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Stephanie Takaragawa

Chapman University, takaraga@chapman.edu

Victoria Carty

Chapman University, carty@chapman.edu

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The 2008 U.S. Presidential Election and New Digital Technologies: Political Campaigns as Social Movements and the Significance of Collective Identity

Stephanie Takaragawa

Chapman University, US
takaraga@chapman.edu

Victoria Carty

Chapman University, US
carty@chapman.edu

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Abstract

The growing role of the Internet social networking sites (SNS) has served as a flash point for debate about the democratization of information, particularly in light of their perceived roles in the 2008 presidential election. This horizontal sharing of information undoubtedly facilitated the revival of the youth vote and volunteerism in many ways mimicking traditional grassroots approaches. While the role of the Internet SNS in mobilization efforts and information-sharing cannot be overstated, its effectiveness in creating a new “public sphere,” or transforming traditional electoral campaign strategies and communicative practices must be closely examined before generalizations about the democratization of media can be confirmed. In the aftermath of the election, theorists were quick to simplistically identify the use of social networking sites as key to this electoral shift. In this paper we attempt to advance contemporary theorizing of new media and institutional politics by examining specifically how and if ICTs (information communication technologies) and new media platforms are shifting the balance of power in terms of organization and mobilization away from the professional model and toward more democratic and bottom-up efforts. Reconceptualizing some of the basic theories of social movements and collective behavior this paper seeks to address questions such as: how are digitally enabled forms of mobilization affecting who becomes a participant; how do they affect organizational structure and leadership; how do they impact the dynamics of collective action; how do we address the powerful yet ephemeral effect of e-tactics established for short-term gains; can mobilizations succeed without collective identity and/or do we need new categorizations for collective identity; and whether e-tactics serve as a gateway for future participation.

The 2008 U.S. presidential election and the Obama campaign in particular, were exceptional for many reasons. Four of the most notable were that for the first time an African American was voted into office, it was organized in many ways

like a social movement, young voters turned out to the polls in the highest numbers since 1972, and it was also arguably the first “social media” election given the role of the Internet and other new digital technologies. The centrality of new media to the campaign is best expressed with the “Be the First to Know” registration site that first released news of Obama’s running mate via a text message. The August 28 text from Obama to his supporters read: “Breaking news: the text message is out and it’s official...Barack Obama has selected Joe Biden to be his running mate” (Davy, 2010). This paper will explore the relationship between Obama’s nomination and new media forms used during the campaign, foregrounding how the Obama team attracted younger voters, and how they were mobilized to participate in the election. Furthermore, this paper will look at traditional social movement theory to determine how digitally enabled forms of mobilization affect media production and consumption patterns of the participants, how they affect organizational structure and leadership, and how they impact the dynamics of collective action. While the integration of new media forms provides the platform through which to analyze new communicative patterns that have been deployed by campaign strategists capitalizing on technologies aligned with horizontal information flow-through, and the rise of the “prosumer” (Toffler, 1980), this paper shows mobilization is still largely structured in a traditional top-down hierarchy. Yet by capitalizing on content of “hope” and “change,” transmitted through new media forms which privileged horizontal information flows, the Obama Campaign specifically appealed to, and mobilized the millennial demographic.

The growing role of SNS’s such as Facebook or MySpace and web 2.0 in general as sources of information for Americans has served as a flashpoint for debate about the democratization of information and the realization of a collaboration economy (Aun 2007; Boyd 2008; Drehle 2008; Earl & Kimport 2011; Future Majority 2008; Goldberg 2008; Hindman 2007, Tapscott and Williams, 2007). This horizontal sharing of information, which contests traditional modes of media distribution patterns, has often been cited as facilitating the revival of the youth vote and volunteerism among young voters during the election. This revival can be seen in the fact that the turnout among young voters (18-29), at 52% (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2008) was just shy of the record set in 1972 (which was the first presidential election after the mandate in which the federal voting age was lowered to 18), and sixty-six percent of them voted for Barack Obama (Drehle 2008). In terms of volunteering, a CBS-MTV poll found that one-quarter of voters under the age of thirty had worked on a campaign, joined a political club, or attended a political rally (Lawrence, 2008).

The role of SNS’s in mobilization efforts and information-sharing throughout the election cannot be overstated. For example, 39% percent of Americans said they had watched online political videos (candidate debates, speeches and announcements), which is triple the rate from 2004, and forty-six percent reported that they used the Internet, email, and texting to get news about the campaign, share their views, and mobilize others (Smith & Rainie, 2008). The proportion of Americans who stated that they regularly learned about the campaign from the Internet more than doubled since 2000; from nine percent to twenty-four percent, and forty-two percent of those aged 18-29 reported that they learned about the campaign from the Internet, which was triple the percentage for any news source (Kohut, 2008).

Within this new media context, understanding how information is deployed and gathered and its subsequent effects on varying demographics sheds light on larger cultural shifts in terms of information gathering, civic engagement and identity construction. New communicative strategies aimed at younger demographics has proven to be key in political realignments; a process that occurs every four decades or so as subsequent generations take charge of their political landscape (Winograd & Hais, 2008). In the aftermath of the election, critiques were leveled against theorists who were quick to simplistically identify the use of social networking sites as key to this electoral shift without a great deal of attention to *how* such media networks were deployed and towards which ends (Boyd, 2008b; Dahl, 2008). In this paper we attempt to advance contemporary theorizing of new media and institutional politics by examining how and if Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and new media platforms are indeed, shifting the balance of power in terms of organization and mobilization away from the professional model (reliant on professional pollsters and funding from entrenched interest groups) and toward more democratic and bottom-up efforts. We focus on the use of social media networks specifically by millennials to understand how politics and political understanding are integrated into their daily communication patterns. Examining the repertoires, tactics, decisions and resources employed by the Obama campaign allows us to illustrate how it combined political goals with culturally- and grassroots-oriented efforts that integrated new media technologies into an organizational structure that resembled a social movement in some key ways. Furthermore, both form (SNS’s) and content (“hope” and “change”) provided accessible messages to be disseminated over a horizontal network of information exchange, turning the media consumer into a media producer, or “prosumer” as Toffler prophesized for the potential of new media (1980), realized now through Web 2.0. However, this paper contends that while SNS’s in fact facilitates a “prosumer” model, it was largely through the manipulation of top-down strategies of traditional hierarchical means of production which temporarily mobilized a previously untapped voter bloc. In addition,

this group lacked the momentum to construct and maintain autonomy after the election, as a result of the imposed structure largely due to the stringent rules of order which prevented a viable full-scale creation of a virtual “public sphere.”

Theories of ICTs and Their Impact on Collective Behavior and Politics

Given the increasingly crucial role of information and communication technologies in contemporary social and political life, and the accompanying mediated communities, networks, and organizational models, the way that developing communication systems impact public discourse is of great significance (Castells, 2007, 2006; Harvey, 1998). Furthermore, the possibilities of collaboration and open-source information have contributed to greater human productivity and potential (Tapscott & Williams, 2007). Habermas’ (1993, 1989) discussions on communication technologies (most notably mainstream media) focus on their negative impact on the public sphere and participatory democracy. Habermas contends that this realm has been colonized as relationships are increasingly mediated by money and power, and that entrenched political parties and interest groups now substitute for participatory democracy. He also claims that with the increasing power of media corporations in public life, citizens have become passive consumers of goods, services, political administration, and spectacle. The result is a decline in democracy, individuality, and freedom. Though he is optimistic about the possibility of the revitalization of the public sphere -- one that embraces democracy based on a political community and an activist public sphere that can collectively define its political will and implement it based on common interests -- his theory stops short of assessing how technological and media advances may bring this to fruition.

Literature across the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and communication studies has begun to acknowledge how new ICTs are revolutionizing the way collective political and social actions are organized (both online and offline), though scholars debate the impact of these new media with the potential of expanding the notion of public sphere through SNS (Westling, 2007). We situated our study within in this context. While there is agreement that SNS’s dramatically expanded access to politically relevant information and offer citizens new possibilities for learning, resources, and action (Carty, 2011; Nipp, 2004; Wellman, 2000), it is largely based on the media form and integration. Many have noted specifically how these affect the way that volunteers are amassed, funds are raised, and messages honed and delivered (Bennett et al., 2009; Heany and Rojas, 2007). Some argue that it allows for a more informed citizenry and novel forms of activism in that there are multiple producers, distributors, and consumers of information (Castells, 2006; Poster, 1995). Similarly, scholars have noted the shift from the uni-directional flow of information (as it existed under the controlled and centralized nature of broadcast TV and mainstream media) toward new forms of media that provide Peer-to-Peer (P2P) sharing and horizontal forms of communication (Jenkins, 2006; Langman, 2005). Castells’ approach to the media and the public sphere reframes the discussion in terms of the centrality of the *network* of information, going beyond Habermas’ original conceptualization. Our work looks at the relationship of P2P and horizontal information flows to community, social identity and mobilization.

Other research illustrates how the Internet allows for participants to comment on and/or pass along information through virtual public spheres of grassroots-based interpersonal networks of discussion and debate, transforming the media consumer into a media producer (Jenkins, 2006; Toffler, 1980; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2003). Bimber (2003) refers to this as “accelerated pluralism” -- a shift toward a more flexible and issue-based group politics as mobilizing becomes more accessible to new political organizers and activists who do not necessarily have financial or institutional connections. The organizational features are thus constituted by loosely articulated and pluralistic networks that permit multiple memberships and part-time participation that work outside of formal institutions and in some instances are able to translate goals into organizational means, what Mann (2000) calls “interstitial locations.” These innovative forms of organizational flexibility and efficiency, enabled by mediated communities and networks, allow social movement actors and political candidates to subvert the traditional professional campaign model that is reliant on mainstream media and professional consultants in terms of outreach, recruitment, mobilizing, and fundraising.

Digital media platforms also allow for the development of community in spite of physical distance as weak-ties provide opportunities for people to create and expand disparate organizational networks, or “networked individualism” (Wellman, 2000). Castells (2007) refers to this as a new type of “informational politics” that results in a unique kind of civil society based on the “electronic grassroots of democracy.” Kahn and Kellner (2003) describe these virtual public spheres that coalesce in cyberspace as post-subcultures -- spaces created for the democratic construction and negotiation of project agendas. And finally, others document the spillover of activism whereby digital network configurations and communication extend to face-to-face, offline political engagement that often facilitate permanent campaigns and strengthen advocacy networks -- the gateway effect (Bennett et al., 2009; Earl & Kimport, 2011). This spillover also

encourages the development of organizational skills, leadership, experience and mobilization by providing organizational bases from which more complex forms of organization can develop (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001).

A more critical analysis of electronic mediated information systems, however, reveals a number of limitations. Lewis, et al., 2005., drawing from Putnam (2000) and others, sees the increased role of media shifting political participation as “the concept of the citizen replaced by the more limited idea of the consumer. Citizens are actively engaged in the shaping of society and making history; consumers simply choose between the products on display” (5-6). Others find that new forms of media may indeed be weakening standard forms of political and social engagement, inducing anomie and eroding social capital by enabling users to retreat into an artificial world (Nie & Erbring, 2000; Kraut et. Al., 1998). This resonates with the overall increasing concern about diminished membership in civic and political organizations as Putnam (2000) suggests, as the very networks that enable individuals and groups to work together can create a division between individual and collective interests.

Bimber (2003) also draws attention to the fact that most people are highly selective in their attention to political issues and their assimilation of information. Additionally, many discussion groups and listservs discourage challenges to the information and conclusions drawn by members because they tend to be composed of like-minded people who are often predisposed to issues that draw Internet users to various sites (Langman, 2005) in what Norris calls the “vicious circle” (2002). Other critiques of new media and communication technologies document problems regarding elite domination over cyberspace and control over listservs by list owners or gatekeepers (Pickerill, 2003; Meikle, 2002). Recent research also exposes how practices of professional management can be extended by way of new media platforms. For example, links that are created through digital tools based on past email communications and Internet use can be manipulated by elites who select citizens as receptors of political communication based on their Internet usage or data shadows (Hindman, 2007; Howard, 2006).

One consequence is that lobbyists, politicians, and interest groups often argue on behalf of profiles without the explicit support of the real person casting the shadow based on the information gathered through data mining (and much of the information collected without informed consent). Additionally, through various registration requirements and the gathering and selling of demographic and psychographic information mediators can create databases of voter profiles that are then used to market citizens through these intermediaries. Howard (2006) illustrates how, through the process of redlining, mediators can determine what kind of information is sent or withheld from potential recipients based on their profiles and online activity, and therefore, although the Internet contains a vast amount of information not available in the past, users may not always have access to it.

The deployment of ICTs can be argued as having a negative impact on the public sphere, or at least it can be maintained that entrenched political parties and interest groups do use ICTs to reproduce traditional top-down patterns of communication. Yet, those same technologies also provide a platform for like-minded groups to potentially exploit this system, particularly as millennials develop greater expertise with the technologies and begin to actively shape the media through their own uses. While social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook and MySpace were all created with specific intentions in mind, it is the user who helps determine and define the directions of development for these sites. Understanding an on-the-ground approach to their own social and communicative practices is key in understanding the potential for Web 2.0 and its impact on institutional politics. Networked individualism and a networked public sphere may be sidelined, but are not entirely off the table.

Political Campaigning, the Internet, and New Media Platforms

Political campaigning in cyberspace began in 1996 as a number of candidates created relatively simple websites providing campaign material electronically that would typically have been printed on flyers, basically operating as a detailed campaign poster. By 2000 candidates had expanded Web pages by encouraging viewers to make donations. However, it was in 2004 that the Internet became an integral component of political campaigning as citizens were increasingly taking advantage of new ICTs to gain knowledge of the candidates and participate in their political campaigns. There was also a turn toward greater citizen-to-candidate and citizen-to-citizen interactivity through blogs, online discussion forums, and other ICTs. During the 2004 presidential election thirty-seven percent of all Americans, and sixty-one percent of those online used the Internet to get political news and information, discuss candidates, volunteer, or give contributions to candidates (Rainie et. al., 2005).

It was Howard Dean, the Democratic presidential nominee (who ultimately lost the Democratic nomination to John Kerry), who pioneered new ways of engaging supporters online. Through a network of websites and blogs the Dean campaign (led by campaign manager Joe Trippi) created a dedicated Internet following that helped Dean lead all Democratic candidates in fundraising (Rice, 2003). Over the course of the primaries 280,000 supporters contributed \$40

million to the campaign, a Democratic Party primaries record (Singel, 2004). This was radically enhanced in 2007 when Republican nominee Ron Paul created the “money bomb,” wherein supporters are given a twenty-four hour time frame to make donations. Paul raised \$4.3 million in twenty-four hours online in November, and in December raised \$6 million online in the same time frame (Baldwin, 2007). The efficiency and financial benefits of fundraising online in terms of overhead cost and relying on rank-and-file supporters in comparison to traditional fundraising is critical. In typical fundraising drives, a percentage of the funds raised are used to cover the cost of the event; contributors are required to make a minimum contribution and direct mail is sent to many non-contributors to cast a wide net (Wilcox, 2008).

Dean was also the first presidential candidate to create a blog as part of his communication strategy and was adept at linking with other political groups and positioning the campaign in existing online political blogs, most notable the Daily Kos (Wolf, 2004). Blogs were later activated by other top Democrat contenders such as John Edwards and John Kerry, and George Bush on the Republican side. The main online driving force behind Dean’s strategy was the use of peer-to-peer politics through manual referral and automated linking technologies. Perhaps most effective was the use of Meetup.com (an Internet tool that allows individuals to connect virtually in order to find people in their local communities). Mobilizing an accelerated pluralism through an “interstitial model,” Meetup.com appeared to exemplify an early basis for transformational campaigning structures. In March of 2003 there were seventy-nine Meetups for Dean in fourteen cities; by the end of the year the Dean group on Meetup had 140,000 members and 800 meetings were held across the country in December alone, thus uniting Web and field recruitment (Dodson & Hammersley, 2003). Acknowledging the significance of the bottom-up, grassroots and Web-based activism, Dean explained, “They built our organization for us before we had an organization” (Wolf, 2004).

However, the grassroots and decentralized network of supporters never merged with the traditional Democratic power structure or leadership (of which Dean was very critical), and Dean Headquarters did not play a role in regulating the various networks (Hindman, 2007). The technology at the time did not allow the campaign to retain control over the Meetups, which were left up to Internet activists and local organizers. Dean was also unable to translate the online energy into effective canvassing efforts on the ground outside of the use of Meetups (though there was an effort to do so). These three shortcomings were circumvented by presidential candidate Barack Obama in 2008, whose campaign perfected and far surpassed Dean’s innovative use of the Internet and added SNS to combine online communication with on-the-ground canvassing efforts. Ultimately, the Obama team organized the campaign and mobilization of supporters more like a social movement than a traditional political campaign.

The Obama Campaign: Peer-to-Peer Networks and New Media

As noted, there was a major spike in the voting rate among the 18-29 demographic in 2008. This turnout was significant because although young citizens represent one of the largest voting blocs, over the past three and a half decades this segment has tended to vote at low rates. Whereas in 1972 fifty percent of all eligible young people voted, this dipped to forty-one percent in 2000. Between 2000 and 2008 there was an eleven percent increase in youth voter turnout; the rate was forty-one, forty-eight, and fifty-two percent respectively for the 2000, 2004, and 2008 elections (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2008). An estimated twenty-three million young Americans under the age of thirty voted in the 2008 presidential election, and this age group constituted eighteen percent of all voters (Tisch, 2008). Voters twenty-five years old and younger (many first time voters) turned out in record numbers and did so across party lines. In 2004 the 18-29 bloc was the only demographic to break for Kerry, who got fifty-four percent of the vote versus George Bush’s forty-four percent (Goldberg, 2008). During that election young voters were targeted not so much by politicians but by grassroots advocacy groups, mostly in the form of entertainment and politics as part of mass culture via celebrities, advertisements on MTV, and cultural events like the Rock the Vote Tour. Though early efforts effectively got young people to the polls, similar to previous presidential campaigns, there was no incentive or real opportunity for them to volunteer and work within the campaigns. This changed in 2008 as the Obama staff specifically targeted youth to not only vote, but more importantly, to participate in the campaign by serving as recruiters, fundraisers, mobilizers, and canvassers. By creating opportunities the campaign not only appealed to, but mobilized this demographic by using language they understood and in familiar territory via SNS’s including Facebook, MySpace, Twitter.

By 2008 the use of digital forms of technology was extensive in political campaigns. Blogs, social networks, text messaging, email lists, candidate’s Web pages, social networking sites, and photo and video sharing sites were harnessed to reach, inform, and mobilize supporters. All candidates had Web strategies, Web teams, and multiple points of presence online, including Facebook, MySpace and YouTube to connect with potential voters (Hesseldahl et al., 2008). Seven of the sixteen candidates who ran for the presidency announced their candidacies on YouTube, and all opened YouTube

accounts. In preparation for the election, YouTube created YouChoose, a section of the site devoted to the posting of videos from candidates in the form of speeches and ads (Rawlinson, 2008). However, Obama far surpassed all of the other candidates in its novelty of these 2.0 tactics. Early in the campaign it hired Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes as part of its team, showing an understanding of the importance of SNS's and, more specifically, the demographics most actively using new media. More than 70% of Americans aged 18-34 have or use a Facebook or MySpace account according to a recent Harris poll (Harris Interactive 2010). ICTs provided a platform for people to engage in dialogue with candidates and each other through features such as video responses, text comments, and ratings. The social networking site MySpace hosted online town halls with presidential candidates at various colleges and universities whereby members could watch the webcast and submit questions both in person and over the Web. It also launched a pre-primary straw poll that allowed MySpace users to vote on candidates, and its Impact channel housed all of the presidential candidates' official MySpace pages (Aun, 2007).

The Obama campaign, more than that of any other candidate, mastered the use of new digital networks to rework the relationship between citizens and candidates, recognizing that tapping into social circles of young people was critical for their participation in Obama's bid for presidency. For example, wired Obama voters were more than twice as likely to contribute money (fifteen versus six percent) and to sign up for campaign-related volunteer activities (eleven versus four percent) than offline supporters (Smith, 2009). Overall, three million donors made a total of \$6.5 million donations online, adding up to more than \$500 million, and of those, six million were in increments of \$100 or less (Vargas, 2008). Seventy-four percent of 2.0 Obama supporters got political news and information online, and twenty-two percent of voters under the age of thirty said that they would not have been as involved in the campaign if not for the Internet (Goldberg, 2008). By foregrounding new media as a strategy for communication and mobilization during the election, the Obama campaign was able to expand its outreach among various populations who do not engage with what was considered to be traditional (broadcast news, newspapers, political journals and magazines) media forms.

Again, the demographics as related to new media were significant to Obama's success. For example, in 2008, two-thirds of Internet users under the age of thirty had a social networking profile, and half of those used social networking sites to get or share information regarding the campaign and to seek out ways to participate (Aun, 2007). Twenty-seven percent of those ages 18-29 had retrieved campaign information from social networking sites, whereas just four percent of Americans in their thirties and one percent of those ages forty and older got news about the campaign that way (Kohut, 2008). Among respondents under the age of thirty, eight percent said they signed up as a "friend" of one of the candidates on a website compared to three percent for those ages 30-39 (Kohut, 2008). This phenomenon, of "friending" that has been activated by the social media sites, such as Facebook and Myspace illustrates the ways in which traditional campaign strategies must be integrated into patterns consistent with established norms for new media users. Furthermore, it also connects the candidate to the voter within this newly reframed social context creating a relationship, albeit arguably a superficial one. Additionally, according to Nielsen/Net Ratings report, MySpace users between 18-24 were nearly three times more likely than average Web users to interact online with a public official or candidate. The under 30 demographic was forty-two percent more likely to view online videos that related to politics or public affairs, and thirty-five percent more likely to listen to online audio related to political and public affairs (Aun, 2007). The confluence of new media outlets amassed a tipping point of visible support among millennial demographics whose visible social status, reflected in memes of support through the mechanism of "friending," created a connection between the elections and emergent political identities, favoring Obama, as youth reached voting age.

Social Capital in the Obama Campaign as E-Tactic

The Obama campaign also built a powerful political infrastructure to complement the Internet and SNS's during the primaries when it hired Joe Rospars (who had worked on Dean's campaign in 2004) to assist Facebook's Chris Hughes and be the online director. This New Media Division created Obama's own social networking site, myBarackObama.com (MyBO), and managed his presence on all SNS's (Sifry, 2008). Ultimately, MyBO served as an online platform that offered a campaign blog, detailed supporter profiles, personalized fundraising pages, applications to manage affinity groups, videos, speeches, photos, how-to guides that gave people materials to create their own content, and event-planning tools. It channeled people to the specific activities and causes that were deemed most important to fulfilling the campaign's electoral strategy (Lutz, 2009). It was highly efficient and flexible in that it maximized group collaboration and gave individual volunteers tasks they could follow on their own schedule with the goal being to "provide opportunities for the most casual supporters to stay involved, while also providing more strenuous opportunities for the smaller core of activists" (Liasson, 2008). Furthermore, its multiplatform approach to media content were accessible to not only media-savvy millennials, but bridged all demographics engaged in emerging technologies at many levels.

MyBO also utilized social-psychological mechanisms to motivate new forms of electoral participation, which mirrored social capital forms of SNS's as already employed by its primary demographic (Ellison et. al., 2007). Social networking sites such as Facebook become places for individuals to express their identities through "show rather than tell" (Zhao et. al., 2008), accruing social capital through number of friends, posts or activities. For example, on MyBO participants could earn reputation points that visibly displayed their involvement for different activities, thereby creating competition among supporters (Stelter, 2008). By the end of the campaign there were two million active users of MyBO. The site raised over \$200 million and coordinated nearly 70,000 events; there were 35,000 affinity groups for Obama and thirteen million people on his e-mail list (Ambinder, 2008). The Obama team intertwined MyBO, the Internet and other media platforms into every aspect of the political organizing efforts and far surpassed those of Republican contender, John McCain's. Aggressively seeking young voters, Obama's Vote-for-Change.com website provided voter registration information and dedicated a section specifically targeting youth. McCain's website was the only one out of all presidential nominees that did not have a section devoted to addressing young voters. Furthermore, potential voters under the age of thirty were contacted by the Obama campaign at nearly twice the rate as the McCain campaign (Rasiej & Sifry, 2008), recognizing the importance of mobilizing this voting bloc. The tables below compare Obama's and McCain's campaign efforts during the general election, both online and offline. These numbers indicate a much more significant digital force in the Obama campaign where *Obama, for example, had five times more "friends" on Facebook, but an online staff ten times greater than that of McCain (Edelman, 2009). By capitalizing on the infrastructure of social network users in terms of "show," the peer support for Obama among those under 30 became part of a community- and identity-building bridge which snowballed into a greater solidarity for this candidate as emblematic of youth's "hope" and "change" towards political realignment. In effect, support for Obama was deeply connected to the millennial identity, communication patterns and ideologies, largely facilitated through SNS's.*

Table 1: Obama Versus McCain Campaign Activity and Support

Campaign activity/support	Barack Obama	John McCain
Number of Facebook friends on Election Day	2,397,253	622,860
Change in the number of Facebook friends since Election Day (as of Nov. 8)	+472,535	-2,732
Number of unique visitors to the campaign website for the week ending Nov.1	4, 851,069	1,464,544
Number of online videos mentioning the candidate uploaded across 200 platforms	104,454	64,092
Number of views of those videos	889 million	554 million
Number of campaign-made videos posted to YouTube	1,822	330
Total amount of time people spent watching each campaign's videos, as of Oct.23	14.6 million hours	488,000 hours
Cost of Equivalent purchase of 30-second TV ads	\$46.9 million	\$1.5 million
Contributions to the candidate, including public financing, as of Oct. 15	\$639 million	\$360 million
Number of Twitter followers	125,639	5, 319
Number of blog posts using the phrase "voting for ____"	79,613	42,093
Number of references to the campaign's voter contact operation on Google	479,000	325
Number of direct links to the campaign's voter contact tool	475	18
Percentage of voters who said they received calls or visits on behalf of the campaign	26	19

Source: Rasiej and Sifry, 2008

Altogether, the Obama campaign used a total of fifteen social networking sites (and had five million friends) to direct people to the MyBO Website, the most popular being Facebook (Drehle, 2008). Obama's Facebook page had three million supporters, and his Facebook application had 61,000 active users who shared news, blogged, and posted speeches and videos. Facebook Connect, an application that enabled Facebook members to log onto third-party websites led to the David All Group development of Act.ivi.st. This helped to amalgamate the campaign by sending out messages to other online communities including Facebook and Twitter to reach the broadest possible audience and, like MyBO, also used

social psychological mechanisms. The mission of Act.iv.st, according to its website, is the following: “We provide easy methods of engagement to everyone from the soccer mom who tweets in between games and the college student who spends hours a day on Facebook promoting your candidate or cause to his network...your Act.iv.st site will be designed to meet your online goals and match your campaign’s messaging. It also creates a competitive environment by awarding points for each action taken and featuring the top activists on a dynamic leaderboard, thereby motivating your supporters to complete more actions” (www.Act.iv.st). Following Facebook Connect and Act.iv.st, the New Media Team later released the free Obama08 app – a device that, among other things, organized a person’s iPhone contacts to enable supporters to call friends located in important electoral districts (Stelter, 2008).

The New Media Division created specifically for this campaign then, managed to effectively utilize existing platforms like Facebook and adding controlled content through MyBO, Twitter and iPhone apps in a top-down fashion that motivated horizontal forms of information sharing. That users provided the network within which to disseminate information, strategies and alliances, does not detract from the fact that they were designed specifically by campaign strategists, in specific and targeted ways to allow the “prosumer” to take that proscribed information and disseminate it across the media landscape. Furthermore, the social-psychological methods employed by strategists had outcomes that can be seen in greater support, or at least significantly more representation for Obama on Facebook, including number of Facebook friends,

Horizontal Communication as Online Strategy

The “tell-a-friend” phenomenon, in particular, has altered how individuals receive information and the level of receptivity based on an inherent sense of trust in the source (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008). For example, a video forwarded from a friend or acquaintance through social media is likely to be more enthusiastically received and effective than a television advertisement (Winograd and Hais 2008). This type of P2P networking is key to understanding how millennials communicate with each other as they seek approval and information from their peer group more so than unknown “experts,” creating a tipping point against mainstream media news. This phenomenon is summarized by co-founder of MoveOn.org (an online organization that mobilizes around a host of progressive issues and raises money for Democratic candidates), Eli Pariser. He explains the tell-a-friend idea this way: “Every member comes to us with the personal endorsement of someone they trust. It is word-of-mouth organizing in electronic form. It has made mixing the personal and political more socially acceptable. Casually passing on a high-content message to a social acquaintance feels completely natural in a way handing someone a leaflet at a cocktail party never would. The ‘tell-a-friend’ phenomenon is key to how organizing happens on the Net. A small gesture to a friend can contribute to a massive multiplier effect. It is a grassroots answer to the corporate consolidation of the media...” (Body, 2003). Thus, through P2P sharing, activists can contest the domination of media corporations over the control of the flow of information and political communication, which dovetails with the ways in which millennials are socialized into information gathering, thusly creating messages that in both form and content are appealing to them.

In essence, the ultimate goal of all of the social networking sites is horizontal information sharing as each supporter’s profile page becomes a communications hub within that supporter’s own social circle, building up volunteers and donors friend-to-friend; turning the media consumer into a prosumer. Staff relied on the idea that people trust those whom they already know or with whom they share a personal connection. It is also a very cost effective way to run the campaign and mobilize the base. As Joe Trippi explains: “YouTube videos were more effective than TV ads because viewers chose to watch them from a friend instead of having their television shows interrupted...the campaigns’ official stuff they created for YouTube was watched for 14.5 million hours. To buy 14.5 million hours of broadcast television is \$47 million” (Drehle, 2008). SNS’s appeal to millennials’ socialization regarding immediacy of efficacy. For example, “liking” Obama or using instant messaging and text messages has turned communication into short bursts of information with little investment of time and effort, but with quick results. This type of communication, prevalent among SNS users, and facilitated by text messaging, instant messaging and Twitter, embodies Malinowski’s “phatic” mode of communication (1923), or communicating for communication’s sake. The production of support and information through this type of communication created continual chatter on political topics, and specifically for support for Obama, which were tied to the social capital of collective groups who not only supported Obama, but made this support visible, accessible and part of their social online identity construction, naturalizing this type of information as part of their SNS profile. These online tactics also support Earl & Kimport’s (2011) call for a reconceptualization of how and why activists, aided by new ICTs, participate in forms of collective behavior. It is much easier to become a participant in collective behavior, given that engagement is a click away, and to establish new forms of collective identity that are not tied to long-term goals,

particularly when SNS's have already socialized them into doing so. As such, the form (phatic communication, "clicking" and posting behavior) is equal to the content (support for Obama) of the message.

Online and Offline Repertoires and Tactics

The Obama team also focused on combining online activity with offline mobilizing and canvassing efforts, serving in some ways as a gateway for future organizational and mobilization strategies. Throughout the campaign ICTs were used to not only communicate with supporters, but also encourage them to work as volunteers in the campaign. This was done in part by tapping into their energy towards public service. The volunteer rate for 16-24 year olds was nearly twenty-two percent in 2008, and almost seventy percent of young citizens agreed with the statement: "it is essential to help other people in need" – the highest rate since 1970 (Liu et al., 2009). This outlook was in synch with Obama's campaign message of "hope" and "change," enabling young voters to create a space outside of things they were disillusioned with: the mass media, lobbyists, and the rituals of institutional politics (Tisch, 2008).

The Facebook group "Students for Barack Obama" established chapters at eighty colleges across the country and developed into a structured grassroots movement with directors of field operations, the Internet, finance, and blog teams (Vargas, 2008). Though the group originated on Facebook, it later developed a website of its own with a mailing list, and each volunteer team included a data manager, a phone bank coordinator, a campus coordinator, and a volunteer coordinator, illustrating the potential for the prosumer or traditional grassroots model. Generation Obama (GO) chapters also formed local grassroots groups across the nation that were run and maintained by supporters who held fundraising events, organized volunteers, conducted voter registration drives, and helped turn out the vote (Organizing for America, 2007). These kinds of activities helped to solidify and nurture collective identity through concrete communities, and face-to-face interactions, albeit short-term ones.

Similarly, "Grassroots Match," a gift-matching program, brought together new donors and their matching donors personally to communicate and reinforce one another's commitment to the campaign (Ambinder, 2008). The campaign also created training spaces for volunteers to assist their participation and to learn about grassroots political mobilization. Through the Obama Organizing Fellows initiatives young supporters could apply online to volunteer to spend six weeks over the summer to train, and then return to their communities to organize get-out-the-vote drives in conjunction with other on-the-ground fieldwork operations. When Hillary Clinton dropped from the race in June of 2008 the Obama team activated the MyBO email list to ask supporters to rally her supporters by hosting "Unite for Change" house parties in their neighborhoods (Liasson, 2008). These events (another digital repertoire introduced by MoveOn.org) were organized through the Internet tool Meetup as well as Facebook Connect and other applications available on MyBO. Approximately 4,000 parties were held that combined new and old Obama supporters (Stelter, 2008) again creating reinforcing communities of support and face-to-face interaction facilitated by online technology, primarily aimed at younger demographics who most frequently utilized these tools.

The overall goal of the mobilization effort was to implement flexibility and a grassroots approach. Geographically diverse networks based on weak-ties were complemented by on-the-ground efforts, and both provided opportunities for supporters to recruit and expand the base. In other words, they illustrate Wellman's (2000) concept of networked individualism as new media enabled fluid and decentralized links between Obama supporters. Bennet et al.'s (2009) and Nipp's (2004) depictions of the connection between digital network configurations that can facilitate campaigns despite networks based on weak-ties and the spillover of activism were also evident. The digital network configurations and communication hubs built by the Obama campaign facilitated offline political engagement and strengthened (short-term and ephemeral) advocacy networks. This spillover, or gateway effect, further encouraged the development of more complex organizational skills, leadership, experience and mobilization (particularly through training endeavors) as proposed by McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly (2001). It also adds credence to research which suggests that community-based activism is often closely related to, or initiated by, online activism and organizing suggested by Bennett et al. (2009) and Best and Krueger (2006).

Another tactic the campaign employed was its leveraging of new digital technologies to provide citizens access to resources usually reserved for professional campaign operatives and pollsters. The use of virtual phone banks accessed through Obama's official website (again something initiated years earlier by MoveOn.org during the 2004 and 2006 elections) allowed volunteers to sign in online, receive a list of phone numbers, and make calls from wherever they were. Supporters made three million calls in the final four days of the campaign alone using this technology, and the data generated from all calls throughout the election cycle was used by the campaign to make strategic decisions about resource allocation (Ambinder 2008). This tactic supports the theoretical claims that new technologies can flatten bureaucratic structures as suggested by Bimber (2003), and exemplifies his concept of "accelerated pluralism" as Obama

volunteers organized through flexible and horizontal networks with very little financial or institutional backing. This type of decentralization allows for users to associate and identify with those parts of the campaign which resonate specifically with them while deploying their support around those issues without coherent understandings of the larger process or issues at hand. This type of information mobilization around politics mirrors other types of information gathering and assessment (or lack thereof) facilitated by the Internet and particularly associated with millennials (Carr, 2010). It also resonates with “flash activism” or “clicktivism” relying on short bursts of time and energy with low costs and risks and immediate results.

The Obama Campaign: Managing Information Online and Offline

The unprecedented scope and scale of data collection, which combined generated data via MyBo and SNS's with national voter databases accumulated from public and commercial sources, was another hallmark of the Obama strategy (Kreiss 2009). Campaign volunteers updated the overall voter outreach database by recording the results from block-walking and other forms of face-to-face grassroots organizing, and this complemented polling data (Delaney 2009). MyBO tracked online activities as well, systematically gathering data on how supporters used the applications on the website to capture the results of volunteers' efforts to engage other potential supporters through its online “Neighbor to Neighbor” tool. Similar to Meetup, this allowed visitors to see people and events in their immediate vicinity. All of the data was aggregated and acted upon to an extent that far outpaced previous forms of electoral volunteering. On Election Day the outreach and data-collection operation morphed into a voter-turnout operation as emails provided people with the names of five others who supported Obama and asked them to call each one to ensure they were going to the polls, and offer a ride if needed (Dreier 2009). This represents another example of new types of collective identity, heavily centered around the political socialization of the young voter – transient, yet powerful and effective for quick mobilizations, but requiring direction and heavy (professional) infrastructure to mobilize the force.

Thus, all of these tactics ensured that peer-to-peer recruitment and mobilization was not activated only in the virtual world but in the material world as well, and represent Kahn and Kellner's (2003) conceptualization of virtual post-subcultures and Kidd's (1993) emphasis on the strengthening of pluralistic politics prompted by grassroots entities that work outside of state-regulated and corporate-dominated media. Volunteers were able to participate in the campaign regardless of formal institutional or financial connections, and much of the information shared among supporters was levied through non-hierarchical channels and weak-ties. These once again embodied a form of networked individualism and Mann's (2000) reference to interstitial locations whereby rank-and-file citizens organize outside of traditional political institutions to affect the formal political sphere. The “tell-a-friend” networking, which was sustained at a very high level throughout the campaign, further calls into question the contention that people only seek out information relevant to them, and also calls for a reconceptualization of collective identity. Throughout the election the information was being sent peer-to-peer, and thus from a (albeit many times virtual) trusted source. This increased the level of receptivity and interest, and the naturalization of the political as social in this medium. Finally, the distinction between campaign organizers and supporters was in some ways leveled as volunteers took on leadership roles, as was the distinction between institutional and non-institutional action as supporters engaged in both types through the use of new media and efforts in the field.

Developing ICTs, as enabled by the Obama team, created new public spaces for the exchange of ideas and accumulation of resources through flexible grassroots efforts -- what Castells (2007) calls the electronic grassroots of democracy. This may be a harbinger of new avenues for communicative action in the public sphere and participatory democracy. Grassroots Match, the Obama Organizing Fellow Program, Students for Barack Obama, Generation Obama chapters, and house parties, with the help of Meetup and Neighbor to Neighbor Internet tools, all assisted and expedited the horizontal information-sharing and the spillover effect among volunteers while simultaneously creating new forms of collective identity based on ephemeral exchanges. This spillover allowed supporters to learn and perfect organizational and leadership skills, and provided linkages to the institutional realm of politics.

These tactics and mobilizing strategies also support Earl & Kimport's (2011) contention that virtual coordinated collective actions do not need co-presence, and that e-tactics, based on efficacy and low cost, can serve as a gateway for future participation. Collective identity can now be formed as easily as “joining” a cause on Facebook, and the dynamics of collective behavior are very different than in the past. Also, with Web 2.0 technologies, in terms of participation and leadership, anyone can be an organizer without concern for long-term allegiance to an ongoing cause. However, this has repercussions and will be revisited in the conclusion.

The Top Down Model

As noted earlier, in many popular accounts the Obama presidential bid purportedly bypassed the “professional model” by relying on volunteers to recruit, gather and record data, and mobilize supporters online and offline. This analysis illustrates that indeed, in some ways it did. However, a closer examination of the campaign paints an alternative, though not necessarily contradictory picture. Behind the strategizing of the Obama team was a digital consulting firm called Blue State Digital (BSD). The campaign purchased its services to manage online fundraising, constituency-building, issue advocacy, peer-to-peer networking and the community-building aspects of the campaign. Rospars and other former Dean aides created BSD in 2004 in an attempt to refine the Internet techniques pioneered by Dean (Hindman 2005). By 2005, BSD had developed the ability to track features to log detailed supporter profiles and to narrowcast political communications. For example, the software “Party Builder,” created by BSD became the basis of the MyBO Web site by allowing the campaign to use Facebook Connect to synchronize data between MyBO, Facebook and other online sites, and it was also the tool that enabled the campaign to directly leverage these external networks (Kreiss 2009).

BSD went even further by integrating the activities of design and branding, web and video content, mass email and text messaging, and online advertising, organizing and fundraising. On its website it states: “For every constituent in your list, our constituent viewer allows you to see an individual’s contributions, email actions (opens, click-through, and forwards), signup information, initiations sent to a friend, petitions signed, and every other action they have taken through your site. With this picture, you can target emails to individuals or groups who meet particular profiles (for example, likely repeat donors, or avid email forwarders)” (bluestatedigital.com). Together with BSD, the new media staffers monitored the traces of social relations made visible in the form of the data that was constantly generated each time supporters clicked through and passed along emails, hosted events, and raised money (Stelter, 2008). In doing so, it systematically identified, prioritized, and tracked prospective voters throughout the entirety of the electoral process. While MyBO provided citizens with the opportunity to create digital social networks of relatives, friends, neighbors and co-workers -- encouraging supporters to attract others to the campaign -- this data was then integrated, coordinated and used for further mobilizing efforts (Kreiss, 2009).

With the assistance of BSD, the Obama team developed more than 7,000 customized emails to individual prospects (over 2 billion landed in inboxes), which were continually and extensively subject to testing and refinement, from senders’ names to subject lines, topics, text, imagery and link placement (Delany 2009). Campaign staff broke their supporter list into several randomized groups, whose members would then receive different emails based on the message or feature being tested. Once they analyzed the results (messages opened, actions taken, donations made, etc.) and cross-referenced this with the list of demographics, staff applied this information to the next round of emails tailored to specific criteria, yielding more positive responses. Hence, supporters received messages with different content based on their state or congressional district, their interests, their demographics, their donations, or their past pattern of actions on behalf of the campaign. Rosbar described MyBO’s use of its email list in the following way: “The point is not to have a million people sign up. The point is to be able to chop up that million-person list into manageable chunks and organize them” (Stelter 2008).

The Obama analytic team, in conjunction with the services of BSD, also solicited different amounts of money based on a person’s donation history, and tailored emails accordingly. It practiced a similar tactic with its advertisements on the Web. Throughout the campaign, political ads were delivered online based on cookies that tracked browsing habits or relational data collected on social networking sites (Delany 2009). The media team spent \$16 million to buy ad space on Facebook, for example, and the Obama staff tracked which ad at what time drew the most traffic, and then would respond with follow-up ads (Stelter 2008). The emphasis of specific types of SNS’s speak to the cultivation of targeted demographics across the board, as it did the same on all other social networking sites on which it was active.

In essence, what BSD did is reminiscent of McGinnis’ (1988) and other scholars’ description of how candidates hired advertising agencies to sell them to citizens when the central source of information for most of the electorate was television. In 2008, however, the marketers were citizens and their peers rather than professional consultants. For example, the networks built through Facebook Connect became the conduits of the campaign’s political messages; consequently, citizens were not the *primary* agents of their communicative participation, as the campaign was able to directly leverage these external social networks. Though topics of common interest and political issues were being discussed among Obama supporters, the Obama staffers and BSD had a hand in what was being discussed on MyBO and controlled who was receiving what kind of information (although once this information is in the hands of consumers it can be shared outside of the hierarchical structure, as recipients can control what they do with the information). According to Boyd, “By and large, when politicians and activists talk about using MySpace and Facebook...they are talking about leveraging it as a spamming device” (2008: 113-14).

Howard's (2006) findings are particularly useful in theorizing the top-down structure of the Obama campaign. Through the e-politics community, which rested to a large degree on the practices of data mining, political redlining, and narrowcasting, staffers accessed data sets assembled from computer cookies to send direct messages to people who visited these sites. They could then capitalize on social networks by having their supporters urge their friends to advocate for Obama -- in a sense turning supporters into advertisers without their knowledge or by acting independently. In this way, new media platforms extended professional management as they served as mediators through the databases they created based on data shadows. Therefore, throughout the electoral process, powerful actors were very much part of the political campaign process as professional consultants employed new computerized forms of communication to both collect and help create public opinion.

Another caveat regarding new ICTs, as illustrated by the new digital repertoire utilized by the Obama campaign, is that although Internet tools and digital technology make it easy for citizens to contact their political representatives, they do not necessarily allow for genuine and substantive forms of debate and serious political contention. For instance, to protest Obama's support to renew the FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) legislation, which offered retroactive immunity for the telecommunications firms that assisted the Bush administration in its wiretapping program, activists created the MyBO group, Get FISA Right in July of 2008. This was the largest self-organized group on MyBO, consisting of over 18,000 members (Ruffini 2008). It had the potential to revitalize the "public sphere" and communicative action as it offered a place for citizens to discuss their shared concerns by articulating them to Obama. The fact that this was placed on Obama's own website exhibits the novelty of avenues provided by ICTs for public discourse and for citizens to express their collective will. However, Obama responded through a written statement on his website explaining his position, which was that he would indeed support FISA. On the one hand, this demonstrates how exchanges can occur much more quickly and easily (or at all) due to new electronically-mediated forms of communication. On the other hand, there was no actual deliberation of ideas between the president and his supporters.

After Obama assumed the presidency, MyBO was transformed into a new site called Organizing for America (OFA) as a way (so the campaign claimed) to keep his supporters engaged and to organize the grassroots. The two main issues were the economic stimulus package and health care reform. However, this has not proven effective and the millennials seem to have disappeared either by choice or through neglect by Obama once in office, and what some assumed might be a sustainable social movement lost its energy (Zeleny, 2009). There are a few possible explanations as to why the social movement character was not sustainable. The first is that the merger with the DNC took away its independent grassroots character and it lost its social movement status by becoming more institutionalized, mimicking the ways in which SNS development targeted a consumerist, American audience. The second is that OFA does not have access to the same level of resources that MyBO provided them. A third may be loss of interest because of Obama's unfulfilled promises, though, tactically, this may also be due to a lack of sustained efforts to maintain and nurture collective identity in the traditional sense -- one based on a deeply emotional, long-lasting investment through face-to-face contact to support a cause. Furthermore, an important factor may be the loss of authenticity when it comes to collective identity due to the mediated representation of experience. This new mode of identity construction and communication among users makes it easy to participate in activism because there are few, if any, risks, and immediate results and rewards through mechanisms such as reputation points are highlighted for all to view. However, none of these processes focus on the benefits of long-term gains, or strong-ties, as evidenced in what happened after Obama assumed the presidency.

What is clear is that the Obama team did not create sustainable and long-term organizational structures that are capable of channeling new technologies in pursuit of *collective goals*. It was also not necessarily in his campaign's best interest to have done so, nor was it a stated intention. Rather, it enabled the mobilization efforts to blend with the new media environment without encouraging young voters to develop long-term habits of attentiveness to public affairs once in office and commitment to civic engagement, or to have a voice in shaping the political agenda. In fact, what it did was to capitalize off extant structures of top-down political strategies, co-opting the newfound prosumer engagement, already developed through Web 2.0 generally and SNS's specifically, drawing with it their attendant millennial users.

Earl & Kimport's (2011) suggest that with the rise of the "new digital repertoire" of activism, scholars need to reconceptualize some of the basic theories of social movements and collective behavior. Although the most recent technological revolution is impacting mobilization efforts, the more important question is *how* technology is being used and for what purposes. Though our focus is on a political campaign, here we assess the e-tactics and offline tactics employed by the Obama team. More specifically, we addressed questions posed by Earl & Kimport such as: how are digitally enabled forms of mobilization affecting who becomes a participant (studied here in the mobilization of the youth vote); how do they affect organizational structure and leadership (the potential for the transformation of top-down strategies); how do they impact the dynamics of collective action (how SNS's facilitate new modes of communication and

cooperation); how do we address the powerful yet ephemeral effect of e-tactics established for short-term gains (can mobilization be sustained into transformational grassroots activism); can mobilizations succeed without collective identity and/or do we need new categorizations for collective identity (can weak-tie communities be reconfigured); and whether e-tactics serve as a gateway for future participation (does this open up the potential for a new paradigm of activism, community and collective action). The research and analysis of the Obama campaign answers many of the questions posed by Earl & Kimport, specifically illuminating the implications of new media forms, specifically Web 2.0 and SNS's in terms of *how* they get used and to what ends. We maintain that the engine of collective action operates differently in this new terrain, and we need new ways of theorizing collective identity in the age of the new media prosumer and accelerated pluralism. Where we have expanded on Earl & Kimport's lead is examining how intermediaries (in political campaigns) complicate collective identity and dynamics of mobilizations that are geared toward short-term gain by the role of intermediaries.

Conclusion

The stated qualities of openness, transparency, and grassroots participation of the Obama campaign were in some fundamental ways in synch with the basic mechanisms of the Internet and other media platforms. Volunteer organizing and mobilizing was far less bureaucratic than in previous elections. Citizen agency was enhanced in terms of sharing information, organizing, recruiting, fundraising, and participating in canvassing efforts. All of this blends easily into the experience of the digitally-savvy millennial. But, there also existed a hierarchical structure of communication and interactivity as the Obama team used sophisticated measures to aggregate and analyze data through professional consultants who tapped into peer-to-peer networks on social networking sites. These intermediaries, while helping to create virtual and offline forms of collective identity, ultimately served the institutional ends of the campaign by raising money, recruiting, canvassing, and getting people to the polls.

The Obama strategy was more complex than typically presented and understood in most popular accounts and raises important questions about activist engagement in electoral politics, especially if this trend of running a political campaign as a social movement is solidified. The staff indeed used a top-down and hierarchical approach to better access volunteers and supporters, and to manage and organize the information, but at the same time the campaign was energized and diffused in a bottom-up fashion. And while certain information such as that utilized through Facebook Connect was initiated by staff who were the original agents of the dissemination of the information, this was secondarily spread horizontally among supporters and friends, which maintained the grassroots character of the mobilization.

What the Obama presidential run demonstrates is that the public sphere is still colonized in some important ways, but through different mechanisms than in the past as advertising agencies have been replaced in large part by digital political consulting firms as they narrowcast communication premised on personal portraits of citizens assembled through commercial, public, and generated data. It illustrates that public discourse is still assessed, influenced, and mediated by media experts and political consulting agencies, and the relationships between citizens and politicians continue to be mediated by power. Citizens in many ways remain consumers of information as passed on (originally) by elites. In essence, we are witnessing the multifaceted interplay between liberating potentials for citizens within the contours of a relatively structured system of communication and organizing when it comes to political campaigns. Domination and control over aspects of cyberspace and new media platforms by elites and professional managers have not ceded to exist. In sum, both top-down and bottom-up approaches coexisted throughout the campaign.

Finally, this paper argues that the blurring of the personal and political through new media has transformed not only the political and social landscape but also problematizes how we think about motivation for participation, dynamics of collective behavior, organizational structures of campaigns and potentials for leadership and collective identity. Peer-to-peer information sharing requires a fundamental shift in the way we understand how information is shared, understood, acted upon by the user, and can be manipulated by elites. What this paper shows is a change in the distribution pattern of information through Web 2.0 tactics that detail the implementation of new patterns of horizontal communication and the shift from the media consumer to the prosumer. While these shifts indicate that at this time, political mobilization is instigated from top-down practices, it reveals the potential for large-scale grassroots mobilization for the future, if this new demographic can harness SNS platforms. What is at stake is the ability for millennials to utilize this technology to activate their participation and to make their voices heard. Suggestions for future research are the exploration of how to define success, or outcomes of collective behavior. In other words, how important is commitment to a cause and a solidified sense of collective identity? Throughout the election cycle Obama talked about changing politics in Washington, ushering in a new era, and how his experience as a community organizer provided him with unique skills to listen to and work with the grassroots. This resonated deeply with those disillusioned with politics as usual, especially with young

voters. Yet, these changes have not manifested themselves. This begs the question, was the goal of the Obama team to merely get him elected without pursuing a progressive agenda as promised? Did his supporters only care about him getting elected? How likely is it that these forms of new media and attendant methods of communication will be transformed by the users to create a true grassroots advocacy? The upcoming 2012 election may shed light on some of these inquiries. Clearly, social media will play a huge role, but will youth return with their enthusiasm?

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