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Staging a successful political campaign in the digital era: How to respond to natural disasters on social media

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Staging a Successful Political Campaign in the Digital Era: How to Respond to Natural
Disasters on Social Media

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JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This study provides a descriptive interpretation of the role digital media plays in the responses of presidential candidates when they are faced with natural disaster events. This study compares two presidential campaign seasons, the 2004 campaign between incumbent President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry and the 2012 campaign between incumbent President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, to isolate the effects of social media on political rhetoric and increased voter support. To study the two campaigns as they faced natural disasters media sources were examined during and after Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and Hurricane Sandy in 2012. To analyze candidate responses to Hurricane Ivan in the 2004 campaign season, before social media was foregrounded, 4 major newspapers, photograph galleries, and personal statements are examined. To analyze candidate responses to Hurricane Sandy in the 2012 campaign season, after social media was foregrounded as a news source, the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the candidates were examined.

The study generated several key findings: social media allows for interactive discussion with voters, candidates must look to predictions for voter response while generating content for social media posts, the use of personal voice is possible through social media, candidates lose total control of their message on social media, and finally that social media can allow candidates to overcome some obstacles but there are still factors which it cannot overcome. This study provides a discussion on these key findings and concludes that candidates face risks and gain benefits while using social media during kairotic moments, opportune moments for which politicians need to issue an appropriate response in the campaign season, such as natural disasters. The study

concludes that politicians must be aware of the rhetorical strategies of social and other media at their disposal in order to take advantage of a kairotic moment in a campaign. Specifically, politicians need to deploy personal voice and personal presence through images to showcase their leadership abilities.

Chapter 1: Digital Campaigning in the face of Natural Disaster

Political campaigns in the United States expose Americans to viewpoints and platforms from different candidates. Campaigns are an attempt at persuasion by candidates to convince voters to share their ideals, and have evolved over time in part due to the evolution of new media that have emerged in the last few decades. As the Internet has expanded it has provided candidates with many outlets and venues on which to directly or indirectly appeal to the public about their campaign issues. Candidates once dedicated to using the internet specifically for campaign websites have now turned their attention towards a different platform online, a new media: social media sites. For candidates who have started to use social media as a tool for their campaigns there is a need for these campaigns to be adaptable and responsive. The younger generation of voters also want to see candidates utilize the media platform they most frequent, social media. Even campaigns which are carefully planned and strategically placed across media platforms have to be able to adapt to different and unexpected situations in which voters want to see their responses. Voters expect politicians to respond to spontaneous situations which are affecting the country, such as natural disasters, unplanned occurrence for which voters demand a speedy response, one that politicians can make through social media. Responding to such events “on the fly” might actually result in a powerful kairotic moment for the candidates if handled correctly. The rhetorical concept of kairos, the seizing of the opportune moment and approach through which to communicate, will be discussed more in depth in chapter two.

Through the use of social media sites candidates are able to demonstrate their responsiveness and awareness to disasters and events in the country to an entire section of the public through a different medium, as many social media sites are frequented by a majority of the population, particularly by younger voters (Levinson). Due to the interactive nature of social media and the presence of younger voters on social media, there is a perception that if candidates use social media they are more likely to engage younger voters. Younger voters use social media as a means to connect with others who they can relate to, as well as a source for where they find most of their news (Householder and LaMarre). As younger voters are new to making decisions about politics, they may not be set in their political ideals or affiliations and can be viewed as swing voters. Therefore, these swing voters might be easily influenced by social media trends and topics. Acquiring swing voter support is an essential step which politicians need to take to ensure their success in an election because they can be the deciding factor in elections. As they look towards social media to find news sources, these young swing voters may be influenced by sources trending on social media, some of which are credible and some which are not. Younger voters may follow the trending sources on social media because of the draw of having information in an instant.

Candidates believe that their social media presence connects them with the population of younger voters who get most of their information online (Householder and LaMarre). Through their social media presence, candidates construct their own identities in the hopes that by doing so it will allow them to reach out to these younger voters particularly on a more personalized level, including using their own authentic voice through their posts. At the same time, candidates also believe that social media will help

their ideas to be distributed to the masses and, in turn, by distributing these ideas, will allow them to reach out to and engage the voters who may not yet be set in their voting choices. These voters, the swing voters, in turn, may be influenced to support the candidates based on social media presence in the next election. As candidates establish their presence on social media sites voters are able to connect with the candidates through posts about their ideals, while at the same time assessing the candidate's credibility and trustworthiness through their posts. This connection between the voters and the candidates can increase the support that candidates have for the next election.

Connections to WRTC

This topic is important to study because there is a need to understand the rhetorical situation of social media so that candidates will be able to plan their social media use strategically and use the platform to educate and persuade the masses. The focus on political campaigns can be seen as a long-lasting saga leading up to the election. As early as 16 months before the 2016 presidential election, we were being conditioned for the election. We were conditioned by the saturation of social media posts from candidates, TV interviews, and advertisements, as well as social media posts produced by those outside of the political campaigns. This push for involvement with political campaigns so far ahead of an election shows how important the rhetoric of an election is in our society, and how soon candidates need to start reaching their voters in hopes of gaining support. Candidates must also keep in mind the importance of understanding how their message might be appropriated by others, particularly on social media. With this in mind, we have to consider the role of immediacy in digital spaces, defined by Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter in *Remediation* as “offering a more immediate or authentic

exposure” (19) and as a characteristic of “a medium whose purpose it is to disappear” (21). Immediacy allows media, in this circumstance social media, to bring one into direct and instantaneous involvement with something or someone, in this case bringing social media users into direct involvement with a candidate’s message. We also must view the ways in which immediacy can be used to influence people’s participation in conversations, whether about politics or other topics, which can arise online. In times of crisis, immediacy allows the user to be in direct contact with a candidate’s responses to the crisis, which allows instantaneous viewing, criticism and discussion of the response given.

The public sphere that is created online, and which is further extended by social media sites, allows for many participants to congregate in digital spaces to discuss issues that are important to them (Jenkins). As these new spaces have been created, we need to understand how to use them effectively to have extensive, participatory conversations online. We also have to understand the need to take a more critical approach when viewing these discussions that arise from political posts in order to reevaluate our own opinions. This critical approach can also give lay persons a lens to look through while they are assessing a candidate’s posts for trustworthiness and authenticity. Another aspect of the knowledge of online conversations is understanding how those conversations can be carried into the real world and turned into effective measures to solve real world issues such voters hope candidates will do when they are elected.

Literature Review

Rhetoric scholars have much to contribute to discussions of ways new media guides and shapes campaigns, both from view and campaign strategist standpoints. One

issue that has developed with the rise of social media use in political campaigns is interactivity. In *Remediation*, authors Bolter and Grusin state, “the logic of immediacy dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented” (6). In this case the medium, social media sites, seems to be left in the shadows because of the interactivity which is endorsed on these sites, the ability to repost and interact with different posts by candidates. When voters are able to interact with different posts they feel a sense of inclusion and they are drawn into the political discussion presented to them, instead of just viewing a post online. Politicians are thus able to utilize social media posts to engage voters by allowing the voters to interact directly with politicians. Voters are able to interact with social media posts in ways such as re-posting, commenting on posts, having discussions with other voters in the comments section of the posts, and carrying these conversations into the offline world.

In my own experience I have seen people reposting articles or other news posts when they have not read the article in its entirety. Thus when voters are reading articles that have been posted by their favorite candidate they may do the same thing. The voters may read a headline from a post by the candidate and choose to immediately repost it because they prematurely think that they will be in agreement with what the rest of the post says. The reposting process also gives the viewer a chance to feel as though they are a part of the political realm.

Although the act of reposting, one piece of the interactivity of social media that Grusin and Bolter point to, can seem as though a voter is supporting a candidate, in reality the voter may just be reposting one idea, rather than signaling support for a specific candidate. Such was the case for presidential hopeful Ron Paul and the number

of Diggs that Paul had in January 2008. Digg is a site which is an index for all news published on the web; therefore, if an article has an elevated number of Diggs, which are votes by the readers who enjoy it, it will be featured on the site's front pages. "Paul had the greatest number of Diggs in popular or front-page stories—close to 3,000, some 50 percent more than the candidate with the second biggest number, Hillary Clinton" (Levinson 105). Paul's lead on Digg did not, however, translate to support at the polls. This practice of reposting, and not fully supporting the candidate once it is time for the election, can be detrimental to a campaign because the candidate and their campaign team may feel as though they have enough supporters due to the number of reposts they received on their social media posts. Paul Levinson in his book *New New Media* offers an outlook on how online campaigns can actually be detrimental to those candidates who do not know how to use the new media effectively. Levinson points out that Ron Paul used the website Digg to try and connect with voters, but in the end "the below voting-age of Ron Paul's supporters on Digg resulted in his success on Digg and failure at the polls" (106) and "Ron Paul's campaign had no equivalent grassroots operation and did the best it could with extensive Internet promotion...started with the Internet and never got beyond it" (106). This demonstrates the need to better understand social media's role and reach in campaigns.

As Levinson points out, politicians need to understand the social media platforms and what audiences the platforms can reach. Lisa Barnard and Daniel Kreiss give a solution to this issue. In their article "A Research Agenda for Online Political Advertising: Surveying Campaign Practices, 2000-2012" Barnard and Kreiss point out

that through online tracking practices politicians and campaign strategists are more aware of their intended audiences:

In contrast to static, one-way broadcast ads, campaigns have developed new forms of online political advertising that reflect a multiplicity of goals and tactics tied to electoral contexts, feature rich new sources of data and analytic techniques used to target the electorate and tailor messages, and leverage horizontal social information flows. (2060)

Understanding audience is key to any platform on which candidates present their ideals. On social media this need to understand audience is amplified as posts may be misconstrued if they are not constructed in the right way. This risk of having their ideas misconstrued can be somewhat mediated, however, with the understanding of audience and how platforms allow the audience to interact with posts. Anders Larsson in “‘Rejected Bits of Program Code’: Why Notions of ‘Politics 2.0’ Remain (Mostly Unfulfilled)” points out that, although there was online mobilization as Barnard and Kreiss state, it seemed as though there was still a leader-to-audience approach taken by politicians and received by users of online campaign websites. However, Larsson does state that with the Internet being a relatively new media it will take time for this medium to be understood and used to its full potential for candidates and that only with further research in the future will we be able to see how this new medium might take shape. “First, according to the innovation hypothesis,” he said, “the Internet is believed to make information dissemination more efficient, to usher in more dialogue between voters and politicians through the employment of various online interactive features, overall giving rise to more sophisticated approaches to Web design” (74). Politicians, when posting

through social media, are utilizing the platforms to engage users in dialogue with their posts.

The idea that political discourse is being changed by social media through interactivity is expanded upon by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. Jenkins states that with the internet there “is a shift in the public’s role in the political process, bringing the realm of political discourse closer to the everyday life experiences of citizens” (219) and that the “current diversification of communication channels is politically important because it expands the range of voices that can be heard” (219). Jenkins is of the mindset, as other scholars are, that online presence is becoming vital for campaigns. In light of Jenkins’ arguments, social media platforms give the next step in online campaigning, providing a space in which voters can interact with politicians and engage in political discourse at a deeper level than ever before, being an integral part of political discourse rather than bystanders to political campaigns.

Politicians also utilize social media during national tragedies, such as hurricanes, to get their voices and opinions heard immediately and this ability to respond in real time is the second issue that has further developed due to social media. Through older forms of media, such as television broadcasts, politicians and their teams would have to contact newscasters to be able to be heard on the station in response to these tragedies, and would have to wait until their spot on the broadcast was approved. Social media now affords them a place where they can get their responses to the public immediately, as the tragedy is unfolding. The idea of immediacy is expanded because the audience, the voters, expect candidates to post on social media when certain events are happening because social

media is checked by the audience throughout their day, maybe even more frequently than other news sources. Candidates thus have to stay on top of certain events, or else they may risk an opportunity where they are expected to be responding to a disaster situation.

In relation to immediacy and campaign strategy, Barnard and Kreiss delve into the evolutions of campaigns online and how the changes that have been made resulted in more success for the candidates. “The extraordinary online mobilization behind the 2008 Obama campaign demonstrated the potential of the uptake of networked media in electoral politics,” according to the authors (2046). The key to utilizing social media effectively, according to Barnard and Kreiss, is to develop a strategy for posting, such as highlighting a key platform each week instead of posting sporadically. Making connections to the candidate’s key platforms is important to do at the immediate time when the issues related to the platform addressed are on voters’ minds and at the front-end of political debates. Strategy should also be in place when politicians respond to natural disasters on social media; their strategy should be to show their concern for citizens by urging residents to stay safe, by showcasing their actions in relief efforts for natural disasters, and voicing their compassion through their own, authentic voice for those affected by the natural disaster. Responding to natural disasters has to be done in a timely manner as well, as there is a chronos moment in which politicians have the opportunity to respond to the tragedies caused by disasters.

However, as will be discussed in a later chapter, times of natural disasters and other key political events provide an opportunity when candidates can reach swing voters. Swing voters are the voters who likely will look to different resources and media outlets to try and decide who they will support in the upcoming campaign. As Roman

Gerodimos and Jákup Justinussen point out in their article “Obama’s 2012 Facebook Campaign: Political Communication in the Age of the Like Button,” “The digitization of the ‘permanent campaign’ has allowed political parties to reach out to both loyal and swing voters through-out the electoral cycle” (114). Gerodimos and Justinussen highlight the importance of reaching out to swing voters when they state, “in an effort to attract swing voters who tend to tune out partisan messages, the president of a political advertising agency interviewed by Serazio admits that ‘you have to figure out a way of really disassociating yourself from politics to try to get their attention in the first place’” (115). Candidates have to take their strategies and tailor them to winning over swing voters in their campaign, and the way that they do this is through showing themselves to the masses by posting on social media, especially during opportune, kairotic moments such as natural disasters. As candidates respond to national tragedies, such as natural disasters, through their social media accounts, they are able to overcome “selective exposure”. While voters might normally not respond to a given candidate, they may rally around a given topic without worrying about political affiliation. In the time of natural disasters, voters may seek out different candidates’ responses to the natural disaster, to view how the candidates responded. The candidates’ personal responses to natural disasters, and other key events, are scrutinized by voters not only on actions but also based on the tone of voice that the candidates’ choose to incorporate into their posts.

Politicians extend and personalize their conversations, often also seen in newspapers and television news programs, to social media platforms so the audience, in this case voters, can participate in the conversation through comments and discussions on the posts. Politicians are also using their own, authentic voices through their social media

posts which opens avenues for authentic dialogue between the politician and the voters and humanizes the candidates. The use of personal voice is the third issue that has developed further due to the rise of social media use for political campaigns.

Delving further into the idea of authentic dialogue between the candidates and voters in their article, “Causes and Consequences of Selective Exposure Among Political Blog Readers: The Role of Hostile Media Perception in Motivated Media Use and Expressive Participation,” Porismita Borah, Kjerstin Thorson and Hyunseo Hwang conclude that political blogs “function as spaces that encourage political mobilization, especially for those who perceive mainstream news media as hostile” (196). Candidates’ ability to connect with their audiences through their own presence on social media sites can greatly impact the support that they receive and the affirmation of their own beliefs. Social media sites enable candidates to reach out to the voters on a more personal level, leaving voters to feel how real and authentic the candidates are with their ideals and responses to political situations.

That politicians need to step back from politics on social media at critical times during a campaign to engage the voters in an authentic dialogue is argued by Elizabeth E. Householder and Heather L. LaMarre, in their article “Facebook Politics: Toward a Process Model for Achieving Political Source Credibility Through Social Media.” In this article the authors address how candidates can appear authentic through social media. Householder and LaMarre point out the way that voters see candidates’ “real” selves is through campaign strategies that enhance “the feeling of personal closeness,” (378) such as “posting about family activities, favored interests, or local community events in which the politician takes a part” (378). Householder and LaMarre state, “These types of

interactions serve to humanize politicians” (378). Expanding on ways in which politicians are able to be humanized is through their social media posts responding to natural disasters. They are able to show themselves stepping away from politics to focus on a very serious issue at hand, and to demonstrate how they are personally using their voice to respond to the situation. With these perspectives on impact of the emergence of social media, there is still further need to understand how campaigns have evolved in response in order to reach our society.

A Look Ahead

This thesis, exploring the idea that politicians must be aware of the rhetorical strategies of social and other media at their disposal in order to take advantage of a kairotic moment in a campaign, specifically investigates ways political candidates respond to natural disasters that occur in the months leading up to the United States presidential election. I chose to explore natural disasters because they are events that often turn out to be kairotic moments in campaigns, key moments which politicians need to respond to appropriately in order to maintain, and gain, voter support. I compare responses from candidates who used social media to those who did not have social media as a campaign tool/In the second chapter of the thesis there is a discussion of declarations of disaster that are issued by the president and how incumbent candidates frequently exploit disasters to aid their campaigns during election years. This chapter explains how presidential incumbents deal with natural disasters in election years, as well as why seizing the kairotic moment natural disasters bring to candidates is so important. In the third chapter I explain the methods I used to gather the data for my thesis, pulling data from presidential candidates’ responses to natural disasters during the 2004 and 2012

election years. The data gathered were from a two-week period surrounding a hurricane in both election years. This data includes newspaper articles, photographs, and personal statements from the 2004 election, as well as social media from the 2012 election.

I then turn to analyzing the data, first I looked at responses to natural disasters by presidential candidates before social media, specifically the responses of President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry to Hurricane Ivan in the 2004 election. The second set of data, discussed in chapter five, examines responses to natural disasters by presidential candidates President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney as they responded to Hurricane Sandy through social media posts on Facebook and Twitter during the 2012 election. This chapter shows how social media is utilized during political campaigns in the time of a natural disaster. My final chapter discusses these findings regarding the differences between both campaign season response strategies. I then compare the two campaigns to understand how social media may influence political candidates' responses in the time of natural disasters and the results of elections due to responses by candidates to natural disasters. Lastly, I provide a list of suggestions for campaigns, based on this analysis of the 2004 and 2012 elections, for social media use and ways to respond to events that may provide kairtotic moments. Finally, I offer a brief section on areas of further inquiry which my findings have generated about different topics that could stem from research on political campaigns utilizing social media platforms.

Chapter 2: Declarations of Disasters

Social media has gained significant importance in allowing readers and viewers to gather news from different platforms, spaces where ideas can be disseminated to the masses. Social media is used by candidates to generate voter connection and support for their views and allows candidates to respond to events which they cannot anticipate or plan for, such as natural disasters. By giving candidates a platform on which to be responsive during these times, candidates have the ability to tune into the needs of “the people,” allowing them to generate voter connection and support. When candidates respond to natural disasters through the media they are seizing an opportune, kairotic moment, one which they can use to influence voters’ opinions of their leadership roles. Natural disasters offer incumbent candidates special benefits because they are provided with an opportunity to showcase their leadership abilities. However, social media allows all kinds of political leaders—not just ones currently holding office—to show support for victims of natural disasters and allows them to play a small role in the disaster relief efforts. In this chapter I will expand on the idea of kairos and politicians seizing the opportune moments that natural disasters bring to their campaign strategies. I suggest that natural disasters create a kairotic moment for politicians, one which they can use to showcase their impact in relief efforts and aid for the victims of such disasters.

The Importance of Kairos

James Kinneavy in “Kairos: A neglected concept in classical rhetoric” defines kairos provisionally as the “right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something” (qtd. in J. Kinneavy and C. Eskin 433). Kinneavy and co-author

Catherine Eskin go on to explain the concept of situational context that stems from kairos in rhetorical acts. The authors state “the rhetorical act is situationally determined in both Plato and Aristotle. And both distinguish the general rules of the art of rhetoric from their situational application” (435). In politics, presidential candidates react to situations with rhetorical responses that present themselves, just as natural disasters present themselves. The presidential candidates also have to understand the right time to respond to these disasters, which would be when they happen, and they have to respond to the natural disasters in the right way. Kairos, in this study, as related to presidential candidates responding to disasters, means not only the time frame in which they respond to events but also how they shape their response messages. Candidates have to not only consider the opportune moment in which they must respond, but they also have to be attentive to: the medium they are using to respond, the message they are sending with their response, and the tone they are using in their response.

Kinneavy and Eskin extend their argument to point out that in Aristotle’s work on political rhetoric “the notions of usefulness, expediency, and suitability are all situationally determined” (437). When thinking about usefulness, expediency, and suitability, these three notions can relate to political rhetoric following natural disasters. These three notions are the conditions by which politicians are judged from their responses. Political candidates must provide useful and suitable responses in a timely manner when reacting to a natural disaster event. The authors continue with the idea of expediency in Aristotle’s view and state, “Aristotle affirms that the orator must argue for ‘whatever reason does assign to each in individual cases’ ...In all arguments, even those

which discuss events that have not yet occurred, rhetoric must focus on that which is appropriate to present circumstances” (437).

Once again, the idea drawn from Aristotle and explored by Kinneavy and Eskin that arguments must have situational application can be related to rhetorical acts by politicians. If a politician is faced with a natural disaster they must understand its current significance, what they need to do in response to the current situation, and not look to the past to judge what they should do and how to respond. This makes dealing with natural disasters very challenging, as each natural disaster must be seen as its own event with its own necessary responses, responses tailored for situational application. Voters and critics look toward candidates to provide responses after each natural disaster, tailored to the specific disaster that just happened, and base their support off of those responses.

When looking towards how candidates respond to natural disasters as a kairotic moment in their campaigns it is important to note the idea of ethics in kairos. “Aristotle’s idea that the confidence must be due to the speech itself is clearly an affirmation of the importance of the individual situation, that is, the kairos of the case” (440). In this quote the authors explain how speakers gain a vote of confidence from the audience if a speech is delivered well, even if the speaker had not had the vote of confidence prior to the speech. This concept is important to understand as it ties into politics and natural disasters directly. Even if the public did not have prior confidence in a candidate’s ability to handle crisis situations, once the candidate makes a speech, engaging the public in a crisis situation, the candidate may be able to gain confidence from that speech alone without regard to his earlier triumphs or faults. This is key during a presidential election because a candidate who may be faltering in the eyes of the voters has the opportunity,

when a natural disaster occurs, to respond to it gracefully and regain confidence from the voters if they believe the candidate's speech and response is worthy.

Exploring Disaster Declarations

I will now explore previous scholarship to explain how often politicians use natural disasters to boost voter support for their campaigns, especially in the months immediately leading up to an election. This scholarship will also help explain how natural disaster response can positively, or negatively, affect voter support during campaign seasons.

Alan B. Krueger, in his *New York Times* article "At FEMA, Disasters and Politics Go Hand in Hand", suggests "presidents have displayed a tendency to declare more disasters in years when they face re-election" (1). Krueger explains "disaster requests are not evaluated based on standard quantitative evidence; instead, declarations involve subjective judgment" (1). Thus the President can decide, based on his/her judgment, whether a natural weather event is destructive enough to qualify as a disaster. Krueger posits that declarations of this kind sometimes have more to do with political aspirations than the actual weather, because if a president sees a kairotic opportunity to make a disaster declaration that will benefit their campaign, it may be more likely that they will do so to generate voter support. Unfortunately, as will be explored later in this section, the tendency of presidents to issue disaster declarations greatly increases during election years in contrast to their declarations of disasters in other years. In non-election years, presidents are less likely to make disaster declarations or to fund disaster preparedness efforts, thus when they are executing disaster declarations during their re-election years,

they may in some cases be trying to overcome previous backlash for not declaring natural disasters warranted in earlier times.

Continuing in his article, Krueger expands his argument to discuss the effects which an election year makes on a president's declaration decision process: "Even after accounting for the amount of precipitation and flood damage each year, they found that the average number of flood-related disasters declared by the president was 46 percent higher in election years than in other years" (1). This was especially true for George W. Bush, the incumbent candidate in 2004. According to the article, "When George W. Bush faced re-election in 2004, he declared 61 major disasters in 36 states—10 more than in 2003 and tied for the second highest number of major disaster declarations ever, according to data provided by FEMA" (1). Therefore, while disaster declarations are used in a positive way to enhance the relief efforts for states affected by disasters, they are also often used by incumbent candidates to generate voter support. The problem with the trend of issuing more disaster declarations during election years is that there is a lack of preparedness for disasters in the years between elections. Presidents in non-election years often focus more on other domestic issues and foreign affairs where they believe funds are more important than on natural disaster preparedness. Natural disasters are something presidents do not always respond quickly to because they are so difficult to anticipate, forcing presidents to respond in the moment, and not prior to the disaster. These unanticipated events may then become timely and opportune moments for candidates to establish themselves as presidential, given they respond well. As incumbents seize the kairotic moment of natural disasters in the form of issuing a disaster declaration, they

may be trying to regain voter support that may have been lost due to their lack of preparedness for earlier disasters.

James Ming Chen expands Krueger's discussion on the cycles of disaster declarations and how presidential incumbents utilize their responses to disasters during election years in his article "LEGAL SIGNAL PROCESSING: A Polynomial and Periodic Model of Presidential Disaster Declarations under the Stafford Act." Chen states, "A presidential disaster declaration appears to be worth one or two percentage points on a state-by-state basis in presidential elections. Some scholars have asserted that spikes in disaster declarations appear to coincide with presidential election years" (1). He explains:

Scholars evaluating this record have casually observed that presidential disaster declarations may follow the presidential election cycle. Indeed, many of the peak years in this period have coincided with presidential election years: 1964: 25; 1972: 48; 1984: 34; 1992: 45; 1996: 75; 2004: 68; 2008: 75. (13)

Therefore, in addition to exemplifying their leadership role by declaring disasters and being involved in disaster relief aid, incumbent presidents have a precedent to look towards as their campaign strategists should be aware of the additional support they will receive from the voters based on their issuance of disaster declarations. However, the notion that effects of a disaster could be diminished by disaster-preparedness appears again through Chen's article. He notes "Voters reward incumbent politicians for making relief expenditures after disaster, but not for investing in preparedness before disaster. Politically speaking, it pays to send in the cavalry" (4-5). This quote explains that

incumbent politicians are better off reacting to disasters rather than effectively preparing for them in that the reactions seem to create a kairotic moment for looking and sounding presidential, particularly on the campaign trail. As this fact is known and utilized throughout campaign seasons, it is no shock when Chen points out “The political economy of public intervention in disaster finance virtually guarantees catastrophic legal responses to catastrophic risks. Government systematically underinvests in disaster preparedness ex ante and overinvests in disaster relief ex post” (4). Disaster-preparedness, then, could actually be a deterrent to voter support, because if the states have prepared for a disaster in advance, the president will not have the opportunity to display his leadership role to as great an extent after the disaster has occurred. Voters, during non-campaign seasons, do not reward presidents who spend money on disaster preparedness because of the nature of natural disasters, they are unpredictable and therefore we cannot anticipate them (Chen). Presidents, therefore, use disaster declarations to their advantage, appealing to the voters and showing that they can raise funds for natural disaster relief in a short amount of time when the disaster strikes.

Chen also points out “One study concluded that states in competitive play in a forthcoming presidential election were twice as likely, *ceteris paribus*, than noncompetitive states to receive a presidential disaster declaration” (12). Therefore, if a president wishes to generate an increase in voter support from swing states, they may provide these states with disaster relief in the months leading up to an election. The presidential incumbent is able to generate voter support with his responses to natural disasters because he is able to play a leadership role in the disaster relief efforts. The non-

incumbent candidate has to take a backseat to the action, because he or she cannot overstep the boundaries set by their role in government and in the relief process.

Natural disasters and the declaration of natural disasters have differing impacts on different types of voters. John T. Gasper and Andrew Reeves examine two main types of electorates in their article “Make It Rain? Retrospection and the Attentive Electorate in the Context of Natural Disasters.” The first electorate, which the authors define based on voter-perceptions, is the responsive electorate. The responsive electorate “views retrospective judgments as a direct response to the absolute state of the world. Electorates punish or reward an incumbent party based on the state of the world without regard to the responsibility of the incumbent in shaping it” (341). During an election year, in the case of generating votes from the responsive electorate, candidates would hope for a year without any natural disasters or crises that were out of their control. Even if a candidate did respond to a natural disaster, the voters would look towards the disaster happening, and not the candidate’s response efforts.

However, if the candidates wanted to generate votes from the other electorate, the attentive electorate, they might desire or even work to create the moment of opportunity that natural disasters bring to their campaigns. The attentive electorate, according to Gasper and Reeves, “is more discriminating. In this framework, competent politicians who preside over bad times are judged on the actions they took and not the circumstance beyond their control” (341). The attentive electorate pays attention to “the actions of their elected officials and being able to assign praise or blame based on the authority and actions of the politician” (342). Keeping this attentive electorate in mind, it is essential for politicians, especially incumbents, to respond quickly and appropriately in times of

natural disaster. For instance, as pointed out through the article, the attentive electorate can place blame on politicians who decide to deny a disaster declaration request. “When President Bush rejected a request for a disaster declaration for counties in central Illinois in early 2008,” according to the author, “the anger was reflected in the coverage by the local newspaper” (344). In this situation the media turned against President Bush because of his denial for the disaster declaration request made by the governor. Therefore, the attentive electorate looks for an incumbent who is able to respond quickly and effectively to disasters and who shows what their leadership roles can do for relief efforts during natural disasters.

In the event that politicians are faced with a natural disaster there is a disaster declaration process which governors must follow to make a request to the president so the president can declare a disaster and federal aid can be funded to help with the disaster relief efforts. This process,

allows us to observe two actors who can take action to provide aid to a group of individuals who have been affected by severe weather. The governor first initiates the process by making a request of the president. The president then has unilateral control to grant or deny this request, which determines whether federal assistance will be granted. (343)

These requests, and the subsequent grant or denial, by the president can shape upcoming elections for both gubernatorial and presidential candidates. According to Gasper and Reeves, the intent to aid in disaster relief can improve a governor’s political standing, while, on the other hand, if a presidential incumbent has turned down a disaster declaration he can be punished by the electorate (344).

Gaspar and Reeves state “electorates penalize incumbents for randomly determined natural events, but they also reward the president when he responds” (352) and “presidential disaster declarations typically more than make up the cost of severe weather damage” (352). Overall, if a presidential incumbent responds to natural disasters with the right intent and actions, in the view of the attentive electorate, the president’s actions and response will outweigh the negative effects of the disaster. A time which is most important for the candidates to respond to events is “the six months before the election” because “the electorate responds to events in this time period” (353-354) and often demonstrates that response as votes on Election Day. This suggests that responding to natural disasters may create a kairotic moment for campaigning for the presidential incumbent. These six months before the election are key as this is the time when voters pay the most attention to an incumbent’s actions and his responses to issues that are arising throughout the country. Due to the keen eye of the voters being on the incumbent during this time, incumbents have been led to use disaster declarations to their advantage to gain voter support. This time explains why so many disaster declarations are being made by presidents in re-election years.

The importance of the timing of disaster declarations cannot be overstated when looking towards the campaigns of presidential candidates. During the time leading up to an election, candidates’ actions can be swayed by the impending importance of their responses. Due to this fact, candidates’ actions may change when responding to requests for declarations during the six-month time period. The rise of social media has seen the same trend with presidential incumbents posting about more of their response efforts than the non-incumbent candidates did in the face of natural disasters. The ability to showcase

their response efforts through social media allows incumbents to gain voter support, especially if the disaster was unexpected and the country was underprepared for it. Without preventative efforts prior to a natural disaster the president is able to make a bigger impact on voters with his response to the disaster as the situation is often more dire and therefore more dramatic. The opportunity to respond to natural disasters lends itself to various incentives for the incumbent to be effective in their response tactics, one of which will be discussed in the following paragraph, and others which will be further discussed throughout subsequent chapters.

One of the main incentives to presidential incumbents seizing the opportunity to respond to natural disasters, and thus to generate voter support for their campaign, is exemplifying the fact that they are able to take on the role of a leader for the country. Leading up to the point of a natural disaster the presidential incumbent may have been focused on his campaign trail, but in the event of a natural disaster they are able to seemingly step away from their campaigns and use the situation to show the fulfillment of their leadership role. Presidential incumbents were able to show their leadership efforts before the rise of social media and its impact on campaigns. However, social media allows another platform which incumbents could use to show their relief efforts for natural disasters, while also allowing a platform for the non-presidential incumbent to their relief efforts and demonstrate presence as well, without overstepping their political boundaries.

In the following chapter I will detail the methods through which I explored the concept of presidential candidates' responses to natural disasters during a kairotic moment in their campaign season. I will explain how I chose campaigns to investigate for

these types of natural disaster responses, how I collected my data while exploring these campaigns, and then how I analyzed the data collected from the campaigns.

Chapter 3: Methods

As literature demonstrates, social media has gained momentum within the past decade, from a proliferation of various social media platforms, to US citizens turning to social media as their main news source. The literature review also details how US political campaigns harnessed social media as an online strategic tactic to attain and increase voter support. In addition, I outlined how natural disasters may provide presidential candidates with a kairotic moment during their campaigns, especially in the six months leading up to Election Day. In my second chapter I expanded on the idea of natural disasters being an opportune moment for candidates and how candidates use disasters to improve their voter support by issuing an elevated number of disaster declarations in the months leading up to the Election Day or through strategic online responses to such disasters. This chapter explains how I explored these trends through two case studies, the 2004 presidential election between President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry and the 2012 presidential election between President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. In this chapter I introduce the two presidential election campaigns compared in this study and explain how I split up the data to isolate social media campaigning from other types of internet campaigning and media coverage.

This study is guided by two research questions responding to the issues discussed previously.

- 1) Is it effective for politicians to use social media to respond to natural disasters?
- 2) Are a candidate's social media responses to natural disasters able to generate a sense of public support for the candidate's campaign?

There are also several sub-questions that I used to investigate these questions:

- How do candidates perform authentic voice through their social media posts?
- How does this personal tone allow candidates to connect more with their supporters?
- What do candidates focus on in their posts about natural disasters?

These questions all focus on the impact that utilizing social media during a natural disaster can have on a political campaign.

My project was designed to highlight and isolate the impact of social media on political campaigns. The project considers two campaigns as case studies, one taking place prior to the advent of social media and one just 4 years ago, when social media was well established as tools of communication and to report timely events. The similarity between these campaign seasons, though separated by 8 years, is natural disasters. After focusing on natural disasters and researching the impact they can have on presidential campaigns, I realized the election years for which natural disasters have the greatest impact on campaigns is years in which a president is able to run for re-election and when the natural disaster occurs within six months of the election. From this new awareness I decided to focus my thesis on two campaigns in which a president is running for re-election as well as when a natural disaster declaration was made within six month of the election. It is important to note that the two campaign years examined through this project, 2004 and 2012, hosted natural disasters within six months of the election, as these are the months in which voters look to candidates to respond quickly and effectively to natural disasters. Due to the rise of new media and different outlets for candidates to show their support for relief effort, the types of responses seen from

presidential hopefuls have differed over the past twenty years. The rise of social media gave candidates another venue in which to respond to these disasters, one in which they are freer to express their response efforts without seeming unsympathetic to those who were impacted by the disaster. For this reason, my data collection focused on candidates' responses pre- and post-social media popularity. For the different data sets I looked at different media from the campaigns; however, those different media sources provided the candidates with the ability to invoke personal voice in their responses to disasters. From the 2004 campaign I studied four newspaper articles, four photographs, and two personal statements which the candidates were either featured in or published themselves, in the two weeks following Hurricane Ivan. From the 2012 campaign I studied Facebook and Twitter posts from the two candidates' personal accounts in the two-week span before, during, and after Hurricane Sandy. In total I found two posts on Facebook from Barack Obama and three from Mitt Romney, as well as six Twitter posts from Barack Obama and two from Mitt Romney which focused specifically on Hurricane Sandy during that timeframe.

After collecting the data on both campaigns and candidates' responses, I explored the similarities and differences between the two campaigns' responses. I then looked toward news articles and polls to get an idea of how the voters and the news media were receiving responses to the hurricanes. Through gathering this data, I was able to offer evidence of the ways in which responses either had the potential to sway voter perception of the candidates, due to their positive or negative feedback on the candidates' actions. This evidence shows how natural disasters, and candidates' responses to the natural disasters, can have an effect on public perception of a candidate. The perceptions from

the public can be impacted by candidates seizing an opportune moment found in natural disasters, depending on whether or not the public feels that the candidate responded effectively. In order to isolate the impact that social media has had on candidates' responses to natural disasters I focused on two elections that were influenced by natural disasters, one before the rise of social media and one where campaigns utilized social media heavily as a news source for voters.

The Incumbent versus the Senator: The Time before Facebook Campaigns

I chose to explore the 2004 presidential election between President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry because, during the campaign season, the Internet was used for campaigning; however, social media was not used for campaigning during this election season because it was so new at the time that it had not gained much traction as a news source. Although several political campaigns have included discussion of natural disasters between an incumbent and a non-incumbent candidate, such as the 1992 election between President George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton and the 1996 election between President Clinton and Senator Bob Dole, it was important to choose two campaigns that both took advantage of the Internet but with differing access to social media and two campaigns where the presidential incumbent was the victor on Election Day. By doing so, the study isolates social media as one major variable for mapping the differences between these campaigns. As such, the campaign between Bush and Kerry displays the forms of media that were used when the presidential incumbent and his opponent were responding to natural disasters in their campaign season. Data collected for the first case study are artifacts from the mediums utilized by the candidates including newspaper articles, videos and articles which were circulated via the internet, and news

broadcasts on television. To study the role of social media in regards to natural disasters I chose to compare a campaign without social media, 2004, to a campaign with social media, 2012. I chose to look at internet news coverage on or about the 2004 candidates' participation in Hurricane Ivan so I could compare it to the tweets and Facebook posts of Obama and Romney in the 2012 campaign. By doing so I was able to capture moments in both campaigns where the personal voices of candidates were used to both speak out on the issues that the hurricanes caused and to reach out to voters. Because candidates were not using social media platforms in 2004 I was forced to seek out the accounts of those watching the candidates rather than of the candidates themselves.

The 2004 campaign season was plagued by natural disasters, such as Hurricane Charley and Hurricane Francis as well as severe weather and storms across the nation which caused flooding and landslides, but the main focus in this study is on the disasters in Florida, a state experiencing one of its worst hurricane seasons since 1996 in the months leading up to the 2004 election. As there were four major hurricanes during August and September 2004 I decided to limit my data collection to responses to Hurricane Ivan which struck the coast of Florida on September 16th, 2004, just a month and a half before Election Day, November 2nd, 2004. I focused on Hurricane Ivan because it was the strongest hurricane to hit the coast during the hurricane season and because its timing coincides with scholars' assumptions that natural disasters that occur in the six months directly before an election have a measurable impact on a campaign. I also chose to look at Hurricane Ivan specifically to isolate one natural disaster event, as Hurricane Sandy was isolated in 2012.

In my research I honed in on the responses to Hurricane Ivan from both President Bush and Senator Kerry during their campaigns. Because social media had not surfaced as a political tool in 2004 I pulled coverage from four major newspapers to reveal the personal presence of President Bush and Senator Kerry in the two weeks following Hurricane Ivan. For both candidates I turned to newspaper articles to understand how they responded and to draw quotes from each candidate voicing their response to the disaster. Another criterion I used to choose newspaper articles was that voters' voices must be present to understand how they were responding to the candidates' actions and statements. I was also able to find a personal statement made by Senator Kerry published on his campaign website following Hurricane Ivan. I then explored the White House website where President Bush's response actions were shown through a photograph gallery. I focused on pictures from his response efforts for Hurricane Ivan from September 19th to September 22nd. I also included a picture from a news article by the *Washington Post*. I chose to include these pictures because they highlighted President Bush's personal involvement in Hurricane Ivan relief efforts. I sorted the data by separating the responses, first examining responses from President Bush according to use of photographs and disaster relief efforts shown in news articles, and then examining responses from Senator Kerry from the use of personal statements to news articles focusing on his actions after the hurricane. I did this to highlight the different approaches the candidates took to addressing the kairotic moment of the natural disaster: Senator Kerry made a personal statement and President Bush appeared in photographs highlighting his relief efforts.

I then turned towards news articles from the two weeks following the hurricane that focused on each candidates' responses and highlighted criticisms and support they both received, as well as a Pew Research Poll to show how voters responded to their efforts. While searching for news articles I came across many that mentioned the hurricane season of 2004 as a whole, however, when choosing which articles to review for this study I focused only on articles dealing solely with Hurricane Ivan. This allowed me to narrow my search to fewer, more specific articles which led to more instances of the candidates' voices in actual quotes and also a greater correlation between direct responses from the candidates to Hurricane Ivan and the critics and voter feedback on those specific responses.

The Incumbent versus the Governor: Social Media Storms

The campaign that I chose to research for evidence on the impact of social media on campaigns is the 2012 presidential campaign between President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. The reason I picked this election is because it used social media and it hosted one of the biggest natural disasters in recent US history, Hurricane Sandy. Another reason I chose to explore the 2012 campaign versus the 2008 campaign is because the campaign featured an incumbent candidate, President Obama. In the event of a natural disaster the presidential incumbent is the candidate who is looked to by voters to respond to the disaster and to provide federal aid and relief efforts to the victims of the disaster. Because social media was established and widely used by the election of 2012, both President Obama's and Governor Romney's campaign strategies incorporated the use of social media when corresponding about issues, events, or campaign appearances. The use of social media was especially

prevalent when disaster struck in late October 2012. The natural disaster of Hurricane Sandy seemingly halted the two campaigns at its point of formation and contact with the Eastern Shore.

I chose to explore Hurricane Sandy because it generated an enormous media event, through news coverage of the storm and of candidates' responses to the storm in newspapers, online, and on television. Social media was also utilized during the storm as it was the platform, at this point, that many young voters were using to get their news. The presidential campaigns responded in part on different media outlets, and had a considerable presence on social media with responding to the disaster as well. An additional reason why I chose to focus on Hurricane Sandy is the fact that the hurricane hit the Eastern Shore only about a week before the Election Day, well within the six-month period where voters remember responses to disasters. I believe the dates being so close together is relevant because the topic of the hurricane and the candidates' responses to the hurricane were fresh on voters' minds as they went to vote on Election Day.

When exploring these campaigns' responses to the natural disaster I focused on their social media presence through their posts on social media. In this case, I collected data from only the candidate's official social media accounts during the time from which it was realized that Hurricane Sandy was going to be a substantial disaster until the relief efforts were ongoing after the hurricane was finished striking the coast. I focused on social media solely because I felt it was the most effective way to consider the candidates' attempts at exploiting immediacy and to share their personal voices with voters. I focused on the two social media platforms that were the main social media

platforms where President Obama and Mitt Romney staged their campaigns and were able to reach voters during the election season (Bimber).

From the understanding of the impact social media could have on campaigns, I chose to explore Facebook and Twitter posts from the two candidates' campaigns for the two weeks surrounding the hurricane. I chose to look at social media posts during a two-week time period, from October 22nd, when Hurricane Sandy formed, to November 2nd, when the candidates stopped posting about Hurricane Sandy. On Twitter I was able to conduct an Advanced Search which allowed me to look specifically at both candidates' Twitter posts during the dates in which Hurricane Sandy was talked about through the media. Their earliest posts were from October 27th and the posting continued until October 31st. During this time period I found 6 tweets from @BarackObama and 2 tweets from @MittRomney. Through their respective posts both candidates spoke about the impending damage that could be caused by Hurricane Sandy, relief efforts that they were involved in, and the need for residents to keep safe during and after the storm. I sorted the data by the messages the candidates were sending through social media, whether it was calling for donations to the Red Cross or personal messages about safety, as well as sorting the posts by time: from before, during, and after the hurricane.

I was able to examine the candidates' Facebook posts during the dates of Hurricane Sandy's impact as well by visiting each candidate's Facebook page, clicking down on the year bar to the year 2012 and then scrolling down to the dates aforementioned for Twitter. Again, as above in my Twitter search, I focused on the dates of Hurricane Sandy, October 22nd to November 2nd. I focused only on the Facebook posts which specifically mentioned Hurricane Sandy or the relief efforts, two posted by Barack

Obama and three posted by Mitt Romney. I first coded these posts based on tone of the candidates through their statements, and then I coded them by images which were attached to the posts. By doing so I was able to split the data into categories: statements made by the candidates on the impending damage that could be caused by the hurricane, relief efforts the candidates were involved in, and calls for citizens to stay safe during and after the storm. I further broke down those categories by splitting the posts by the timeline of the hurricane. By using both of these methods I was able to understand how both candidates utilized Facebook and Twitter and used their posts to reach out to their audiences in hopes of drawing approval from voters.

After gathering the data from the candidates' social media pages I wanted to explore the public and news media perceptions of how well the campaigns responded to Hurricane Sandy, in similar ways that my study of the Bush-Kerry campaign included public response analysis. For this I turned to different news sources, such as articles, polls and responses on their social media posts. I then was able to provide evidence for how perceptions were formed based on social media posts and whether the campaigns, who both utilized social media during the time, were able to generate voter support from their posts or whether the news media and the public scrutinized them for their responses. To further analyze and connect the two campaign seasons I also included The White House Twitter account in my Twitter search page which aided Obama's campaign, even if unintentionally, when they posted tweets about his concern for the citizens who could be, and were, affected by Hurricane Sandy and his response efforts in Hurricane Sandy's wake. My belief is even though The White House Twitter page was not intentionally aiding Obama's campaign, the steps that it took to post pictures of Obama in preparation

efforts as well as relief efforts coincided well with what Obama's campaign was posting on his Facebook and Twitter pages and most likely had an effect on his campaign's success. However, I did not include the data in President Obama's data section because there was no personal voice from the candidate in The White House posts.

The following chapters describe my findings for both campaigns. I begin in chapter four with a discussion of findings from the 2004 Bush-Kerry campaign to examine candidates' internet use prior to social media. I then turn to a discussion of findings from the 2012 Obama-Romney campaign to examine candidates' use of social media in chapter five.

Chapter 4: Two Presidential Hopefuls Face Disaster

Natural disasters provide a kairotic moment for presidential hopefuls to respond in a “presidential manner” in the midst of their campaign seasons, if responded to correctly and with thoughtful attention to content and message as discussed in chapter 2 on disaster declarations. The natural disasters which occurred during the months leading up to Election Day in the Bush-Kerry and Obama-Romney campaigns provided the candidates with an issue which demanded a response from at least, if not only, the presidential incumbent. Through this chapter I offer evidence on the ways in which natural disasters provided an opportunity in 2004 for President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry to respond to these devastating events during the months leading to the presidential election. President Bush and Senator Kerry were faced with the daunting task of understanding how to respond to natural disasters, what media to use, what messages to send out to their critics and voters, while also needing to keep a focus on their campaigns.

The natural disaster I focused on for the 2004 campaign season is Hurricane Ivan. Hurricane Ivan, which made landfall in the United States on September 16, 2004, was the strongest hurricane to hit Florida in the 2004 hurricane season. Hurricane Ivan was at a category 3 hurricane status when it reached the Gulf Coast of the US and brought “10 to 15 feet of storm surge, winds estimated as high as 120 miles per hour, and 117 tornadoes. Ivan claimed 92 lives in eight countries and caused some \$14 billion in damage in the U.S. alone” (Wiltgen 1). As social media had not yet reached mainstream popularity at this point in time, the candidates turned to different media to respond to the tragedy and to the public. In an effort to identify the same sort of instances of authenticity as might be

demonstrated in social media posts today, I looked towards personal statements from the two candidates. I pulled data from a variety of media including four newspaper articles and one statement made by Senator Kerry online, as well as media sources and a photo gallery released by the White House website, to evidence their responses. Because the campaign took place in 2004 the websites are no longer live and therefore not viable sources of data for this study. The responses used were categorized by content of the message, voice, and images to perform presence, followed by a discussion of the resulting support or disapproval the responses elicited from critics and voters. In lieu of social media, I focused on responses such as quotes and images that performed the candidates' voices. After discussing this data, I provide a brief discussion on the ability of the presidential incumbent to respond to natural disasters, and the disadvantage that a non-incumbent candidate faces in the event of a natural disaster, while also discussing a Pew Research Center poll that was reported on during the time of Hurricane Ivan.

Leadership Abilities Are Assessed

One of the major challenges presidential incumbents face when a natural disaster strikes is the need to showcase their leadership roles as president through their responses in media. The incumbent has to be able to display their fulfillment of their presidential leadership duties in a timely manner so that the voters will know if there ever is another time of crisis that the president can do his job and protect the people of the United States. President Bush seized the opportune moment to display his leadership roles following Hurricane Ivan. I will now explore a few sources which serve as a background to the data I used to study the campaigns.

William Douglas and James Kuhnenn, in their article “Hurricanes’ election-year role: After each storm, Bush has visited Florida and offered aid. Kerry has had a tougher challenge,” highlight the way in which President Bush demonstrated his presidential leadership role during the hurricane season of 2004, especially after the devastation of Hurricane Ivan. They stated,

Why has Bush - whose aides said early in the administration that he wouldn't engage in as many “I feel your pain” gestures as President Bill Clinton - rushed to Florida after every storm? Because it allows him to employ the power of the presidency and perks of incumbency to benefit his reelection bid, several political analysts said. (1)

In essence, even though President Bush appears to his audience as though he is stepping away from his political campaign and showing his leadership at work when a disaster strikes, this was, in fact, a very tactical move for his campaign to make. Through his actions he is demonstrating what the country wants to see in the face of a disaster, someone who can step up to the plate and perform his presidential duties as the leader of the country, providing support for the victims of the disaster and participating in relief efforts for those affected by the disaster. In regards to Hurricane Ivan, news coverage on Bush’s actions was featured in four articles that focused on the hurricane solely apart from the other hurricanes that affected the area during the time which will be discussed further in this chapter (Douglas and Kuhnenn, 2004; *The Washington Post*, 2004; West, 2004; Kennedy, 2004).

Continuing in their article, Douglas and Kuhnenn point out that The White House gave another reminder of the great things President Bush was doing in the wake of

the storm “with a news release that detailed Bush's \$7.1 billion supplemental budget request to respond to damage from Hurricanes Ivan and Jeanne. The total supplemental request for Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne exceeds \$12.2 billion, White House officials said” (1) The White House highlighted and supported the actions of the president in the face of a disaster, which, in turn, also supplemented support for the incumbent’s campaign. The White House also gave another avenue for which the presidential incumbent could generate support for his campaigns, because while the statements were not coming straight from the president, or his campaign sites, the White House supported his actions, therefore drawing more voters’ attention to the duties he attended to in the wake of Hurricane Ivan. These actions are significant because, in addition to news coverage of President Bush’s time in Florida following Hurricane Ivan, the White House provided an additional source through which voters could view President Bush’s presence, and dedication to, relief efforts.

From News Services, at *The Washington Post*, in the article “‘We’re Praying For You,’ Bush Tells Storm Victims,” there is agreement with the Douglas and Kuhnenn’s article about President Bush’s abilities to bring his leadership roles to Florida in the wake of Hurricane Ivan. The article quotes President Bush in his statements on how Floridians were reacting to the storm, “Bush said he was moved by the number of people who have stepped forward to help others in need. ‘The amazing thing about these catastrophes is how the American people rise to the occasion” (1). This statement shows that President Bush was able to praise Floridians on their efforts while also commenting on the country as a whole, citizens who come together in times of crisis. In this way he was showing that, with him as the leader, the country would be able to face times of crisis because of

how united the people are with one another. The article goes on to highlight his travels and the sights he saw as well as the political support he was gaining by visiting after the storm:

Bush saw homes obliterated, their lawns littered with broken lamps, clothes dryers, windows, chairs and microwaves. In the devastation, he also found political support. One resident held up a dilapidated piece of cardboard scrawled with the words: "George Bush. You have our vote!"

(1)

President Bush seized his kairotic opportunity in Florida, visiting those who were affected by Hurricane Ivan, consoling them and helping with relief efforts. While his presence was felt in Florida by the citizens affected by the hurricane and evidenced through articles and photographs published alongside those articles as in the *Washington Post*, the rest of the nation was able to see the steps he was taking to aid in the disaster relief after Hurricane Ivan, thus they were able to see him looking very presidential as he sought the office again. The coverage that President Bush received from news outlets such as the *Washington Post* article mentioned above were, in effect, free campaign advertising. Coverage of the incumbent's disaster response efforts, in this case President Bush, did not have to be publicized by the campaign itself if news sources were covering it extensively.

To explore each candidate's responses to this event, I considered four photographs of President Bush during relief efforts, one statement by Senator Kerry, and pulled quotes from news sources from President Bush. The photographs, four of which are discussed in this study, were disseminated through news media sources, online, in

newspapers, and on television and had the ability to display to voters the support President Bush was giving to Floridians, as well as the support the victims of Hurricane Ivan were giving back to him due to his efforts in their state. These photographs were published both on the White House website, through a photo gallery, and in various news articles, both in print and online, which were released following Hurricane Ivan. The photo galleries, capturing the opportune campaigning moments to demonstrate leadership, displayed his relief efforts so the public had a way to view his efforts, not just reading about them. The photographs were also beneficial to President Bush as he was able to show that he could step away from his campaign trail and appearances and focus on response efforts for the victims of Hurricane Ivan. One of these photographs was included in *The Washington Post* article (see figure 1).



Figure 1. President Bush meets with residents during his tour to assess damage done by Hurricane Ivan in Pensacola.

This image shows Bush interacting with the public in Florida following Hurricane Ivan. The photograph appears un-staged and places the incumbent in the midst of the storm relief efforts directly following Hurricane Ivan. The photograph shows President Bush clearly talking with supporters, purportedly using his authentic personal voice. His voice is performed by his actions in this photograph and his engagement with the

residents and the relief efforts for those residents. The picture reflects what he does not specifically say in a personal statement, that he is there for the residents affected by the hurricane and he is dedicated to relief efforts for them.

Other photographs of his visits to Florida were compiled in a “Hurricane Relief 2004 Photo Essay” by The White House website on their “Hurricane Recovery” page. These images show President Bush surveying damage caused by the hurricanes (see figure 2), consoling residents who were affected by the hurricanes (see figure 3), and working with the First Lady helping the relief efforts by passing out water and other supplies (see figure 4).



Figure 2. President Bush visits Pensacola, Fla. where residents took him on a walking tour through homes that no longer existed.

This image clearly shows the incumbent, President Bush, assessing damage in the midst of the aftermath of hurricane Ivan. He appears to be speaking with a resident who has been affected by the hurricane, showing he is personally involved in communications with and aiding the residents of Florida who suffered because of Hurricane Ivan. The image shows President Bush as using his authentic personal voice as he is exploring the damage caused by the storm. The photograph performs his authentic voice because the viewer is able to see his actions and concern through his involvement in surveying sites

damaged by the hurricane. This personal involvement shows his compassion and dedication to the residents who were affected by Hurricane Ivan.



Figure 3. President Bush spends time with local residents during a walking tour of hurricane damage in Pensacola, Fla., Sept. 19, 2004.

This image shows President Bush interacting with more members of the public in Florida. This image appears un-staged and shows the incumbent being compassionate to the residents who have been affected by Hurricane Ivan, even appearing as though he is consoling the residents with whom he is visiting during this walking tour. The photograph shows his personal presence in Florida as well as his personal emotions and sympathy for the victims of Hurricane Ivan. His facial expression as well as his body language towards the residents show his concern and compassion, performing his concern in lieu of personal statements.



Figure 4. Laura Bush works with volunteers and The Army National Guard at the Indian River County Distribution Center passing out water, ice and Meals Ready To Eat.

This image shows that not only the incumbent is involved in relief efforts for Hurricane Ivan victims, but that his wife, the first lady, is as well. This image shows the First Lady, Laura Bush, working in relief efforts and shows that the First Family is involved personally in relief efforts for the hurricane victims. Therefore, this image shows that not only does the country keep a leader who is dedicated to responding in times of need, but they support a whole family who is dedicated to response efforts if they choose to re-elect President Bush.

Photographs, like those shown above, clearly were intended to show the president and his first lady as caring, involved, and presidential. Floridians who were receiving visits from the First Family were already aware of their efforts, but the photographs allowed citizens who were not in Florida to view how involved the Bushes were in the relief efforts for those affected by the hurricanes. These photographs made it possible for President Bush to perform voice without making official personal statements during the relief efforts for Hurricane Ivan. The content of the photographs made President Bush appear to be involved in relief efforts while also appearing sympathetic. His authentic voice can be seen through the photographs as he is speaking with and consoling the

residents affected by Hurricane Ivan, therefore the photographs were another way of using his personal voice to ground him in the relief efforts. The photographs have other rhetorical effects as well, such as the ability to evoke emotion in the viewer. As viewers see President Bush touring the residential spaces affected by Hurricane Ivan, they sympathize with the victims of the hurricane, making Bush's relief efforts seem even more authentic.

Joining in on praising President Bush's involvement in relief efforts, a FEMA article, "President Bush Declares Third Major Disaster for Florida Due to Hurricane Ivan," published on September 16, 2004, highlights Bush's role in the Hurricane Ivan disaster response efforts and speaks of him ordering "the release of all necessary federal disaster aid resources for Florida" (1). The article goes on to mention Michael Brown, Under Secretary of Homeland Security for Emergency Preparedness and Response, who said "the President took the action under a major disaster declaration issued in response to Hurricane Ivan that struck the Florida Panhandle this morning" (1).

Brown continued to highlight President Bush's involvement in the response efforts for Hurricane Ivan and in light of the hurricanes that had already hit Florida earlier in the season: "President Bush has seen first-hand the incredible losses that Floridians already have sustained and knows how much more they are enduring from this destructive storm," Brown continued, "He has directed the federal government to continue helping those affected by these hurricanes rebuild their lives" (1). President Bush was able to direct the federal government to help the victims of Hurricane Ivan by officially declaring the hurricane a disaster on September 16th, 2004. The above quote was a way, in addition to the photographs, to put President Bush on the ground, which

helped voters view him as presidential, even when he wasn't visible on the campaign trail.

When declaring Hurricane Ivan a major disaster for Florida on September 16th, 2004, it was President Bush's 47th major disaster declaration of the year. This number of disaster declarations was higher than many of the presidential incumbents who were candidates before him, such as in 1992 when George H.W. Bush declared a total of 45 disasters, and in 1984 when Ronald Regan declared a total of 34 disasters (Chen). As has been stated in the previous chapter, declarations of disasters are highest when there is an election year with an incumbent president, as President Bush was in 2004. Therefore, his campaign strategy was able to work in two ways: he was gaining support from voters due to his compassion for those affected by the hurricane when he went to visit Florida, as well as gaining support for issuing a disaster declaration.

Attentiveness to Politics

Occurring at the same time that President Bush was visiting Florida and offering his hand in the efforts for disaster relief after Hurricane Ivan, there were conflicting views on how the political campaigns would be affected by the stream of natural disasters. The media itself recognized the power of disaster rhetoric delivered at the opportune, kairotic moment for both candidates. According to Paul West's article "Hurricanes scramble the Bush-Kerry race in Fla.," in the *Baltimore Sun*, coverage of the hurricane did not guarantee a positive response from voters. The residents, who would be voting on the presidency a few short months later, had conflicting views in aspects related to their attentiveness to the campaigns in the wake of natural disasters. In a section of the article called "Divided attention" a quote from a resident in an Orlando

suburb, who was waiting for a roof repair, remarked “‘I’ve watched the news a whole lot, and what I’ve watched is about the storms,’ she said. ‘It’s definitely taken away from my ability to pay attention to politics’” (2).

In the same section of the article, however, one Osceola County resident said, on the subject of politics, “‘I’m paying attention, now more than ever, because of what we’ve gone through’” (2). This particular resident was discouraged by the misleading promises made by federal disaster agencies in response to the storm. The resident continued, saying, “‘I think more people will vote than ever this year. They’re sick and tired of no change. If you don’t have an excessive amount of money, under the Bush administration, there’s been no improvement in your quality of life’” (2).

As evidenced through West’s article, there were also divided responses from political figures related to the question of whether the hurricane responses would have an effect on the election. Regarding the Election Day, “‘Officials of both campaigns concede that there’s no precedent for gauging the impact of three - or more - hurricanes on a presidential contest in a single state. They say they expect it to influence the result on Election Day, but exactly how they can’t say’” (1). On the other hand, one independent pollster in Fort Lauderdale, Jim Kane, stated “‘By the time the November election gets here, the hurricanes won’t help either side,’ Kane said. Then he qualified his prediction - if another hurricane doesn’t strike the state, he said” (1).

Therefore, neither campaign officials nor voters could predict exactly how Hurricane Ivan would influence the election. However, with other hurricanes still to come in the hurricane season, and numerous other disaster declarations, 21 to be exact, to be announced by President Bush, the precedent of the president fulfilling his leadership

duties would not soon leave the minds of those voters who sympathized with, or those who were, the citizens and voters who were affected by Hurricane Ivan.

Non-Incumbent's Limited Response Capacity

Conversely, at the same time incumbent President Bush was able to show his leadership roles being fulfilled and demonstrate his performance of duties, the other presidential candidate, Senator John Kerry, was left without a solid avenue to respond to the natural disasters. In William Douglas' and James Kuhnenn's article "Hurricanes' election-year role: After each storm, President Bush has visited Florida and offered aid. Kerry has had a tougher challenge" (1). The authors point out, "For Kerry, the quadruple-hurricane whammy has been anything but a perfect storm. The hurricanes have forced him to reduce his campaigning in the state in deference to residents trying to put their lives back together, and to avoid the appearance of using the disasters for political gain" (1).

In light of Senator John Kerry neither being the president nor the governor of Florida, his campaign team felt he did not fit into a solid place for aiding in the disaster relief efforts in Florida. At the same time, to be compassionate to the people of Florida, his campaign events had to be postponed in Florida, for the sake of not seeming unsympathetic to the damage the hurricanes had caused. In Douglas' and Kuhnenn's article Richard F. Foglesong, a political science teacher, is quoted speaking on the topic of what Senator Kerry's next steps could be, "'John Kerry has to do the polite thing and stay away from a state that is distressed,' Foglesong said, 'He's really frozen. That's a double win for Bush'" (1).

The social media platform, being the foreground for political campaigning currently, allows a space for the non-incumbent to participate in disaster relief, as I will evidence in the upcoming chapter with Romney in the 2012 campaign. Romney was able to utilize Facebook and Twitter in the wake of Hurricane Sandy to respond to the natural disaster. However, in 2004 when Senator John Kerry was on the campaign trail he did not have the resources which social media now affords to non-incumbent candidates. Senator Kerry, therefore, was left without a solid avenue to reach out to voters and to generate voter support based on disaster relief efforts because he was limited by the forms of media that he could utilize. These traditional forms of media such as newspaper articles are only available if reporters and editors deem the story worth telling and press releases on campaign websites or visits to Florida, if he had used them to continue campaigning in Florida, could have made him appear unsympathetic to the victims of the hurricane as he ran the risk of turning the hurricane – and its victims – into props for his election. Additionally, attempting to deflect attention from Bush's efforts might have been seen by voters as criticizing the efforts of President Bush, efforts which were, at the time, supported and effective.

Senator John Kerry was, however, able to make a few statements about the natural disaster in support of the residents affected by Hurricane Ivan. I analyze each for the content of the message and the tone of the voice he is using in the message. He utilized these opportunities to show his support and his compassion for the citizens who were affected by Hurricane Ivan. The following is a statement on Hurricane Ivan which Senator Kerry released on September 16th, 2004 on the site votesmart.org,

Teresa and I offer our heartfelt prayers for all those affected by Hurricane Ivan. To the families in Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia and Mississippi who are facing such great loss and devastation, our deepest sympathies are with you. Our thoughts are also with those still bracing for the storm and with those charged with the difficult work of recovery. You have the support of the entire nation.

In its wake, Hurricane Ivan has left tremendous devastation here at home as well as throughout the Caribbean. We unite today in our prayers and support for all those rebuilding communities, homes, businesses and lives in the days to follow.

This response was more personal than Bush's responses because it used personal pronouns and seems to be spoken in Kerry's authentic voice. These aspects of the response allowed Kerry's personal voice to be heard. Kerry was also able to evoke leadership qualities through his tone and message as he reached out to the country as a whole, allowing him to seem both genuine and also like a leader. The response sent a message to both the victims of the hurricane and those working on disaster relief to stay strong during the hard times that they were facing. The content of the message focused on how the country stood behind the victims of Hurricane Ivan, showing that even though he wasn't the president, Kerry understood what messages he had to invoke in his speech to show leadership. With access to social media, where his personal voice would have been more accessible, Kerry might have been very successful with this approach. However, due to the limited accessibility to this voice and news articles focusing on his rallies in Florida, his personal voice and sympathy for the victims of the hurricane were lost.

Another way that Senator Kerry reached out to those who were affected by Hurricane Ivan was in statements in a speech he gave while visiting Florida. John Kennedy, in his *Orlando Sentinel* article “Ready or Not, Election Roars Back,” focuses on the speech that Senator John Kerry and his running-mate Senator John Edwards made just a few days after Hurricane Ivan devastated Florida. Because up to that point the hurricanes had kept Senator Kerry’s campaign out of the limelight, “It quickly became apparent that no visit to Florida could be complete without talking about the weather. Kerry noted the tragedies that had beset the state, and said the country watched and prayed for Florida's storm-battered residents. He praised the state's spirit” (1). Again through his speech Kerry was able to use his personal voice to offer his condolences and support for the residents of Florida. The content of the message backed up this sense of sympathy for the storm victims, praising their spirit and sending his condolences. The content of his message also focused again on the country, as a whole, as sympathetic to storm victims, as his personal statement did earlier. This shows that Kerry was taking a leadership stance, even though he was not the incumbent, to make a statement about the whole country and in a sense to speak on behalf of the whole country.

Having the opportunity to make these statements in his travels to Florida, Senator Kerry was able to participate in the response efforts for Floridian residents, as well as having his voice heard. However, the rest of his speech at the rally was about other issues. Due to other issues being raised during his speech, there were conflicting opinions on how well Senator Kerry addressed issues that were important to the most important voters, the swing voters of Florida. In adjoining statements from the article these views are expressed:

“It's no secret that Florida is a battleground,” said Reed Dickens, a Bush spokesman. “But we think their arrival now may be too little, too late. They're not right on the issues that matter to Floridians.” But those crowding the lower bowl and the floor of the arena were mostly solidly behind Kerry, the Massachusetts senator, although some said it was time for him to toughen his campaign on Bush. Several said they welcomed Kerry's tougher tone. (Kennedy 1)

In both of these responses to Senator Kerry and Senator Edward's rally in Orlando it is clear that there was a push, by critics and voters, for politicians to have a presence in Florida during the time following the hurricane. However, Senator Kerry's campaign may have missed a clear opportunity to highlight issues in regards to the hurricane's impact on the state and federal relief efforts. The risks involved with highlighting these issues may have been seen by campaign strategists as too daunting at the time of the Senator Kerry's rally in Florida, and with him commenting on the tragedy and the strength of Floridians, both at the rally and through his online statement he was able to make his response without overstepping his boundaries as a non-incumbent candidate.

Poll Results

On September 16, 2004, the same day of President Bush's declaration that Hurricane Ivan was a major disaster for Florida, when hurricane season was underway and after President Bush had already declared disasters for many states in the panhandle, the Pew Research Center released an article titled “Kerry Support Rebounds, Race Again Even.” Before I discuss this article, it is important to note that the polling discussed in the

article was done in the weeks before Hurricane Ivan struck the coast of Florida.

According to the article,

Bush's biggest personal asset is his strong leadership image. By roughly two-to-one (58%-30%) voters say the phrase "strong leader" describes Bush rather than Kerry, and that view remained steady through the polling period. Moreover, Bush's supporters cite his leadership abilities as a basis of their vote far more often than did President Clinton's supporters during his reelection campaign in 1996, or former President Bush's backers four years earlier (1).

Throughout the polling results discussion, voters are continually referenced as believing in President Bush's powers as a leader, "**Bush also continues to lead on most key character traits.** By a substantial margin, he is seen as the candidate 'willing to take a stand, even if unpopular.' He also is widely viewed as 'a strong leader'; the candidate who would 'use good judgment in a crisis'; and 'down to earth'" (3).

This is not surprising, as President Bush had recently declared disasters and guided federal aid to numerous states that were affected by the start of the hurricane season and by other natural disasters in the months leading up to the polling, as well as being commander and chief during the September 11, 2001 attacks. It is not a stretch to imagine that after Hurricane Ivan and President Bush's declaration of the hurricane being a major disaster for, again, numerous states, that subsequent polling would show support for his leadership qualities. I would like to draw attention to the second to last comment from the polling results that states in the last quote that "the candidate who would 'use good judgment in a crisis'" (3). With the opportune moments which natural disasters

afforded him during his campaign, President Bush was able to continually showcase himself performing his leadership duties while responding to the disasters. Even though President Bush did publish a clear, personalized statement on Hurricane Ivan on his campaign website, showcasing his leadership abilities led voters to believe that he was the candidate who was best able to respond to a natural disaster effectively.

Both candidates' outreach through different media sources appear to have resulted in President Bush being able to secure about 51% of the popular vote, earning him 286 Electoral Votes, while Senator Kerry secured about 48% of the popular vote, earning 252 Electoral Votes. While this project does not measure direct voter impact, it is interesting that in Florida President Bush received 3,964,522 votes (52%) and Senator Kerry received 3,583,544 votes (47%). According to CNN.com Election results, in Florida in 2004 President Bush received votes from 93% of Republicans, 14% of Democrats, and 41% of Independents. These results show that President Bush had a stronger pull of swing voters from the Democratic Party than Senator Kerry had from the Republican Party with Kerry receiving only 7% of the Republican vote.

In this chapter I explored the responses of President Bush and Senator Kerry in regards to Hurricane Ivan. Both campaigns were able to employ strategies to have their personal voices heard; President Bush through quotes in news articles and Senator Kerry through a personal statement on his campaign website. The two campaigns were also able to have their personal presence felt in Florida, however these presences were manifested in different ways and resulted in two different outcomes. President Bush's personal presence was shown through photograph galleries and news articles which praised him for his time spent in Florida and his relief efforts. Senator Kerry's personal presence was

displayed through an article about his rally in Florida, in which he was criticized for not speaking about the hurricane and relief efforts more in his time in Florida. In this case the media sources afforded the incumbent president with an advantage over the non-incumbent, highlighting and praising his efforts in Florida, while the non-incumbent was criticized for not voicing his opinions and response to the hurricane at a greater level.

In the next chapter I will concentrate on social media effects on political campaigns in the wake of natural disasters as I explore President Barack Obama's and Mitt Romney's responses to Hurricane Sandy in 2012. To show the contrast of their campaigns to the campaigns of President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry, I will focus in on their social media use in hopes of comparing social media campaigns for Obama and Romney to the non-social media campaigns of President Bush and Senator Kerry.

Chapter 5: Two Presidential Hopefuls Respond to Disaster on Social Media

As President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry demonstrated in their 2004 presidential campaigns, natural disasters provide kairotic moments for presidential candidates to show their leadership strengths and to showcase their compassion for those affected by these tragedies. The political importance of these opportune moments was not lost on the presidential candidates of the 2012 election season. One of the most significant weather events of the 2012 election season, between President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, was Hurricane Sandy. Hurricane Sandy was declared by President Barack Obama as a major disaster for New Jersey, New York and Connecticut on October 30, 2012. Hurricane Sandy caused extensive damage in the United States. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Sandy caused \$67.6 billion in damages and 159 deaths. Further, according to Doyle Rice and Alia Dastagir's *USA Today* article "One year after Sandy, 9 devastating facts," "Sandy damaged or destroyed at least 650,000 homes and 250,500 insured vehicles. More than 300,000 business properties were also affected" (1) and "During Sandy's immediate aftermath, more than 8.5 million customers lost power, according to FEMA" (1). The timing of Hurricane Sandy aligned with the presidential election as it touched down on the coast of New Jersey only a week before Election Day, November 6, 2012 (see figure 7 and figure 8).

Through this chapter I will provide data from, and discuss, President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney's responses to Hurricane Sandy as they pertain to their social media presence on Twitter and Facebook. In analyzing the candidates' responses to Hurricane Sandy I sought out the most authentic voices of the candidates,

therefore, in place of official statements, I chose to look at Twitter and Facebook posts. For the 2012 presidential campaign analysis I chose to look at social media artifacts from both candidates rather than speeches they gave or newspaper coverage they received because as I studied in the previous chapter. Though different from the artifacts studied in the previous chapter, both mass and social media represented the best ways, during each particular campaign, for the candidates to speak out and reach the voters in the kairotic moment which Hurricane Sandy presented. In the 2012 presidential campaign both candidates expressed their support for those who were affected by Hurricane Sandy on their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. However, their responses differed by way of what material was in the messages each candidate was sending through their posts. President Obama used his Facebook and Twitter accounts to send out different messages about the hurricane and relief efforts as well as providing resources for those affected by the hurricane. Governor Romney, on the other hand, focused solely on calling on citizens to donate to Red Cross relief efforts. The candidates also differed on how they displayed, on their social media accounts, what disaster relief efforts they were involved in during the time of the disaster, and subsequently during the aftermath of the disaster, with President Obama using more visuals than Romney.

In this chapter I divide posts from the candidates into data sets governed by what time frame the posting occurred: before the hurricane made landfall on the East Coast, during Hurricane Sandy, and after Hurricane Sandy left the East Coast. I will also divide those data sets into categories based on which candidate was doing the posting, either President Obama or Governor Romney and will feature the Facebook posts and, subsequently, the Twitter posts from both candidates. I will then provide data related to

the feedback candidates received from voters and critics due to their response efforts and their posts on social media.

Social Media Use Leading Up to Hurricane Sandy

President Barack Obama:

The following posts are from President Barack Obama's official accounts for Facebook and Twitter. The posts, one from Facebook and two from Twitter, are from one day before Hurricane Sandy made landfall on the East Coast. President Obama's posts focus on two different aspects of safety efforts. First, his Facebook post and his first Twitter post focus on a call for donations to Red Cross relief efforts. In his Facebook post he demonstrates his involvement with the efforts to prepare the East Coast for the hurricane, through the picture displayed of President Obama in the Oval Office speaking with someone on the phone. The picture in his Facebook post also shows that, even though Election Day was approaching, President Obama was able to step back from campaigning and engaging in political debates in order to attend to his presidential duties, which reassured the voters that, in fact, his presidential duties came before his campaigning. This picture, along with the calls for support for the Red Cross, shows his leadership skills at work, visually and verbally (see figure 5 and 6). Through an additional post, President Obama warns those who reside on the Eastern Shore to stay safe, showing that he is compassionate and caring for the citizens of the country that he leads (see figure 7).



Figure 5. “States along the East Coast are preparing for Hurricane Sandy. If you can, please support American Red Cross disaster relief efforts here: <http://OFS.BO/JdnJ23>”



Figure 6. “States along the East Coast are preparing for Hurricane Sandy—support American Red Cross disaster relief efforts here: OFA.BO/v9CrHz”



Figure 7. “If you’re on the Eastern seaboard, please make sure to follow the instructions of your state and local officials today. Stay safe. –bo”

In his final post before Hurricane Sandy hit the Eastern Shore, President Obama urges citizens to stay safe during the hurricane. Ending his tweet, President Obama signs off with “-bo.” This signature following his post and warning to citizens is very personal compared to his earlier Twitter and Facebook posts. Using the signature “-bo” makes readers think President Obama was the actual author of the post, rather than a staffer who was posting through his social media account. By using this signature, President Obama was able to involve himself in his Twitter feed and show that he was more personally involved in outreach to citizens, thus being able to connect with more voters if they

picked up on his personal tone as well. In comparison to his Facebook post which showed President Obama in his leadership role and displaying his official position in that moment, the Twitter sign-off of “-bo” shows a more personal tone. The two different tones of the post, one being more official while the other is more personal, gives the voters a rounded sense of who President Obama is as a president, sympathetic and compassionate to those affected by disaster but also official and a leader at the same time.

Mitt Romney:

The next set of posts are from Mitt Romney’s official Facebook and Twitter accounts prior to the devastation of Hurricane Sandy. Romney’s posts, one from Facebook and one from Twitter, deal directly with supporting the Red Cross efforts by asking for donations and providing a link which people could use to access the donations site. By asking for donations to the Red Cross relief effort through his posts, Romney was displaying his dedication to relief efforts and his dedication to proactively helping the soon-to-be victims of Hurricane Sandy (see figure 8 and figure 9). On his Facebook post, contrary to the picture President Obama used, Romney displayed a picture of a “Support the Sandy Relief Effort” advertisement with a text messaging number that people could use to donate to the cause. Using this picture Romney was able to show that he was willing to put his campaign efforts into creating an image for the relief efforts for the victims of Hurricane Sandy. This shows Romney taking a step away from politics, and a step towards gathering help for the victims of Hurricane Sandy, seizing the kairotic moment at the time. However, Romney’s post, while showing a step away from the campaign trail and a focus on Hurricane Sandy, did not offer the voters proof that he was

personally involved in the relief efforts. As he did not show himself through this post, in the picture or through a personal statement, both of which President Obama included in his Facebook post, Romney failed to personalize his post enough in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.



Figure 8. “Please support the Sandy relief efforts by donating to the Red Cross. Text REDCROSS to 90999 or click here: <http://rdcrss.org/PSpvi2>”



Figure 9. “Please support the #Sandy relief efforts by donating to the Red Cross. Text REDCROSS to 90999 or click here: <http://rdcrss.org/PSpvi2>”

Social Media Use During Hurricane Sandy

President Barack Obama:

The subsequent three posts are from President Barack Obama’s official Twitter account during the time of Hurricane Sandy’s devastation. In his first post during the

hurricane President Obama spoke about America coming together during hardship, showing his leadership skills in speaking of uniting the country even in the face of a disaster (see figure 10).



Figure 10. “President Obama on Hurricane Sandy: ‘The great thing about America is that during tough times like this, we pull together.’”

In an additional post President Obama focused on the Red Cross relief efforts asking for donations and providing a link to the site where people could donate (see figure 11), showing his involvement in the progression of relief efforts for the victims of the hurricane. In his final tweet during Hurricane Sandy he speaks about preparation and response efforts, providing a link to the people who were in Hurricane Sandy’s path with information on how to prepare for the devastation of the hurricane (see figure 12). This final tweet showed his compassion for those who were being affected by Hurricane Sandy during the time of the hurricane.



Figure 11. “Support storm relief efforts where they’re needed most by contributing to the American Red Cross: OFA.BO/t4cVsp”



Figure 12. “If you live in Hurricane Sandy’s path, get the information you need on how to prepare here: ready.gov”

President Obama used his posts on Twitter during Hurricane Sandy to call for donations and to show his concern and compassion for those affected by the storm. It is important to note, however, that his personal sign-off of “-bo” is not present in his posts during the hurricane. This absence of his sign-off displays to his audience that President Obama is a leader, both in his actions and his tone and message in his posts.

Mitt Romney:

The following Facebook post is from Mitt Romney’s official account during Hurricane Sandy (see figure 13). During the hurricane Romney again focused his response post on support and donations for the Red Cross and again used a picture of his “Support the Sandy Relief Effort” advertisement. As has been explained there is usually not an area for the non-incumbent candidate to be involved with relief efforts during a natural disaster. However, through Romney’s use of Facebook and his short responses, only calls for donations, he was not overstepping his boundaries as the non-incumbent candidate. This strategy allowed him to show his support for the victims of the hurricane without appearing as though he was making the disaster over-political and trying to sway votes in his favor. He was able to show his support for the victims while remaining respectful of the leadership role that President Obama had to take during the time of the disaster. Romney’s downfall, however, was the inability to use his personal voice through social media. His Facebook post (see figure 13) shows a picture, generated by his campaign, which advocates for donations to the Red Cross. The picture does not evoke his authentic personal voice because it is a generic post, something that any organization

could generate. Therefore, Romney missed the opportunity to use his personal voice, both through the picture on the post and the text message of the post, both of which are too generic to be seen as his own personal voice.



Figure 13. “Please support the Sandy relief efforts by donating to the Red Cross. Text REDCROSS to 90999 or click here: <http://rdcrss.org/PSpvi2>”

Social Media Use After Hurricane Sandy

President Barack Obama:

The next posts are from President Barack Obama’s official Twitter and Facebook accounts after Hurricane Sandy, when relief efforts were in full force and the hurricane had moved away from the coast. In the days after Hurricane Sandy, President Obama posted about supporting the Red Cross efforts as he had done before and during Hurricane Sandy. In his one Facebook post and one Twitter post during this period he made a statement about his thoughts being with the victims of the storm as well as advocating for donations to the Red Cross efforts (see figure 14 and figure 15). This shows that he is compassionate towards the victims of Hurricane Sandy while also being

actively involved in the relief efforts that were attached to the devastation the hurricane caused.

In his Facebook post President Obama included a picture of himself meeting with other officials to discuss relief efforts, along with his words for the victims and the call for donations. This picture showed he was engaged in response efforts as well, not only asking for donations but also actively involved and staying informed with updates about the relief efforts. This shows that even though the storm had passed, President Obama was still tending to his duty of protecting the needs of Hurricane Sandy victims and not rejoining campaign efforts until his presidential duties were fulfilled. Although the picture is clearly not taken by President Obama, as he is pictured discussing Hurricane Sandy with other officials, the picture does not feel less authentic than a picture that he could take himself. The reason for this is because the picture still shows him being involved in efforts, showing that even though he has time to post about his efforts, he does not have time to take a huge step back from relief efforts to take and format his own image. The image displayed shows him fulfilling his presidential duties, albeit taken from another person's perspective, and is associated with his own thoughts on the hurricane shown from the text associated with the post.



Figure 14. “Our thoughts this morning are with everyone who’s been affected by the storm. Help support relief efforts where they’re needed most by donating to the Red Cross: <http://OFA.BO/ruDtEw>”



Figure 15. “Our thoughts and prayers go out to everyone affected by the storm. Support Red Cross relief efforts here: OFA.BO/2iMcEV –bo”

President Obama again used the “-bo” signature to end his Twitter post, this time during Hurricane Sandy. This signature, as it had done previously, gave a personal effect to his tweet. The signature showed that while he was engaged in compiling donations and responding to Hurricane Sandy, he was still able to take his time to post on Twitter and to engage in his own personal outreach to citizens affected by the storm. By using the signature President Obama made it seem as though he was writing the tweet sent out to readers and that it was not just another campaign worker publicizing his statements for him.

President Obama's personal sign-off on Twitter is again in contrast to the picture that was posted on his Facebook. The picture shows Obama engaged in a discussion, showing his leadership in action, while the tweet seems more personal due to his sign-off. The Facebook post also seems less representative of President Obama's personal voice because the picture is taken by someone else. The picture does show his personal presence though, just as the photographs of President Bush did in the 2004 campaign; however, the overall post invokes Obama's personal voice less because of the absence of his personal sign-off.

Mitt Romney:

The two following posts are from Mitt Romney's official Facebook and Twitter accounts after Hurricane Sandy. During this time Romney focused again on support for the Red Cross relief efforts (see figure 16 and figure 17). He also posted a picture of efforts made to compile supplies for the response effort in conjunction with the Red Cross (see figure 16). The picture appears to give a sense that he is more involved in relief efforts than he was previously during the hurricane. This addition of a picture displaying relief efforts makes Romney appear as though he is more of a hands-on contributor during the relief efforts which also shows that he took a step back from political campaigning to focus on, and participate in, relief efforts for the victims of Hurricane Sandy. However, Romney is not pictured in the photograph taken of relief efforts as President Obama had been throughout his posts. Thus, even with personal voice being utilized by non-incumbents through social media posts, these challengers to the incumbent are not able to make themselves a visible part of a natural disaster.



Figure 16. “Our continued prayers are with those affected by Sandy. Support the Red Cross: Text REDCROSS to 90999 or visit <http://rdcrss.org/PSpvi2>”



Figure 17. “Our continued prayers are with those affected by #Sandy. Support the Red Cross: Text REDCROSS to 90999 or visit rdcrss.org/PSpvi2”

Public Perception of Responses from Obama and Romney

President Obama and Mitt Romney both utilized social media to respond to the disaster that was created by Hurricane Sandy. Both candidates were able to show their support for the Red Cross relief efforts and to call for donations from their constituents. However, President Obama was given an extra opportunity, one that was not afforded to Romney, in his ability to exhibit the fulfillment of his presidential duties by providing pictures along with his posts of meetings with officials and Governor Chris Christie. His efforts did not go unrewarded, the public paid attention to his posts and recognized his

leadership abilities; President Obama and his campaign team successfully seized the opportunity that Hurricane Sandy allowed to showcase his leadership abilities.

Leslie Marshall, in her article “Hurricane Sandy Seals the Election for Obama,” points out that President Obama was able to use Hurricane Sandy as a kairotic moment to display to the electorate he could perform his duties well.

This is an opportunity for the president to be “presidential.” To show the leadership the right accuses him of lacking. To show America where they can put their trust in times of a crisis—whether it be a hurricane like Sandy, or worse, a terrorist attack. He and his administration clearly showed what to do in the case of a crisis like Sandy. (Marshall 1)

President Obama and his campaign team seized the kairotic moment that Hurricane Sandy presented during the weeks leading up to the presidential election. The campaign was able to use the disaster to display President Obama’s leadership qualities, thwarting any attempts by the Republican Party which intended to show that he was not capable of fulfilling his leadership duties as the president.

In addition to President Obama’s Facebook posts and tweets, the official White House Twitter account aided his efforts to showcase his fulfillment of his leadership duties as president in much the same way White House documents, statements and coverage aided President Bush during his campaign. The White House account posted about Obama’s involvement in response efforts during Hurricane Sandy (see figure 18). The White House account tweeted about President Obama’s involvement in the response efforts, providing a picture in which the president is displayed taking part in a meeting on the update of response efforts that were being made for Hurricane Sandy. This post by

The White House provided voters with another view on what response efforts President Obama was involved in during the time of Hurricane Sandy.



Figure 18. “Photo: President Obama receives an update on the ongoing response to Hurricane #Sandy in the Situation Room:”

Susan Milligan, in her *US News* article “Who is Politicizing Hurricane Sandy?,” agreed that other political parties felt the need to respond positively to President Obama’s response to Hurricane Sandy, pointing out unlikely political figures who showed their support for the president’s actions. The support came from an influential political figure during Hurricane Sandy, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who is a Republican. Throughout Milligan’s article Governor Christie’s support for President Obama as a hands-on leader during the disaster response is shown. “Obama, Christie said, has been ‘wonderful,’ keeping in direct contact, cutting red tape, and basically doing everything he can to help the victims of the storm” (1). According to Milligan, Christie was upset when asked about his or Obama’s concern for the upcoming election responding, “I don’t give a damn about Election Day. It doesn’t matter a lick to me at the moment. I’ve got bigger

fish to fry,”” (1). This quote shows voters who read the article, published on October 31, 2012, that both Christie and President Obama were focused not on the election but on dealing with and responding to the disaster at hand. Additionally, the quote and President Obama’s work with Governor Christie suggested President Obama’s willingness to be non-partisan in times of crisis as he was able to work closely with a Republican.

President Obama’s work with Governor Christie was shown through social media by way of The White House Twitter account. The account posted about Obama’s contributions and involvement with the relief efforts after the hurricane devastated the Eastern Shore. The White House tweets mentioned that he visited New Jersey to assess the damage caused by the hurricane, talk with the victims of the hurricane and thank those who were involved in ground relief efforts (see figure 19).



Figure 19. “Today, President Obama travels to New Jersey to view #Sandy damage, talk to citizens recovering from the storm & thank first responders.”

A second tweet from The White House Twitter account displays a picture where President Obama is surveying the damage done by the hurricane along with New Jersey Governor Chris Christie (see figure 20). This picture shows how the president collaborated with state leaders to assess damage and come up with relief efforts. This again showed his leadership abilities, and the ability to collaborate with a Republican

governor to respond to a disaster.



Figure 20. “Photo: On Marine One, President Obama & @GovChristie survey the damage done by Hurricane #Sandy along New Jersey Coast:”

There are parallels that can be drawn by The White House highlighting the president’s participation in disaster response between President Bush’s response to the hurricane season of 2004 and President Barack Obama’s response to Hurricane Sandy in 2012. In both cases the president was shown by The White House fulfilling their leadership duties, President Bush through visits which were documented and highlighted through the media through video feeds and President Obama through social media posts. Additionally, in both cases, The White House endorsed the incumbents’ response actions in the wake of the storms. The White House communications office remains an influencing factor in presidential campaigns by endorsing the incumbent, even in the social media age where politicians can interact directly with voters.

Concluding her article Milligan states, “government continues, even in a heated presidential campaign. Obama's put politics aside, and so has Christie. The rest of us should follow suit” (1). It is true that President Obama appeared to shift his focus to Hurricane Sandy relief efforts, putting his campaign on the backburner for the time being.

However, his campaign strategists, and those who controlled his social media sites, were astutely aware of how they needed to portray his response efforts through posts on social media. Through their implementation of social media strategies the campaign team was able to display President Obama's leadership abilities at the forefront of his response efforts, while also showing his compassion for the victims of the disaster.

On the other hand, Romney's campaign encountered troubles during Hurricane Sandy and relief efforts. On the subject of Romney Milligan states,

There's not much he can do. If he does nothing and continues campaigning in what is a very gettable win for him, he looks callous. If he tries to appear as though he actually is the president (he's done a bit of this, calling FEMA and governors), he looks a little opportunistic and self-serving, since he has no authority to do anything for the damaged areas. And if he criticizes the president's response, he just looks silly, especially since the governors—including his own party's Christie—have been complimentary of Obama, at least regarding the response to the storm. (1)

The Romney campaign was in a hard place with what campaign strategy they should use during Hurricane Sandy and relief efforts, and Milligan, as well as other media sources, criticized their decisions and resulting actions. In light of Romney's Facebook post, where he posted a picture showing relief efforts by the Red Cross and Romney collecting canned goods (see figure 17), Milligan states "he collected canned goods—exactly what the Red Cross says it does not want, since such items must be sorted and transported" (1). So although Romney wanted to display his efforts to get involved in the relief effort with the Red Cross, his Facebook post showing the collection

of canned goods missed the point of the Red Cross relief efforts for Hurricane Sandy victims. In a way, Romney was trying to seize the kairotic moment and support the campaign efforts, but he fell a bit short.

The responses to Romney's actions in asking for donations to the Red Cross were mixed as well, with some support and some backlash from critics. Ed O'Keefe, in his article "Hurricane Sandy highlights how Obama and Romney respond to disasters," states that due to Hurricane Sandy and Romney's call for donations through his social media posts there was,

A focus on Romney's earlier comments about FEMA, when he agreed that 'federal disaster response could be curtailed to save federal dollars', in the wake of Hurricane Sandy he backtracked on these comments, 'As the first responders, states are in the best position to aid affected individuals and communities and to direct resources and assistance to where they are needed most. This includes help from the federal government and FEMA.'

(O'Keefe 1)

As there was a focus on Romney's earlier comments, critics viewed his call for donations to the Red Cross, his only actions regarding Hurricane Sandy on social media, as a step away from his earlier stance on the issue of federal aid for disaster victims. This viewpoint, being disseminated by way of news sources on different media, may have had the power to sway swing voters' opinions to President Obama and to support his efforts to aide in the disaster relief. Through this moment, in which Romney was criticized for his part in the relief efforts due to his past beliefs, there is evidence to show that social media, although it has the ability to generate positive reactions from voters, can also put

candidates at risk of backlash from voters due to their post content. This backlash then leads to a decrease in support for their campaigns.

In the next chapter I will draw some key distinctions and similarities when it comes to how natural disasters impacted these two campaigns and discuss the effects that social media has on political campaigns in light of both sets of data from this chapter. I will tie together old forms of media and their effects on a campaign, from the evidence from the campaigns of President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry in 2004, with social media platforms and their effects on a campaign, from the evidence from the campaigns of President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in 2012. By doing so I will be able to compare the effects of campaign strategies during kairotic times of disaster from both elections, and then be able to separate the effects of social media on campaigns for further consideration.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Social media affords politicians a platform for staging their campaigns. Social media opens avenues for candidates to engage in conversations with the public, in particular with the voters, some who are supporters and some who oppose the candidate. Whether they are reaching out to supporters or acting against those who oppose them, social media allows candidates to reach their audience by using their own personal voices through their messages. Before social media, as shown through the 2004 Bush-Kerry campaign season, incumbents had greater power in responding to natural disasters than non-incumbents. They were afforded avenues to respond to disasters that non-incumbent candidates did not have the chance to utilize. Social media gives the non-incumbent candidate a platform where they can respond to natural disasters without overstepping their boundaries and looking self-serving. Still the fact remains that not every disadvantage the non-incumbent faces while campaigning, such as running against an incumbent or having a much smaller war chest, can be overcome by social media. But when wielded correctly, social media is a powerful political tool.

The candidates studied in chapters four and five seem to have understood the kairotic moment that natural disasters brought to their campaigns and thus tried to seize the situation and opportunity to reach out in genuine ways to voters, either by being on site or through personal social media accounts. In both cases of presidential incumbents responding to disasters, President Bush and President Obama, the incumbents were able to seize the opportune moment disasters created in their campaigns. However, because of social media, President Obama was able to use his personal voice in his posts and outreach to the victims of Hurricane Sandy in more compelling and direct ways than

President Bush. In the case of non-incumbent candidates, Senator Kerry and Governor Romney, Romney had an opportunity to seize the kairotic moment presented by Hurricane Sandy because of the social media platform he used to call for donations to the Red Cross, while Senator Kerry was left with no clear avenue to engage in relief efforts for Hurricane Ivan.

Incumbent Disaster Response Trends

In the years before social media, non-incumbent presidential candidates were hindered by older forms of media, leading to almost-automatic greater support for the presidential incumbent as they responded to natural disasters. The media streams available in 2004 gave the presidential incumbent, President George W. Bush, an advantage because he was able to participate in and advertise through popular media his own personal response efforts for the natural disasters while his opponent did not have the same option. These forms of media provided him with an avenue through which he was able to showcase his fulfillment of his presidential duties. By doing so he proved to voters and critics his ability to lead the country, especially in times of crisis. In 2004, one strategy President Bush's campaign used was capitalizing on photo opportunities that were available when President Bush was participating in relief efforts on site for Hurricane Ivan. These photographs were published both on the White House website, through a photo gallery, and in various news articles, both in print and online. The photo galleries, capturing the opportune campaigning moments to demonstrate leadership, displayed Bush's relief efforts so the public had a way to view his efforts, not just read about them. The photographs were also beneficial to President Bush as he was able to show that he could step away from his campaign trail and appearances and focus on

response efforts for the victims of Hurricane Ivan. By making appearances in Florida after Hurricane Ivan, President Bush was able to show his leadership skills as well as continue to spread his condolences and help to those affected by the hurricane. Because he was able to showcase his leadership he was still able to campaign for himself even while appearing to put the country and relief efforts first.

In the 2012 Presidential election campaign season, President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney both seized the opportunity to use social media to disseminate their responses to Hurricane Sandy to the public. In analyzing the feedback which both candidates received for their responses, President Obama appears to be the candidate who benefitted the most from his social media posts. Critics and voters alike praised President Obama for his leadership efforts from Washington, DC, some of which he showed through pictures displayed on his social media posts, and through his collaboration on site with the Republican Party by way of his meeting with Republican Governor Chris Christie to assess and make plans for relief efforts. Through his posts President Obama was able to appear as though he was taking a step back from his campaigning to focus solely on response efforts for the hurricane. President Obama used photographs in 2012 in the same way that President Bush used photographs in 2004, to show his presence during relief efforts and to show that he could step away from his campaign and be actively involved in meetings and response efforts for Hurricane Sandy. President Obama's campaigning through social media was met with great success because he was able to not only show his personal involvement in relief efforts through images, but he was also able to attach his own personal voice and personal tone with the statements and personal signatures he made in addition to the images.

Non-Incumbent Disaster Response Trends

In light of these discoveries I believe that old forms of media streams showed the non-incumbent presidential candidate as removed from disaster relief efforts. Therefore, in the past the non-incumbent candidate could have seemed, to the public and voters, as though they may not have cared enough about disaster relief or the issues that natural disasters brought to light. If Senator Kerry had used media outlets such as newspaper articles, press releases on his campaign website, or television broadcasts to show his presence in responding to natural disasters he would be portrayed as though he was trying to push his agenda through the media. Both of these avenues for getting his involvement publicized would have made him look opportunistic and insensitive to the needs and feelings of those who were affected by the disaster, as it did when he and his running-mate Senator John Edwards staged a rally in Florida just weeks after Hurricane Ivan struck the coast. Through their rally Senator Kerry and Senator Edwards touched on the hurricane but then moved on to other political issues, making themselves seem too involved with their political campaigns during the time of the disaster and not focused enough on providing sympathy to those who were affected by Hurricane Ivan. Senator Kerry was, however, able to reach out and express his sympathy through a statement released on his campaign website focusing on the victims of Hurricane Ivan and his concern for them. In this way, he did not overstep his boundaries but provided enough of a statement so that the voters knew he was sympathetic to citizens affected by the hurricane.

Mitt Romney's approach to his own disaster response for Hurricane Sandy was different than Kerry's approach because of social media. Social media allowed Romney

to express a greater, more appropriate level of caring for hurricane victims. He could control his message to a greater extent because he didn't have to schedule an event to get on TV and reach voters and so he was able to post online and stay "out of the way" of the president. Social media did not prove to make his message as strong and "presidential" as Obama's response, but it seems more effective than Kerry's.

I will now highlight key findings on how social media has changed strategies of both non-incumbents and incumbents.

Key Findings

Social media allows for interactive response immediately with a candidate's post. Social media has assisted in making disaster response an easier task to publicize for both presidential incumbents and non-incumbents alike. Social media platforms allow the incumbent candidate to perform leadership duties with both text and picture at the immediate time in which they are responding to the natural disaster, such as through the Facebook and Twitter posts published by President Obama and Governor Romney which featured text as well as photographs. Additionally, the platform allows for the public to engage in interactive conversations about the president's responses to the disaster and the efforts he is making to engage in disaster relief movements. The ability to post immediately about response efforts allows the candidate, if the platform is used effectively, to generate positive discussion about themselves and generate more voter support in the time before an election. The different ways that voters are able to be in an interactive discussion with candidates through their social media posts is through "sharing" or "liking" Facebook posts, "re-tweeting" or "favorite-ing" Twitter posts, and commenting on both social media platform posts.

These interactive ways to participate in discussion provide the candidates' with immediate feedback from their supporters or those who oppose them, both of whom can view their posts if they follow the candidates' social media accounts or if a friend "shares" or "re-tweets" the candidates' posts. Though this study did not analyze the number of "shares" or voter comments, simply existing in the social media platform allowed for such interaction. Future study of responses to candidates' posts is warranted. Campaign strategists can use this interactive discussion by the public, the voters, to understand what posts and what content they should continue posting on the social media accounts.

Voter response is key when understanding how to generate content for social media posts. As politicians are using social media to reach out to voters, strategists need to understand how voters are responding to the different posts published on social media platforms. Voters who understand how to analyze candidates' posts on social media may be taking a critical eye to the content of their posts. They may read into the fact that the president is not completely leaving his campaigning to the side during these disaster relief efforts because the president is able to utilize his relief efforts to generate support for his next election. Specifically, this is evidenced by the heightened number of disaster declarations which correlate with election years in which there is a presidential incumbent candidate. In election years which have a presidential incumbent candidate, the percentage of disaster declarations made by the incumbent increases significantly (Chen), pointing to the fact that the incumbent could be using natural disasters to gain voter support.

Voters and campaign strategists should be aware of how campaigns utilize resources such as disaster declarations, responses on social media, and videos and images in times of disaster to generate voter support. While a candidate's intentions may be good, supporting the victims of natural disasters through their response efforts, campaign managers have to understand the level at which they can use social media campaign strategies effectively to showcase the candidate's roles in disaster relief to further generate voter support before Election Day and how to avoid over-publicizing their actions. One way which strategists are able to step away from overloading voters with posts about the candidate's actions during disaster relief is by including the candidate's own personal voice on the posts, as President Obama did when he signed off of Twitter posts with "-bo."

Personal voice is more possible with social media than with other campaign tools. When comparing the 2004 and 2012 Presidential election campaigns, it is apparent that social media allowed President Obama to use his personal voice as content on his social media posts, particularly when he signed off with "-bo." Obama was able to use his own words, in addition to the pictures on his posts, to convey his concern for and sympathy towards the victims of Hurricane Sandy. President Bush, as he was limited to media such as newspapers and his campaign site, which was a part of the White House site, was less able to associate his personal voice with every media post his campaign sent out. Although he was able to show his presence in Florida following Hurricane Ivan, through The White House photograph gallery on their website, he was not able to add his own personal voice on every photograph, as Obama was able to do with his signatures on certain social media posts.

Even though social media provides the candidates with a place to use their personal voice to reach out to voters, candidates must seize that opportunity. For example, Romney did not utilize his personal voice through his social media posts, instead focusing on calls for donations to the Red Cross. His calls for donations for Hurricane Sandy relief efforts, and the criticism he received for the calls, tie into my next key finding: Candidates can't control their message, and the response their message generates, as easily on social media as they could through other, less interactive media like campaign websites. In the past, in the event of natural disasters, candidates shaped their response messages based on the predictions they were able to make based on what voter response they would generate from those messages. The same level of response messages are required by critics and voters alike in today's social media age, however, candidates have to be aware that voter response is less predictable and more visible on social media.

Due to the nature of media in the past there was not an avenue for which candidates like Senator Kerry could participate in relief efforts without critics providing their views on the notion that the candidate was overstepping. Natural disasters were events in which the non-incumbent candidate had to take a backseat to allow the president to fulfill his duties.

Social media provides a platform where a non-incumbent candidate, in the 2012 election Mitt Romney, is able to participate in disaster relief efforts while not interfering with the president's duties or appearing opportunistic. Social media provided Romney with a platform where he could be engaged with Hurricane Sandy relief efforts, but at a point where he was able to distance himself from President Obama's presidential duties

so he could appear to the voters as though he was sympathetic and apolitical in his disaster responses. Social media platforms allow the non-incumbent candidate to speak on their personal social media account which makes the candidate look merely concerned and aware of the effects of the disaster. In this way the medium which candidates are able to use really does matter, especially due to the type of voter response the candidates' messages can generate.

Romney, due to his utilization of social media posts, was able to show his ability to step back from campaigning in the wake of Hurricane Sandy which could have generated voter support for his campaign. However, Romney's calls for donations were met with steep criticism from critics and this criticism subsequently trickled down to his supporters. He risked compromising a key issue in his campaign, the defunding of FEMA, due to his calls on social media for donations to Red Cross relief funds. His misstep with the push for donations to a disaster relief agency shows the importance of understanding the risk factors associated with social media campaigns. Because Romney used social media to call for donations to the Red Cross rather than using just his personal voice to be sympathetic to the victims, he did not adapt his posts to include a personal tone, making him seem too focused on campaign issues in the time of a disaster.

Both Romney and Senator Kerry, the non-incumbent candidates, touched on the issue of natural disasters in the times following major hurricanes, Sandy and Ivan respectively. In their responses, however, they both faced criticism for the issues they were highlighting, Romney calling for federal aid for Hurricane Sandy victims and Senator Kerry for not addressing natural disasters enough through his rally. Both candidates had a misstep in their judgment of what issues they should touch on during the

opportune moments in the wake of natural disasters. The candidates faced the issue of not having the opportunity to immerse themselves in relief efforts which made them appear uninvolved with disaster relief. Additionally, Romney did not utilize personal voice in his social media posts, focusing solely on advertising for relief efforts. These missteps led to a loss in voter support while the presidential incumbents, President Obama and President Bush, were able to gain voter support from their response efforts.

Candidates, and their campaign strategists, need to understand the affordances of the different social media platforms they are utilizing as well as understanding the importance of content selection they are disseminating to the masses of voters who will view their social media posts. While looking towards social media posts from, and voter response to, both candidates in the 2012 Presidential election it is evident that President Obama received support from both supporters and those who had opposed him before for his messages and response efforts while Romney received backlash from supporters for the messages on his posts. Voter responses can shape a message sent out by a candidate through their social media posts. Therefore, candidates and strategists alike need to pay particular attention to the specific issues and moments that they are responding to through social media. Media platforms which candidates choose to use to disseminate their message present candidates with the opportunity for benefits and risks in the form of support and backlash from critics and from voters. Social media, providing a space for mass dissemination of posts with campaign content from the candidates, heightens benefit and risk factors due to the number of voters who use social media as their main source of information.

Social media does not allow non-incumbents to fully overcome obstacles associated with being a non-incumbent candidate. The social media platform continues to privilege the incumbent by allowing the incumbent to showcase his leadership abilities when responding to natural disasters. Social media gives candidates new methods with which to reach out to voters and to generate voter support in the months, and weeks, before an election. Before the rise of social media, and the influence it is able to have on presidential candidate campaign practices, existing media streams such as newspapers, television broadcasts, and campaign websites did not encourage the non-incumbent candidate to make an effort to respond to natural disasters on a large scale. Mass media limited the non-incumbent to providing a statement shortly following a hurricane, such as Senator Kerry did on his campaign website, but did not allow them to showcase their participation in any further relief efforts for victims, or else the candidate would have appeared to be flaunting his participation for the viewers and not being sincere in his actions.

Although social media provides both the incumbent and non-incumbent candidates with a platform with which they have the ability to respond to natural disasters, there are still advantages which the presidential incumbent is afforded and which are blocked for the non-incumbent. When a non-incumbent candidate uses social media to respond to natural disasters they may be accused of using social media politically, such as they had been with older forms. However, when the incumbent posts about disaster responses it is seen as a step away from politics and a step towards showcasing their presidential duties, such as when President Obama posted pictures of himself talking with officials. Therefore, even though the non-incumbent is provided with

the opportunity to use social media to respond to natural disasters, they still need to be aware of what feedback they might receive from voters, whether they perceive the candidate's message as too political or stepping away from earlier stances or campaign platforms, in the case of Romney supporting donations to the Red Cross.

Incumbents, on the other hand, are praised for their responses to natural disasters, if they respond in a timely and effective manner because they are endowed with the right to speak to and comfort the American people in times of crisis. President Obama responded in both ways, timely and effectively. He grasped the opportune moment of Hurricane Sandy, posting on social media throughout the timeline of the hurricane as well as posting effectively by using both images of himself participating in relief efforts and in talks with officials and by using his own personal voice in his social media posts. His personal voice showed the voters he was sympathetic to their hardships because of the hurricane and the photographs showed his fulfillment of his presidential duties. Romney, on the other hand, was not able to showcase his leadership abilities in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy because he would have been criticized by critics and voters alike.

Candidates have to be aware of aspects of their social media presence that could either generate support for their campaigns or push voters away. These aspects are the message they are sending through the content of their posts and the awareness of how voters might respond to their message, through interactive discussions on their posts and their choice of who to vote for on Election Day.

Areas for Further Research

This study, on social media's effect on presidential campaigns in the event of a catastrophic natural disaster is just a glimpse of the power of social media for political

campaigns. Further knowledge can be gained from exploring different trends taking place in social media political campaigns. Social media campaigns and posts by candidates provide a plethora of topics and issues to explore rhetorically. Instead of focusing on only natural disasters, scholars could venture into analyzing social media campaigns as a whole, as some of the scholars cited in the literature review have done previously. As social media continues to grow its influence also continues to grow, providing scholars with a plethora of data on social media political campaigns.

Data and study on social media usage in political campaigns could also be extended to include topics such as how many posts politicians publish in the days leading up to Election Day, the types of posts which they utilize in their campaigns and how often each type of post is used. There are also different topics within crisis situations such as overseas crises or wars that would be interesting to follow on social media. Another avenue scholars could explore is how social media is used by candidates to illuminate their opponents in a negative light through smear tactics in their posts. Further study is also needed on voter reaction to social media posts and the way that these reactions differ from voter reactions to responses from candidates before social media was foregrounded as a news source. This study is a first step in the work of creating a well-rounded sense of how social media influences political campaigns and how campaign strategists are able to use it as a platform for campaigning for years to come.

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