

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

Spring 5-1-2009

The Fourth Phase: New Media and Political Campaigns

Timothy Martinez Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone

 Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Martinez Jr., Timothy, "The Fourth Phase: New Media and Political Campaigns" (2009). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 483.

https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/483

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

The Fourth Phase: New Media and Political Campaigns

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

Timothy Martinez Jr.

Candidate for B.A. Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors

May 2009

Honors Capstone Project in Newspaper Journalism and Political Science

Capstone Project Advisor: _____
Gustav Niebuhr

Honors Reader: _____
Grant Reeher

Honors Director: _____
Samuel Gorovitz

Date: _____

Abstract

With the increased use of new media in political elections, I set out to answer two important questions: how does new media affect the relationship among candidates, journalists, and citizens during elections and how will traditional media adapt to the new technology? Since this topic is evolving, I read blogs and news articles during the 2008 presidential election and reflected on past elections to discover key differences.

I found that four key distinctions pertaining to new media that made the 2008 election different than previous ones. First was the creation of a virtual town hall, which was illustrated through public participation, such as the YouTube debates. Second was evolution of blogs from a PR tool to a forum for supporters. Third was explosion of social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook that enabled candidates and journalists to stay connected with citizens. Finally, there was the increased impact of participatory journalism sites like *The Huffington Post's* OffTheBus and CNN's I-Report.

The conclusion I drew from these four developments is that new media has changed the way campaigns are run by candidates, covered by the press, and engaged by the public. Most importantly, the average citizen has been empowered through the technology as never before. Instead of being passive observers in politics and the press, citizens can now actively participate by communicating with candidates and journalists.

Table of Contents

Introduction	Pages 1-7
Chapter 1: Virtual Town Hall	Pages 8-16
Chapter 2: Candidate and Journalism Blogs	Pages 17-38
Chapter 3: Social Networking	Pages 39-56
Chapter 4: Participatory Journalism	Pages 57-66
Epilogue	Pages 67-70
Works Cited and Consulted	Pages 71-75
Written Capstone Summary	Pages 76-80

Introduction

The changing landscape of new media in society has challenged the traditional norms of communication and expression. Technological advances currently enable users to interact with people through text, images, audio, and video in any part of the world almost instantly. As of last year, the Pew Internet & American Life Project reported that 55% of all adult Americans now have a high-speed Internet connection at home, which was a 17% increase from the previous year.¹ These numbers are evidence of a shifting paradigm toward an age of online information and virtual dialogue. This has had no greater effect on anything more than it has on the way political campaigns are conducted by candidates and covered by traditional media.

The 2008 presidential election was an election of firsts in many ways. Not only was the first African-American president elected, but it was also the first time many new forms of online communication were pioneered and successfully integrated in the political campaigns and their coverage by traditional media. The technological advances during the 2008 election indicate the official start of the fourth phase of political communication. This fourth phase is one that utilizes new media and the Internet to increase interaction among the press, voters, and politicians. However, before continuing with the analysis of the present phase, it is pertinent to look at the previous three because each one builds upon the other.

The first phase of communication to influence politics began in the early 19th century in the era of the penny press. The creation of the printing press

¹ Information from a July 2, 2008 press release from the Pew Internet & American Life Project. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Press-Releases/2008/55-of-adult-Americans-have-home-broadband-connections.aspx>.

allowed for the inexpensive production of thousands of copies of newspapers, which in turn enabled journalists to publish and distribute their work to the masses. The rise of the printing press coincided with the presidency of Andrew Jackson, and it had noticeable effects on the way he ran the country. Jackson not only added reporters to his staff, but he also used newspapers to bypass critics of his plan regarding The Second Bank of the United States. By publishing his views in the newspapers, he went directly to the public about what he planned to do before opposition in Congress could argue against it.² This is an early example of how presidents used newspapers as a way to communicate with the average person, which continues today.

Newspapers dominated political reporting and coverage of campaigns for decades until the invention of the radio in the final years of the 19th century. Franklin D. Roosevelt was the president who strategically incorporated radio into politics by using it to make informal speeches known as the fireside chats. In his first broadcast on March 12, 1933, Franklin used radio to ask for public support of his plan to fight the banking crisis.³ These fireside chats greatly increased the personal communication between the president and the public, which is a reason why every president until Barack Obama conducted a weekly radio address.

Finally, the third phase of political progression appeared in the 1950s when television became an important aspect of campaigns and the presidency.

² Huntzicker, William, James Start, and William David Sloan. (1999). *The Popular Press, 1833-1865*. P. 36.

³ Information taken from the National Museum of American History webpage on Treasures of American History from the Great Depression and World War II. From http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/small_exhibition.cfm?key=1267&exkey=143&pagekey=246

Whereas newspapers and radio dealt mostly with print and audio, television helped advance the visual side of politics that has remained prevalent ever since. Arguably, one of the first momentous televised political events occurred on September 23, 1952, when then California senator and vice presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon delivered his famous “Checkers Speech.” Nixon gave the televised speech to a national audience to detail his finances after questions emerged over his political funds. At one point in the speech, Nixon mockingly admitted to taking a dog named Checkers as a gift and said he was not giving it back. As a result, Nixon was able to humanize himself and win over public support. Ironically, television did not work in favor of Nixon in his 1960 televised debate with John F. Kennedy. In that situation, some attributed his loss to looking sickly and coming across as unfocused.

Although each phase brought something new to the political arena, the previous form of media did not fall into irrelevancy. Newspapers, radio, and television were all forced to adapt to the changing forms of communication to remain a factor in the coverage of politics. Newspapers provided their readers with in depth and investigative reporting, which was something radio and television did not do very often. Radio experienced a resurgence with the talk radio movement of the 1990s. Conservative radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, Michael Savage, Laura Ingraham, and others gave opinionated views against Bill Clinton and attacked Al Gore during the 2000 presidential election. Television, on the other hand, has remained the most relevant over the years especially during its transition from network to cable television. However, the growing force of the

fourth phase of communication during the 2008 presidential election is pushing the previous media to once again adapt to a changing political environment.

The analysis of new media's influence on political elections begins with the difficult task of defining it. The term new media is a phrase that essentially encompasses all technology that has to do with digital and online networking. To be more specific, new media is information that can travel over the Internet and includes websites, blogs, podcasts, social networking sites, video sharing and streaming sites, and online chat rooms.

Websites are collections of web pages that contain information about or are devoted to a particular topic or organization. They often include text, graphics, photos, video, audio, and an array of other digital media. One type of website is a blog, which usually consists of entries of commentary, information on certain subjects, news, or anything else. Blogs can also contain graphics, images, audio, video, or other interactive formats such as discussions, forums, or comments sections. The popularity of blogs has grown substantially over the past several years and many news organizations and political organizations have adopted some form of the blog.

Video streaming and video sharing are other forms of new media. Streaming videos are basically movies, short clips, or some sort of moving images in a compressed file that is sent over the Internet and displayed to the viewer as it arrives. YouTube is the most visited video sharing site and has increased the popularity of video sharing substantially since its emergence.

Podcasts are similar to streaming video but are audio entries and must be heard over a device. The word “podcast” comes from the words “iPod” and “broadcast.” Podcasts come in the form of music, news, information, audio books, school lessons, and more. Many news radio agencies use podcasts to distribute their news shows and several politicians have used video podcasts to promote their speeches and campaigns.

Social networking sites are among the most popular forms of new media. These are sites designed to keep people in touch with friends and family, meet new people, and provide entertainment. Social networking websites such as MySpace and Facebook allow users to add friends to their pages, creating an online community of interaction among people around the country and the world. Although some social networking sites have been around for several years, it wasn't until the 2008 election that they played such a critical role for candidates.

While new media was an important staple of Barack Obama's campaign for president, previous elections experienced the nascent stages of online grassroots organizing and fundraising. Websites, which were used as early as the 1996 presidential election featuring Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, have progressed into a multimedia collection of images, audio, and video. Currently, all major news organizations have some form of accessible information online, whether it is a website, a YouTube video channel, or social networking profile. The coverage and conduct of elections has changed the interaction between the media and politicians, but has also significantly changed the relationship between the

distributors of information, or the politicians and journalists, and the consumers of the information, or voters and audience.

There are four important changes and adaptations in new technology that have changed the way political elections are conducted and reported on. The first change that new media has allowed is the creation of a virtual town hall, which allows users and average citizens to engage in a personal relationship with journalists and candidates. The second element is the increased use of candidate blogs and political news blogs, such as *The Huffington Post*, the *Daily Kos*, and *RedState*. The blogs are used to significantly enhance the two-way communication between candidates and their supporters and journalists and their consumers. Also, it is a way for news organizations to rapidly spread information and tools for candidates to raise money. Third, the traditional media and candidate use of social networking sites allows them to receive additional exposure and participation from voters and consumers. Finally, the significant expansion of participatory journalism empowers citizens to become involved in the campaign coverage and has increasingly forced candidates to be cautious of everything they say regardless of where they are.

Each aspect that has made the 2008 election different than past elections is distinct in its own way, but the developments are not mutually exclusive. The overarching theme for all four aspects is the importance of underlining public interaction, whether it is between candidates and voters or journalists and consumers. New media has enabled the establishment of a personal connection between a candidate or journalist and millions of Americans. More importantly, it

has empowered the individual to become an active participant in American democracy.

Chapter 1: Virtual Town Hall

By 9:00 p.m. EST on October 7, 2008, political websites around the nation were already prepared and blogging about the second presidential debate between Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama. Real time blogging came from websites of newspapers like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Popular political websites like *The Huffington Post*, *InstaPundit*, and *Talking Points Memo* were also blogging live to their readers. While users online were interacting with the blogging journalists, a different type of interaction was happening on stage. The candidates were taking questions in a simulated town hall style debate from members of the audience and user-submitted questions from the Internet.

In a historic partnership between the Commission on Presidential Debates and the social networking site, MySpace, citizens were able to submit questions to the candidates via a special site created by MySpace. About six million questions were sent to NBC by e-mail or telephone calls and an estimated 25,000 were formally submitted through the official site MyDebates.org.⁴ The moderator of the debate, Tom Brokaw, pored over the entries before settling on just a small number to ask the candidates.

Although there was some filter between the Internet user-submitted questions and the candidates, the ability to send in questions represented a major shift in the way politics is handled. The different actors involved with the elections such as the candidates and journalists have begun to utilize technology

⁴ Estimates taken from *The New York Times* "The Caucus" blog. The numbers came from the entry "Asked, Millions Reply" from October 6, 2008 by Katharine Q. Seelye. Retrieved October 7, 2008.

in ways that engage citizens, allowing interaction and a lateral relationship with politics. Although the use of the Internet in elections is no longer considered a new thing, the way it is being used in elections is different and more efficient than it was in the past.

In a book reflecting on the use of the Internet in the 2000 presidential election, three professors from Syracuse University noted a key mistake during the election. They wrote that during the elections, the candidates and the media were engaging in a passive relationship with the public, claiming that there was “one institution communicating directly to many individuals, with those individuals only responding back to that institution.”⁵ They noted that there was much potential for web politics to work, but recommended that institutions should “treat citizens and citizenship as ends rather than means to an end.”⁶ In the eight years since they made this recommendation, the different institutions have created a variety of ways for the public to communicate laterally with journalists, candidates, and fellow citizens, which has since sparked political interest and participation.

The 2008 election cycle saw the use of new media successfully engage citizens in ways that had never been done before. The creation of the virtual town hall that allows millions of citizens to participate in politics from their homes is two tiered. The first tier deals with the use of Internet websites like MySpace and YouTube to prompt candidates answer questions important to the public at

⁵ From *Click on Democracy* by Steve Davis, Larry Elin, and Grant Reeher published in 2002. Quote taken from page 253.

⁶ Page 252.

debates. The second tier is the lateral relationship between the media and Internet users established by live blogging while the debates are occurring.

Two important examples of debate commissions utilizing new media to promote participation were the partnerships between MySpace and the Commission on Presidential Debates and the CNN news network and YouTube. The two debates saw the submission of questions from Americans across the nation to be answered by the candidates.

The MySpace debates tried to take political participation to another level with its specially made website designed to complement the televised presidential debates. On the MySpace sponsored site, visitors were allowed to communicate with other MySpace users in a comments section or even add the site as a friend. By October 16, 2008, the day after the third and final presidential debate, the site had over 29,000 friends, which gave an indication of how many people visited and participated in the site.⁷ While the debates were live on television, the official debate website had streaming video of the broadcast and had interactive features while the debate was occurring to keep the viewers engaged. Icons on the left side of the page showed the viewers which topic the candidates were discussing and, during the debate, questions and polls appeared on the screen that asked whether or not they agreed with what the candidates were proposing.

This method of live streaming on the web with interactive features is different than the typical television viewing experience, because the television is a medium designed for a one-to-many communication whereas the Internet can be a many-to-many interaction. Among other things on the site was an area to view

⁷ Number of friends retrieved from www.myspace.com/mydebate.org on October 16, 2008.

clips, take quizzes on issues, register to vote, host a discussion, and submit questions. The “host a discussion” section gave users the opportunity to host a virtual viewing party that would allow people to talk about the issues being discussed.

While the MySpace debates crept into the political arena with relatively little media coverage, the YouTube debates exploded onto the scene in a wave of articles on the implications and impact the debate could have. The popular video sharing site was developed in 2005 and had never been used in a presidential election cycle, though it had already made waves in the political sphere because of its surprising impact during the 2006 midterm elections. Almost all of the press about the potential and importance of the YouTube debates in the political sphere was extremely positive. Katharine Seelye of *The New York Times* called it “an event that could define the next phase of what has already been called the YouTube election, a visual realm beyond websites and blogs.”⁸ However, the majority of headlines that came in the days after the debates were negative, with many claiming that it was more hype than revolution. Micah Sifry wrote on the Personal Democracy Forum website that “The ‘YouTube debates’ are neither real debates, nor a serious use of the internet's [sic] potential.”⁹ In an article entitled “An Embarrassing End to the YouTube Experiment,” Blake Dvorak wrote “the revolutionary facade of the great YouTube Experiment has fallen in spectacular fashion: Many of these questioners weren't the ordinary Americans as advertised

⁸ “YouTube Passes Debates to a New Generation” by Katharine Seelye was published by *The New York Times* on June 14, 2007.

⁹ “How CNN demeans the Internet” by Micah Sifry was published on November 29, 2007 at the Personal Democracy Forum.

by CNN at all.”¹⁰ Dvorak was making reference to the retired general Keith Kerr who asked about homosexuals in the military at the Republican YouTube debate; he was later found out to have been on an advisory committee for Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton.¹¹

Much of the dissatisfaction among viewers and bloggers of the YouTube debates was due to the fact that there was a filter that did not allow certain videos to go through. Some suggested that Internet users should be able to vote for the videos that would be shown to the candidates, but CNN did not use this format. A lot of the controversy occurred after the Republican YouTube debate as many criticized CNN for choosing mostly left-leaning videos out of the 5,000 submitted to the network. The claim was that the debate did not fairly give the candidates questions and generalized the Republican Party. One particular lament from blogger Robert Bluey was that although the network had 5,000 submissions to choose from, it chose very narrow questions. He wrote, “Instead, we heard three questions about guns, a topic of significance to the GOP, but was it really that important to ask three different questions?”¹² What the YouTube debates set out to be was what they failed at the most. Instead of offering a way to give citizens a means to communicate directly with the candidates, CNN purportedly selected the videos and thus advanced its own agenda. Although these claims were on a

¹⁰ “An Embarrassing End to the YouTube Experiment” by Blake D. Dvorak was published on November 30, 2007 by Real Clear Politics at realeclearpolitics.com.

¹¹ “Gay Questions Put CNN on Offensive” by Jacques Steinberg was published on November, 30, 2007 by *The New York Times*.

¹² “Where Were the Health Care Questions?” Posted on Bluey Blog by Robert Bluey on November 29, 2007.

number of political blogs, CNN never defended itself and the issue was never resolved.

Despite the shortcomings of the participatory aspect of the YouTube debates, they succeeded in reinvigorating the spirit of debates. According to Nielson Media Research, 2.6 million viewers watched the YouTube debate on July 23, 2007, making it the highest viewed debate among 18-24 year olds in the history of cable news.¹³ This is an indication that the prospect of a debate involving homemade video questions from average citizens sparked a higher interest in politics. Likewise, Nielson Media Research reported that 63.2 million viewers watched the second presidential debate which featured the user submitted questions via MySpace.¹⁴ The ratings outnumbered the first and second presidential debates, which received 52.4 million and 56.5 million viewers respectively.¹⁵ The ratings for the two debates once again point to a want of participation by citizens in everyday politics and the interest in having a lateral relationship with the candidates. Although the debates only scratched the surface of full public participation in a virtual town hall with the candidates, they did point the candidates and media in the direction of active participation by asking public questions during debates. Future citizen-involved debates need to see less filter and bias through opening up an even greater democratic process. One of the biggest downsides of the YouTube debates was that they didn't let the voters decide which questions were most important. Had the network allowed users to

¹³ "CNN's YouTube debate draws impressive ratings" by Paul J. Gough was published July 25, 2007 by Reuters on reuters.com.

¹⁴ Ratings taken from the Nielson blog entry "56.5 Million Watched McCain and Obama's Final Debate" posted on October 16, 2008.

¹⁵ Ibid.

vote for the videos they thought were the most important, the YouTube experiment would not have been seen as a failure but an important step toward citizen participation.

Even though the debates themselves failed to garner significant regard as seriously engaging the public, media sites across the web were offering a different type of virtual town hall. Through live blogging and live chatting, the media fostered an environment that enabled citizens to comment on and discuss what the journalist was writing about while the debates were going on. This communications in the political field among journalists and the readers is the second tier of public interaction.

Just like the MySpace debate website attempted to do, the advent of blogs on mainstream media sites has opened up a dialogue within the community. This means that the press is no longer a one-to-many medium like the television, but has become a many-to-many medium because of the Internet. In his book *Republic.com 2.0*, Cass R. Sunstein likens the public forum created by the media to a public park.¹⁶ He writes “the public-forum doctrine increases the likelihood that people generally will be exposed to a wide variety of people and views.”¹⁷ The public park is a place where free and open dialogue with people of different backgrounds and political views can come together to discuss various issues.

As the presidential and vice presidential debates took place, the blogs on mainstream media sites would write about what was happening. The *Los Angeles Times* political blog called “Top of the Ticket,” which is written by Don Frederick

¹⁶ From *Republic.com 2.0* by Cass R. Sunstein published in 2007. Quotation found on page 27.

¹⁷ Ibid.

and Andrew Malcolm featured live blogging to be read along with each debate. During the only vice presidential debate between Gov. Sarah Palin and Sen. Joseph Biden the political blog section at *The New York Times* site called “The Caucus” had 1,892 comments while the debate was occurring.¹⁸ The comments section served as a forum for people who were Democrats, Republicans, or independents, as many were making observations about what they saw. Types of comments during the debate ranged from criticism of the style such as “sound bites, sound bites, sound bites” to more general indictments of the content, such as “This is ridiculous, it’s an advertisement not a debate” from user josephnd9.¹⁹ While some of these comments went largely ignored, others were addressed or rebutted by fellow readers. The comment section is the equivalent to a large viewing party where people of all political parties and ideologies gather to debate the debate.

The diversity of entries and participants in the comments section was mimicked at almost every non-partisan and, at times, partisan site that had live blogging during the presidential and vice presidential debates. Despite the possibilities of journalist and citizen interaction during the debate, there was very little conversation going on between the reporter and the viewer. Instead, the reader would make comments about the debate and issues similar to the journalist. The readers hardly ever made direct comments about what the journalist was writing and the journalist never responded to comments made about the debate.

¹⁸ The comments were from the blog entry “Live Blog: St. Louis Showdown” published on October 2, 2008 by Katharine Seelye.

¹⁹ The comments came from the “Live Blog: St. Louis Showdown” at *The New York Times*. The entry from Joe was comment #162 and the entry from josephnd9 was comment #163.

The major disconnect between a potentially lateral relationship between the journalist and the reader is seen between the reporting at the top of the page and the discussion section at the bottom. Although the comments promote discussion among like-minded and different citizens, it still fails to offer an important outlet from the reader to the journalist. The future must see the divide disappear so that the journalist and reader comments mix together.

Both the media and debate commissions have taken a major step toward establishing a community centered in a virtual town hall. There is no doubt that advances in both institutions could urge further citizen discussions in a completely lateral matter with politicians and journalists. Cass R. Sunstein argues that democracy is threatened if a citizenry becomes inert and that the goals “emphatically require both unchosen exposures and shared experiences.”²⁰ A way to keep the public engaged and participating in debates and public forums is to offer them something that is unpredictable and unwarranted such as a rhetorical question raised in a comments section or a unique question asked through a YouTube video. In order to keep the interest of the public in politics, the filters and barriers of the 2008 presidential cycle must be restructured to open public communications.

²⁰ From *Republic.com 2.0* by Cass R. Sunstein published in 2007. Quotation found on page 43.

Chapter 2: Impact of Blogs on Campaigns and Coverage

While the use of blogs in the political sphere is no longer an innovation, the significance and impact of blogging was elevated during the 2008 presidential campaign because of several changes and strategies such as live blogging, integration with YouTube, and user comments. Blogs have become an essential component in elections for candidates and journalists alike. More importantly, blogs are important in perpetuating the trend of having a virtual town hall, which establishes an intimate relationship among candidates, journalists, and the public.

The Internet has given millions of people the ability to create personal blogs or professional blogs about any subject imaginable. According to an eMarketer report from May 2008, there were an estimated 94.1 million blog readers in 2007 in the United States alone and an estimated 22.6 million bloggers the same year.²¹ This is expected to have grown by 2.6 million and 10.6 million, respectively, in 2008.²² The numbers and continuing proliferation of blogs are a clear indicator that they are becoming more prevalent in all aspects of society, especially in politics. The usefulness and importance of blogs has expanded in three areas: the candidates' personal blogs on their websites, the journalistic blogs dealing with politics such as the "Top of the Ticket" at the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Huffington Post*, and finally, the interaction afforded to the public through blog comments.

²¹ Estimates taken from the article published by the Internet research company eMarketer on May 16, 2008 called "Blogs Blossom into a Big Business. Retrieved from <http://www.emarketer.com/AboutUs.aspx>.

²² Ibid.

This first part of this section focuses specifically on the blogging done by candidates and the online strategies that have allowed them to spread their message. For example, the strategic placement of Obama's historic "A More Perfect Union" speech on YouTube to enable the public to see the speech in its entirety illustrates how the recent convergence between blogging and YouTube has benefitted campaigns. The second part will focus on how journalistic blogs have made candidates more accountable and transparent to the public.

Section 1: Candidate Blogs

As demonstrated later in the section, blogging definitely serves as an advantage for candidates, but some argue that not blogging can be politically hazardous. This was the case when on August 5, 2004, just three months before the election, the now infamous Swift Boat Veterans for Truth group began running television commercials questioning John Kerry's war record in Vietnam. Even though some of the major newspapers reported that the group had "failed to come up with sufficient evidence to prove him a liar," the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth had already succeeded in casting doubt on Kerry's record.²³ He had a blog on his website but failed to respond to the accusations until some time after the group was able to make its mark. Possible reasons for waiting was because the Democrats wanted to preserve funds or didn't think that the ads would have much effect. In a piece published in *Wired* during the aftermath of the 2004 election,

²³ "Swift Boat Accounts Incomplete; Critics Fail to Disprove Kerry's Version of Vietnam War Episode" by Michael Dobbs published on August 22, 2004 in *The Washington Post*.

reporter Daniel Terdiman lamented the fact that John Kerry had not truly joined the blog movement that other news sites were embracing at the time.²⁴

Nevertheless, the modern era of online politics has evolved to a point where a situation like this is just a distant memory because of the candidates' regular use of blogs and their current understanding that immediate reaction is crucial. For these reasons along with advancements in technology, this same scenario happening four years later is very unlikely. Campaign blogs have several vital elements to the candidates such as speed, the ability to reach a large audience, and being a good public relations tool. Candidate blogs have proven to be an important tool to communicate with supporters and the media. Two major problems arising with candidate blogs is that they are just glorified PR tools and are not really communicative.

By acting as online public relations machines, candidate blogs are criticized for being impersonal, uninspiring, and not exciting. During the primaries, staff members mainly wrote for the blogs and discussed things such as the whereabouts of the candidate or the things he or she was doing on the campaign trail. A website devoted to following the 2008 presidential election's use of technology called TechPresident attacked the inefficient use of blogs as a place to set out talking points. Contributor Jeff Commaroto wrote that having guest posters and full-time bloggers post about the candidates "is immensely uninteresting and distancing and just sounds like rampant cheerleading."²⁵

²⁴ "Longing for a Blogging Candidate" by Daniel Terdiman in *Wired* on November 12, 2004.

²⁵ The title of the entry is "Candidates' Blogs: Glorified Public Relations?" published by Jeff Commaroto published on August 23, 2007.

Using the blogs on the official websites in this manner does not make the candidates accountable for everything published by staffers. Also, it does not draw in readers who would like to hear directly from the candidate. For example, former Republican senator Fred Thompson, who ran an unsuccessful bid to receive the Republican nomination in 2008, had a blog that featured his own writing as well as staffers'. Although it was unclear whether he actually wrote his own entries or whether his speechwriters did, the way he directly addressed his supporters offered a more sophisticated and personal approach than his competitors. While on the road campaigning, however, Thompson's blog section at Fred08.com saw fewer entries done by Thompson himself. Poor performances in the Michigan primary on January 15, 2008, and the South Carolina primary four days later led Thompson to drop out of the race, so it was unknown whether he would have continued blogging as deep into the presidential campaign as the other candidates went.

Barack Obama had full-time staffers and guest bloggers throughout his entire campaign to update his supporters. John McCain, Hillary Clinton, and Mitt Romney followed suit with Obama, and all had contributors to their official campaign blogs rather than writing them themselves. Despite these impersonal entries, every candidate began doing something entirely new with the help of YouTube's campaign "YouChoose," launched in the final week of February 2007. YouTube gathered the videos from all the candidates in the presidential race and placed them all together, allowing more viewers to see them. The idea was to give viewers the opportunity to see the videos of the candidates in order to make the

message more personal. In the 2008 election cycle, it was reported “All of the presidential front-runners (Clinton, former New York mayor Giuliani), even the long shots (Rep. Dennis Kucinich, Sen. Joe Biden), maintain their own YouTube channels, filling them with clips from their own websites.”²⁶ The YouTube channels are mini-sites within the overall site that are managed by and devoted to candidates and feature their videos. Essentially, what these videos and the ones on their websites let the candidates do was create a form of video blog that the site readers could watch. With new technology like the ability to embed videos directly onto the blogs, candidates have shifted in the direction of trying to become more intimate by giving supporters more than just a blog but a video of themselves personally addressing them. These YouTube video blogs are a new way to quickly and cheaply record messages to a mass audience, and the effectiveness of this new medium was reflected in the number of views.

By February 27, 2008, the number of subscribers to Barack Obama’s YouTube channel had overshadowed John McCain’s subscribers 31,192 to 2,844.²⁷ The explanation of this massive discrepancy could be due in part to Obama’s success in promoting his YouTube channel on his own website and the fact that the majority of the young voters were leaning toward Obama. It is difficult to determine whether Obama’s use of technology helped gather young voters or whether the young voters were already more supportive of him and were attracted to his use of technology. While the answer is most likely a mixture of

²⁶ “YouTube Gets Serious With Links to Candidates” by Jose Antonio Vargas published by *The Washington Post* on March 2, 2007.

²⁷ Figures taken from TechPresident, which tracked YouTube subscribers on charts from March 7, 2007 through February 27, 2008.

these two elements, the correlation between Obama's increased use of technology and his popularity among young voters is indicative that technology had definitely given Obama the advantage over McCain's less tech-friendly approach. The generational gap between Obama and McCain was underlined when McCain said, "I am learning to get online myself" and "I don't expect to set up my own blog."²⁸ There is no doubt that McCain's lack of computer knowledge damaged his image with young voters because technological savvy is now almost a prerequisite for incoming leaders.

The most important aspect of the blog in the political arena is the ability to respond to potential controversy speedily and to a wide audience, including supporters, journalists, and other bloggers. This aspect and the successful unity between campaign blogs and YouTube were illustrated when videos of Obama's former pastor delivering fiery sermons appeared in ABC News in mid-March 2008, leaving Obama in a potentially damaging situation similar to John Kerry's. After the videos of Rev. Jeremiah Wright saying, "God damn America," surfaced, Obama was determined to distance himself quickly and publicly from the controversy.²⁹ Questions over Obama's patriotism and loyalty to the country made their rounds on blogs and cable news networks until five days later, he finally wanted to ensure this controversy aimed at diminishing his image would go no further. Although his blog was not the centerpiece of the reaction, he did use it as a supplementary tool to publish and spread his response to these claims.

²⁸ The quote was taken from an interview with *The New York Times*, which appeared in the article "McCain's Conservative Model? Roosevelt (Theodore, That Is)" by Adam Nagourney and Michael Cooper published on July 13, 2008.

²⁹ The story, "Obama's Pastor: God Damn America, U.S. to Blame for 9/11" by Brian Ross and Rehab El-Buri, was taken from the ABC News site and was published on March 13, 2008.

On March 18, 2008, Obama delivered his “A More Perfect Union” speech to address topics of race in the United States as well as clarify his stance on Wright’s sermons. According to a poll by the Pew Research Center, “fully 85% of Americans say they heard at least a little about Obama's speech,” which quite possibly made it the biggest event of the presidential campaign.³⁰ Part of the speech’s ability to be so effective in spreading the message was his tactical use of his blog. Instead of responding exclusively on his blog or through his campaign advisers, Obama wisely planned a televised speech; however, he did not neglect the power of his blog and YouTube. Immediately after he delivered the speech, his team published the full transcript and an embedded video of it that was also published on his website’s official YouTube channel. The success of this tactic was monumental. After one day, the video garnered 1.2 million viewers and on the second day, it gained an additional 1.3 million viewers.³¹ Although most of the high viewership can be attributed to the hype surrounding his speech, the blog played an intricate part in recording the video in its entirety as well as publishing the transcripts. So rather than having segments of the speech played on newscasts, Obama was able to allow viewers to see the whole thing whenever they wanted. This led to a positive reaction from the public who mostly believed that Obama was sincere in talking about Wright and racial issues.

³⁰ Poll found in the article “Obama Speech on Race Arguably Biggest Event of Campaign” published by the Pew Research Center on March 27, 2008.

³¹ The first day’s numbers were taken from *The Nation* article “Obama’s Speech Makes YouTube History” by Ari Melber published on March 19, 2008 while the second day’s numbers were taken from the AFP article “Barack Obama’s race speech an online video hit” published on March 21, 2008.

What made this event so successful was that it reached so many people and gave them an opportunity to talk back. Not only were the television, the newscasts, and the newspapers saturated with information about the speech but the Internet was too. The 2008 election experienced the creation of numerous “share” applications, which allows readers to pass on the story or video to friends or news aggregators. This application was featured on all the major candidates’ blogs to promote their entries on share sites such as Digg, Newsvine, and Delicious. Each of these sites allows users to share and submit articles from around the web including blogs that they find interesting or important. All of the blogs give the readers the option of sharing it with a number of icons at the bottom of every entry. By having so many choices to share the blog entry, it ensures that someone would most likely pass on the post to a greater online community at other sites. This also gives a much wider readership of potentially undecided voters that do no frequent campaign blogs. For example, one of the most “dugg” entries from John McCain’s website during the campaign was about his views on abortion and had a total of 2,776 diggs. This means that almost 3,000 people found it interesting, unique, or simply liked it.³²

Just as the case was for live blogging during the debates, comments on candidate blogs are an important facet in creating a virtual town hall. The comments on the blog help minimize the one-to-many aspect that also impersonalizes the written and video entries. For example, in the case of Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” speech, there were 1,906 reader comments directly on

³² This information was taken from Digg’s Web site and was about the digg entry “No Woman Will Have The Right To Choose – John McCain” submitted by jpsoraire.

the blog and an additional 10,051 comments about the video on YouTube by the day of the election. In both of these cases, viewers were commenting on the issues he was talking about but were also debating portions of his speech. Once again, rather than supplying a one-to-many message, the comments allowed another dimension of discussion on a smaller level engaging the readers and promoting a more democratic, town hall style discussion.

This was a way for both Obama and McCain's supporters to have a community where they could all go and talk to one another about the issues. For example, on one of McCain's most popular blog entries, entitled, "John McCain Sweeps Chesapeake Primary," posted on February 12, 2008, many of the supporters were comparing and contrasting McCain's speech to Obama's speech given that same night. The assumption that the people who post comments on McCain's blog would already be his supporters is not true. That same night, there were heated conversations between comments posted by "Chemicalkinetics" and "Lee308" about how liberal McCain's record in the Senate was.³³ Not only did they criticize McCain's record but they also actually expressed positive sentiments about other candidates. Of course, McCain supporters vehemently defended his positions in a heated argument. This instance shows that candidates' blogs aren't invulnerable to criticism from supporters of opposing candidates, which heightens the democratic process since ideological positions are being discussed.

³³ The debate between the two participants happened under the blog post "John McCain Sweeps Chesapeake Primary" from johnmccain.com on February 12, 2008.

In terms of candidate blogs, the most notable evolution in the 2008 presidential cycle was the frequent use of YouTube embedded videos to bring back the intimate feel that was lost in the fact that most candidates did not personally write on their own blogs. The video blogs were effective and vital tools in getting out messages to a wider audience and YouTube aided candidates by promoting viewership. Interestingly, the number of comments on the YouTube videos outweighed the comments on the blogs in every instance. This is indicative that readers possibly see the blogs as a superficial public relations tool rather than a serious medium that candidates use to address supporters. YouTube both in comments and views eclipsed the actual website, which puts the company at an advantage. Future candidates will most likely continue the trend of using video entries in their blogs over written posts to engage the reader more and may see more video comments and debates among the viewers.

While the number of blog videos candidates make on YouTube may go up, candidates can still use blogs to further open communications with the public. One potential innovation would be to have live blogging on their sites. In this scenario, they would be able to have a direct dialogue with a large number of supporters by addressing concerns and taking questions. Although they would not be able to answer every single question, candidates would be able to open the up their campaign and promote absolute transparency. The effectiveness of live blogging could establish an impression of being candid and honest, as they would be forced to confront the tough issues.

Despite the opportunity to interact directly with supporters through live blogging, candidates may be reluctant to participate for a number of reasons. Republican candidates were already reluctant to partake in the CNN/YouTube debates for fear of getting curveball questions from Democrats. Referring to a question Democrats received in their CNN/YouTube debate, Republican Mitt Romney stated, “I think the presidency ought to be held at a higher level than having to answer questions from a snowman.”³⁴ Romney’s unwillingness to be a part of a YouTube debate with unexpected questions suggests that candidates would not want to take unfiltered questions from the public in a live blogging format.

Contenders in the 2008 presidential election successfully used blogs to address supporters and attempt to control any bad publicity as in the case of Obama with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright controversy. Candidate blogs will remain an important tool in upcoming elections and have the potential to take political interaction and campaign accountability to a new level with newer technology like live blogging or video comments.

Section 2: Journalism Blogs

During the formative years of blogs, they were sometimes hyped as the medium that would cause the mainstream news outlets to crumble. For a few years, things had appeared to be headed in this direction until the mainstream media learned to incorporate the blog into its online publications. During the 2004

³⁴ Quote taken from *The Washington Post* article called “The GOP YouTube Debate is Back On” by Jose Antonio Vargas published on August 12, 2008.

presidential election, the only existing political blogs, such as the *Talking Points Memo*, *InstaPundit*, *RedState*, and *Daily Kos* were independently run. However, the 2006 midterm election and the 2008 presidential election saw the inclusion of mainstream political blogs like “The Caucus” blog at *The New York Times*, the “Top of the Ticket” blog at the *Los Angeles Times*, and “The Fix” blog at *The Washington Post*.

These additions along with other influential political blogs such as *The Huffington Post* and the *Drudge Report* have made candidates the most tracked and followed in history. The consequences of having an election covered through so many mediums are twofold. First, more coverage ensures that there is more transparency and public information about a candidate by publishing stories that may not have normally received attention by the mainstream media. Second, political blogs further establish a virtual town hall by allowing readers or television viewers to interact and discuss stories through comments.

The importance of blogs in promoting candidate accountability dates back to 2002 when blogger Josh Marshall of *Talking Points Memo* proved to be instrumental in the resignation of Trent Lott as Senate Majority Leader. During the 100th birthday party for the now late Senator Strom Thurmond, Lott remarked that he had voted for Thurmond when he ran for president and said, “If the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either.”³⁵ This was controversial because Thurmond ran a notorious campaign in 1947 on a segregationist platform and then tried to prevent

³⁵ Quote taken from “Lott Decried For Part of Salute to Thurmond” by Thomas B. Edsall published by *The Washington Post* on December 7, 2002.

the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957. Although the mainstream media covered the remarks for the first few days, the furor died down quickly. Marshall, however, continuously posted reminders on *Talking Points Memo* and succeeded in keeping the controversy alive, resulting in Lott's resignation. This early example of how blogs have had more impact in promoting candidate accountability than the mainstream media was one of the major themes during the 2008 presidential election.

The big story of 2008 that demonstrated the continued power struggle in political coverage between mainstream media and independent blogs was the extramarital affair of candidate and possible vice presidential pick John Edwards. The *National Enquirer* first broke the story on October 10, 2007, and claimed that Edwards was romantically involved with a campaign worker.³⁶ The major disconnect between the political blogs and the mainstream media was evident when the story was almost exclusively covered for months by the blogosphere. Edwards publicly denied such claims, and the mainstream media was not interested in pursuing the potential scandal. Bob Schieffer of the CBS News even went so far as to say, "I believe that's a story that we will be avoiding, because it appears to me that there's absolutely nothing to it," on a December 19, 2007, broadcast of Don Imus' *Imus in the Morning*.

The gap in the coverage was widened when an e-mail surfaced from *Los Angeles Times* editor Tony Pierce requesting that site bloggers did not cover the

³⁶ The article was a National Enquirer exclusive called "Presidential Cheating Scandal! Alleged Affair Could Wreck John Edwards' Campaign Bid" published on October 7, 2007.

story “because the only source has been the *National Enquirer*.”³⁷ The logic behind this decision was most likely based on the model that journalists should never report on gossip or unsubstantiated claims against someone. However, while most of the mainstream media maintained its solidarity in refusing to cover the story, blogs like the *Drudge Report*, *The Huffington Post* and *The Daily Kos* were responsible for keeping the story alive. The sites continued to investigate and publicize the affair on a regular basis. It wasn’t until Edwards finally admitted the affair on August 8, 2008, did the mainstream media begin to really report on the issue, which resulted in the end of Edwards’ possible vice presidential selection by Barack Obama.³⁸

This event showed both that the mainstream media still lags behind in reporting issues that blogs aren’t afraid to tackle and that increased coverage has increased candidate exposure to the public. The mainstream media walks a precarious line between maintaining high journalistic standards and covering the same stories as blogs, even if the claims initially appear to be gossip. The conundrum is whether the mainstream media will succumb to lesser journalistic standards that come out but pique curiosity. The competition between political blogs and the mainstream media will undoubtedly remain throughout the next few elections; however, the importance of getting scoops and outdoing independent blogs may result in the mainstream media compromising its ethics to pursue different stories.

³⁷ The contents taken from a Slate entry “Is the MSM about to turn against Edwards?” by Mickey Kaus published on July 25, 2008.

³⁸ Date affirmed in ABC News article “I believe that's a story that we will be avoiding, because it appears to me that there's absolutely nothing to it” published on August 8, 2008 by Rhoda Schwartz, Brian Ross, and Chris Francescani.

One possibility of this happening is that newspaper or newscast sites will discuss and report on these potentially false stories in their blog sections. This was the case when FOX News picked up a story about Obama attending a radical Muslim madrassa in Indonesia. Some of the newscaster's blogs featured more information as well as claims that Obama was not born in the United States, which would have made him ineligible to become president. Obama disputed these comments, but the network ran with the stories until his birth certificate came out and the school in Indonesia proved to be a regular public school. Regardless of the politics, FOX News may have run with the story because it would not pass up the opportunity to have a real story that not many other networks were covering. After the criticism the *Los Angeles Times* received for not covering the Edwards affair, it is unlikely mainstream media outlets would repeat the non-coverage.

Regardless of how the mainstream media handles the situation, blogs have helped ensure that the democratic process is fair and have taken a bigger watchdog approach in elections by investigating stories and covering things that other outlets may have missed such as the Trent Lott scandal or the John Edwards affair. Whereas these two scoops were seen as positive results of constant coverage and investigation, the focus of the media is sometimes erroneously directed solely to something that has no real bearing on the campaign. This was the case when an explosion of coverage about Palin's then pregnant 16-year-old daughter followed just three days after Republican nominee John McCain announced Sarah Palin as his running mate on August 29, 2008.

Every political blog and most mainstream outlets covered some aspect of the story with many cable news shows discussing the implication of Bristol Palin's pregnancy. Syracuse University professor Charlotte Grimes blamed the echo chamber of the modern media for the overwhelming coverage of Bristol Palin in an *Albany Times Union* article published on September 8, 2008. Grimes claimed, "The media echo chamber stretches far beyond the news and it's mind-numbingly repetitive," and "whether to follow up on the rumors is a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't choice for traditional journalists."³⁹ The "damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't" mentality also stems from the idea that blogs must cover a story if the competition is discussing an issue and people are interested in hearing about it.

The unmerited political distraction even evolved to the point that oft-troubled celebrity Lindsay Lohan commented on her MySpace blog, "The real problem comes from the fact that we are taking the focus off of getting to know Sarah Palin."⁴⁰ This is an example of how the 24-hour news cycle and the Internet sometimes have negative ramifications contrary to the protection of democracy by allowing transparency. Increasingly, there has been coverage of candidates' personal lives or family issues that seep onto the political docket. Unlike the Edwards story in which he lied about having an affair, these stories do nothing to advance election coverage. Consequently, these stories are likely to remain in upcoming elections because sensationalist stories increase television news

³⁹ Quote taken from the *Times Union* article "Papers restrained with news of pregnancy" published September 8, 2008.

⁴⁰ Quote from Lohan's MySpace blog taken from "Lohan Gets Political: Palin Baby Drama 'Distracting'" published by Newser on September 2, 2008.

viewership and political blog readership. The 24-hour news cycle and the race to be the first to report will only perpetuate the problem of focusing on the personality and life of a candidate rather than the views and credentials.

Technology has the potential to exacerbate this pitfall in campaign coverage because more blogs will have the need to grasp for new or different material to attract readers.

Nevertheless, as blogs play an important role in monitoring the activity of candidates, they also create an additional form of public communication with journalists. Like candidate blogs, the comment sections of political blogs have added another dimension to journalism and the creation of a two-way dialogue featuring reporters and consumers of the news. As discussed earlier, the “Top of the Ticket” blog at the *Los Angeles Times* jumped into the political blog arena specifically to cover the 2008 race to the White House. On the very first post on June 11, 2007, reporter and blogger Andrew Malcolm describes the blog as a place to stay informed with “interesting nuggets of news, trends, insights and trivia that help reveal our democracy’s inner workings as it moves through the next dramatic months of political history.”⁴¹ The seasoned *Los Angeles Times* journalist also invited readers to leave comments and occasionally responded or made remarks about readers’ posts.⁴² Aside from letters to the editor and e-mails, journalists previously had closed communications with the audience. Blogs, however, have enabled readers of newspapers to directly communicate with the

⁴¹ Taken from the first blog entry on the *Los Angeles Times* Top of the Ticket entitled “Paris Hilton not here” by Andrew Malcolm.

⁴² Ibid.

journalist as well as debate items of news with other readers. The consumption of written news is now more interactive and engaging than ever before.

Television news shows have also recognized the shift toward incorporating new technology and have utilized blogs to the fullest extent. The eagerness to heighten viewer interaction to gain an edge over competitors and the development of the Internet has spawned an entirely new experience. Prior to the Internet, the only time the audience was able to hear from the television journalist was during a telecast, so shows began adding calls from viewers to personalize broadcasts. Now most major news networks like ABC News, MSNBC, CBS News, CNN, and FOX have blogs for their television personalities like George Stephanopoulos, Keith Olbermann, Katie Couric, and Bill O'Reilly. Blog entries, which can also be written by staff members, sometimes reflected or elaborated on election stories covered during the broadcast. Other types of entries are stories they don't cover in the broadcast, or personal perspectives on the state of politics. Olbermann usually employs this type of entry when he blogs with his special comments section of his show Countdown With Keith Olbermann. The sheer number of blogs from television journalists indicates that only a niche audience views them. The readers most likely visit the specific blogs because they enjoy the journalist or are avid viewers of the show.

Despite the large amount, most of the newscast blogs average double-digit numbers in the comments section with many cultivating interesting conversations and debates. These are important technological developments that make television journalists more aware of what the audience is thinking and enables viewers to

gain more information directly from the journalists and other citizens who leave educated comments. One of the most innovative uses of blogs and television came from CNN's Anderson Cooper, who created a truly multidimensional experience for the audience. On February 6, 2008, Cooper began employing something called live show blogging on "Anderson Cooper 360°."⁴³ This new type of blogging allows viewers to post comments on Cooper's blog about what they are viewing on his show, which he reads and then responds to during the commercial breaks or on air. The idea behind this was to increase interaction to give viewers the opportunity to engage in a discussion with Cooper while he is on television.

For example, the night before the Kentucky and Oregon primaries, Cooper engaged in live show blogging about regional polls and Republican attacks on Michelle Obama. The live show blogging garnered 253 comments with Cooper replying to viewers about the positive quality of his panelists on the show that night and facilitated questions about whether Chelsea Clinton should have had to answer questions from the media.⁴⁴ Two main problems arise with live blogging however. While many people asked Cooper questions about the content, he didn't get to answer all of them, ending with a total of only 3 comments, or 1%, answered. Typically, either Cooper or one of his correspondents like Erica Hill responds to questions, but that is still not enough to answer all the inquiries. A solution to this problem could be to hire more people to operate the blogs. Another potential way to fix the problem would be to devote a short portion of the show to verbally respond to the comments that viewers write on the blog. Not

⁴³ The date of the first live show blogging was taken from the February 6, 2008, blog entry "Anderson Cooper: Behind The Scenes" from the show Web site.

⁴⁴ Details taken from "Live Blog from the Anchor Desk 5/19/08" on AC360.com.

only would this enhance the viewer's experience by allowing a conversation with the television journalist, a range of alternative viewpoints and ideas may also become expressed through the interaction.

The second problem with live show blogging is similar to one that arose during the town hall-style presidential debate. Not all of the comments were pushed through to Anderson Cooper, with some being deleted by a moderator. Cooper defended this method as a safety measure to preserve the dialogue. He stated that malicious people sometimes try to ruin a fruitful conversation and that the "process is very straightforward and - like on the television program - there is no hidden agenda."⁴⁵ The supervision of the live show blogging is a necessary measure to stop needless attacks or tasteless criticism because there is no better way of filtering comments.

Despite the regulation, Cooper's show has created an environment that pushes interactive journalism to the next level. "Larry King Live," another show on CNN, also introduced the same type of live blogging system on September 29, 2008. On one blog entry from the show, viewers submitted 1,900 comments to ask filmmaker Michael Moore questions about the election. He was not able to answer all of them, but did respond to a small number of questions on-air. While other networks' shows have not created a similar format yet, live show blogging has the potential to spread despite the problem that it requires a lot of work by the host to comment on the blog while putting on a live television newscast. Nevertheless, the competitive nature of television journalism could see the spread

⁴⁵ Quote taken from the AC360 blog entry "Anderson's View: Behind the Scenes" posted on February 13, 2008 by Anderson Cooper.

of innovative technology to foster an environment that makes journalists aware of public concerns.

Both newspapers and television newscasts have added blogs to their repertoire in order to compete with independent political blogs and promote interaction. Candidates in recent elections have also recognized the power and significance of blogs for their own use and to promote communication between themselves and the public. The fact that Barack Obama published a reaction to his controversial reverend Jeremiah Wright exclusively on *The Huffington Post* is evidence that the paradigm is shifting toward a political arena controlled through blogs.⁴⁶ While blogs offer a way to have a more transparent electoral cycle with open two-way communication with the audience, problems with the quality of coverage persist. Candidates use blogs as strategic tools to lay down talking points and communicate with supporters while the media uses blogs as tools to create a lateral conversation with the audience.

With the number expected to be at 34.7 million by 2012, the future of blogs in politics looks promising.⁴⁷ The increased use of live blogging in conjunction with television will most likely take viewing to a new level, and the success of video blogs from candidates may give way to journalists attempting to add videos to supplement their blogs. Overall, blogs have been consequential during recent elections in maintaining democratic values of accountability and

⁴⁶ Obama posted the reaction called “On My Faith and My Church” on March 14, 2008 at *The Huffington Post*.

⁴⁷ Estimates taken from the article published by the Internet research company eMarketer on May 16, 2008 called “Blogs Blossom into a Big Business. Retrieved from <http://www.emarketer.com/AboutUs.aspx>.

play a significant role in establishing the norm of having an open forum between leaders and citizens and journalists and consumers of the news.

Chapter 3: Social Networking

By the time Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential election, his Facebook profile had already garnered more than 5 million supporters. John McCain's official Facebook profile barely had half a million. The huge disparity between the two candidates of the 2008 election points to the expanding importance of social networking sites in running and reporting on campaigns. During 2008, Obama found success by using and marketing strategies with the two prominent social networking sites Facebook and MySpace, which helped him create an early grassroots movement. This section will focus on past uses of social networking from previous elections, the successes and failures Obama encountered, and how social networking can be used as tools against candidates. Finally, the section will touch on the ways traditional media has adapted to the increased use of these sites and predictions about future strategies.

In March 2003, the first social networking website called Friendster appeared on the Internet and instantly garnered three million users. This set the stage for the establishment of the two social networking giants MySpace and Facebook. MySpace, founded in 2003, is currently the most widely-used social networking website in the U.S. with 73 million users. Facebook, founded a year later, has 36 million users in the U.S., but currently has surpassed MySpace on an international level with 150 million users worldwide compared to MySpace's 110 million worldwide users.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Statistics taken from "MySpace Getting a facelift in effort to turn popularity into wealth" by Brian Stelter published by the International Herald Tribune on June 16, 2008.

The age of a vast majority of the users on social networking sites incorporates people of voting age, both young and old. Although social networking sites are predominantly thought of as places for youths, both MySpace and Facebook have seen an increase in users between the ages of 25 and 54.⁴⁹ Facebook, which began as a social networking site for college students, now reports that “the fastest growing demographic is those 30 years old and older.”⁵⁰ The rapid growth in popularity makes social networking sites a prime target for candidates and media to spread ideas and information.

In 2004, only one year after the creation of the first social networking site, former Vermont governor, Howard Dean, was one of the first candidates to demonstrate how the Internet could be used for campaigning, creating online fundraisers, and constructing “Netroots” movements. The term Netroots was coined in 2002 by Jerome Armstrong to “describe the growing community of people who became politically active through online interaction.”⁵¹ Essentially, Netroots is an online grassroots movement that mobilizes supporters efficiently and effectively over the Internet.

Armstrong was a member of the Dean campaign when Dean unsuccessfully tried to gain the Democratic nomination for president in 2004. After Dean’s loss to John Kerry, Armstrong continued his work in trying to determine how successful online campaigning and social networking could be. In 2006, he teamed up with former Virginia governor Mark Warner to create a contest among Democratic congressional candidates in Republican districts to see

⁴⁹ Winograd, M. & Hais, M.D. (2008). *Millennial Makeover*. p.168

⁵⁰ Taken from <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>.

⁵¹ Winograd, M. & Hais, M.D. (2008). *Millennial Makeover*. p.157.

who could get the most votes online at a website. The people in the decisive districts called “Map Changers” could go to the website and cast a virtual vote as a sign of support for their candidate. Residents were also required to submit their name, e-mail address, and zip code. The top 10 candidates to receive the most online votes won a monetary contribution and a chance to have Warner go to their district to headline a fundraiser for their campaign.⁵² The incentive for Democrats to organize online networks proved successful and Armstrong and Warner repeated this method in Iowa and New Hampshire.

In a New Hampshire contest, two 19-year-old candidates running for state legislator made the top 5 in vote getting online and then went on to win their districts. Andrew Edwards and Jeffrey Fontas, both college students, demonstrated how invaluable social networking could be in a campaign through this contest. They each created a Facebook group for their respective campaigns, raised their number of friends, and utilized the site’s NewsFeed features. The NewsFeed feature on Facebook allows each user of a particular group to know what is going within their online community. They used this feature to update their friends, as well as friends of friends, about their contest. They were also able to use widgets on their sites that gave people information on how to vote. Another function of the widget was that it enabled them to post their contest as an “event,” which allowed them to send “invitations” to everyone in their group to gather more votes without sending a large amount of e-mails.⁵³

⁵² Winograd, M. & Hais, M.D. (2008). *Millennial Makeover*. p.158.

⁵³ Winograd, M. & Hais, M.D. (2008). *Millennial Makeover*. p.160.

In addition, the 2006 midterm elections witnessed an increase in congressional and gubernatorial candidates turning to MySpace and Facebook to organize and mobilize supporters in an inexpensive and effective way. Facebook set up profiles for all candidates so that supporters could find and friend their candidate or issue group. Despite the candidate-friendly invitation from Facebook, only 32% of candidates running for Senate posted content on their profile and 13% of House candidates posted information. Statistics showed that Democrats were more likely to update a profile and had more supporters.⁵⁴ The outcome of the 2006 election ended with the Republican Party experiencing numerous defeats. Even with noted losses, the Republican Party's aversion to effective online campaigning and social networking continued into the 2008 presidential election.

Entering the 2008 race to receive a presidential nomination, all prospective candidates had profiles on MySpace and Facebook during the 2008 primaries. Although the technological playing field was essentially level, Democratic candidates went in a completely different direction than the Republicans and by the end of the election, the lack of technological parity was irreconcilable. Democrats, and Obama specifically, utilized social networking sites in three ways: emphasizing online fundraising and Netroots movements, taking advice from and partnering with technologically savvy campaign organizers, and canvassing the web with the campaign's brand and image.

⁵⁴ Williams, C. B. and Gulati, G. J. (2007). "Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Hyatt Regency Chicago and the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers, Chicago, IL.

Obama launched his own social networking website on Feb. 11, 2007, called My.BarackObama.com, which allows users to create profiles to connect with other members and donate money. While Republican candidates focused on fundraising in traditional ways, Democrats employed both traditional and online fundraising techniques. Obama's website helped him raise "more than two million donations of less than \$200 each and swiftly mobilize hundreds of thousands of supporters before various primaries."⁵⁵ The site, created by Obama's new media campaign team, provided supporters with the organizational tools to establish online Netroots movements, to donate to the campaign, to build local groups, and to create personal fundraising pages. This social networking site gave supporters everything they needed to be an intricate part of a campaign that is growing larger but at the same time, more intimate. His site empowers voters to join an extended family with people in their immediate communities as well as those thousands of miles away. What brings the people together is the common cause is campaigning for the election of Barack Obama while commingling with like-minded individuals.

General social networking sites were significant in the 2008 elections because it has seen "younger voters turn out in record numbers and take an active role in contributing their time, energy and even money; the internet is lowering barriers to entry and making it easier for many people to get involved and stay informed."⁵⁶ The youth's vote in this election was particularly reliant on using

⁵⁵ Quote taken from "The Facebooker Who Friendened Obama" by Brian Stelter published by *The New York Times* on July 7, 2008.

⁵⁶ Quote taken from "The Internet is a Game Changer" by Andrew Lipsman published on comScore on February 14, 2008. <http://www.comscore.com/mt/mt-tb.cgi/121>.

social networks to inspire and use a sort of “peer” pressure to inform their friends about a candidate and urge support.

While McCain tried to counter Obama’s social networking site with his own called “McCainSpace,” the site came too late and failed to challenge My.BarackObama’s productivity. McCain’s site launched an updated version of the site in August 2008, more than a year and a half after Obama launched his. In an analysis of the new site, Todd Zeigler wrote, “There is really nothing about this social network that has anything to do with taking action and winning elections.”⁵⁷ Unlike Obama’s site, which promoted social action such as knocking on doors and making campaign calls, McCainSpace merely allowed participants to post blogs, videos, and photos. The call for action was a more useful tool in campaigning than the call for camaraderie, which Obama’s site promoted, too.

The Democrats’ dominance in the social networking domain would not have been so successful if they had not taken the advice from individuals who had extensive knowledge of the networking field. The Obama campaign’s use of its own site in conjunction with MySpace and Facebook designed a standard by which other candidates of the election struggled to reach. His secret weapon was the online organizing guru of the new media campaign team, Chris Hughes. Hughes, along with Mark Zuckerberg, was one of the co-founders of Facebook, but left the site in 2007 to work on Obama’s campaign. This gave Obama an

⁵⁷ Analysis taken from *The Bivings Report* entry “McCainSpace: Too Little Too Late” by Todd Zeigler, which was posted on August 28, 2008.

upper hand in creating his social networking site, as Hughes used the Facebook model as his inspiration for creating My.BarackObama.⁵⁸

This was not the only situation the operators of Facebook offered their aid and advice to candidates in the 2008 election. In 2007, Facebook held a conference with an audience of 200, including “AFL-CIO, Emily’s List, a member of Senator Hillary Clinton’s campaign, as well as insiders representing the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.” In addition, “Very few Republicans were present, aside from a lone Ron Paul campaign staff member and members of the Young Republican National Federation.”⁵⁹ At this seminar, Facebook employees showed campaign staff members how to utilize Facebook and its features for the benefit of online campaigning. They discussed such activities as creating groups dedicated to the campaign and other strategies to help their candidates win the election. Democrats were the majority of the attendants at the conference giving them a rewarding boost over Republican candidates who did not put much consideration into the importance of social networking. Early on, Democrats acknowledged the significance of these sites and were open to receiving campaign suggestions from the professionals.

Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace were so effective because they gave candidates constant exposure on the Internet and made it easier for them to get their message out. The two major networking sites ensured that the

⁵⁸ Quote taken from “The Facebooker Who Friendened Obama” by Brian Stelter published by *The New York Times* on July 7, 2008.

⁵⁹ Quotes taken from “Facebook Pitches Its Political Beliefs” by J.P. Freire published by The Caucus, *The New York Times* Politics Blog on October 10, 2007.

image of their sites was also prominent creating a symbiotic relationship between the candidates' images and the sites' images. For example, in 2007, after noting the amount of political interest its members had, MySpace made it easier to find information and discuss current events by making the "Impact Channel." The channel was not only used for political information but for non-profit and volunteer organizations. In the 2008 election, the MySpace profile of every major candidate had a link to the Impact Channel, which helped give lesser-known candidates more exposure and relevance. Paul and Democrat Dennis Kucinich were fighting for more coverage on mainstream media outlets, while complaining that other candidates were getting preferred treatment. MySpace offered no real bias against any candidate, allowing fair attention and enhancing the democratic process. The Impact Channel itself was a productive way to help candidates get their campaign messages out there while building donations through donation widgets. Another unique accessory to the Impact Channel was the ability to gain interest through "digital yard signs" that could be created on a members profile page simply by dragging the candidate's ad onto their own page.⁶⁰ The Impact Channel served as the virtual town square for MySpace users as polls and streaming videos about the 2008 election could also be found there.

Along with MySpace and Facebook's advantage for candidates, YouTube also benefitted campaigns through social networking. Although YouTube is a video-sharing site, users can connect to one another and send video or written responses to any video. Launched in 2005, YouTube has grown exponentially, as "the site's average viewer spends more time browsing through the content than do

⁶⁰ Winograd, M. & Hais, M.D. (2008). *Millennial Makeover*. p.172.

visitors to the other, more text-oriented social networking sites.”⁶¹ Like MySpace, YouTube also created a campaign-oriented channel on the site called YouChoose, which featured campaign videos, speeches, informal chats, and behind-the-scene footage. This collection of presidential videos gave the same kind of campaign advertisement as MySpace’s Impact Channel by giving everyone equal exposure. While it is true that some candidates like Obama utilized the pages more than others, it gave them an opportunity to lay out platforms, stances, and the campaign’s overall image.

One of the main advantages of using social networking sites for campaigning is that it is an inexpensive way to get the talking points out into the public. According to Lee Rainer, the director of the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, “right now, social networking and YouTube are the two most striking things about this election cycle that make it different from 2004.”⁶² John Edwards, the Democrat candidate for vice president in 2004, made it different by using YouTube to announce his candidacy to indicate that he understands the importance of social networking. By the end of the campaign, as Obama raised more than \$500 million online alone, he pushed the networking sites to keep his base engaged through the waning months of the long, tiring campaign season.⁶³ Users were able to make hundreds of Facebook groups in support of Obama, such as Students For Barack Obama, which had 3.2 million supporters. There was also online peer pressure on Election Day when Democracy

⁶¹ Winograd, M. & Hais, M.D. (2008). *Millennial Makeover*. p.169.

⁶² Quote taken from “The Future President, on Your Friends List” by Alex Williams published by *The New York Times* on March 17, 2008.

⁶³ Campaign dollar amounts taken from *The Washington Post* article “Obama Raised Half a Billion online” by Jose Antonio Vargas published on Nov. 20, 2008.

For America, a political action committee created by Howard Dean, established a Facebook get-out-the-vote campaign that asked supporters to get three friends to commit their vote for Obama. The site was open with its aim to use pressure writing, “We all know peer pressure works. When you ask someone you know to commit to do something for you, they won't want to let you down.”⁶⁴

Even though the Democrats greatly benefited from social networking sites, these sites can also be used in a negative manner, attacking candidates or emphasizing mistakes. Barack Obama faced his own dispute over a MySpace profile under his name that led to some negative publicity. In 2004, a college student named Joe Anthony created a profile on MySpace under Obama’s name as a fan page after he had just won a seat in the Senate representing Illinois. By the time the Obama campaign had made their official candidacy announcement, Anthony had gained 40,000 friends on his Obama profile. The Obama campaign decided to work with Anthony to coordinate its own social networking site with the MySpace profile, rather than creating a competing MySpace page. However, this agreement fell apart when the MySpace Impact Channel began advertising the Obama profile and “Anthony was faced with the challenge of managing a website with a growing list of over 160,000 friends.”⁶⁵

Because of this onslaught of friend requests, Anthony changed the administrative password to the profile so that the Obama campaign could no longer have access and started requesting compensation for his work. Campaign officials became wary with having Anthony as the unofficial spokesperson, but he

⁶⁴ Quote taken from *Politics Online* blog post “Barack the Vote on Facebook” published on Oct. 10, 2008.

⁶⁵ Winograd, M. & Hais, M.D. (2008). *Millennial Makeover*. p.172.

was unwilling to relinquish the profile. The Obama campaign then seized the profile in July 2007 under MySpace's "public figure" policy, which gives public figures the right to the URL containing their names.

The outcome of this dispute sent waves of controversy throughout the Internet. Although the Obama campaign won the right to get its official MySpace page back from Anthony, no one really won in this situation. Anthony was never compensated for his efforts and Obama's profile lost the 160,000 friends and had to start generating friends all over again. This situation caused a stir on the Internet about how the Obama campaign, which promoted the Netroots idea of building an online community, treated one of its supporters. These types of situations can potentially cause a great deal of harm to a political campaign due to the sheer number of Internet users these stories reach. Fortunately for the Obama campaign, it was able to recover and re-establish its MySpace page again.

A second problem political officials can face with social networking sites is lack of control. When candidates their message via MySpace, Facebook, or YouTube, they relinquish a bit of control over the message and how they are perceived. In exchange, they get a way to creatively network and pass their message to millions of people for free. Some politicians would rather be in full control over what information is dissipated. For example, a candidate who has a MySpace profile can very easily become associated with the wrong types of groups, which can lead to a guilt-by-association situation. In addition, as people have the freedom to write opinions in the comment sections, political candidates run the risk of having negative or untruthful comments posted about them.

A third potentially harmful situation with social networking is exclusive to YouTube. Clips of political gaffes are some of the most viewed YouTube videos, which can lead to the negative branding of a candidate. Political candidates must be aware of any faux pas that may end up on the site for millions of viewers to see. The most prominent case of this happening is the video involving George Allen during his bid for reelection as senator in Virginia in 2006. A volunteer with the Democratic opponent Jim Webb was following Allen on his campaign as a tracker and was filming him wherever he went. On August 11, 2006, Allen was recorded calling volunteer S.R. Sidarth, who has Indian ancestry, the obscure racial slur “macaca.” The video was put on YouTube and was played constantly on television networks. Allen never recovered from the video and ended up losing the election because of all the bad publicity surrounding the video. This incident is an example of how candidates can be branded with things they say that are put on YouTube with friends referring the video or commenting on it to each other. Allen could not stop the video from being shown, and it was a great tool for the Webb campaign. A search of George Allen on YouTube still yields the video as the top result.

Finally, social networking sites could be used as tools to make fun of candidates, campaign against them, or discredit them. Although many of the Facebook groups were supportive of Obama’s candidacy, some groups like the “Stop Obama” group were dedicated to exposing his lies and discrediting his campaign. Numerous videos on YouTube also had spirited opinionated tirades against candidates, with many touting falsehoods. However great the risks

nevertheless, social networking sites will continue to be an important tool for politicians and will likely be a necessity to win any future elections.

Noticing the positive aspects of social networking sites, the traditional media has now ventured into the territory when covering everything from everyday news to election coverage. According to the Pew Research Center for the People & The Press, the number of people who are getting their news from the Internet is growing rapidly. Although most people still get their news from websites such as CNN.com or MSNBC.com, “overall, more than a quarter of those younger than age 30 (27%) – including 37% of those ages 18-24 – have gotten campaign information from social networking sites.”⁶⁶ With so many people spending large amounts of time on MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube, traditional forms of media have had to find a way to reach out to Internet users beyond just having their own news website.

Many of the traditional news media outlets have paired up with social networking sites in order to reach a greater audience, particularly when it comes to the 2008 presidential election. A partnership with MySpace allowed NBC and MSNBC to take a different approach to covering the election. A site within MySpace’s Impact Channel called “Decision ‘08” allowed users to check election information state-by-state, watch streaming videos, and friend the site. MSNBC delivered a vast array of news stories about the election and current events. Likewise, users were able to read MSNBC’s political blog “First Read” on the main page. Popular NBC correspondents such as Brian Williams or the lately

⁶⁶ Quote taken from the Survey Report “Internet's Broader Role in Campaign 2008; Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off” published by The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press on January 11, 2008.

deceased Tim Russert had their own MySpace profiles that users could also be a part of and get additional information.

A similar partnership between ABC News and Facebook “allows Facebook members to electronically follow ABC reporters, view reports and video and participate in polls and debates, all within a new ‘U.S. Politics’ category.”⁶⁷ The two organizations also sponsored the Democratic and Republican presidential debates that took place in New Hampshire in early 2008. Other news organizations, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, have created Facebook pages that allow users to follow the political coverage of a specific reporter from the media outlet. The Facebook page for the FOX News Channel also features discussions, polls, and photo submissions to engage readers and viewers.

The partnerships between traditional news media and social networking sites changed the way the media covers political campaigns, particularly debates. MySpace’s agreement with the Commission on Presidential Debates allowed MySpace to create a new site without advertisements called MyDebates.org. The site, which was used in the 2008 presidential debates, allowed “viewers to watch live and recorded video of the events, to express their approval or disapproval of specific answers and to interact with each other around the issues.”⁶⁸ The MySpace debates, along with the CNN/YouTube debates, demonstrated how the

⁶⁷ Quote taken from “ABC News and Facebook in Joint Effort to Bring Viewers Closer to Political Coverage” by Brian Stelter published by *The New York Times* on November 26, 2007.

⁶⁸ Quotes taken from “MySpace Partners Up for the Debates” by Brad Stone published by The Caucus, *The New York Times*, on August 6, 2008.

use of social networking websites has altered campaign news coverage and how news organizations are preparing for the future with the use of the Internet.

Social networking sites helped democratize and promoted interaction between news organizations and their audiences. Similar to the benefits to the politicians, news outlets can get their image out to the public and make it easier for readers and viewers to be engaged with the material. It is important for them to emphasize their distinction from the others and the sites allow them to underline the personalities unique to each organization.

The 2008 election demonstrated the most innovative uses of the Internet for campaigning to date with social networking sites touting considerable influence. It is likely these practices will continue to be a force in future elections, but there may also be the creation of new social networking technology and the advancement of current innovations.

For example, Twitter, another social networking tool used by Obama during the 2008 election, is one of the fastest growing social networking tools. Twitter is a social networking system that allows users to “microblog,” which is a form of blogging where users send brief updates of 140 characters or less, called “tweets.” The messages can be sent via text messaging or the web and can be received by phone, e-mail, the Twitter website, SMS or RSS feeds, Facebook, or blogs. Users can send tweets to everyone in their circle of friends or to specific people. The upside to this technology is that it can keep everyone updated with what someone is thinking or doing. This can be particularly useful to candidates. Besides being a tool for the Obama campaign, Twitter was used by CNN anchors

during their broadcasts in 2008. Other major news agencies including the *Los Angeles Times*, BBC, and NPR have also started to use Twitter to spread breaking news. The downside, however, is that the amount of information may be so overwhelming that it might be difficult to filter the important items from the mundane.

Twitter, and other similar services, will likely be used in upcoming elections and by the Obama administration during its term in office. Obama is already being coined as the “first social media President.”⁶⁹ Although Obama had to cease using his BlackBerry and e-mail access, he might become the first president with a computer in the Oval Office.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it is likely that his administration will continue its use of social networking and technological advances. According to the *Los Angeles Times*’s Technology blog, the Obama administration has already found ways to incorporate new technology such as “social networks as a means of encouraging civic engagement, online video as a means of informing the citizenry and a Google search-minded approach to the sharing of government documents.”⁷¹ The Obama administration has also announced that they will use online videos on YouTube to supplement radio broadcasts for the weekly national address.

Although some complain that the traffic on the Obama social network My.BarackObama.com has declined, the website is still being updated and

⁶⁹ Quote taken from “Obama, the first social media president” by David Sarno published by the *Los Angeles Times* on November 18, 2008.

⁷⁰ Quote taken from “Lose the BlackBerry? Yes He Can, Maybe” by Jeff Zeleny published by *The New York Times* on November 15, 2008.

⁷¹ Quote taken from “Obama, the first social media president” by David Sarno published by the *Los Angeles Times* on November 18, 2008.

perhaps will be used to promote the Obama administration's goal for transparency by making government information more accessible to the public. In addition to the My.BarackObama.com website, the website Change.gov was developed and launched within 24 hours of Obama's presidential victory over McCain. The interactive website of Obama's transition team is a sign that "the candidate who revolutionized American politics with his heavy use of cutting-edge communications technology and social networking tools is preparing to transform the way the U.S. president interacts with the citizenry."⁷² The Obama administration might also convert their social networking site into a hub for civic action.⁷³ More importantly, his administration has set a technological paradigm that future campaigns and media outlets must adhere to in order to achieve competitive success.

The 2008 election experienced some of the most effective uses of social networking to date from candidates and journalists alike. For campaigns, these sites have given them an easy and inexpensive way to raise money, get their message out, and focus their efforts on becoming more efficient by taking advice from experts. At the same time, the sites could be used for smearing by opponents, and they have the potential to crush a campaign, as illustrated in the case of George Allen. Finally, as technology grows in society, the use of the most up-to-date social networking systems will be vital to the success of future

⁷² Quote taken from "Change.gov Has Come to America" by Richard S. Dunham and Dwight Silverman published by the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on November 11, 2008.

⁷³ Quote taken from "Obama, the first social media president" by David Sarno published by the *Los Angeles Times* on November 18, 2008.

candidates and traditional news media outlets in order to maintain a high level of communication with citizens.

Chapter 4: Participatory Journalism

Up until April 2008, Barack Obama's mission to gain the nomination as Democratic presidential candidate had gone fairly smoothly. However, on April 6, 2008, Obama was recorded saying that people from small towns in the Midwest "get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."⁷⁴ As a result, Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton criticized the remarks as being elitist and patronizing, and the overall reaction was overwhelmingly negative. Obama's comments proved to be an unfortunate stumble that got him bad publicity that gave Clinton a small rise in the polls.

The unlikely journalist who recorded Obama's comments, which he made at a private fundraising event in California, was not from any major network or newspaper. She was an average citizen with a passion for politics. Mayhill Fowler, a self-proclaimed failed writer with no journalistic background, submitted her story about Obama to *The Huffington Post's* participatory journalism section and instantly turned into an important figure in the 2008 campaign coverage.

At this juncture, Fowler became a symbol of the changing landscape of campaign coverage known as participatory journalism. The concept of participatory journalism, or citizen journalism, is certainly not new. Readers have submitted written pieces that were published in newspapers, usually in a designated section, and television viewers have called in to report news going on in their neighborhood. Nevertheless, the volume of citizen-created news articles

⁷⁴ Taken from Mayhill Fowler's April 11, 2008 blog entry on *The Huffington Post's* "Off The Bus."

has reached a new high with the recent technological advancements in low-cost recording devices and widespread access to the Internet. With cellphones that can take pictures and record audio, just about anybody anywhere can report on a scoop that no other journalist has captured.

According to J.D. Lasica, the senior editor of the University of Southern California's *Online Journalism Review*, there are six broad categories of participatory journalism, which include audience participation sites, independently-run sites like the *Drudge Report*, full-fledged participatory sites and others. Although many of the categories no longer seem to be mutually exclusive since Lasica first defined them in 2003, the biggest impact during elections has come from independently run political sites and user-generated news sites. In this section, I will look closely at two important participatory journalism websites, and then I will discuss the effects this new journalism has had on mainstream media campaign coverage and how candidates have reacted politically.

The first citizen journalism site that had a major influence during the 2008 election cycle was the "OffTheBus" section at *The Huffington Post* blog. OffTheBus was a news site during the campaign cycle sponsored by *The Huffington Post* and *NewAssignment.Net* of New York University. The premise of the project was to better campaign coverage by depending on "its on-the-ground citizen reporters and on cutting edge distributed reporting techniques."⁷⁵ Arianna Huffington and NYU professor Jay Rosen decided to create the site because they felt that the pack of mainstream reporters was reinforcing similar ideas without

⁷⁵ This description was taken from the masthead portion of the OffTheBus site.

daring to report something new. The name of the project was inspired by Timothy Crouse's non-fiction book *The Boys On The Bus*, which describes the theory of pack journalism through the life of a reporter covering the 1972 presidential campaign. Therefore, by having various numbers of citizen reporters, they hoped to get an array of perspectives and angles of the same stories to enhance campaign coverage.

To get the project going in June 2007, Huffington and Rosen hired Amanda Michel and Zack Exley to run the program and organize the massive number of citizen participants who were willing to offer their help. Initially, Huffington called out for volunteers in a post on her website to increase the number of citizen reporters. She said she was specifically looking for three types of people. The first type of person was someone to be a part of the general blog network such as a correspondent that follows a candidate, develops a beat or takes on something new. Second, they were looking for people who wanted to join a mailing list to receive information about special projects or possible investigations. Lastly, they wanted people with any expertise or technical skill who would be able to answer questions from bloggers.

While Huffington's request for contributing citizen journalists garnered about 300 volunteers originally, the greatest recruitment tool for the site was Mayhill Fowler and the publicity she received from breaking two big stories. Just six weeks after Fowler reported on Obama's remarks she had another scoop about former president Bill Clinton attacking *Vanity Fair* writer Todd Purdum. In a *Los Angeles Times* article, she attributed her success in getting Clinton to talk to her to

the fact that he thought everyone at the rally for his wife in South Dakota was an average citizen. She went on to say that she is in a sense an ordinary citizen who follows candidates. Therefore, she decided to ask Clinton what he thought about an article critical of his wife written by Todd Purdum. At that point, Clinton began to describe Purdum as “sleazy,” “slimy” and a “scumbag.”⁷⁶ Even as Fowler tried to end the conversation, Clinton continued telling his tirade unknowingly to a citizen journalist.

Once Fowler broke the story, the controversy complicated Hillary Clinton’s final days of campaigning; Barack Obama became the presumptive presidential nominee on June 3, 2008. The effect of this story went beyond the political sphere and extended to how citizen journalists could make an impact. The next month it was reported in *The New York Times* that there were over 7,500 contributors to the site with many of the recruits being attributed to Fowler’s success. In the article, Huffington said of Fowler, “She became the poster child for ordinary citizens being able to impact the campaign.”⁷⁷

The expanding number of citizen journalists allowed OffTheBus to cover a lot more ground and strategically distribute the work throughout the more than 7,500 volunteers. Amanda Michel, the director of the site, created a “Special Ops” section to use a sweeping method to divide and conquer all the information that are released by candidates. For example, citizens would volunteer to go to one of the hundreds of platform hearings or pore over documents released by campaigns.

⁷⁶ “How Mayhill Fowler got online scoops of Obama and Bill Clinton” by James Rainey published in the *Los Angeles Times* on June 7, 2008.

⁷⁷ “Citizen-Journalism Project Gains a Voice in the Campaign” by Katharine Seelye published in *The New York Times* on July 25, 2008.

In this sense, OffTheBus increased the depth of campaign coverage by having thousands of citizen journalists blanketing all aspects of the political field. The stories about Obama's criticism of small towns and Bill Clinton's attack on a *Vanity Fair* writer were reported because Obama and Clinton did not know there was anybody recording their candid moments.

While this type of transparency ensures that candidates are accountable for everything they say, it places anyone involved in the campaign under close scrutiny any time they make an appearance or any time they speak at a private or public event. Nevertheless, using citizens to tactically cover the election not only has positive and negative ramifications on the way campaigns are run, but it also affects the way mainstream media covers campaigns.

An important example of this is another website that uses citizen-generated media. In August 2006, CNN launched a public journalism portion of their site that would publish user-generated stories. The site, known as I-Report, was adapted from another segment of CNN called Fan Zone in which viewers would send in their pictures and videos of the 2006 FIFA World Cup. The response was overwhelming as thousands of people sent in e-mails and photos. They continued to adopt this type of citizen journalism by asking people to submit pictures or first-hand accounts of big news events such as the shooting at Virginia Tech and wildfires in California. However, as the segment started to increase in scope on the network and a full-fledged participatory site emerged from the idea, the I-Report expanded to cover politics and, more specifically, the presidential election.

At first unlike OffTheBus, CNN did not organize its contributors known as I-Reporters or give them assignments. Instead, I-Report depended on the creativity and dedication of citizen journalists to turn in possible stories or pictures that CNN may publish on its news site or may broadcast on its television channel. Now as a part of I-Report, CNN encourages citizens to make stories on certain topics they hand out such as the Democratic or Republican National Conventions. In March 2008, CNN created a complete I-Report site that is labeled as “Unedited. Unfiltered. News.” The site features all articles and videos that were submitted by citizen journalists regardless of their quality or bias. At the top of the page, there is a disclaimer that warns, “Take Note: iReport.com is a user-generated site. That means the stories submitted by users are not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post. Only stories marked "On CNN" have been vetted for use in CNN news coverage.”

Although no story that came out of I-Report was ever considered a game changer in the 2008 election cycle like stories from OffTheBus, CNN’s commitment to public journalism ensured that citizens were able to become involved in politics and share their opinions. On July 23, after the CNN YouTube Democratic debate, thousands of citizens submitted videos or articles expressing their opinions about how the candidates addressed or didn’t address issues. In one video post, 18-year-old Connor Tipping gave an in depth analysis of what he saw as the positives and negatives of the debate. Tipping’s I-Report was featured on the CNN channel and was checked for accuracy and content.

The popularity and innovation of CNN's I-Report has inspired other broadcast news organizations to adopt a similar type of section. ABC's i-Caught, FOX News' uReport, and MSNBC's FirstPerson all rely on user-generated news. While these competitors have the potential to influence coverage in the future, none of them have matched the organization or impact in campaign coverage like the I-Report. CNN effectively integrated citizen coverage of the campaigns into the mainstream broadcast coverage, which is a prime example of the successful marriage between the Internet and television.

The main question arising out of the increased use of citizen journalism in campaign coverage is what impact it has on candidates and other media outlets. For candidates, participatory journalism affects them in two major ways. The first way is that candidates are more accountable to the public. As video and audio recording devices get smaller and less expensive, candidates are essentially always being recorded, so they must always be careful of what they are saying. Until Mayhill Fowler reported on Obama's "small town" comment, he had not made any noticeable gaffes when speaking at any events. Had Fowler not been there and recorded the speech, which was at a private fundraising event, the story would have never come out. Nominees are no longer safe at any event because anyone could become a citizen journalist by submitting a story about what a candidate said that no one else has covered.

As a result of this constant scrutiny, candidates have had to take on a methodical approach to every single public or private outing. More than ever, candidates are trying their best to think before speaking. It is impossible for

anyone not to mess up, but technology has left little wiggle room for any mistakes. In addition to the constant inspection, the nature of coverage has become increasingly personal with fewer instances being taken off the record. The main instance of the personal becoming political occurred in 1987 when Gary Hart, a Democratic senator from Colorado, was asked if he committed adultery with Donna Rice. The recent instance of personal becoming political was seen with the media's focus on Sarah Palin's pregnant daughter. Although careful analysis can be a positive aspect since candidates are accountable for everything they say and are always being scrutinized, campaigns have shifted toward being more staged and restrained from being open to do spontaneous things.

The second major effect participatory journalism has on politics is that it increases the level of partisanship. The majority of news pieces about the 2008 campaign featured in either OffTheBus or I-Report were opinionated. A quick search of 2008 Republican vice presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, yielded hundreds of partisan videos attacking her character and expressing negative sentiments about her ideology. Likewise searches of Obama and John McCain also yield similar critical videos. Some submissions feature a person offering an opinionated analysis of some aspect of the campaign in the same style as news broadcast hosts Bill O'Reilly or Keith Olbermann. Other submissions are opinionated written pieces making unsubstantiated claims against one or all candidates. These submissions underline the partisan tensions in politics and perpetuate the bitter attack mentality that certain campaigns have adopted. Neither of these do much to advance democracy or make campaigns more transparent.

Rather, the participatory journalism sites offer a place for someone to express an opinion for others to read and comment on.

Since a lot of the submissions are opinionated and not based on fact, journalists and media outlets have experienced mixed feelings on the usefulness and importance of participatory journalism. While it is generally accepted that allowing citizens to submit stories encourages political involvement among the public, the question of whether there is journalistic value or credibility in some of these stories. The issue of credibility is an important one. Citizens tend not to have any journalistic background or understand that news should be objective and should present both sides fairly. A prominent critic of citizen journalism is Vincent Maher who cites its “three deadly E’s” which include ethics, economics, and epistemology.⁷⁸ In a post he claims, “This mess we call the blogging versus journalism debate is anchored on a twist of the truth wrapped in a false promise: that this blogging army is co-ordinated and uniform in its intentions.”⁷⁹ He criticizes citizens for having de facto authority in their writing with subjective selection and no monitoring.

On the other side, Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis of the Media Center at the American Press Institute remain optimistic that this type of journalism creates better stories and memorable experiences. They explain, “The official voice of journalism is usually formal, often drained of color and attitude, and written as an objective and balanced account.”⁸⁰ Freeing the writer from the bland

⁷⁸ “Citizen journalism is dead” by Vincent Maher posted on his site vincentmaher.com.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Bowman, Shayne and Willis, Chris. “We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information.” The Media Center at the American Press Institute. July 2003.

objectivity of mainstream news does give citizens the opportunity to make it more interesting. Also the fact that the average person knows a lot of things journalists don't makes for better journalism and different stories. Citizens following campaigns for OffTheBus go into the meetings and speeches with their own preconceptions that are most likely different than mainstream media reporters. This type of reporting ensures that the information is gathered by the people and for the people.

Participatory journalism will undoubtedly continue to play a significant role in campaign coverage as networks learn how to incorporate user-generated news on their sites or in their broadcasts. Future elections will see more participation in journalism and politicians and mainstream media adapting to a new environment. Politicians may become carefully calculated in everything they do and say while the media tries to utilize citizens to gain a scoop or cover something completely new.

Epilogue

On January 20, 2009, millions of people around the world watched Barack Obama get sworn in as the 44th president of the United States. Keeping with the tradition of his technology-based campaign, Obama's inauguration shattered Internet records with millions logging onto social networking sites, watching live video streams, and reading updates on news sites. CNN.com reported 160 million page views throughout a 12-hour period and 150 million live video feeds for the inauguration. The previous record was on Election Day when there were 5.3 million viewers for Obama's victory speech.⁸¹ Facebook, which partnered with CNN, allowed users to send live status updates to their friends while watching the inauguration, and Facebook reported millions of users logging onto the site during the live broadcast.⁸²

All of this evidence indicates the fourth phase of mass communication is firmly cemented in American politics. The technological advances made in the past few years, including YouTube, social networking sites, political blogs, streaming videos, and more, are permanent fixtures in political consumption and communication. In the previous three phases, politicians, journalists, and citizens were forced to find, "within its constitutional frame work, the flexibility to change and adapt to those new circumstances."⁸³ The 2008 presidential election proved to be a pivotal point in the time of exploration and adaptation for the leaders and

⁸¹ Numbers taken from the post "Inauguration Day, by the numbers" by Caroline McCarthy from "the social" section at CNET News, which was published on January 20, 2009, and updated on January 21, 2009.

⁸² Number from "Online inauguration videos set records" by John D. Sutter published on CNN.com on January 21, 2009.

⁸³ Winograd, M. & Hais, M.D. (2008). *Millennial Makeover*. p. XI.

citizens. Some trials were considered successful like the use of social networking sites to spread visibility and others were considered failures like the YouTube debates.

The most difficult task at hand is determining what comes next. Obama's administration has become an extension of his campaign with many of his strategies that incorporate new media bleeding onto the White House's website. The weekly radio address that every president since Franklin D. Roosevelt can now also be viewed in a video or downloaded as an mp3 file. A "Stay Connected" box on the White House website mimics the exact box from Obama's campaign website. It includes links to the official White House Facebook profile, Twitter page, MySpace profile, YouTube channel, Flickr photo page, Apple iTunes podcasts, and Vimeo channel.

One of the main goals of the Obama administration is to champion transparency and an open government by creating an e-government. The administration designed two websites for this purpose to empower the average citizen by allowing them to research and know what's going on in the government. One of the websites, recovery.gov, was created to educate people on the details of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The Obama administration is ensuring the theme of citizen empowerment and participation continues with the use of new media and searchable databases to make it easier for the people to understand and research complicated issues such as the budget.

However, the Senate and House congressional websites fall well behind the technological savvy of the executive branch. Similarly, many websites of the

state judicial websites fail to promote transparency and lack an inviting interaction that welcomes the average person. Regional government has a lot of work to do and it will take time before more legislators and local courts adapt to some of the changes in new media.

Looking ahead at the midterm elections of 2010 is the next important stage in political evolution. Candidates have already announced bids for reelection or bids to challenge. Early glimpses of campaign websites indicate a shift in the direction of e-campaigning with interactive Internet tools and viral videos. Republican Chuck DeVore, current California State Assemblyman, has already announced his bid to challenge Barbara Boxer as California senator and is targeting supporters through his site. Along with the typical Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook links, he allows visitors to submit “shouts” or short messages to him that are posted on the site.⁸⁴

Predicting the next new media x-factor that will play a significant impact in the next election is nearly impossible. In the past few years, major players in recent political elections like YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook, have burst onto the scene almost out of nowhere. Recently, the number of users on Twitter has grown exponentially with politicians, journalists, and citizens using the micro-blogging application for their own purposes. With each of these new technologies, it is clear that Americans are eager to use new media in order to communicate instantly with millions of people around the world.

Each of the four important elements that made the 2008 presidential election unique, the virtual town hall, candidate and journalist blogs, social

⁸⁴ Information from www.chuckdevore.com.

networking sites, and participatory journalism sites, will undoubtedly continue to evolve and develop into efficient political tools. Journalists and candidates saw that empowering the voter through an intimate dialogue and personal connection increased participation. After the end of one of the longest election cycles, future campaigns and media outlets will not abandon what worked for them in the previous elections. The country will continue to move in the direction of mass communication that embodies the true values of democracy by giving the average citizen more power.

Sources Cited and Consulted

- Cornfield, Michael. Politics Moves Online: Campaigning and the Internet. New York: The Century Foundation, 2003.
- Dunham, Richard S. and Dwight Silverman. "Change.gov Has Come to America." Seattle Post-Intelligencer. 11 Nov. 2008. 2 Feb. 2009. <<https://login.libezproxy2.syr.edu/login?qurl=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1592877921&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=3739&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.
- Emarketer.com. "Blogs Blossom into a Big Business." 16 May 2008. 12 Dec. 2008. <<http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?id=1006293>>.
- Facebook.com. "About Facebook- Statistics." 2 Feb. 2009. <<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>>.
- Freire, J.P. "Facebook Pitches Its Political Benefits." The New York Times. 10 Oct. 2007. 21 Jan. 2009 <<http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/10/10/facebook-trains-campaigns-to-use-the-web/?scp=10&sq=campaign%20facebook&st=cse>>.
- Grimes, Charlotte. "Papers restrained with news of pregnancy." Times Union. 8 Sept. 2008. 12 Dec. 2008. <<http://timesunion.com/ASPStories/Story.asp?StoryID=718183&LinkFrom=RSS&TextPage=1>>.
- Howard, Phillip. New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Huntzicker, William, James Start, and William David Sloan. The Popular Press, 1833-1865. Greenwood Press, 1999.

Kaus, Mickey. "Does Obama Want Edwards Gone?" Slate Magazine. 28 July 2008. 12 Dec. 2008. <<http://www.slate.com/id/2195914/#latedict>>.

Lefkow, Chris. "Obama's e-government off to good start." Yahoo.com. 26 April. 2009. 30 April 2009.

Lipsman, Andrew. "The Internet is a Gamechanger in the 2008 Presidential Race." comScore. 14 Feb. 2008. 22 Jan. 2009. <<http://www.comscore.com/mt/mt-tb.cgi/121>>.

McCarthy, Caroline. "Inauguration Day, by the numbers." CNET.com. 20 Jan. 2009. 29 April 2009. <http://news.cnet.com/8301-13577_3-10145923-36.html?tag=mncol;txt>.

Nationalenquirer.com. "Presidential Cheating Scandal! Alleged Affair Could Wreck John Edwards' Campaign Bid." 10 Oct. 2007. 12 Dec. 2008. <http://www.nationalenquirer.com/john_edwards_cheating_scandal/celebrity/64271>.

Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. "Internet's Broader Role in Campaign 2008; Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off." Survey Reports. 11 Jan. 2008. 2 Feb. 2009. <<http://peoplepress.org/report/384/internets-broader-role-in-campaign-2008>>.

Pew Internet & American Life Project. "55% of adult Americans have home broadband connections." 2 Jul. 2008. 29 April 2009.

<<http://www.pewinternet.org/Press-Releases/2008/55-of-adult-Americans-have-home-broadband-connections.aspx#>>.

PoliticsOnline.com. "Barack the Vote on Facebook." 10 Oct. 2008. 12 Dec. 2008.

<http://www.politicsonline.com/blog/archives/2008/10/barack_the_vote.php>.

Sarno, David. "Obama, the first social media president." The Los Angeles Times.

18 Nov. 2008. 2 Feb. 2009.

<<http://www.typepad.com/t/trackback/816965/35917204>>.

Schwartz, Rhonda and Brian Ross. "Edwards Admits Sexual Affair; Lied as

Presidential Candidate." ABC News Online. 8 Aug. 2008. 12 Dec. 2008.

<<http://www.abcnews.go.com/Blotter/story?id=5441195&page=1>>.

Stelter, Brian. "ABC News and Facebook in Joint Effort to Bring Viewers Closer

to Political Coverage." The New York Times. 26 Nov. 2007. 2 Feb. 2009.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/26/technology/26abc.html>>.

---, "The Facebooker Who Friendened Obama." The New York Times. 7 July 2008.

21 Jan. 2009.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/07/technology/07hughes.html?_r=3&scp=4&sq=campaign%20facebook&st=cse>.

---, "MySpace Getting a facelift in effort to turn popularity into wealth."

International Herald Tribune. 16 June 2008. 21 Jan. 2009.

<<http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/06/15/technology/myspace16.php>>.

Stone, Brad. "MySpace Partners Up for the Debates." The New York Times. 6

Aug. 2008. 2 Feb 2009. <

<http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/08/06/myspace-partners-up-for-the-debates/?emc=eta1>>.

Suffer, John. "Online inauguration videos set records." CNN.com. Cable News Network. 23 Jan. 2009. 29 April 2009.

<<http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/01/21/inauguration.online.video/index.html>>.

Vargas, Jose A. "Obama Raised Half a Billion Online." The Washington Post. 20 Nov. 2008. 12 Dec. 2008.

<http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/11/20/obama_raised_half_a_billion_on.html>.

Williams, Alex. "The Future President, on Your Friends List." The New York Times. 17 Mar. 2008. 24 Jan. 2009.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/18/fashion/18myspace.html?pagewanted=1&sq=campaign%20facebook%20myspace&st=cse&scp=8>>.

Williams, Christine and Girish, Gulati. "Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections" American Political Science Association, Hyatt Regency Chicago and the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers, Chicago. 30 Aug. 2007. 3 Feb. 2009.

<http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p208735_index.html>

Winograd, Morley, and Michael D. Hais. Millennial Makeover; MySpace, YouTube & the Future of American Politics. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

Zeleny, Jeff. "Lose the BlackBerry? Yes He Can, Maybe." The New York Times.

15 Nov. 2008. 2 Feb. 2009.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/16/us/politics/16blackberry.html?_r=1

>.

Written Capstone Summary

New media has ushered in a new era of political elections. The explosion of advanced technologies has changed the face of campaigns by allowing an increase in interaction among candidates, journalists, and voters like never before. The bigger role new media is playing in campaign and campaign coverage has important implications on politics and the press that will completely transform the current political paradigm.

The focus of this paper is on this new fourth phase of political interaction and its significance on how it is reshaping elections in the United States. In the aftermath of the 2008 presidential election, the fourth phase of technological growth is prominently in the spotlight. Candidates and journalists are using new media in innovative ways to instantly connect to millions of Americans around the nation. Defining the concept that brought the nation into the fourth phase is no easy task. The term new media is used to encompass all technology that has to do with digital and online networking. Some of the more important elements discussed at length in this paper are the use of websites, streaming videos, blogs, social networking sites, and online citizen journalism sites. The central theme of the fourth phase, which all of these elements incorporate, is the empowerment of the average person by enabling him or her to actively communicate with candidates and journalists.

The significance of these new advances can be seen through a historical lens. Prior to the current movement, three previous phases of technological developments have already changed the way candidates, the press, and citizens

look at campaigns. The first phase began in the early 19th century when widespread use of the printing press allowed independent journalists during Andrew Jackson's administration to put out their own papers to a large audience on a regular basis. Almost a hundred years after that, the second phase to arrive on the political scene was radio. Radio increased public interaction with the help of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who conducted weekly radio addresses known as the fireside chats. Next, television, the third phase, radically changed the way campaigns were carried out and covered by espousing visual elements. Candidates like Dwight D. Eisenhower quickly used television to put out political advertisements and others like Richard M. Nixon used television to rebut criticism directly to the American people.

The purpose of this paper is to look at what makes the fourth phase different than the rest and how it is affecting politics. The importance of understanding the impact of new media cannot be understated. The way new media is utilized will have a tremendous impact on how elections are conducted by candidates, covered by the press, and followed by the public. The 2008 election cycle was a clear indicator that things have already begun to evolve, as blogs and social networking sites were an integral piece to Barack Obama's successful presidential run.

Since the study of the role of new media in elections is still in its preliminary stages, the method used for this research paper was monitoring sites across the web daily and reading a variety of articles about technological innovations. Regularly visited political news blogs consisted mainly of *The*

Huffington Post, *Daily Kos*, *RedState*, *Talking Points Memo*, *Instapundit*, and several other traditional media news blogs such as *The New York Times*' "The Caucus," the *Los Angeles Times*' "Top of the Ticket," and *The Washington Post*'s "The Fix." The candidate blogs that were followed included the two presidential candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain, and several of those who were seeking party nominations in the primaries like Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, Fred Thompson, Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, and Bill Richardson. While a large amount of the research was done during the run up to the election, it was also important to look back at the previous ones, particularly the 2006 midterm elections, for comparison. This involved reading older news articles and books about the changes in elections.

By looking at the use of new media in past elections, it became evident that the seemingly isolated incidents were signs of things to come. For example, early in the 2000 presidential election, candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore created websites for their supporters, which were rudimentary and ineffective. Instead of using the websites to talk with supporters, Bush and Gore continued the old way of doing things by talking at them. Then in 2004 race for the Democratic presidential nomination, former governor Howard Dean used the Internet for fundraising and creating virtual grassroots movements. In 2006, citizens with video cameras exposed politicians like George Allen on the new video-sharing site, YouTube. Finally, 2008 experienced a culmination of each of those elements in addition to newer technology.

The overwhelming success of Barack Obama can be largely attributed to his strategic implementation of new media in his campaign, which led to his ability to mobilize supporters, raise money, and spread his message. Just like Obama's techniques have forced other candidates to use new media in campaigns, independent websites like YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook have forced traditional media outlets to adapt and integrate new technology to stay relevant in the fast-paced coverage of political news.

There are four important points discussed in the paper that make the 2008 election cycle different than the rest. The first is the creation of a nationwide virtual town hall, second is the increased use of blogs by candidates and journalists, third is the formation of social networking sites, and fourth is the expansion of participatory journalism.

Each of these four traits played important roles in the method of campaigning. Candidates and journalists used technology to establish a lateral connection with the average citizen. Instead of one candidate or journalist talking at the American people as was seen with newspaper, radio, and television, new media allowed citizens to talk back in a virtual conversation. Town hall-style debates like the MySpace presidential debates and the YouTube debates during the primaries let voters ask questions directly to the candidates. Comment sections on blogs enabled readers to discuss and dispute journalistic articles or candidate blog entries. This fourth phase underlines the transformation of political coverage into an era of intimate dialogue among candidates, journalists, and voters.

Although this new era of communication empowers voters during the course of an election, there are many implications, both positive and negative, that come with it. For example, the traditional nature of journalistic practices including fact checking, objectivity, and fairness must be reconsidered in the face of participatory journalism. Likewise, candidates must always be cautious of what they say because they are under constant scrutiny. Ultimately, since campaigns often provide a glimpse into how politics are changing, understanding past and current phases in communication can help predict future political patterns.