election results. Gallup Polling will also be used in the information section. Since 1958, the Gallup Organization has been highly respected in providing statistical research services. Gallup conducts public opinion polls around the world. Its polls are well known for being reliable and objective. While these two polling organizations are highly reliable, with polling there is always the danger of problems with sample size, selection biases, as well as timing – in this case, specifically if the poll was conducted before or after the elections.

Systematic analyses will also be used to help demonstrate impact in all six subsections of this paper. The methodologies of these studies vary with some using regression analysis and

⁴⁹ Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis, *Campaigning Online: The Internet in U.S. Elections* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003): 8.

others using correspondence such as in the usage of Radian 6, a social media tracking tool. Several studies use regression analysis, but the ones relied on most are the regressions used in analyzing the effects of Facebook on the election results of the 2006 and 2008 elections. It is possible that these regression analyses could be regressing the wrong factors, using the wrong data, or omitting certain key variables. Additionally, they could make a numerical error and it would be impossible to tell since their data sets are not provided.

These studies use a variety of data sources including LexisNexis, surveys, and voter turnout data. Many studies rely on surveys including those conducted online. With surveys there is a danger of selection biases, insufficient sample size, or tailored questions designed to illicit a certain response. Other studies use voter turnout data, mostly from the U.S. Census Bureau, which is the most accurate. However, voter turnout data may be different from official election results as some ballots are invalidated and absentee ballots may not be counted. Finally, some studies rely on exit polls, which have been shown to be sometimes inaccurate measures of election results. These studies could be improved, but they are the best we have. There are some issues in measuring specific aspects of fundraising, voter turnout, and election results, which will be addressed throughout those sections.

VI. Information

New media can be used to find information and serve as a forum for discussion. It is impacting the political process by providing political information and thus serving as a democratizing tool by helping the average voter make informed decisions. Without a sense of the issues, a person is less likely to vote, which is why this new information source is so important. New media is the fastest growing source of information about elections and candidates. The Internet now clearly exceeds radio and is on par with newspapers as a major source of campaign information and election news among the entire adult population, with 26% of adults getting most of their election news from the Internet.⁵⁰ TV remains a dominant source of political news with 77% of Americans turning to election related television programming for campaign information.⁵¹ Social networks, in particular, enable young voters, who might otherwise not tune into traditional news, to share information. Additionally, the Internet is constantly updating with new information. As Professors Christine Williams and Girish Gulati remark, “Since the first online campaigns, the most fully developed characteristics of candidates’ web sites has been the availability of campaign information. Its prevalence is explained by the fact that web sites represent a cost-effective means of communicating at any time of the day the most up-to-date information about candidates and their campaigns to the public and the media.”⁵² For example, in 2006, 98% of Senators’ websites had information about the candidates’ policy positions.⁵³

Systematic analyses show that people go online to get information about political campaigns. Professor Jeremy Mayer’s study of campaign press coverage online points out that the Internet provides limitless information and is also an interactive medium that requires user involvement.⁵⁴ This interactive quality may motivate users to get more invested in the political

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008,” 51.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Williams and Gulati, “Closing the Gap, Raising the Bar: Candidate Web Site Communication in the 2006 Campaigns for Congress,” 450.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jeremy Mayer, “Campaign Press Coverage – At the Speed of Light,” in *Campaigns on the Cutting Edge*, ed. Richard J. Semiatin (Washington, D.C: CQ, 2008), 149.

process. In fact, the amount of people looking online for political news over time is growing thus demonstrating the rising capability of the Internet as a source of political news. In Spring 2000, 17% of Americans went on the Internet for political news and election information, which was up from only 4% in 1996. This number grew to 30% in Spring 2004 and 40% in Spring 2008.⁵⁵ Professor David Tewksbury finds that the Internet provides the most content of any information source and helps people find the news that most interests them. Over a quarter of survey respondents said that a primary reason they go online for election news is because one does not get all the news and information from traditional news sources.⁵⁶ This study also demonstrates that the Internet audience is much more precise in their assessment of specific topics and subjects than offline audiences. They also can address more focused questions about political interests.⁵⁷ Laurence Strait studied information usage in the 2008 primaries by posting an online survey on Survey Monkey and posting links to it through different social media groups and political websites. He found that of those who used the Internet to follow the 2008 primary campaigns, the convenience of the Internet and the desire to access political information quickly at any time are highly correlated with a significance of over 70%.⁵⁸ These studies demonstrate that new media is becoming a major source of election information.

Whereas these studies show the importance of the Internet for political news, data on the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections showed that people are using the Internet to obtain campaign information and learn about the candidates and their positions. The 2004 election was the first election in which the Internet really became a prevalent source of campaign information. A Gallup poll conducted in January of 2004 found that 49% of Americans use the Internet at least occasionally to get political or candidate information and that an additional 28% do so frequently.⁵⁹ The Internet as an information source is particularly relevant for young voters. As Professors Michael Xenos and W. Lance Bennett state:

It is clear that as young people moved through the media environment of the campaigns on their way to the polls, many sought their information from websites produced by candidates, parties, and other political organizations. Indeed an estimated 28 per cent of 18 – 29-year-olds received *most* of their information about the campaigns via the Internet in 2004, making them the age group most reliant on new media for political information about the election.⁶⁰

In their research, they found only 8 sites providing information on political issues targeted to the youth in 2000. In 2005, this number was up to 23.⁶¹ Additionally, 31% of Internet users said they had gone online for information about the candidates' positions on certain issues, which was up from 10% in 2000. Finally, Professor Karen Mossberger found that in the 2004 election convenience was the most-cited reason for those who read news on the Internet with 48% using

⁵⁵ Frantzich, "E-Politics and the 2008 Presidential Campaign: Has the Internet 'Arrived'?", 145.

⁵⁶ David Tewksbury, "Exposure to the Newer Media in a Presidential Primary Campaign," *Political Communication* 23, no. 3 (2006): 317.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁵⁸ Strait, "The Effect of Political Efficacy on Web 2.0 Usage: The 2008 Primaries," 31.

⁵⁹ Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski, "The Role of the Internet in Presidential Campaigns," 579.

⁶⁰ Michael Xenos and W. Lance Bennett, "The Disconnection in Online Politics: the Youth Political Web Sphere and US Election Sites," *Information, Communication & Society* 10, no. 4 (2007): 444.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 451.

the Internet for the ease of getting political news. The second most cited reason was that the other forms of media are inadequate and do not provide enough information.⁶² The 2004 election suggested that the Internet was beginning to emerge as one of the most widely used sources of political information.

The 2008 Election illustrated that the Internet along with TV was a significant source of electoral information with a very large percentage of American voters using the Internet to find political information during this election cycle. A Time poll noted that among 18 to 29 year old registered voters, 44% say the Internet is their top news source about politics and current events.⁶³ In addition, 8% of Americans said they used social networking sites to learn about the campaigns during the 2008 cycle.⁶⁴ The Pew Research Center found that 74% of Internet users went online during the 2008 election to take part in, or get news and information about the 2008 campaign, "This represents 55% of the entire adult population and marks the first time... that more than half of the voting-age population used the internet to connect to the political process during an election cycle."⁶⁵ This number is up from 52% in 2004, 33% in 2000, and 22% in 1996.⁶⁶ In other words, this statistic makes it clear that the Internet is gaining a bigger role in this area. Among this group, 12% went online everyday for political news and 7% did so multiple times a day. The Internet is a key source of information and news about the campaign especially for young people, with 31% of ages 18 to 24 using the Web to find news about the Obama campaign and 20% doing so for the Clinton campaign.⁶⁷

The Pew Research Center conducted an in-depth analysis of who was going online for political information in the 2008 election and what they were doing while online. This study found that the Internet served as a forum for discussion, with 38% of Internet users communicating with others about politics on the Internet. They also found that the campaigns were embracing new media technologies with 59% of Internet users sharing or receiving campaign information using tools such as email, instant messaging, text messages, or twitter.⁶⁸ Additionally, 27% of those younger than 30 say they got information on the campaign or the candidates from specifically, social networking sites.⁶⁹ The Pew Research Center also found that voters were using the Internet to become more informed with 57% of online political users going online during the 2008 election season to get information about the candidates' positions on the issues or about their voting records, 69% of online political users going online for information about the race for President, and 52% of online social network users using these sites for political information or to take part in some aspect of the campaign.⁷⁰ Pew also looked into where online they were going to find this information, discovering that 64% got news or information about the

⁶² Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal, *Digital Citizenship: the Internet, Society, and Participation* (Cambridge: MIT, 2009), 76).

⁶³ Jingsi Wu, "Facebook Politics: An Exploratory Study of American Youth's Political Engagement During the 2008 Presidential Election," *Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association* (2009): 3.

⁶⁴ Christine B Williams and Girish J. Gulati, "Facebook Grows Up: An Empirical Assessment of Its Role in the 2008 Congressional Elections," *Midwest Political Science Association* (2009): 3.

⁶⁵ Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski, "The Role of the Internet in Presidential Campaigns," 579.

⁶⁶ Pew Research Center, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008," 5.

⁶⁷ Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski, "The Role of the Internet in Presidential Campaigns," 579.

⁶⁸ Pew Research Center, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008," 3.

⁶⁹ Wu, "Facebook Politics: An Exploratory Study of American Youth's Political Engagement During the 2008 Presidential Election," 5.

⁷⁰ Pew Research Center, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008," 43 and 71.

2008 election from network TV websites such as cnn.com, abcnews.com, or msnbcnews.com, 54% got news of information from portal news services like Google news or Yahoo news, and 26% visited blogs that cover news, politics, or the media.⁷¹

The evidence presented above makes a persuasive case that the Internet has played a big role in providing political or electoral information. This data makes it clear that the Internet is impacting electoral politics by becoming a major source of information and discussion. The number of people going online to get political information has increased as demonstrated by the 2004 and 2008 elections. This information can also impact the campaigns in terms of affecting the news cycle and agenda setting, which will be discussed in the following section.

VII. News Cycle & Agenda Setting

Due to its participatory quality, the average citizen has the ability to change the national news cycle with the click of a mouse or a post on a blog. New media sources, specifically YouTube and blogs, can impact the news cycle and set political agendas. Additionally, due to this omnipresent media, candidates are much more vulnerable and can be badly hurt if they misspeak. Due to the interactive quality of social networking, average citizens can control content and contribute to the political conversation. The resulting struggle for control over the message can often force campaigns to respond, which then impacts the news cycle. The Internet also accelerates the process through which the public receives information and debates political news.

This omnipresent media can help to make sure stories with real implications do not slip through the cracks. Citizens can use the Internet to find past speeches to fact check and then to alert others if they find a discrepancy. Due to this, candidates can no longer be ‘off the record.’ For example, the McCain campaign originally said that Governor Sarah Palin opposed the ‘bridge to nowhere’ in Alaska, “online there was an absolutely obsessive campaign to prove that wrong... and eventually the campaign stopped repeating it.”⁷²

Stephen E. Frantzich identifies the agenda setting capability of new media. He states, “New Internet technologies such as YouTube allow a person with limited skill and equipment to blast a message that has the potential to reinforce or hijack a campaign’s central themes.”⁷³ New media also makes it easier for campaigns to spread their own messages. As Andrew Rasiej, the founder of the Personal Democracy Forum states, “The campaign, consciously or unconsciously became much more of a media operation than simply a presidential campaign, because they recognized that by putting their message out onto these various platforms, their supporters would spread it for them.”⁷⁴ The agenda setting capability of new media was clearly demonstrated several times throughout the 2008 election cycle. For example, stories like Joe the Plumber, that Obama would talk to Iran without conditions, and that Obama was ‘palling around with terrorists’ rose quickly through social media outlets and “led to dramatically shortened news cycles, roller coaster reactions from voters and traditional media, and an acute awareness on the part of both campaigns that social media was ‘always on’.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid., 61-2.

⁷² Clair Cain Miller, “How Obama’s Campaign Changed Politics,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 2008.

⁷³ Frantzich, “E-Politics and the 2008 Presidential Campaign: Has the Internet ‘Arrived’?,” 56.

⁷⁴ Talbot, “How Obama Really Did It: Social Technology Helped Bring Him to the Brink of the Presidency,” 81.

⁷⁵ Metzgar and Maruggi, “Social Media and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election,” 152.

YouTube became a major tool in the 2008 election for political marketing with the capability of influencing the national news cycle. YouTube's increasing popularity has aided YouTube to be used as a political tool that can extend the news cycle. As Harfoush remarks, "YouTube also had a huge impact on the coverage of both campaigns by hosting news clips that might have normally disappeared after one news cycle. This worked both for and against the Obama and McCain teams, as controversy didn't just disappear after a few days."⁷⁶ It is clear that YouTube was being used as a political tool in the 2008 election as six of the seventeen major candidates announced their bids for president on YouTube and all contenders posted videos to YouTube.⁷⁷ The public responded to this with 60% of online political users going online to watch a video related to politics or the election, 50% watching "official" online videos from either a campaign or a news organization, and 43% watching unofficial political content.⁷⁸ Democratic and Republican debates were also held on CNN during the 2008 primary season where candidates answered questions delivered by citizen-contributed YouTube videos, "In an era of 8-second television news sound bites and journalistic filters, online videos offered candidates the opportunity to get their message out on their own terms."⁷⁹ Video is now ubiquitous at all campaign stops. As Senator McCain states, "I assume that there's a camera there at all times. You have to, and frankly it doesn't bother me."⁸⁰

Several videos either released by the candidates or by the average video user in 2008 went viral and changed the news cycle. For example, a music video set to an Obama speech – "Yes We Can," by the hip-hop artist Will.i.am – has been posted repeatedly on YouTube and has been viewed over 18 million times.⁸¹ As social media consultants Albert Maruggi and Emily Metzgar state, this is an extremely cost effective way of advertising, "that is the equivalent of many millions of dollars of broadcast air time and almost certainly influenced the election's outcome in same way."⁸² Journalist Tom Fiedler recognizes that these new media tools have not only been able to impact the news cycle, but they have also extended particular episodes in the news cycle. He remarks:

The Internet also opens new windows through which voters can view campaigns. Before YouTube, a candidate's gaffe—or more rarely, a brilliant speech like Obama's on race in America—would enjoy a brief, ephemeral life on television before the news would move on and the moment would pass into history. But with the creation of YouTube, such moments can be replayed countless times at a viewer's convenience... Such moments are then shared with others through Facebook or MySpace, creating ever widening ripples across the Web without

⁷⁶ Harfoush, *Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand*, 152.

⁷⁷ Owen, "The Campaign and the Media," 22

⁷⁸ Pew Research Center, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008," 30.

⁷⁹ Owen, "The Campaign and the Media," 22

⁸⁰ Joseph Graf, "New Media – The Cutting Edge of Campaign Communications," in *Campaigns on the Cutting Edge*, ed. Richard Semiatin (Washington, D.C.: CQ, 2008): 63.

⁸¹ Talbot, "How Obama Really Did It: Social Technology Helped Bring Him to the Brink of the Presidency," 80.

⁸² Metzgar and Maruggi, "Social Media and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election," 153.

passing through a gatekeeper's filter where they could be tested for truth or fairness.⁸³

YouTube gave more people the opportunity to watch Obama's speech on race with an overwhelming 6.7 million people or 85% of Americans watching it by Election Day 2008. It was watched 5.3 million times in one week, which outpaced viewership for all the cable channels combined for that week⁸⁴. Professor Jingsi Wu states, "It has been noted that young people are pursuing more original materials of election news, such as video or speech transcripts, rather than relying on second-hand analyses of the events. Obama's speech about race on CNN was viewed almost 3.4 million times on Youtube in the several days after it was delivered, and remained among the most shared links on Facebook."⁸⁵

Professor Diana Owen also recognizes the ways YouTube affects the political news cycle. She remarks, "the proliferation of online videos made headlines, driving millions of voters to view clever and controversial postings developed by individuals and organizations not affiliated with the presidential campaigns."⁸⁶ For example, the 'Obama girl' video titled '*I Got a Crush... On Obama*' was watched 11.6 million times and sparked numerous spin offs.⁸⁷ Youtube has also become a channel to attack candidates. One case of this happening was when political activist Robert Greenwald posted a series of videos that portray Senator McCain as contradicting himself in different settings. These videos have been viewed more than five million times.⁸⁸ Another example is a video that circulated from 1994 showing Mitt Romney taking a pro-choice position on abortion and asserting he was supportive of gay rights, which ultimately hurt his campaign.⁸⁹ Clearly, YouTube not only has the potential to be an agenda-setting tool, but it already has affected news cycles, as illustrated by these instances throughout the 2008 campaign.

Besides YouTube, there were several instances during the 2008 campaign where blogs served as an agenda-setting tool. It was a blogger for the *Washington Post* who reported that McCain was advertising his victory twelve hours before one of the presidential debates.⁹⁰ A further example of blogging affecting the national election news cycle was the story about Sarah Palin's pregnancy. A rumor emerged from Alaska-oriented discussion boards that Palin's daughter Bristol was actually the mother of Palin's 4-month old baby. The rumor quickly spread to the national political blogosphere and forced the McCain campaign to reveal that Bristol was currently pregnant.⁹¹ Another instance in the 2008 presidential campaign was when *The Huffington Post* criticized Senator Obama for a planned appearance with a minister perceived as hostile to gays. The Clinton campaign forwarded this blog post to journalists and it was then picked up by the national media.⁹² Finally, bloggers also impacted the news cycle during

⁸³ Tom Fiedler, "Bloggers Push Past the Old Media's Gatekeepers", *Nieman Reports* 52, no. 2 (2008): 141.

⁸⁴ Miller, "How Obama's Campaign Changed Politics."

⁸⁵ Wu, "Facebook Politics: An Exploratory Study of American Youth's Political Engagement During the 2008 Presidential Election," 6.

⁸⁶ Owen, "The Campaign and the Media," 22

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁸ Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski, "The Role of the Internet in Presidential Campaigns," 584.

⁸⁹ Davis, *Typing Politics: The Role of Blogs in American Politics*: 25.

⁹⁰ Marjorie Hershey, "The Media: Coloring the News," in *The Elections of 2008*, ed. Michael Nelson (Washington, D.C.: CQ, 2010): 139.

⁹¹ Metzgar and Maruggi, "Social Media and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election," 151 to 152.

⁹² *Ibid.*

'bittergate.' At a campaign event in San Francisco, Obama described Pennsylvania's small-town voters by stating, "So it's not surprising then that they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them."⁹³ Blogger Mayhall Flower then reported these remarks on her blog and this post "leapt from the Web and ignited a political firestorm that engulfed his campaign, labeled him an 'elitist,' and may have knocked the sheen of inevitability from his candidacy."⁹⁴ These instances prove that blogs were utilized as an agenda-setting tool during the 2008 election and had real results in how the campaigns were affected by the news cycle.

Political Scientist Matthew Hindman's study uses online data to prove the agenda setting capability of blogs and the links between blogs and traditional media sources. Hindman searched the Lexis-Nexis database to chart the media's interest in blogs. He found that in the 2004 election, there were 3,212 newspaper stories about blogs. This was a tremendous increase over the nine newspaper stories about blogs in the 2000 election and demonstrates the growing link between mainstream news and blogging.⁹⁵ Blogs allow issues and ideas to remain in the public's minds longer. As he concludes, "by the end of the 2004 election cycle, then, most public discussion took it for granted that blogs had become a crucial part of the political landscape. There was also much agreement on how blogs wielded political influence by setting the broader media agenda, and reaching an elite audience of opinion leaders and (especially) journalists."⁹⁶ Metzgar conducted a similar study, also in 2004, and found an agenda setting effect between blogs and broadcast news. A survey of journalists revealed that 51% of journalists reported using blogs regularly, 28% reported using blogs for daily reporting, 53% reported using blogs as a source of story ideas, 43% reported using blogs as fact-checking sources, and 33% reported using blogs to get information about developing scandals and breaking news.⁹⁷ These two studies demonstrate that there is a measurable connection between blogs and mainstream media, which enables blogs to play an agenda-setting role in electoral politics.

Several other studies demonstrate the agenda setting capability of new media in general. Metzgar's study uses Radian6, a social media-tracking tool, to track what stories originated in new media sources and were paid more attention to in social media during the 2008 election cycle. She tracked discussion for seven-day periods following each of the three presidential debates and the one vice-presidential debate by compiling a list of dominant themes and tracking them online through Radian 6 technology. Metzgar also finds that issues such as Iran, Joe the Plumber, Afghanistan, and Iraq were more heavily discussed in social media outlets than in traditional media.⁹⁸ She points out the unique quality of new media in that it enables the general public to contribute to political discourse. She states, "several now famous incidents illustrate what can happen when the people formerly known as the audience commit acts of journalism in the political realm."⁹⁹ These incidents include Dan Rather and the 60 minutes interview in 2004, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott's words in support of Senator Strom Thurmond in 2002, and Virginia Senator George Allen's racially tinged comments at a campaign rally in 2004.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹³ Fiedler, "Bloggers Push Past the Old Media's Gatekeepers," 38.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, 107.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 111.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 148.

⁹⁸ Metzgar and Maruggi, "Social Media and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election," 156.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 144.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

unique shared commonality of these instances is that coverage of these events originated with citizens, not journalists, who used new tools to raise awareness about these incidents. As Metzgar states, “each began online but led to serious, brick-and-mortar implications.” For example, Rather retired, Lott resigned following blog coverage on his words, and Allen failed to win re-election.¹⁰¹ This new media has led to the erosion of the gate-keeping authority since “people (have the) ability to shape the narrative... and knock [candidates] off their talking points.”¹⁰² Metzgar remarks, “as recent incidents highlighting Twitter’s role in breaking news scenarios have indicated, the connection between social media and traditional journalists is more than just hypothetical... The distinction between the two is fast disappearing, morphing into a single information ecosystem.”¹⁰³

These studies conclude that social media was not only useful for just distributing a campaign message, but also for offering a mechanism for ongoing political engagement. Additionally, on some of the biggest issues, traditional media and social media coverage merged and became uniform. Social media emerged as a viable environment for placing stories harmful to one’s opponent due to the lack of a formal gate keeping authority. Finally, Woolley recognizes the give and take relationship between old and new media in that one can play the agenda-setting role while the other carries it out or vice versa. She remarks, “Views expressed in political Facebook groups also may reflect similar topics and themes as those that have been perpetuated in other media venues, as a result of both first- and second-order agenda setting, priming, and framing. In this sense, the news agenda that has been shaped by old media outlets may be carried out by users in this new media context.”¹⁰⁴

The studies presented above demonstrate that new media has emerged as a force that can impact the news cycle and set agendas in a political context, as we ourselves saw throughout the 2008 election. Specifically, the studies presented here by Hindman and Metzgar are clear in their analysis of the agenda setting ability of new media. Additionally, it is evident that new media outlets such as YouTube and blogs can shape agendas as illustrated throughout the 2008 election. New media is more omnipresent than old media and is thus well equipped to serve as an agenda-setting tool.

VIII. Public Opinion

New media creates a sense of digital intimacy between the candidate and the voters and therefore, new media influences the public’s opinion of political candidates. It does this by helping to facilitate the candidate’s relationships with the public through online communication and direct dialogue such as texting or twitter. This in turn can frame the public persona of a candidate. New media can be used as an introductory tool for a political candidate and can help them establish name recognition and establish a more personal connection. It can then be used throughout the political process to communicate directly with voters. The Pew Research Center found evidence of this in the 2008 election with 28% of wired Americans saying that the Internet makes them feel more personally connected to the campaign and 22% saying they would not be as involved in the campaign if not for the internet.¹⁰⁵ They also found that one in ten text

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 145.

¹⁰² Metzgar and Maruggi, “Social Media and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election,” 156.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 148.

¹⁰⁴ Woolley and Limperos, “The 2008 Presidential Election, 2.0: A Content Analysis of User-Generated Political Facebook Groups,” 639.

¹⁰⁵ Pew Research Center, “The Internet and the 2008 Election,” 51.

messaging users got text messages directly from a candidate or political party this election cycle and 37% got email directly from a candidate or political party.¹⁰⁶ This kind of direct communication between politicians and voters helps to build public support and involvement in a campaign and demonstrates the potential new media has as a tool to build and shape public opinion.

Several studies find that it is easier for the public to get to know the candidates due to personalized online messaging like Twitter or YouTube. Professors David Lassen and Adam Brown found that Twitter enables the general public to be better connected to their political representative. This is particularly the case in an electoral scenario as Congressional members are more likely to rely on direct communication like Twitter with their constituents when their electoral position is the most unsure and they need to strengthen constituent ties.¹⁰⁷ As Lassen and Brown state, Twitter enables the public to take a stake in the performance of their political representatives. They remark:

The impression that one may use Twitter to frequently check in and check up on a member of Congress may increase constituent trust and support. Such changes may come as a result of the direct, at times personal nature of tweets, which may cause some to feel that members are being more honest and trustworthy... Individuals may feel that they have a larger and more direct ability to influence the decisions and behavior of their member of Congress when a relevant Twitter account is available.¹⁰⁸

Social networking personalizes the candidate and makes them more accessible for the general public. Williams and Gulati remark, "These sites go beyond simply communicating the campaign's theme and information on how to make participating easier. Active engagement by the candidate and a well maintained site can make the candidate more accessible and seem more authentic."¹⁰⁹ Representative Justin Amash used Facebook as a campaign tool in order to show the voters who he is and gain credibility among them. Amash states, "I wasn't considering a run for Congress or any other seat when I began posting my votes, but Facebook has turned into a fantastic campaigning tool. Above all, it has helped me to gain credibility with voters. When I say that I'm a principled, consistent conservative, people know that it's true. They can see it, and they can tell from our discussions that I'm actually reading the bills."¹¹⁰ The studies show that new media is a fantastic tool for political candidates to use to connect with the voters and build and shape the public's opinion.

New Media was used as a political tool during the 2008 campaigns to build a rapport with the public and increase awareness of the candidates. Yahoo even sponsored a conversation online with Clinton, Obama, and McCain where average citizens were able to engage directly with these three Senators and create an intimate dialogue. Email messages were also frequently sent

¹⁰⁶ Pew Research Center, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008," 26.

¹⁰⁷ David Lassen and Adam Brown, "Twitter: The Electoral Connection," *Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association* (Chicago, IL, April 2010): 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ Williams and Gulati, "Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections," 19.

¹¹⁰ Matt Silverman, "How Political Campaigns Are Using Social Media for Real Results," *Mashable* (June 2010).

from the candidates themselves to attempt to nurture relationships with their supporters. President Obama was so committed to new media as a political tool that he even announced his running mate by sending a text message to his supporters. As Harfoush states about the Obama campaign, “The team’s brilliant use of technology to build relationships, transmit information, and organize offline action has redefined modern politics. Beyond that, it has permanently changed the nature of our interactions with politicians...the campaign’s use of blogging, social networks, text messaging, email, and video heralds a new era of integrated digital communication that is simultaneously widespread and intimate.”¹¹¹ The Obama website had a digital ‘meet and greet’ that focused on putting a face to the campaign and introducing the senator to the public.

Jackson points out the capability of new media to establish intimacy with the voters, “Not only did these actions render traditional news media meaningless or irrelevant, they reaffirmed the personal connection between Obama and his supporters when a text message from Barack Obama appeared on their phones. This created a sense of ‘digital intimacy,’ the closeness one feels to another person by being near and therefore privy to his or her day-to-day activities and minutiae.”¹¹² Professor Leonard Steinhan agrees with Jackson, “As Obama’s election campaign drew to a close, his advisers realized that – win or lose – his supporters felt a greater sense of ownership over the political process than ever before: Obama was ‘their candidate,’ a sentiment that my.barack.obama.com shows clearly and strongly in both name and purpose. Similarly, those people who invested in Obama by posting on YouTube, Facebook, and MySpace, and or by receiving and forwarding text messages and Twitter tweets were deeply connected to their candidate.”¹¹³

President Obama created personal bonds with his supporters through new media, which McCain did not quite achieve. Steinhorn remarks:

Senator McCain dabbled in online and search engine advertising, but for the most part ran a traditional campaign that never kept pace because it was almost purely image based and not rooted in the social relationships so essential to building an emotional connection in this new media era. Thus his brand suffered when his advertising or decisions seemed to contradict his image, as when one of his ads made the false and seemingly outrageous accusation that Obama supported comprehensive sex education for kindergartners, a claim so far-fetched that it made voters question McCain’s honor and integrity, the qualities that were the bedrock of his appeal.¹¹⁴

In essence, McCain did not connect with voters through new media and therefore, was unable to build the same kind of bond or intimacy with the public as Obama did. Throughout the 2008 election, new media demonstrated its ability to be a political tool to raise public opinion and create a connection between the candidate and the public.

¹¹¹ Harfoush, *Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand*, XIII.

¹¹² Jackson, Dorton, and Heindl, “A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama’s Historic Victory of the US Presidency,” 44.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹⁴ Leonard Steinhorn, “The Selling of the President in a Converged Media Age,” in *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, ed. James Thurber and Candice Nelson (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2010): 150.

New media can help shape public opinion because the use of new media tools such as email, texting, and twitter have created a way for the political candidate to directly communicate with the voters and establish a digital intimacy with them as demonstrated by the Pew data. This was illustrated throughout the 2008 case study and specifically in the Obama campaign. While there are no studies that can quantify this, without this new media it would have been harder if not impossible for candidates to directly reach so many voters.

IX. Fundraising

With the Howard Dean campaign in 2004 and the Barack Obama campaign in 2008 bringing in over 40% of their funds online, the Internet has clearly established itself as a dominant source of fundraising. The 2004 and 2008 case studies show that new media serves as a tool for candidates to raise more money from an increased donor base. Additionally, reaching out to small donors is more easily accomplished over the Internet and enables them to contribute to the political process in this way.

The Pew Research Center found that in the 2006 election 6% of online political users donated money to a candidate or a campaign. However, this number increased in 2008 with one in ten online political users going online to contribute money to one or more candidates for office.¹¹⁵ These statistics illustrate the growing role of Internet fundraising in American politics. Gueorguieva looks specifically at the use of YouTube with regard to political fundraising. She finds that YouTube is an effective fundraising tool through her analysis of response patterns to more than 300 online advertising campaigns showing that video ads generate at least twice the response as standard image ads.¹¹⁶ Political Scientists Hun Park and James Perry find a similar relationship between websites and fundraising. They discover that campaign website users are 11.2% more likely to give money to a political candidate than nonusers.¹¹⁷ The findings of these studies are significant as they find that online advertising and campaigning are extremely effective and influential in attracting donors.

Online fundraising has several distinct advantages that enable political candidates to easily increase their overall fundraising efforts as observed in the 2004 and 2008 elections. Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski use examples from these elections to show that Internet fundraising is impacting elections in four ways. Firstly, websites provide the campaigns with immediate access to political donors. The Internet also provides a new, more populist venue that allows for a massive number of small donors to contribute smaller amounts over longer periods of time, especially when there is a need for such financial support. Thirdly, the website provides a ready venue for responding to a politician's emergency financial crisis. Finally, supporting a candidate financially through the candidate's website provides a rally point for both the candidate and for the supporters of the candidate.¹¹⁸ Political Scientist Michael Cornfield also recognizes three distinct advantages of online fundraising in that the cost of online solicitation decreases as the number of solicitations increases, online fund-raising allows for donor-

¹¹⁵ Pew Research Center, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008," 39.

¹¹⁶ Gueorguieva, "Voters, MySpace, and YouTube : The Impact of Alternative Communication Channels on the 2006 Election Cycle and Beyond," 240.

¹¹⁷ Park and Perry, "Do Campaign Web Sites Really Matter in Electoral Civic Engagement? Empirical Evidence from the 2004 and 2006 Post-Election Internet Tracking Survey," 114.

¹¹⁸ Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski, "The Role of the Internet in Presidential Campaigns," 582.

motivated transactions at anytime and from anywhere, and online fund-raising allows success to be converted quickly into money.¹¹⁹

It is difficult to tell how much money is raised exclusively through the Internet, but Professor Robert Boatright finds that most online donors are not veteran political activists. He finds that of these online donors in 2004, 44% had never worked for a campaign, attended a campaign event, or made a campaign donation before 2004.¹²⁰ Thus indicating that a good amount of the money raised through the Internet is in fact ‘new money.’ The Internet does yield a much greater return for the fundraising dollar and the yield is almost instantaneous. Specifically, Internet solicitations are essentially free and instant, while direct mail solicitations cost about forty cents for every dollar raised.¹²¹ Additionally, Boatright finds online donors are typically different from traditional donors demographically and ideologically.¹²² Boatright’s findings indicate that there may not be a large amount of overlap between traditional donors and donors through new media means.

The 2004 presidential election first suggested that online fundraising might impact electoral politics. The Howard Dean Campaign raised a whopping 40% online, which amounted to 27 million dollars, even raising \$4 million in one day.¹²³ They were able to do this by relying on a strategy of emphasizing repeated small online donations. Political Scientist Patrick Patullo recognizes that this is a particularly salient strategy that was then copied by other campaigns. Dean, “raised money online. *Lots* of money in \$80 - \$100 increments that were well below campaign finance regulations on re-soliciting donors. Other politicians took note.”¹²⁴ Dean raised 60% of his \$51 million in contributions of \$200 or less, much of it online. The 2004 McCain campaign also was successful in using the Internet to fundraise, raising \$2.7 million in three days.¹²⁵ This trend extended into the general election as both President Bush and Senator Kerry raised a large portion of their funds via the Internet and most small donors made their contributions online. During this election cycle, 74% of the campaign websites allowed supporters to donate money to the campaign with their credit card.¹²⁶

Professor Monica Postelnicu recognizes that this was the first election that showed how Internet fundraising can impact overall fundraising efforts. She states, “with more than \$100 million transferred from voters to both campaigns over the Internet, the 2004 presidential campaign was the first one that effectively encouraged voters to donate significant amounts of money online.”¹²⁷ This continued to be the case in the 2006 midterm elections. Williams and Gulati remark, “Television remained the medium of choice, but the Internet’s financial role

¹¹⁹ Michael Cornfield, *Politics Moves Online: Campaigning and the Internet* (New York: Century Foundation, 2004): 55.

¹²⁰ Robert G. Boatright, “Fundraising – Present and Future,” in *Campaigns on the Cutting Edge*, ed. Richard J. Semiatin (Washington, D.C.: CQ, 2008): 12.

¹²¹ Boatright, “Fundraising – Present and Future,” 10.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Frantzich, “E-Politics and the 2008 Presidential Campaign: Has the Internet ‘Arrived’?,” 144.

¹²⁴ Patrick Patullo, “Yes We Can: Political Campaigns Go Social,” *Digital Media Buzz* (2009).

¹²⁵ Frantzich, “E-Politics and the 2008 Presidential Campaign: Has the Internet ‘Arrived’?,” 141.

¹²⁶ Williams and Gulati, “Closing the Gap, Raising the Bar: Candidate Web Site Communication in the 2006 Campaigns for Congress,” 452.

¹²⁷ Monica Postelnicu, Justin D. Martin, Kristen D. Landerville, “The Role of Campaign Web Sites in Promoting Candidates and Attracting Campaign Resources,” in *The Internet Election: Perspectives on the Web in Campaign 2004*, eds. Andrew Paul Williams and John C. Tedesco (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006): 106.

continued to enlarge. Estimates put the total for online fund-raising at \$100 million and online campaign advertising at \$40 million.”¹²⁸ The 2004 and 2006 election cycles demonstrate the impact Internet fundraising can have on overall political fundraising efforts.

The 2008 campaign continued to demonstrate the impact of Internet fundraising in expanding donor bases and overall fundraising efforts. The Obama campaign was particularly successful in maximizing the possibilities of fundraising online, specifically in reaching a wider range of donors. As Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski point out, the 2008 election expanded on the use of Internet fundraising in the 2004 election, specifically in soliciting small donor contributions. They state, “The financial transformation has been at least 10 times, if not more, significant than what occurred in 2004. Likewise, the entire financial base of political support may ultimately shift from high-end to low-income donors.”¹²⁹ Garnering donations from many ordinary Americans was a focus of the Obama campaign. New Media Director Joe Respars of the Obama campaign reflects on this, “We’re committed to running a different kind of campaign – fueled by donations from ordinary Americans who want to take back ownership of the political process... So this week, we’re counting people, not dollars.”¹³⁰ The Obama campaign was very successful in doing so, raising money from 3 million online donors.¹³¹ In the first quarter of 2007, Obama raised \$25 million from 104,000 donors and more than half of that was online. In the second quarter of 2007, Obama raised \$10.3 million through Internet fundraising.¹³² This trend continued in February 2008 when the Obama campaign raised \$30.5 million in donations of \$200 or less and \$5 million of that came from repeat donors. In March, 60% of Obama’s contributions came in amounts of \$200 or less. In April, and again in June, 65% came from contributions of \$200 or less.¹³³

Obama’s social networking site, MyBO, as well as his main website were particularly useful tools for Internet Fundraising. The month before Super Tuesday, the freshman senator from Illinois had set a record in American politics by collecting \$55 million in donations in a single month.¹³⁴ By July 2008, the campaign had raised more than \$200 million from more than a million online donors and Obama had raised \$340 million from all sources by the end of June. Additionally, MyBO had logged more than a million user accounts and facilitated 75,000 local events.¹³⁵ On MyBO, visitors could use credit cards to make one-time donations or to sign up for recurring monthly contributions. MyBO also made giving money a social event by allowing supporters to set personal targets, run their own fundraising efforts, and watch personal fundraising thermometers rise. MyBO offered a variety of ways to participate in campaign fundraising efforts. They offered several gimmicks to generate individual donations of \$5, \$10,

¹²⁸ Williams and Gulati, “Closing the Gap, Raising the Bar: Candidate Web Site Communication in the 2006 Campaigns for Congress,” 443.

¹²⁹ Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski, “The Role of the Internet in Presidential Campaigns,” 584.

¹³⁰ Harfoush, *Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand*, 10.

¹³¹ Steinhorn, “The Selling of the President in a Converged Media Age,” 151.

¹³² Boatright, “Fundraising – Present and Future,” 17.

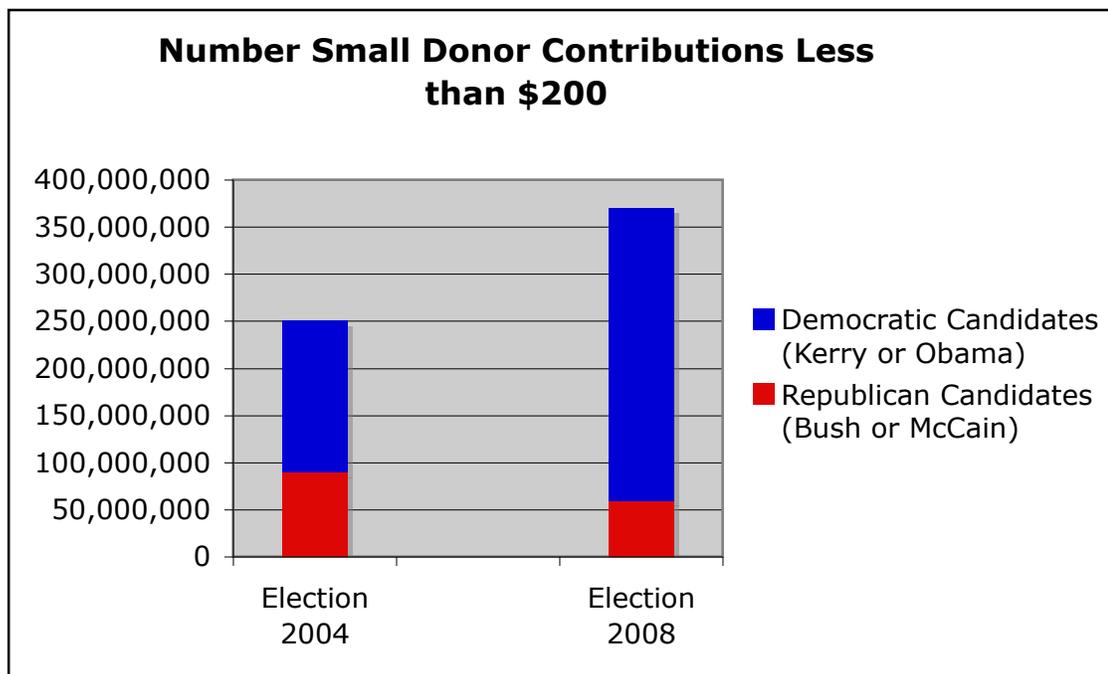
¹³³ Candice J. Nelson, “Strategies and Tactics of Fund-raising in 2008,” in *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, eds. James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2010): 96.

¹³⁴ Talbot, “How Obama Really Did It: Social Technology Helped Bring Him to the Brink of the Presidency,” 78.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

or \$30 to expand the pool of donors who could then be solicited for an additional contribution.¹³⁶ By October 2008, 70,000 people had established MyBO fund-raising pages, which produced \$30 million for the campaign.¹³⁷ Campaigns were also able to use mainstream social networks to fundraise during this election. For example, by using social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and MyYahoo, Steve Spinner, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, quickly raised \$250,000 for the Obama Campaign.¹³⁸

Online fundraising had a particularly big impact in increasing small donor contributions thus involving more people in the political process than in previous elections. The Campaign Finance Institute found that 49% of the Obama campaign receipts were from contributions of \$200 or less and estimated that 2.5 million undisclosed donors gave a cumulative average of about \$62 each.¹³⁹ One organization that was exceptionally successful in fundraising online was MoveOn.org. MoveOn pioneered online giving in 1999 and online small donor cultivation has been a key part of their strategy since then. They claim to have delivered over 88 million for Barack Obama in 2008 and also claim to have helped Democrats win at least six Senate seats with almost \$3,854,978 in small donor contributions.¹⁴⁰ The following graph from the Center for Responsive Politics demonstrates the great success Obama had raising from small donors as compared to other candidates for President. It also demonstrates the large impact new developments in online fundraising have had for political candidates:



Source: MoveOn.org, *People-Powered Politics 2008*, 3.

¹³⁶ Anthony Corrado, "Fund-raising Strategies in the 2008 Presidential Campaign," in *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, eds. James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2010): 115.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹³⁸ Nelson, "Strategies and Tactics of Fund-raising in 2008," 99.

¹³⁹ Nelson, "Strategies and Tactics of Fund-raising in 2008," 97.

¹⁴⁰ "People Powered Politics 2008: Post-Election Report," 3.

Obama's online fundraising success provided him with a number of strategic advantages. First, it allowed him to raise money efficiently and at a relatively low cost. Secondly, Obama's small donor contributors gave him a large pool of donors who he could draw upon to give repeated contributions. Thirdly, Obama's online fund-raising provided him with the capacity to outspend Clinton at crucial points during the nomination contest by having resources in every state.¹⁴¹

Through these online fundraising tactics, President Obama was able to outspend both the McCain and the Clinton campaigns. Obama raised \$750 million total and \$500 million online (or 67%), while McCain only raised \$360 million total and \$75 million online (or 21%). Additionally, 15% of online Obama voters contributed money online to a candidate while only 6% of online McCain voters did the same.¹⁴² Senator McCain never became an online phenomenon and instead relied on more traditional and more expensive direct mail fund-raising.¹⁴³ This was a similar story with the Clinton campaign as according to the Center for Responsive Politics 48% of Obama's funds came from donations of less than \$200, but only 33% of Clinton's did.¹⁴⁴ Like Obama, Clinton did raise substantial sums of money online, but she did not match Obama's success mostly because she focused on soliciting large contributions. By the end of 2007, only 14% of her total receipts came from small contributions as compared to 32% of Obama's. Her most successful fundraising came within a day of her victory in the Pennsylvania primary when 100,000 supporters gave a total of \$10 million. However, this was still not enough to match Obama's fundraising power.¹⁴⁵

The fundraising data from the 2004 and 2008 Presidential Elections demonstrate the impact new media is having on the electoral process and provide persuasive evidence that Internet fundraising is having an impact. Additionally, as indicated by Boatright's study, a significant amount of money raised through the Internet is 'new money.' Internet fundraising technologies are particularly effective in increasing small donations from a wider range of donors. This was illustrated throughout the Obama campaign. The Obama campaign's success in relying on the Internet as a fundraising tool proved the impact Internet fundraising technologies can have on overall fundraising efforts and therefore, the electoral process as a whole.

X. Political Participation/Youth Voter Turnout

While political participation has been in decline or on a flat trend for the past three decades, the Internet is capable of reversing those trends by increasing information, discussion, and communication. This section examines new media's impact on politics by increasing political participation, particularly among youth voters. Specifically, this new media is useful in reaching out to youth voters and encouraging them to vote. While some authors question if new media can alone improve voter turnout, it can certainly get young voters more involved in the political process by using youth friendly media outlets to reach out to them. Political participation encompasses many forms of activities including campaign donations, attempting to persuade others, voting, and taking part in activities related to politics.

¹⁴¹ Corrado, "Fund-raising Strategies in the 2008 Presidential Campaign," 117-8.

¹⁴² Pew Research Center, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008," 78.

¹⁴³ Corrado, "Fund-raising Strategies in the 2008 Presidential Campaign," 121.

¹⁴⁴ Talbot, "How Obama Really Did It: Social Technology Helped Bring Him to the Brink of the Presidency," 81.

¹⁴⁵ Corrado, "Fund-raising Strategies in the 2008 Presidential Campaign," 119.

The Internet has functioned as a tool designed to increase political participation in several ways. For example, MySpace has facilitated an online voter registration drive that produced a printout for potential voters to send to their state election officials. Other tools such as online volunteer sign-up forms, downloadable campaign materials, and tell-a-friend tools were found on most 2006 campaign websites. Campaign websites are also a tool for the candidates to increase political participation among their supporters. As Williams and Gulati state, “Another important function of web sites is to reinforce supporters’ commitment to the campaign by helping them to understand their stake in the campaign or at least feel that their involvement in the campaign matters.”¹⁴⁶ Social networks can also be used to recruit volunteers. For example, Peter Franchot, a candidate for Maryland state comptroller in 2006, recruited 80% of his campaign volunteers online through MySpace and Facebook.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, websites like MoveOn.org have been pioneers “in online-to-offline organizing – using email and the web to help folks make an impact in their neighborhoods.”¹⁴⁸ These sites enable people who share a political interest to find each other online and then meet up offline. In the six months leading up to the 2008 presidential election, 1,472 Meetup users utilized the site to organize offline gatherings and groups in support of McCain and 13,702 users did the same for Obama.¹⁴⁹

Julia K. Woolley and Anthony M. Limperos identify the possibility that new media is impacting voter turnout. She states, “Previous studies have demonstrated that one possible consequence of third-person perceptions of media coverage is increased voter turnout and political participation. Online political participation via Facebook groups may similarly result from users’ reactions to unfavorable mass media portrayals of their candidate of choice, or favorable portrayals of his or her opponent, and may similarly divide among part lines.”¹⁵⁰ Political Scientists Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis also studied this by collecting voter turnout data from online participants. They found that campaign site visitors are well above the national average in their tendency to vote. Of those who saw a campaign Web site, 91% reported that they were “very likely” to vote, which is very high as nationwide turnout is around 50%.¹⁵¹ Bimber and Davis explain this by considering the background of a typical website visitor. They remark, “The most plausible reason, of course, for high turnout comes from what we know about the Web audience’s background: They were more interested, knowledgeable, and committed to candidates than others even before they saw a campaign Web site. But it is also logically possible that they were more likely to vote *because* they saw a Web site, or at least that their already high likelihood of voting was increased even further by their experiences at a Web site.”¹⁵² Therefore, Bimber and Davis do believe that new media has had some sort of impact in increasing voter turnout rate.

¹⁴⁶ Williams and Gulati, “Closing the Gap, Raising the Bar: Candidate Web Site Communication in the 2006 Campaigns for Congress,” 452.

¹⁴⁷ Vitak and others, “Poking People to Participate: Facebook and Political Participation in the 2008 Election,” 16.

¹⁴⁸ “People Powered Politics 2008: Post-Election Report,” 4.

¹⁴⁹ Vitak and others, “Poking People to Participate: Facebook and Political Participation in the 2008 Election,” 11.

¹⁵⁰ Woolley and Limperos, “The 2008 Presidential Election, 2.0: A Content Analysis of User-Generated Political Facebook Groups,” 648.

¹⁵¹ Bimber and Davis, *Campaigning Online: The Internet in U.S. Elections*: 138.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal conducted a study that examines Pew survey data collected immediately after the 2000, 2002, and 2004 elections to measure political participation and the impact the Internet had on it. They found that the Internet opens new venues for mobilizing political participation, reduces the information costs of participation, increases the net benefits of participation, and promotes discussion. Additionally, they found a link between the Internet and voter turnout with the respondents who had access to the Internet and online political news being more likely to report voting in the 2000 presidential elections, even after controlling for other demographic and attitudinal variables.¹⁵³ They discovered that “All online activities are linked to increased voting, but during presidential election years only.”¹⁵⁴ Specifically, holding other factors constant, individuals who regularly read news, communicate through e-mail, or participate in chat rooms online are significantly more likely to vote than those who do not with an increase from 16% to 39%.¹⁵⁵ As Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal discover, new media can impact and increase political participation. They state, “The consequences for U.S. democracy are significant, particularly for the young, who are more likely to be online, but also less likely to engage in voting and other forms of political participation. Given the close presidential elections of 2000 and 2004, the findings are crucial, showing that politics online matters for politics off-line. The Internet can have a positive effect on political participation, most clearly in presidential elections.”¹⁵⁶ This study demonstrates that new media does have an impact by increasing political participation and voter turnout among those participating in online political activities.

However, some authors have found that new media technology does not influence voter turnout. Professor Richard Semiatin concludes that technology does not seem to boost turnout. He believes new media helps to expedite voter mobilization methods and political participation in general but not voter turnout, “the early results show that new approaches such as email contacts and robo calls have no detectable effects on voter turnout.”¹⁵⁷ Park and Perry finds similar results with their regression returning a negligible average effect of a 1.7% indication that the use of campaign Web site does not matter much in voting.¹⁵⁸ However, even if these two authors are right and new media does not increase voter turnout, this is only one part of the online political landscape and it is clear that new media is having an impact by increasing political participation overall.

New media had a clear impact by increasing political participation during the 2008 presidential election. During this election, 26% of all Internet users who voted in the 2008 election went online for help with the voting process. For example, they did so to find out where they go to vote or if they were registered to do so.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, 79.8% of those politically active on the Internet in the 2008 presidential primary elections used the Internet for help to decide whom to vote for.¹⁶⁰ There were many cases of Internet users using new media to get politically involved with 37% of online political users forwarding political commentary or

¹⁵³ Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal, *Digital Citizenship: the Internet, Society, and Participation*, 78.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁵⁶ Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal, *Digital Citizenship: the Internet, Society, and Participation*, 87.

¹⁵⁷ Richard J. Semiatin, *Campaigns on the Cutting Edge* (Washington, DC: CQ, 2008): 97.

¹⁵⁸ Park and Perry, “Do Campaign Web Sites Really Matter in Electoral Civic Engagement? Empirical Evidence from the 2004 and 2006 Post-Election Internet Tracking Survey,” 116.

¹⁵⁹ Pew Research Center, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008,” 85.

¹⁶⁰ Strait, “The Effect of Political Efficacy on Web 2.0 Usage: The 2008 Primaries,” 33.

writing to others, 25% forwarding political audio or video recordings to others, and 22% sharing photos, videos or audio files online related to the campaign or the elections.¹⁶¹ Much of these activities were conducted through social networking sites. Additionally, 8% of Americans went online to sign up for volunteer activities related to the campaigns such as helping to register voters or helping to get people to the polls.¹⁶²

The Obama campaign used new media tools to boost political participation. The campaign used my.barackobama.com as the primary means of linking the campaign to its grassroots supporters, “The new grassroots political activism of my.barackobama.com represents the most effective use to date of both new media networking and traditional political organizing.”¹⁶³ In addition, Obama’s supporters on Facebook are “motivated by the strong affective association to exchange information, opinions and mobilize actual action among their peers. These activities in a sense, are all meaningful forms of political engagement.”¹⁶⁴ Their Facebook posts were related to general political participation as 11.9% of posts cited media sources, 3.6% were posts related to mobilization, and 57.2% of the posts mentioned specific issues.¹⁶⁵ This online political participation paid off as, “one of the biggest changes in 2008 was an increase in voter registration, early voting, and attendance at Obama’s rallies. These were all a reflection of the extraordinary interest that was generated by Obama’s campaign.”¹⁶⁶ New media had a particular impact on the 2008 campaign by generating enthusiasm and adding to offline political activity.

New Media also has the ability to increase political participation among young voters who are not typically getting involved in politics or even voting. Youth voter turnout has declined steadily since 1972 and it has only been in the 2004 and 2008 presidential election that there has been a major surge in youth turnout. In fact, nearly 4.6 million more young people cast votes in 2004 compared to 2000, demonstrating an 11% increase.¹⁶⁷ This trend continued with 23 million people under 30 voting in the 2008 election, an increase of 3.4 million over 2004, making the 2008 election the highest youth voter turnout since 1971.¹⁶⁸ Many campaigns and organizations took advantage of new media sources to communicate with and inspire the youth to get involved. For example, “MoveOn’s groundbreaking ‘Make Sure All Your Friends Vote’ viral video tool uses social peer pressure to encourage friends to vote. A study of a controlled experiment, published in the February 2008 issue of the *American Political Science Review*, found social pressure to be the single most effective way of increasing voter turnout by mass communication.”¹⁶⁹

Karen Mossberger and Caroline J. Tolbert study youth voter turnout and the effect technology has on mobilizing the youth vote. They find that this media impacts the youth more

¹⁶¹ Pew Research Center, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008,” 34.

¹⁶² Ibid., 29.

¹⁶³ Jackson, Dorton, and Heindl, “A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama’s Historic Victory of the US Presidency,” 44.

¹⁶⁴ Wu, “Facebook Politics: An Exploratory Study of American Youth’s Political Engagement During the 2008 Presidential Election,” 19.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁶ Dewey M. Clayton, *The Presidential Campaign of Barack Obama: A Critical Analysis of a Racially Transcendent Strategy* (New York: Routledge, 2010): 138.

¹⁶⁷ Shabazz, “Obamania: Media Tactics Drawing Youth to the Voting Booth,” 238.

¹⁶⁸ Vitak and others, “Poking People to Participate: Facebook and Political Participation in the 2008 Election,” 7.

¹⁶⁹ “People Powered Politics 2008: Post-Election Report,” *MoveOn.org*, February 1, 2011.

than the general public, as the young are significantly more likely to be engaged in presidential electoral activities online than middle aged and older respondents. Specifically, 22% of youth voters were highly involved in the presidential nomination online, 43% were moderately active, and only 35% were either not engaged or had low engagement.¹⁷⁰ They see the impact of new media in this respect, “Technology is mobilizing the young, and it is creating a style of online participation that can be sporadic and less intense, but this may also facilitate the involvement of some who would otherwise be on the sidelines.”¹⁷¹

Professor Mark Kann finds that even if new media does not directly affect youth voter turnout, it will increase their overall political engagement. He states, “While its uncertain if youths’ online involvement contributed to this increase [in youth voter turnout], it is evident that young American’s presence on the Web has the potential to enhance their engagement in public life.”¹⁷² Writer Joshua Levy agrees, “Now you have all these young people who can participate in the process rather than just watching and going to vote every four years... They may not even know that they are engaging in politics when they ‘friend’ Barack Obama on Facebook or MySpace. But I think they most certainly are, and are increasing political awareness among their network through that act.”¹⁷³ The Internet’s participatory culture motivates the youth to vote and political candidates realize this. A Senate campaign staffer stated, “We simply cannot afford that drop off of the younger vote who historically does not turn out on Election Day, so we need to reach out to young people wherever they are... Facebook is quite helpful.”¹⁷⁴

Vitak conducted a study that examines the connection between political participation on Facebook and in offline settings. Her research question was “do political activities on Facebook affect political participation among young voters, a group traditionally perceived as apathetic in regard to civic engagement?” The study aims to illuminate the relationships between political activity on Facebook and more traditional forms of political participation occurring on and offline. The study specifically examines trends in Facebook use by college students in the weeks leading up to the 2008 presidential election to determine what relationship exists between students’ political activities on the website and their political participation in general.¹⁷⁵ She finds that on Facebook 20.4% of college students posted a wall comment about politics, 18.4% posted a status update that mentions politics, 13.8% joined a group about politics, 13.8% RSVP’d for a political event, and 8.8% became a fan of a political candidate or group. More generally, 48% of Facebook users have used Facebook for at least one of the 14 political activities asked about in this study.¹⁷⁶ She found a strong, positive correlation indicating a significant linear relationship between perceptions of Facebook as an appropriate medium for political communication and the

¹⁷⁰ Karen Mossberger and Caroline J. Tolbert, “Digital Democracy: How Politics Online is Changing Electoral Participation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*, ed. Jan E. Leighley (New York: Oxford UP, 2010): 204.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁷² Mark E. Kann, Jeff Berry, Connor Grant, and Phil Zager, “The Internet and Youth Political Participation,” *First Monday* 12, no. 8 (2007): 1.

¹⁷³ Joshua Levy, “Beyond Boxers or Briefs?: New Media Brings Youth to Politics Like Never Before,” *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* 88, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁷⁴ Williams and Gulati, “Facebook Grows Up: An Empirical Assessment of Its Role in the 2008 Congressional Elections,” 10.

¹⁷⁵ Vitak and others, “Poking People to Participate: Facebook and Political Participation in the 2008 Election,” 19.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

amount of political activity one engages in on Facebook.¹⁷⁷ Another finding was a strong relationship between political interest and political participation on Facebook. Political activity on Facebook is the most significant predictor of political participation in this model ($\beta=.239$, $p < .001$) and exposure to political activity on Facebook is also a significant predictor of political participation ($\beta=.141$, $p < .001$).

As Vitak states, “This may also suggest that Facebook has some legitimacy as a political tool, as those that are engaged in historically valued forms of offline participation such as volunteering and petitioning are also using Facebook to achieve their political goals... we believe there must be some perceived utility in Facebook as a political tool if those who are more actively participating offline are also actively participation on Facebook.”¹⁷⁸ She concludes that political engagement is indeed occurring within the Facebook environment, suggesting that Facebook is an avenue for young people to express and share their political views. Additionally, political activity on Facebook is significantly related to more general political participation.¹⁷⁹ The implications of this study are extremely important as its findings have the potential to change the way candidates and political organizations use social network sites.¹⁸⁰ Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2008) also addressed political participation on Facebook as part of a larger study of Social Network Sites’ effects on social capital. They employed a regression analysis and found a strong relationship between being a member of a Facebook political group and political participation offline.¹⁸¹

New media had a measurable impact by increasing youth political participation during the 2008 presidential election. The youth used the Internet to find information about the candidates, post political content, and contribute to the political dialogue. The Pew Research Center found that 42% of youth ages 18 to 29 say they regularly learned about the 2008 campaign from the Internet, which was the highest percentage for any news source.¹⁸² In addition to this statistic, 30% of those who post political content online are under the age of 25 and more than half are younger than 35. Political content creation is also tightly linked with the usage of social media platforms such as online social networks, video sharing sites, blogs, and status update services such as Twitter.¹⁸³ Throughout the 2008 campaign, 72% of youth ages 18 to 29 were online political users, 67% watched online political videos, 58% went online for political news, and 49% engaged politically on a social networking site.¹⁸⁴ There are also indications of this online participation translating to participation offline. For example, 14% of online political users ages 18 to 29 volunteered offline, which is higher than for any other age group.¹⁸⁵

This increase in youth political participation and voter turnout was especially visible during the 2008 Iowa Caucus and primary season. Jackson looks at youth voter turnout in 2008 specifically in the Iowa Caucus and how this impacted election outcomes. She finds that the

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁷⁹ Vitak and others, “Poking People to Participate: Facebook and Political Participation in the 2008 Election,” 2.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 61.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸² Pew Research Center, “Social Network and Online Videos Take Off: Internet’s Broader Role in Campaign 2008,” January 2008, 1.

¹⁸³ Pew Research Center, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008,” 13.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

2008 primary season recorded the largest number of youth votes since the voting age was lowered to eighteen, most of them going to Obama with a 2:1 ratio in Nevada, 3:1 in New Hampshire, and 4:1 in Iowa. Youth turnout in the Iowa caucus was up an astonishing 135% over 2004.¹⁸⁶ As Wu remarks, “The young people are voting in numbers rarely seen since the general election of 1972... In Iowa, as many people under thirty caucused as did senior citizens. In every contest, the youth vote has at least doubled and often tripled previous records.”¹⁸⁷

This increase in voter turnout extended beyond Iowa to other states and into the general election, “In some states, youth turnout has tripled or quadrupled. More than three million young Americans voted on Super Tuesday, and studies by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement show that young voters often become repeat voters.”¹⁸⁸ One of the most important successes of the Obama campaign was his use of new media tools to introduce the youth to his brand and message and also motivate them to participate. Jackson describes this:

Exit polls suggested that one out of ten voters, and overwhelming number of them young and minority, was casting a vote for the first time. This same constituency drove a paradigm shift in media, which the Obama campaign learned to use expertly. By developing a sophisticated way to reach his constituents one-on-one with a carefully tailored message of hope, change, and inclusion, Obama caught his competition and the traditional media off guard, establishing the power and resonance that a single voice can have in the digital age and setting a new standard for the marketing and promotion of people, products, services, and ideas.¹⁸⁹

This trend of youth political participation online has already continued in the 2010 Midterm elections with 24% of cell owners ages 18 to 29 using their phones to keep up with news related to the election or politics and 58% using their phones to inform other that they had voted.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, 12 million people over the age of 18 posted status updates on Facebook saying they voted in the 2010 election.¹⁹¹

The above evidence makes a compelling case that new media tools are adding to and boosting political participation. As Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal identify, new media tools accomplish this by creating new ways to politically participate, which are easier to access. Their systematic study along with Bimber and Davis’ study prove that those who are active online are more likely to participate offline and vote. While some believe new media may not increase voter turnout, it has definitely increased other forms of political participation. This is especially relevant for the young voters as new media brings in the youth and enables them to be part of the electoral process as illustrated through the case study of the 2008 Iowa Caucus and the Vitak’s

¹⁸⁶ Jackson, Dorton, and Heindl, “A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama’s Historic Victory of the US Presidency,” 42.

¹⁸⁷ Wu, “Facebook Politics: An Exploratory Study of American Youth’s Political Engagement During the 2008 Presidential Election,” 3.

¹⁸⁸ Levy, “Beyond Boxers or Briefs?: New Media Brings Youth to Politics Like Never Before.”

¹⁸⁹ Jackson, Dorton, and Heindl, “A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama’s Historic Victory of the US Presidency,” 49.

¹⁹⁰ Pew Research Center, “Politics Goes Mobile,” December 2010, 5.

¹⁹¹ John D. Sutter, “Tuesday Races Top Obama Election in Internet Traffic,” *CNN.com* (November 2010).

systematic study. Additionally, as Shabazz remarks, an increase in youth voter turnout can also indirectly impact election outcomes. The impact new media has on election results will be examined in the following section.

XI. Election Results

New Media impacts the results of local races, congressional races, and presidential caucuses and primaries as illustrated by the connection between online and offline success. However, it may have only a small or negligent impact on national presidential elections. In these smaller, more competitive races, new media outreach provides an advantage by boosting voter turnout. In these competitive elections, each vote makes a difference in the final outcome so voter turnout efforts through new media channels are particularly effective. However, many political scientists believe new media cannot impact presidential election outcomes and it is extremely difficult to measure the difference new media outreach makes. The best study proving a correlation between new media efforts and election outcomes is conducted by Williams and Gulati and proves that social media outreach can change final election results by a small margin.

There have been several cases of local or congressional elections where social media outreach is believed to have impacted election results. It is logical that new media is affecting local races as there has been an increase of 13% between Americans looking up information on local races in 2004 (25%) and those in 2008 (39%).¹⁹² New media use has been increasing across all metrics and candidates are realizing this and integrating this usage into their campaign strategy. New media usage is especially prevalent in competitive races and local campaigns. Williams and Gulati find that a competitive race means that candidates are more likely to be active on Facebook and other social networks because a small number of votes can make a difference in who wins and who losses.¹⁹³ This is also true in local races. As Randi Zuckerberg, the Facebook market development director, states, “In some ways Facebook can be even more influential to local campaigns and politicians. Because those are places where a few thousand votes really matter and a few thousand votes can really swing a race.”¹⁹⁴ For example, New Jersey Democratic congressional candidate Dennis Shulman used Facebook to rally support in his race against an incumbent opponent. Through Facebook he was able to raise \$250,000, much of this coming from college students across the country.¹⁹⁵ Josh Rahn, Facebook’s director of sales, after explaining that 80% of the 45 million active users are of voting age stated, “our goal is to make you win.”¹⁹⁶ Rahn cited a 2006 House race in Connecticut in which Democrat Joe Courtney won over Republican incumbent Rob Simmons by 83 votes, “Considering the 720 percent increase in turnout among student voters at the University of Connecticut, Courtney’s reliance on Facebook didn’t hurt.”¹⁹⁷ Therefore, the use of Facebook as a campaign tool can add to a candidate’s final vote tally.

New media outreach can indirectly impact election results in several ways. One example of this is through blogging. As Davis states, blogging can impact house races, but maybe not

¹⁹² Pew Research Center, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008,” 72.

¹⁹³ Williams and Gulati, “Facebook Grows Up: An Empirical Assessment of Its Role in the 2008 Congressional Elections,” 18.

¹⁹⁴ Golodryga, “Facebook Changes Dynamics of Race.”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ J. P. Freire, “Facebook Pitches Its Political Benefits,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 2007.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid,

presidential contests, “Liberal bloggers believe they already have altered electoral outcomes.”¹⁹⁸ Bloggers claim to have defeated Senator Joe Lieberman in the 2006 senatorial primary and claim to have made possible the wins of Senators Sherrod Brown, Jon Tester, and Jim Webb.¹⁹⁹ However, he remarks, “Blogs’ influence is not at the level of determining outcomes of presidential elections. However, blogs are helping candidates win, particularly at lower levels.”²⁰⁰ They may accomplish this in indirect ways such as through raising money and encouraging public support of their candidates. Political Scientist Alan Rosenblatt agrees with this assessment, “A few years ago people were asking when the Internet would win a presidential election. Today we recognize that no one can win the presidency without an Internet strategy. Indeed, it no longer makes sense to talk about Internet strategy in isolation. The use of digital network strategy is integral to every part of a campaign, from field organizing to fund-raising, from branding/messaging to press relations, and from registering people to vote to getting people out to vote.”²⁰¹ Since new media can impact election results in several indirect ways, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint, isolate, and measure how it has changed election results.

However, there does seem to be a correlation between success on social networks and winning elections. In this *ABC News* study, Reporter Jennifer Schlesinger finds that “having ‘friends’, ‘followers’ and people who ‘like’ you may help candidates win elections. For example, in the 2010 midterm elections the candidate who more people ‘liked’ on Facebook won in 71% of Senate elections. Twitter was even more accurate, with the candidates with the most ‘followers’ winning in 74% of elections.”²⁰² Facebook found similar results as they watched 118 races in the Senate and the House and found that 77 winners had more ‘likes’ than their opponent. The Facebook political team’s snapshot of 98 house races shows that 74% of candidates with the most Facebook fans won their contests. In the Senate, 81% of candidates in 19 races with the most Facebook fans won their elections.²⁰³ Additionally, Facebook found that candidates with twice as many fans as their opponent won by at least 3.9% of the vote.²⁰⁴ In fact, Facebook believes that social media is often a better predictor of election results than how much money a candidate raised and spent. In 42 of the races Facebook analyzed, the winner had more ‘likes’ but less money.²⁰⁵ These results indicate that new media outreach can either impact election results or correlate to a certain margin of victory.

Williams and Gulati conducted two studies that measure the impact of Facebook on election results in the 2006 congressional races and 2008 presidential primary season. They find that Facebook can change election results by a small percentage. Their study of the 2006 congressional races uses data from the 2006 midterm elections to prove that Facebook can change election outcomes. They modeled their research after a study conducted on the 2004 Australian national elections that found that having a web site increased a candidate’s share of

¹⁹⁸ Davis, *Typing Politics: The Role of Blogs in American Politics*: 4.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁰¹ Alan Rosenblatt, “Dimensions of Campaigns in the Age of Digital Networks,” in *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, ed. James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2010): 203.

²⁰² Jennifer Schlesinger, “Did Facebook and Twitter Predict the 2010 Midterm Elections Results?,” *ABC News*, November 25, 2010.

²⁰³ Sutter, “Tuesday Races Top Obama Election in Internet Traffic.”

²⁰⁴ Schlesinger, “Did Facebook and Twitter Predict the 2010 Midterm Elections Results?”

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

the vote by an average of 2%. Williams and Gualti find that U.S. congressional candidates who campaigned on Facebook in 2006 won a larger share of the vote than candidates who did not campaign on Facebook when controlling for all other variables.²⁰⁶ They used a logistic regression model, coding 1 if the candidate had a presence on Facebook and 0 if they did not. They also took into account political party, competitiveness of race, financial resources, and constituency-demand. Williams and Gulati then regressed the dependent variable (the candidate's final vote percentage) and regressed the final vote on the natural log of the number of Facebook members who registered as a supporter of the candidate and the natural log of the number of members who registered as a supporter of the opponent.²⁰⁷

Williams and Gualti found different results for races with an incumbent and those with open seats. Firstly, they found that a competitive race increases the use of Facebook by incumbents and challengers.²⁰⁸ As Williams and Gulati remark, "when controlling for the same electoral variables from the first model, substituting the natural log of the number of the incumbent's Facebook supporters and the challengers' supporters indicate that a candidate's Facebook activity had a significant effect on the incumbent's final outcome."²⁰⁹ They found that the coefficients of the log-transformed variables indicate that a 1% increase in the number of Facebook supporters increased an incumbent's final vote percentage by .011, while the same increase in number of Facebook supporters for challengers reduced incumbents' vote percentage by .015.²¹⁰ Williams and Gulati state, "Put another way, an incumbent who had 100% more supporters than another incumbent (i.e. twice as many supporters) would have finished with a vote share that was 1.1% higher than the other incumbent. At the same time, if the incumbent's opponent had twice as many supporters as the other incumbent's opponent, he or she would have finished with a vote share that was 1.5% lower."²¹¹ For example, if a candidate increased their number of supporters from 100 to 200, they would add 1.1% to an incumbent's final vote share. However, to add another 1.1% they would have to add 200 more supporters. For an additional 1.1% increase, 400 additional supporters would be necessary.²¹² Williams and Gulati found an even bigger impact on open-seat races, "These results suggest that social networking sites may have an even larger impact in open-seat races... open-seat candidates who updated their Facebook profile had a 3.8% higher voter share than candidates who did not update their profiles."²¹³ For instance, candidates who doubled their number of supporters increased their final vote share by 3%. At the same time, candidates running against challengers who doubled the number of their supporters saw their vote share decrease by 2.4%. Therefore, the effect of Facebook activity is over twice the amount observed for incumbents and their challengers.²¹⁴

This study finds by linking Facebook supporters to final election results that, "the candidates' Facebook support had a significant effect on their final vote shares, particularly in

²⁰⁶ Williams and Gulati, "Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections," 10.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰⁸ Williams and Gulati, "Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections," 9.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the case of open-seat candidates.... In other words, the number of Facebook supporters is an indicator of a campaign resource that does matter.”²¹⁵ In conclusion, Williams and Gualti state, “The evidence from our analyses provides a compelling case that Facebook played an important role in the 2006 congressional races and that social networking sites had the capability of affecting the electoral process... Facebook seems to be one more tool that candidates can use to connect with voters and make a favorable impression.”²¹⁶ Some possible problems with this study are that 18 to 29 year olds are overrepresented on Facebook and that members of Facebook do not need to be registered to vote to indicate their support for candidates on the site. This study also does not examine the possibility that offline success could be affecting online success, and not just the vice versa. However, “the number of Facebook supporters is capturing the underlying enthusiasm and intensity of support for a candidate... Facebook also could have an impact prior to the election if, as a result of viewing profiles or communications from Facebook friends, members engaged in other offline campaign activities.”²¹⁷ This study demonstrates that there is a connection between political support on this popular social networking site and winning elections offline and suggests that new media activities do impact the results of elections, specifically congressional campaigns as demonstrated here. The role Facebook played in the 2006 campaigns set up social networking to play an even larger role in the 2008 campaigns.

Williams and Gulati conducted a similar study on the 2008 Iowa Democratic Presidential Caucus and New Hampshire Democratic Presidential Primary, finding evidence of a connection between new media success and offline election results. The 2008 Iowa Caucus was one election that clearly demonstrated the impact of new media on election results. In this contest, Obama claimed 38% of the vote in Iowa, with Clinton only receiving 29%. Furthermore, 236,000 turned out to vote, which was nearly double the attendance in the 2004 caucus. Specifically, youth turnout for the Iowa primary was up 135% over 2004, and voters under 25 gave Obama seventeen thousand voters providing a key contribution to his twenty thousand-vote margin of victory.²¹⁸ As Shabazz remarks:

It was young people and practitioners/youth media educators/programs that ultimately decided the outcome of the Iowa Caucus. Fifty-seven percent of youth supported Senator Barack Obama to help him win against his other opponents... It has been a long journey for the youth electorate since the cold Iowa night where they came out in record numbers. But what Obama understood and what Hillary learned too late was that the news had shifted to online blogs, *YouTube* and other online outlets—the very outlets reaching youth.²¹⁹

Political Consultant Joe Trippi remarked that it was Obama’s use of new media tools that really made a difference in caucuses such as this one. He states, “The tools changed between 2004 and 2008. Barack Obama won every single caucus state that matters, and he did it because

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

²¹⁷ Williams and Gulati, “Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections,” 18.

²¹⁸ Jackson, Dorton, and Heindl, “A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama’s Historic Victory of the US Presidency,” 42.

²¹⁹ Shabazz, “Obamania: Media Tactics Drawing Youth to the Voting Booth,” 240.

of those tools, because he was able to move thousands of people to organize.”²²⁰ The Iowa Caucus proved that online organizing can in fact lead to offline action.

Williams and Gulati assess the impact Facebook campaigning had on the outcome of the Iowa caucuses. They do this by using a regression model where the dependent variable is the candidate’s final vote percentage and the independent variable is the candidate’s share of Facebook supporters among members listing Iowa as their home state. Williams and Gulati also control for resources and polling as it was before the caucus took place.²²¹ They find that success on Facebook matters more for a candidate’s final result than success on other platforms and in mainstream media venues. As Williams and Gulati state, “The results in Iowa seem to indicate that Facebook matters even more than candidate visits and television ad buys in the 2008 presidential nomination contests, and together these indicators explain very high percentages of the variance in candidates’ vote shares.”²²² For example, Williams and Gulati’s predictive model indicates that an increase by 1% in the share of the Iowa Facebook poll increases a candidate’s final vote count by .429%. Thus candidates who registered 10% more supporters than their opponents would be estimated to increase their final vote share by 4.3%. This was even more substantial for young voters where the increase on final vote share was 10.7%.²²³ Williams and Gulati found similar results in the New Hampshire Primary. In this case, an increase in 1% in the share of the New Hampshire Facebook supporters increased a candidate’s final vote share by almost 3% for all voters and 8.6% for voters under the age of 25.²²⁴

However, when these results are applied to the Clinton – Obama contest, the results from their model do not quite match up with the final election results. Based on their estimates, Williams and Gulati suggest that Obama’s Facebook support would increase his vote share by 24%, with a net advantage of 18% over Clinton. With the final vote difference only being 8%, this is highly improbable.²²⁵ On the other hand, when they use the youth model, it shows Obama with a 45% net advantage over Clinton, which is very close to the 46% spread between him and Clinton from the Iowa entrance polls. This is also the case in the New Hampshire primary.²²⁶ These results seem to indicate that campaigning on new media venues will have more of an influence on the results of the youth vote than that of the general public. Additionally, Facebook may over represent the youth vote, which may be why this model is more applicable to the Iowa caucus than the New Hampshire primary since the youth represented 22% of the total turnout in Iowa and only 18% in New Hampshire.²²⁷ In conclusion, as Williams and Gulati remark, “The combined evidence from our various models and analyses makes the case that Facebook played a role in both the 2006 congressional races and early 2008 nomination contest. It offers some initial empirical confirmation that social networking sites indeed have the potential to transform

²²⁰ Miller, “How Obama’s Campaign Changed Politics.”

²²¹ Christine B. Williams and Girish J. Gulati, “The Political Impact of Facebook: Evidence from the 2006 and 2008 Nomination Contest,” in *Politicking Online*, ed. Costas Panagopoulos (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2009): 278.

²²² *Ibid.*, 282.

²²³ Williams and Gulati, “The Political Impact of Facebook: Evidence from the 2006 and 2008 Nomination Contest,” 282.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 285.

campaigns and the electoral process.”²²⁸ This study indicates that by campaigning on new media platforms such as Facebook, a candidate does have the possibility of influencing final election results.

Success in offline elections can in turn increase online success. For example, after his win of the Iowa caucus, Obama got a 20.25% bump in Facebook supporters, compared to Clinton’s 9.16% bump.²²⁹ There is also evidence that new media campaigning may affect the results of caucuses more than primaries since organizing plays a bigger role in these contests and new media increases the ability to organize. The Obama campaign decided to target small caucus states where Clinton had little to no presence, such as Idaho. This was a risky move since they would have to depend on their online organizing abilities, but it paid off with Obama winning states like Idaho where online organizing played a big part.²³⁰ An increase in youth voters during the 2008 election also enabled new media to play a larger role in impacting election results. As Jackson remarks, “All told, over two million more youths voted in 2008 than in 2004, for a 2008 total of twenty-two to twenty-four million votes, helping Obama win key states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, Florida, and Nevada, with youth-dense populations around universities.”²³¹ Arianna Huffington, editor in chief of The Huffington Post also sees the impact new media had especially for the Obama campaign. She states, “Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president. Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee.”²³²

While there is evidence new media does impact election results, especially at the local level, some systematic studies do not see new media impacting election results at the presidential or even senatorial level. Schlesinger finds that Facebook election predications have their limitations as illustrated in the 2010 midterm elections. She believes social media has limits as signs of success of a campaign since Facebook failed to predict some high-profile elections. For example, Delaware Senate candidate Christine O’Donnell had more Facebook and Twitter fans than Democrat Chris Coons did, but she lost by nearly 17%.²³³ This was also the case with Republican Sharron Angle of Nevada who had more Facebook likes than Senator Harry Reid and more money, but could still not win the election.²³⁴ Schlesinger finds that an incumbent is more likely to win an election even if they have a smaller online following than their opponent. Other authors agree with this assessment, but they are mostly focusing on a specific aspect of new media such as campaign websites and are not looking at it as a whole. For example, Park and Perry find that the campaign website experience has a negligible impact on election results.²³⁵ Bimber and Davis agree, “They found that citizen’s viewing of candidates’ web sites had no impact on their decisions about whether to vote or their vote preference. These findings were

²²⁸ Ibid., 284.

²²⁹ Ibid., 276.

²³⁰ Harfoush, *Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand*, 28.

²³¹ Jackson, Dorton, and Heindl, “A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama’s Historic Victory of the US Presidency,” 42.

²³² Miller, “How Obama’s Campaign Changed Politics.”

²³³ Schlesinger, “Did Facebook and Twitter Predict the 2010 Midterm Elections Results?”

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Park and Perry, “Do Campaign Web Sites Really Matter in Electoral Civic Engagement? Empirical Evidence from the 2004 and 2006 Post-Election Internet Tracking Survey,” 108.

derived from research on only a limited number of races, leaving open the possibility that a positive relationship between web site presence and vote shares exists more generally.”²³⁶

However, as a whole, evidence seems to indicate a connection between success on new media platforms such as Facebook and winning elections. Williams and Gulati’s regression analysis makes a persuasive case that new media is impacting election results in some respect, especially in smaller, more competitive races as well as caucuses where organizing is so important. As illustrated by the Obama campaign, the more dominant a candidate can be in using new media tools, the more likely it is that this online presence will help the candidate win elections or increase their final vote share.

XII. Conclusion

This paper has illustrated that new media can impact elections by providing information, impacting the news cycle and focuses of campaigns, shaping public opinion of candidates, increasing fundraising opportunities, boosting political participation and youth voter turnout, and in some cases, impacting election results themselves. This was demonstrated throughout the 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama. Obama used new media in ways not used before and to an extent not previously done to win the highest office by effectively integrating new media usage into his campaign strategy. As Steinhorn states, “No traditional advertising campaign could have created this phenomenon. Obama established a brand, symbolized it with a message and logo, synchronized it with our cultural moment, and created a communications strategy built on the mystic cords of social networking and the dynamic synergy of new media.”²³⁷ Clayton agrees that new media usage is one of the main reasons that he is now President, “The Obama campaign’s innovative use of ‘new media’ as well as old media was nothing short of spectacular. Had his campaign not been so skilled in its many applications of the new technology, which allowed Obama to raise the necessary money to be competitive in all fifty states, he probably would not have won the presidential election.”²³⁸

The social media critic says there is “no net effect of new media.” In other words, that without new media there would have been the same results through different means. However, it is very difficult to prove this without the same election happening twice – once with new media and once without new media. This claim that nothing would have been different without new media is a difficult one to respond to. In all of the sources used in this paper, many recognize new media’s limits in not being the one factor that could lead to an election win. However, not one of these sources claims that new media is not in some way impacting, influencing, or in anyway changing the electoral process – and I have been unable to find any counter proof or any scholarly articles that say so.

The very nature of social media with its speed, inclusiveness, and ease of access makes it logical that it is a tool capable of revolutionizing the electoral process. These qualities make it easier for the average citizen to participate politically whether in terms of having political discussions online, volunteering online, donating to campaigns through their website, or even impacting the national news cycle by posting a video of a candidate misspeaking at a campaign event on YouTube for the whole world to see. Now that the general public can be the press, the

²³⁶ Williams and Gulati, “Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections,” 10.

²³⁷ Steinhorn, “The Selling of the President in a Converged Media Age,” 155.

²³⁸ Clayton, *The Presidential Campaign of Barack Obama: A Critical Analysis of a Racially Transcendent Strategy*,” 152.

press is even more omnipresent making it difficult for the political candidate to get away with anything.

As far as election results go, while new media may not be the one resource that will mean if a candidate wins or losses, it is very likely that it could make a difference at the margins. This is especially the case in an extremely close election. For example, isn't it possible that social media outreach could have changed the 2000 presidential election since the election came down to about 300 votes in Florida? Even in indirect ways, such as turning the news cycle against a candidate or a strong Internet fundraising campaign, new media has the potential to impact election results. Therefore, in response to the critic who is claiming that new media is not changing anything – I say, how could it not be? New media, in its speed and democratic nature, is a completely unique tool that has infinite capabilities in influencing the electoral process.

The impact new media can have on campaigns has many implications for future elections. Some of the impact of new media may be indirect in that it amplifies existing forces in politics. Hershey describes how it has come to influence several components of the electoral process. She remarks, "The Internet, in short, is no longer used by campaigns just to raise money. It has come to influence every aspect of presidential campaigning, from identifying supporters to communicating with them to entering their networks and talking to their friends. With new applications appearing regularly, political use of the Internet should continue to expand in 2010 and 2012."²³⁹ New Media may not be the one tool to get a candidate elected, but online social networking can play a significant role in the result. As Metzgar points out, "Campaigns need to change with the technologies, going where the voters are going and employing the tools the voters are using still out there. But even more importantly, campaigns must have a message that resonates with the voters wherever they may be found. Creating a Facebook page or integrating blogging capacity into a campaign homepage does not guarantee that a campaign will catch fire... And as concluded here, social media tools are just part of the packaging."²⁴⁰

The Obama campaign set a precedent for future elections and how they need to integrate new media into their campaign strategy. Devora Rogers, senior content manager at IPG Emerging Media Lab, points this out, "What [Obama] did with his campaign changed the game. From now on that's going to be the minimum that people have to do. They have to have their website, they have to have a totally integrated campaign with radio, TV, web, social media, Twitter. Those are the new rules."²⁴¹ Political pundits believe that this use of new media will continue to expand in future elections. For instance, "The New Hampshire primary is over a year away, and the first major candidate has yet to formally declare. Just don't tell that to outlets like Politico, Talking Points Memo and RealClearPolitics, which are already planning to smother the 2012 campaign trail in a way they could never have imagined four years ago."²⁴² In fact, President Obama recently announced his reelection campaign through a YouTube video. He also is already fully integrating new media into his 2012 campaign strategy by holding a 'townhall' live on Facebook. After these future elections, there will be more data available that identifies the impact of this new media.

One thing to look for in the future is Republicans increasing their social media presence. In fact, they are already overtaking Democrats in certain areas. Republican party leadership has

²³⁹ Hershey, "The Media: Coloring the News," 141.

²⁴⁰ Metzgar and Maruggi, "Social Media and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election," 161.

²⁴¹ Patullo, "Yes We Can: Political Campaigns Go Social."

²⁴² Peters, "Political Blogs Are Ready to Flood Campaign Trail."

been urging their members to try to gain an electoral advantage by surpassing Democrats in their use of new media outlets.²⁴³ They already have a more active presence on Twitter with 54.5% of the Republicans in Congress tweeting and only 18.7% of Democrats in Congress tweeting.²⁴⁴ They are also getting close on Facebook where the Republicans have 200,251 fans while Democrats have 208,044 fans.²⁴⁵

In the future as new media continues to be used in presidential campaigns and campaigns in general, it will be easier to assess and measure its impact. However, the case studies, systematic analyses, and data presented in this paper indicate that new media has already begun to heavily influence the course of the electoral process in the United States.

²⁴³ Lassen and Brown, "Twitter: The Electoral Connection," 8.

²⁴⁴ Christine B Williams and Girish J. Gulati, "Communicating with Constituents in 140 Characters or Less," *Southern Illinois University Carbondale* (2010): 8.

²⁴⁵ *Facebook*.

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