The Internet as a Source of Campaign Information:An Analysis of its use in the 2004 Democratic Presidential Primary Campaign

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Research Questions

The Internet has become an established tool for campaign learning and information. In the 2004 presidential campaign, each candidate has employed his/her own Web Site and most had accompanying Weblogs to compete with other online and off-line sources of campaign information.

Using data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES04), this research seeks to address a number of questions surrounding the use of the Internet to access information about the 2004 presidential campaign. These key questions are:

- What proportion of those intending to vote in a Democratic primary or caucus use the Internet to obtain information about the presidential campaign online? We call them "Accessers."

- Which candidates did "Accessers" support during the early days of the Democratic campaign and how did that support shift as the front-loaded primary season progressed?

- How does their level of candidate support differ from "non-Accessers?"

- How do "Accessers" differ from "non-Accessers" demographically and behaviorally?

Review of the Literature

Internet & Democracy

As with many other new media formats before it, the Internet entered into the public sphere with a wave of optimism and a wave of pessimism (Norris, 2001). On one hand, the Internet was heralded as the great democratizer – a force that would allow individuals from different social and economic classes to learn about and participate in politics. At the same time, others suggested that the Internet would only serve to increase the already apparent divides between those who were engaged in politics and those who were not. Pessimists contended that the Internet would create a digital divide, or "inequalities in access to the Internet, extent of use, knowledge of search strategies, quality of technical connections and social support, ability to evaluate the quality of information, and diversity of uses" (DiMaggio, Hargittai, & Neuman, 2001). In the context of seeking political information online, this would mean that those traditionally uninformed and unengaged would remain so and that the gap between the unengaged and the engaged may, in fact, increase. When the Internet was early in its diffusion

process, those individuals who were most politically engaged were also most likely to have access the Internet (e.g. those with higher incomes and higher levels of education). As the Internet has diffused throughout the population, scholars have suggested that those who are not politically engaged are now more able to selectively avoid information about politics and instead seek out other types of information of interest on the Internet (Davis, 1999; Graber, 1996). Therefore, instead of engaging those who are traditionally unengaged, the theory goes, the Internet will further expand the divide between those who are politically engaged and those who are not.

Demographics of the Digital Divide

A digital divide in terms of Internet access and use has been widely documented. Several demographic characteristics have been found to relate to both Internet access and use. Nie and Erbring (2000) write that education and age are the most important demographic factors relating to Internet access; however, they found that demographics did not explain many differences in Internet use (measured as number of hours per week). Using multivariate analysis, Bimber (2000) found that education and income related positively to Internet access while age was negatively related to Internet access. Racial and ethnic differences in Internet use have also been investigated, showing that whites, Asian-Americans/Pacific Islanders, and non-Hispanics tend to have higher rates of Internet use compared to non-Asian/Americans/Pacific Islanders, non-whites and Hispanics (NTIA, 2000, 2002). The Pew Internet and American Life project reports that "Several demographic factors are strong predictors of Internet use: having a college degree, being a student, being white, being employed, and having a comfortable household income" (Lenhart et al., 2003).

The Internet divide for gender has been more contested. Some have found that there is no difference between men and women in terms of their reliance on the web (Johnson & Kaye, 2003). Others have found that although there was no difference between men and women in terms of Internet access, men are more likely to be frequent users and women are more likely to be moderate users (Bimber, 2000). Looking at the diffusion of Internet technology over time, some research has suggested that many of the gaps identified by researchers have been closing (DiMaggio et al., 2001; Lindstrom, 1997); the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA, 2002) reported that since August 2000, males and females have had the

same rate of Internet use. When looking at women by age group, however, younger women are more likely than men to use the Internet while older women are less likely than men to use the Internet.

The audience for online politics

Not surprisingly, only a percentage of Internet users look for political information online. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project Tracking Surveys (2002), 13 percent of Internet users look for political news and information online. This Pew study was not conducted during an election season; however, and not surprisingly, online political information seeking heightens as an election nears (Romer, Kenski, Waldman, Adasiewicz, & Jamieson, 2004). Another Pew study conducted around the 2002 elections found that 43 percent of Internet users said they "got political news and information online" (Cornfield & Rainie, 2003).

Demographic differences persist when evaluating who accesses the Internet for political information – suggesting the presence of a digital divide for political information. Evidence indicates that there is an age division in Internet use for political information; while older individuals are more politically engaged, they are less likely to use the Internet. Johnson and Kaye (2003) found that education was negatively correlated with time spent seeking political information online in the 1996 election but was positively related in 2000. Looking specifically at reports of hours per week spent looking for political information on the Internet, Johnson and Kaye (2003) found that in 1996, males spent more time seeking political information online, while in 2000, there was no difference between males and females in the amount of time they reported seeking political information online. Prior research has also suggested that individuals who use the Internet for political information are those who are already politically inclined (Graber, 1996; Johnson & Kaye, 2003).

More recently, the Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet released a study (2004) describing an online citizenry that is not only more politically engaged but also influential among their friends, relatives and colleagues. This group tends to be better educated, younger, and male.

Methodology

Sample Design

This research is based on data from NAES04, a rolling cross-section telephone survey that has been in the field continuously from October 7, 2003 and will continue beyond Election Day, November 2, 2004. Respondents are selected for cross-section study samples via a two-stage process—Random Digit Dialing and random selection within household.[1] Rolling cross-section sampling is implemented by adding new randomly generated telephone numbers on a strict schedule to the pool of numbers interviewers are calling to attempt to complete a survey. On each day of fieldwork, a set count of new numbers is added, proportional to the desired count of interviews completed daily. The intention is to maximize the representativeness of any single day's interviewing sample by including those respondents who are easy to contact and those who are more difficult to contact. Consequently, the day on which a respondent is interviewed may for purposes of analysis be considered a random event. Each respondent was called back a maximum number of 18 times and refusal conversions were employed.

Sampling Frame

We divided this analysis into three distinct sampling periods: (1) 10-7-03 through 1-12-04; (2) 1-13-04 through 1-27-04; and (3) 1-28-04 through 3-2-04. In period 1, campaign activity, though relatively active, was still considered to be in the early phase, despite the frontloading of the democratic primaries and caucuses. The sample size for this period is 13,632 adults including 4,203 Democratic Primary Intenders.[2] The second period, 1-13 through 1-27 saw an increase in news coverage and campaigning in Iowa and New Hampshire. The Iowa caucus took place on January 19th and the New Hampshire primary occurred on January the 27th. During this time, the frontrunner, Howard Dean, showed signs of weakening, and John Kerry was beginning to climb in the polls. The sample size for this period is 2,421 adults including 708 Democratic Primary Intenders. The third period begins on the day following Kerry's decisive victory in New

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[1]First, households were selected by randomly generating telephone numbers. Area code, exchange, and bank, representing the first eight digits of a ten-digit phone number, were randomly generated proportional to telephone company estimates of the count of residential numbers in each combination of area code, exchange, and bank. The last two digits of each phone number were generated entirely at random. Second, adult residents of a household were selected randomly based on a specific algorithm (See Romer, et al. 2004 for complete design).

[2] Democratic Primary Intenders are the main unit of analysis for this study. This group is defined as registered voters who say they are going to vote in the Democratic primary or caucus in their state.

Hampshire and continues through his dominating run in the primaries through Super Tuesday, March 2nd (he won all but 2 primaries during this time period). On March 3rd, John Edwards dropped out and Kerry became the "presumptive Democratic nominee." The sample size for the 3rd period is 6,766 of which 1,768 are Democratic Primary Intenders (Table 1).

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Table 1: Sample Design

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Sample Period	Total N	Democratic Primary Intenders N	Margin of Sampling Error for Democratic Primary Intenders
10-7-03 thru 1-12-04	13,632	4,203	+/-1.51%
1-13-04 thru 1-27-04	2,421	708	+-3.68%
1-28-04 thru 3-2-04	6,766	1,768	+/-2.33%
TOTAL	**22,819**	**6,679**	+/-1.2%

NAES2000 and Internet Use

In 2000, NAES framed the question about using the survey to gain information about the presidential campaign differently than the current 2004 survey. In 2000, respondents with Internet access were asked, "In the past week, how many days did you SEE something about the presidential campaign online?" From December 14, 1999 through April 3rd, 2000 36% of respondents likely to vote in the Democratic primary or caucus in their state said they saw something. In 2004, the question was changed from the more passive act of seeing something online to the more active act of accessing something online. In that way, we could capture those most interested in using the Internet to find information about the campaign. In the current NAES04 we assess Internet access and use by initially asking whether or not respondents had access to the Internet. Those individuals who reported that they had access to the Internet were asked how many days in the past week they used the Internet for political purposes. The text of the question read, "How many days in the past week did you access information about the campaign for president online?" Respondents were permitted to give any answer between 0 and 7. Throughout this analysis, "don't know" and "refused" responses to these questions are treated as missing data.

Key Terms in This Research

In this research, we focus on three analytical groups; we will refer to them by these names throughout this report.

- ***Democratic Primary Intenders (Intenders):*** *Registered Voters who said they were planning to vote in the Democratic primary or caucus in their state.*

- ***Accessers:*** *Those online Intenders who accessed information about the presidential campaign from the Internet at least once in the prior seven days.*

- ***Non-Accessers:*** *Includes those online Intenders who DID NOT access information about the presidential campaign from the Internet at least once in the prior seven days and those Intenders without Internet access.*

Research Findings

Internet Use in the NAES04 Sample

General Internet access among Democratic Primary Intenders (Intenders) is high. Through the end of the 3rd interviewing period, 73% of all Intenders (n=6,679) say they have access to the Internet either at home, work, or some other place. This number is in line with Pew (Pew Research Center, 3/2004) who report that 68% go online to the Internet or send email[3].

Accessing Information about the Presidential Campaign Online

Among Intenders, there is a subgroup which reports accessing the Internet to find information about the presidential campaign—"Accessers." Their number rose steadily, but

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[3] Survey by Pew Research Center, Pew Internet and American Life Project. Methodology: Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, March 17-March 21, 2004 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,703. The following question was asked:
Do you ever go online to access the Internet or World Wide Web or to send and receive email?
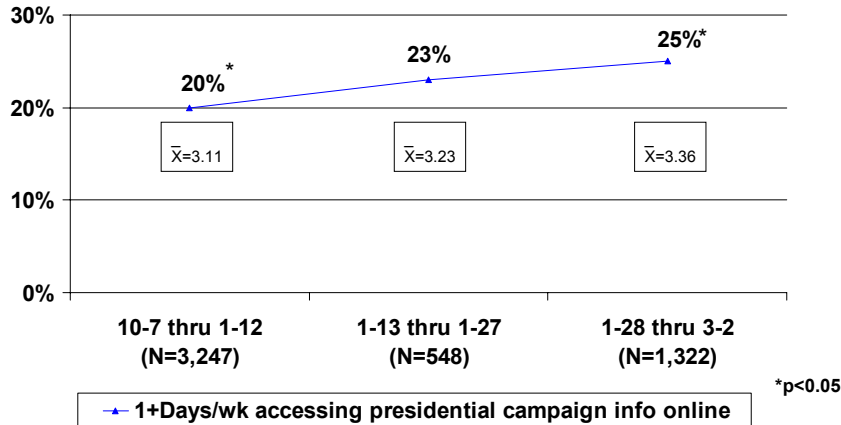68% Yes
32 No
* Don't know/Refused

slightly, over the course of this early campaign time frame. Among those Intenders with Internet access, 20% reported going online to access information about the presidential campaign from 10-7-03 through 1-12-04[4]. In period 2 (1-13 through 1-27), that number climbed marginally to 23% and peaked in the period after New Hampshire through Super Tuesday to 25%. The increase was statistically significant from the first and third periods (1/28 through 3/2) (Chart 1).

Chart 1: % Online 1+ Days Per Week
To Access Information about the Presidential
Campaign Online
Among Those With Internet Access And Likely to Vote in Democratic Primary

Q:How many days in the past week did you access information about the campaign for president online?

20%*	23%	25%*
X̄=3.11	X̄=3.23	X̄=3.36
10-7 thru 1-12 (N=3,247)	1-13 thru 1-27 (N=548)	1-28 thru 3-2 (N=1,322)

*p<0.05

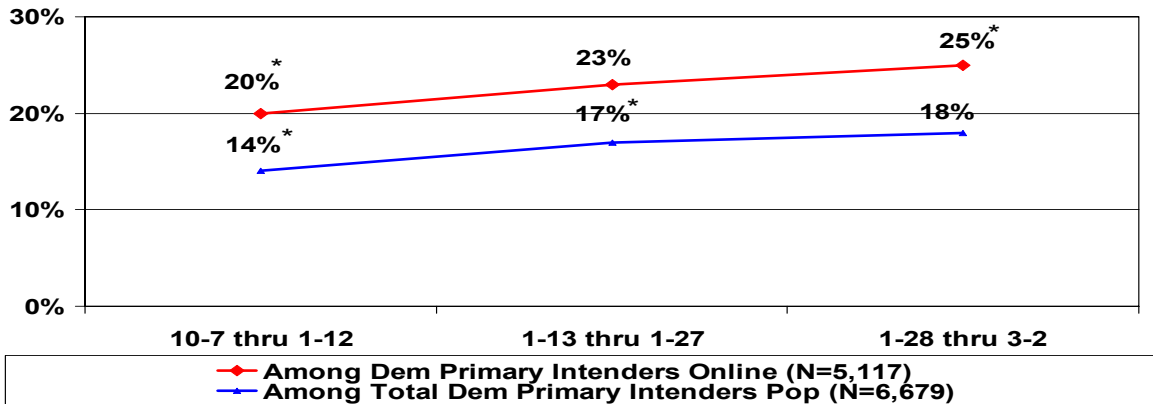—▲— **1+Days/wk accessing presidential campaign info online**

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[4] These percentages were consistent from month to month. 10/1-11/2: 22% (N=404), 11/2-12/1: 20% (N=1,142), 12/2-1/12: 20% (N=1,701)

When taken as part of the entire sample of Intenders, "Accessers" comprise almost a fifth (18%) of this group by the end of the third period. In the early stages of the campaign, "Accessers" made up 14% of the Intenders. The rise was steady through the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire period but stabilized by Super Tuesday. Chart 2 shows the total both among those Intenders with Internet access and among the total Democratic Intender population

Chart 2: % Online 1+ Days Per Week
To Access Information about the Presidential
Campaign Online

*Among Democratic Primary Intenders Online
*Among Total Democratic Primary Intenders

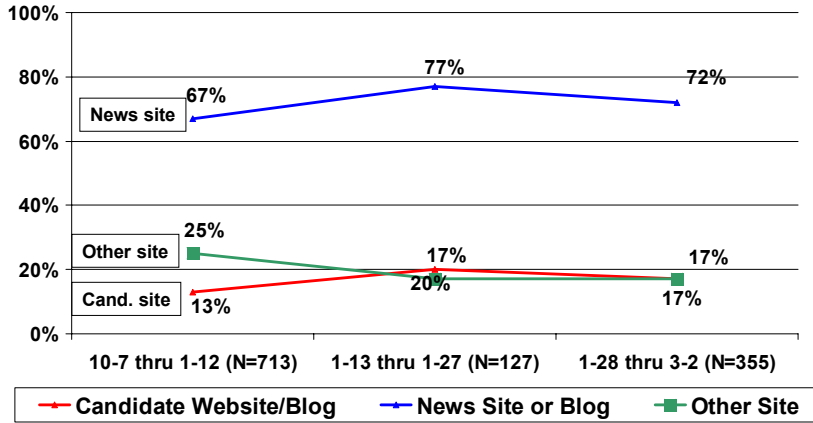|	10-7 thru 1-12	1-13 thru 1-27	1-28 thru 3-2
Among Dem Primary Intenders Online (N=5,117)	20%*	23%	25%*
Among Total Dem Primary Intenders Pop (N=6,679)	14%*	17%*	18%

*p<0.05

Source of Online Information

During the 2004 Democratic primary election campaign, each of the candidates has employed a web site and most had weblogs to compete with the news organization web sites, and other political sites as a source for online campaign information. In tracking where Democratic primary intenders actually go to obtain information, NAES04 found that they primarily went to the more traditional online source: A news organization's web site. However, the percentage of "Accessers" who visited candidate web sites or blogs increased over time, peaking in the period around the Iowa Caucus and New Hampshire Primary. During that period, one-fifth of "Accessers" (20%) obtained information about the presidential campaign from a candidate website or weblog.

Chart 3 shows that two-thirds of "Accessers" were clicking onto news sites in the early part of the campaign. That number climbed to 77% around the time of the Iowa Caucus and New Hampshire Primary. In the time between New Hampshire and Super Tuesday, the number dropped slightly to 72%.

In addition to candidate and news sites, "Accessers" visited other sites for their political information. According to open-ended responses, these "other" sites include, *MoveOn.org, the Drudge Report, AOL* or *MSN,* the *Democratic Party* web site, search engines like *Google.com* and *Yahoo.com.* Early in the campaign, about a quarter of the "Accessers" visited something other than a traditional news or candidate site. As the campaign progressed, the number accessing information from these "other" sites declined as traffic to the candidates' sites grew.

Chart 3: Online Source of 2004 Presidential Campaign Information

Among Registered Voters Intending to Vote in Democratic Primary who Access Information About Presidential Campaign online at least 1 day per week

	10-7 thru 1-12 (N=713)	1-13 thru 1-27 (N=127)	1-28 thru 3-2 (N=355)
News site	67%	77%	72%
Other site	25%	20%	17%
Cand. site	13%	17%	17%

Legend: ── Candidate Website/Blog   ── News Site or Blog   ── Other Site

Q: During the past week, which of the following did you access to get information about the Presidential campaigns online: Candidates' website or weblog, a news organization's web Site or web log or some other web site or web log?
(multiple responses)

In the early days of the 2004 Democratic primary campaign, Howard Dean was consistently leading national and many statewide polls. Much of Dean's strength, it was argued was his effective use of the Internet to reach young voters and to raise money (Wolf, 2003; Franke-Ruta, 2003). Our findings support Dean's early Internet strength.

In the NAES04 data, Governor Dean's lead was much stronger among "Accessers," but it declined along with his fortunes. Dean's support among this group during the 10-7 through 1-12 time period was 32%, while among "Non-Accessers" it was twelve points lower (20%). Additionally, at this early stage of the campaign, when some pundits were suggesting John Kerry's campaign was "floundering" (Oliphant, 2003), the Massachusetts senator was earning nearly equal support from both "Accessers" and "Non-Accessers" (10% "Accessers"/8% "Non-Accessers") (Chart 4).

Chart 4: Primary Vote Intention by Access to Presidential Campaign Information

Accessers v. Non-Accessers: 10-7 to 1-12
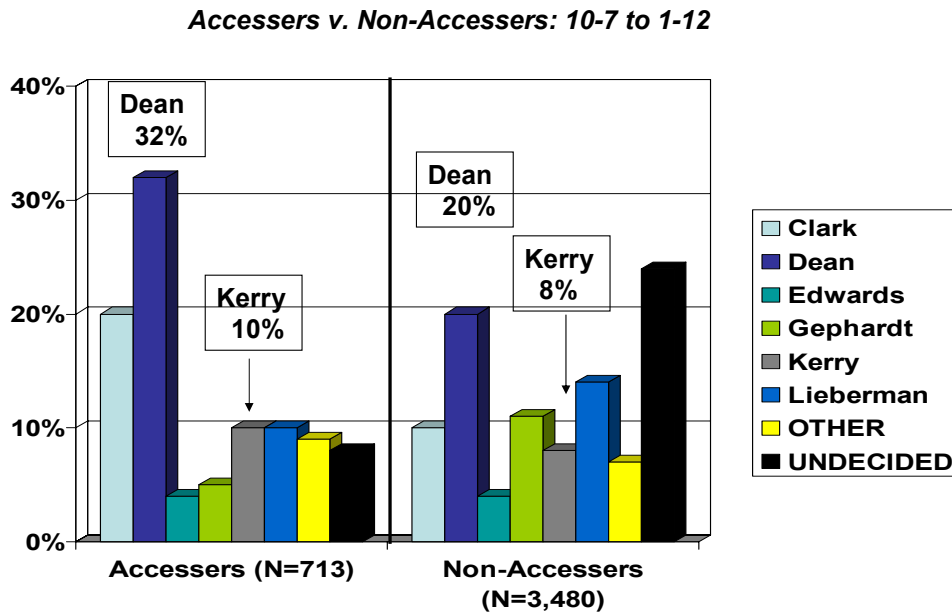
After Kerry's decisive victories in Iowa and New Hampshire, the party quickly coalesced around his candidacy, leaving John Edwards as his only serious challenger. In the period following the New Hampshire primary (Jan. 28- Mar. 2), the campaigns of Richard Gephardt,

Wesley Clark, Joseph Lieberman, and Howard Dean effectively ended and John Edwards would drop out on March 3. As evidence of this coalescence, John Kerry continued to get an equal share of support from both "Accessers" and "Non-Accessers" during the January 28-March 2 period, but at this time Kerry was far ahead of Dean and Edwards. In Chart 5, Kerry's support among online "Accessers" was at 47% and 50% among the total intender population. John Edwards had the support of 22% of "Accessers" and 15% of "Non-Accessers." Dean's support was about 8%, but most of that was recorded in the earlier part of the third period.

Chart 5: Primary Vote Intention by Access to Presidential Campaign Information
Accessers vs. Non-Accessers : 1-28 thru 3-2
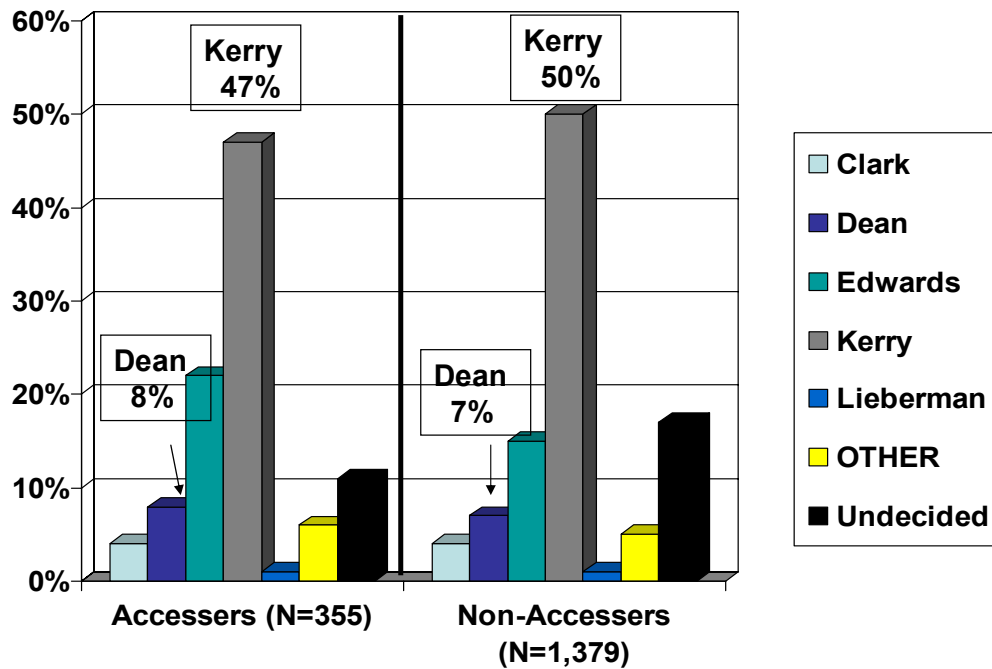
Profile of the Accesser

Our research shows that "Accessers" comprise about a fifth of the Intender population and are distinctly unique from the "Non-Accessers" both behaviorally and demographically. Specifically, these differences were observed when examining campaign attention, campaign knowledge, and demographics.

Online "Accessers" More Attentive to Campaigns and Feel They Are More Knowledgeable

The level of attention online "Accessers" report showing to the campaign is double that of "Non-Accessers." Three in ten (30%) of the online "Accessers" say they were "very closely" following the campaign in the early stages. That number climbed significantly in the days leading up to Iowa and New Hampshire to 46% reporting they are following the campaign "very closely." The number leveled off during the period between New Hampshire and Super Tuesday to 44%.

"Non-Accessers" interest in the campaign grew as well during this time period, but at a much lower level. Twelve percent of the "Non-Accessers" reported following the campaign very closely from October through January 12. That number doubled during the Iowa and New Hampshire periods and again, leveling off after New Hampshire through Super Tuesday (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Attention To Campaign
% Very Closely Following Campaign

Among Democratic Primary Intenders

*Q: How closely are you following the campaigns of the Democratic candidates for President*
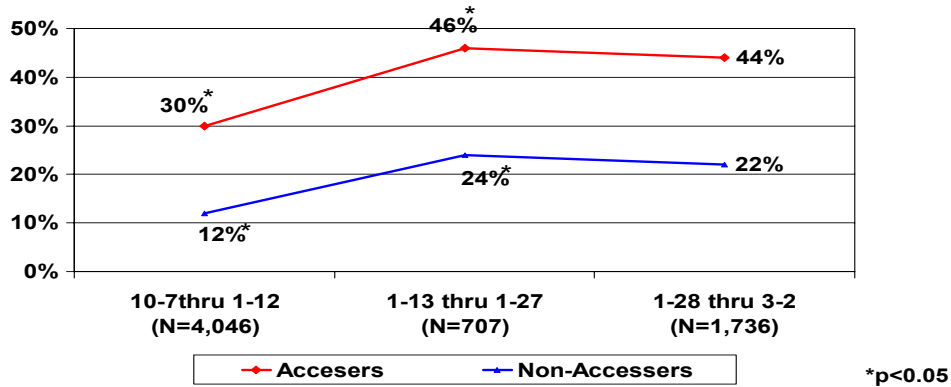
There is a similarly higher level of self-reported campaign learning among online "Accessers" compared with "Non-Accessers." As the campaign progressed, voters claimed they learned more about it. However, "Accessers" reported a greater level of learning. In the early days of the campaign, 32% said they learned enough about the campaign to make an informed vote choice. By Super Tuesday, nearly half (46%) felt this way. Among "non-Accessers," the number who said they learned enough never increased beyond 28% (See Chart 7).

Chart 7: Self-Reported Campaign Learning
% saying they know enough to make a decision in the primary campaign

Among Democratic Primary Intenders

Q: So far have you learned enough about the Democratic presidential candidates and the Issues to make an informed choice among the candidates, or have you found it difficult to choose because you feel you have not learned enough (Asked beginning 11-10-2003)
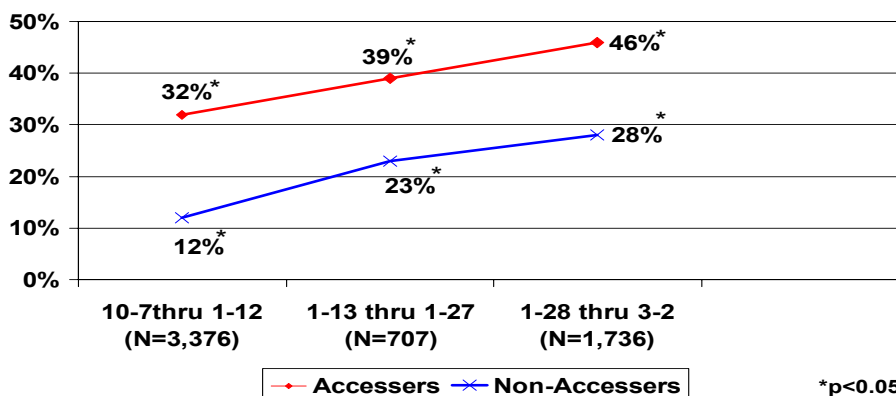
"Accessers'" self-rating on political knowledge bore out in additional analysis we conducted using the Delli Carpini/Keeter knowledge battery (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). "Accessers" had higher levels of political knowledge compared to those who (1) had access to the Internet but did not access information about the campaign in the past week ($p<0.001$), and (2) those with no Internet access.[5]

We created a general political knowledge scale by summing five questions: which job is held by Dick Cheney, whether the President, Congress, or the Supreme Court has the final responsibility to determine if a law is constitutional or not, how much of a majority in the House and Senate is required to override a presidential veto, which party has the most members in the House, and which party is more conservative on a national level (Cronbach's alpha=0.61, *M*=3.34, *SD*=1.40).

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[5] The t-test of general political knowledge evaluates the difference between (1) those individuals who do not have access to the Internet (2) those individuals who have access to the Internet, but did not access information about the campaign for president within the past week and (3) those individuals who have access to the Internet and did access information about the campaign for president within the past week. No other variables are controlled (i.e. education) in this analysis. Further, this was only conducted for those individuals intending to vote in the Democratic primary between the dates of 1/28/04 and 3/2/04.

Table 2: Knowledge Analysis T-Test

	Mean	N	SD
No Internet Access	2.766	205	1.433
Internet Access, but did not access information about the campaign	3.353	470	1.354
Accessers	4.018	166	1.141

*Note: All groups were significantly different (p<0.001) from each other using t-tests.

In addition, "Accessers" were more likely to know that Senator Kerry is a decorated Viet Nam veteran and that John Edwards is the son of a mill worker. These two attributes were heavily repeated by the candidates during the campaign.

Table 3: Candidate Knowledge

	Accesser % knowing this	Non-Accesser % knowing this
Kerry is a decorated Viet Nam veteran	72*	50
Edwards is the son of a mill worker	43*	24

*p<.01

Demographic Profile of "Accesser"

Democratic Primary Intenders who are "Accessers" tend to fall into the following demographic/behavioral profile, relative to "non-Accessers":

- higher level of education
- male
- younger
- more ideologically liberal among this Democratic intender group
- greater political interest
- believe they have learned enough to make an informed choice,
- more likely to discuss politics with friends and family

Table 4: Logistic Regression Analysis of Using the Internet to Access Campaign Information[6]

	B	Sig.	S.E.
Education	0.147	***	(0.030)
Income	0.001		(0.001)
Black	-0.065		(0.167)
Hispanic	0.160		(0.234)
Female	-0.519	***	(0.116)
Political Interest (4=follow government affairs most of the time 1=follow government affairs hardly at all)	0.542	***	(0.094)
Age	-0.032	***	(0.004)
Perceived Learning (1=learned enough, 0=have not)	0.624	***	(0.122)
Political Discussion with friends & family (0-7 days)	0.170	***	(0.027)
National News (0-7 days)	-0.038	+	(0.023)
Newspaper (0-7 days)	-0.041	+	(0.022)
General Political Knowledge	0.150	**	(0.054)
Ideology (5=very liberal, 1=very conservative)	0.164	*	(0.064)
Constant	-5.291	***	(0.513)
Cox & Snell R-square	0.165		
Model Chi-Square	477.777	***	
N	2649		

*Note: +p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001*

Are those "non-Accessers" who follow the Democratic primary campaigns "very closely" similar to "Accessers" in general? The answer is no. In fact, these more campaign attentive "non-Accessers" (N=835) differ little from all "non-Accessers." What distinguishes them is that they are much older and more conservative. The following table is a more detailed breakdown of "Accessers" and "Non-Accessers" by demographic characteristics.

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[6]We conducted a logistic regression analyzing respondents intending to vote in the Democratic presidential primary between the dates of October 7, 2003 and March 2, 2004. This logistic regression was performed by grouping respondents into two groups: (1) Those accessing the Internet for information about the campaign for president within the past week and (2) Those with Internet access who did not access information about the campaign for president within the past week and those without online access.

Table 6: Demographic Breakdown: Democratic Primary Intenders

Interviewed From October 7, 2003-March 2, 2004			
	Accesser	**Non-Accesser**	**Non-Accesser following presidential campaign very closely**
	(N=1,195)	(N=5,441)	(N=835)
AGE			
18-29	23*	14*	5*
30-44	35*	25*	16*
45-64	34	37	39
65+	8*	24*	41*
DK/REF	^	^	0
EDUC			
High School or less	18	48*	47*
Some college/	30	26*	24*
Coll grad/post grad	52	26*	29*
DK/REF	0	^	^
INCOME			
LT $35k	21*	38*	38*
$35K to lt $75K	36	35	31
$75K or more	36*	19*	22*
DK/REF	6	8	9
GENDER			
Male	57*	41*	49*
Female	43*	59*	51*
IDEOLOGY			
Conservative	12*	24*	27*
Moderate	39	42	36*
Liberal	49*	32*	34*
DK/REF	^	2	3
RACE/ETHNICITY			
White	78*	71*	74
Black	14*	22*	22
Hispanic	7	8	8

p<0.05

Conclusions

This research represents only a partial examination of the 2004 campaign and, as such, is just a first step in understanding the use of the Internet in the campaign. Therefore, we offer preliminary conclusions at this stage. NAES04 researchers will undertake a more thorough analysis of the entire election cycle once we complete the data collection in January 2005.

Nevertheless, we offer the following observations:

- Despite an intense front-loaded Democratic primary and caucus season, our research shows a modest increase in the number of those likely voters going online to access campaign information over the course of the early, but most important, part of the Democratic primary campaign.

- As was reported in the major news sources, Howard Dean was stronger among "Accessers" early on, but that support dropped commensurate with his fortunes in the campaign.

- There continues to be a divide between the politically engaged and unengaged. It is clear in the higher level of political attention and knowledge reported by the "Accessers."

- "Accessers" tend to be younger, better educated, and more ideologically liberal than "non-Accessers."

- The divide between Intender men and women is wide in the use of the Internet to access campaign information.

Discussion

Continued research by NAES on accessing political information online will move to the general election phase of this campaign. We will continue to track the level of access among the most likely voters. Furthermore, the greater sample size will allow us to more reliably analyze the frequency of access, placing the groups into high, medium, and low categories. In the research presented here, while we found clear differences between "Accessers" and "Non-Accessers" across the three time periods, sample size was too low in periods 2 and 3 to analyze by greater or lesser frequency.

In addition, we are testing other questions to determine if the current wording is too restrictive. Half of the respondents will now be asked how frequently they have "read" something online about the presidential campaign in the past 7 days. While the other half will be exposed to the current question—*How many days in the past week did you access information about the campaign for president online.* By doing this, we can look further into the intensity level of online access of campaign information.

Moving forward, we also want to examine how the Internet as a source of campaign information compares with other media sources in the level of attention. We will analyze the results from a battery of questions measuring how much relative attention respondents paid to campaign stories on broadcast, cable, in newspapers and online.

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