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Explaining Facebook Support in the 2008 Congressional Election Cycle

By

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Explaining Facebook Support in the 2008 Congressional Election Cycle

Abstract

This study investigates what explains the level of support candidates generate on Facebook and what strategic assessments campaigns are making about this community of (potential) supporters. Based on data collected about 814 major party candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2008, it appears that the Facebook community responds to the same array of factors in the larger political environment as the general public when registering its collective judgments about candidate viability through Facebook support. In company with journalists and political pundits, many campaigns view social networks as uniquely positioned to reach a heretofore marginally active segment of the electorate and engage them in the political process. Recruiting political supporters from this group is worthwhile in close elections and if it proves easier than converting those who are undecided or predisposed to the other party's candidates, especially if they can be energized to volunteer, contribute, and proselytize their Facebook friends and peers. Results of the multiple regression analyses show that the amount of campaign contributions raised is the most important variable explaining Facebook support, especially for challengers and open seat candidates. In addition, Democrats have more supporters than Republicans, and incumbents more than challengers or candidates for open seats. A competitive race increases supporter numbers for non-incumbents. When Congressional districts have with a high percentage of college educated citizens it increases candidates' supporters, but a high percentage of young citizens diminishes their numbers. Finally, candidates who have active Facebook pages, either because of their own updating of content or as a result of postings by current supporters, generate more new supporters as a result. Campaigns that do not engage in an activity that is relatively common and easy to do (video uploads) are penalized in Facebook supporter numbers more than campaigns passing up more time consuming or difficult activities (campaign event posts) for which there is less peer pressure. Degree of effort works in reverse for user generated activities: candidates who have more low effort wall posts generate more Facebook supporters; those with more high effort fan photo postings do not end up with significantly more supporters. Summing up Facebook's prospects, one campaign staff member concludes, "It is a very minimal aspect of campaigns now, but as time goes on, Facebook will be more prevalent in every campaign and at every level."

Introduction

“Nationwide this year social networking has been huge, and that is becoming obvious. Anyone in politics who tries to ignore that is foolish quite frankly, and is going to have no chance at continuing to win elections.”¹

With Facebook leading the way, social networking sites have emerged as an online tool that offers candidates another effective means of mobilizing voters (Williams and Gulati, 2007). And, they seem poised to play a more significant role in the next cycle of Congressional elections. The candidates’ use of Facebook in 2008 affords another opportunity for studying the early adoption and dissemination of emerging technology tools in campaigns. This study investigates how Facebook support should be interpreted: what predicts or explains it, empirically and through the lens campaigns themselves are using to make strategic assessments about this community of (potential) supporters.

For the 2006 elections, Facebook created a special space—“US Politics”—on its network to store profiles for all U.S. congressional and gubernatorial candidates. Facebook took the initial step in creating these profiles by designing a standard template with only the candidate’s name, office being sought, and basic contact information. Passwords that allowed the candidates to assume responsibility for personalizing their profiles were forwarded to the offices of the Republican and Democratic national committees, who then distributed them to their candidates.² Once assuming control of their profile, candidates could initiate a discussion topic, post comments on their wall, and post notes, event information and videos and photographs. Facebook users who “friended” a candidate as a way to show their support on their own profile also were allowed to post materials and comments. A candidate did not need to activate the profile for users to register their support and post content. Facebook’s decision to create a specific space for political candidates with basic profiles assured that they more noticeable and accessible to users. As a result, Facebook distinguished itself as the early leader among online social networking sites for political campaigns.

For the 2008 elections, Facebook introduced several modifications. Political candidates were given pages instead of profiles. These pages were similar to personal profiles, but offered the candidates greater capability to post various kinds of campaign material (e.g., announcements, links to other pages, YouTube links, notes, photo albums, and event information) and allowed their supporters to post their own materials as well. A second change was to eliminate the “US Politics” section and place all of the candidates’ pages within a “Politicians” sub-section of fan Pages. Thus, politicians were clustered near celebrities and other public figures, sports teams, films, restaurants, bars and clubs, products, non-profits, and other organizations. In addition, the Politician pages were not reserved for U.S. political candidates exclusively. Current elected officials and candidates for all levels of office in any country were eligible to have pages as long as an official representative of the politician created the page.³ Despite these additional features and the enhanced visibility of Politician pages, only 8% of Americans reported using social networks to learn about campaigns during the 2008 election cycle (Smith and Rainie, 2008).

¹ “Ryan,” campaign staff of Roger Wicker (R-MS).

² Ezra Calahan and Chris Hughes, telephone interview, 24 October 2006.

³ See Williams and Gulati, 2009 for a more extensive description of Facebook in the 2006 and 2008 election cycles.

Research Questions

The major party House candidates' 2008 vote share is only weakly correlated with their number of Facebook supporters at the end of October ($R = .192$ or $.223$ if dichotomized as won or lost).⁴ A difference of means t-test, however, indicates that winners had significantly more supporters on average than losers did (420.31 vs. 183.06), a result significant at the .001 level. Thus while Facebook supporter numbers would not be a useful predictor that foreshadows electoral victory or defeat, the most electable candidates do have more Facebook supporters. This indicates that the Facebook community is responding to or reflecting the array of factors within the larger political environment that determine candidate viability. It is the unique characteristics of this community such as its more youthful and Democratic leaning demographic that undermine its predictive power.

An interesting research question then becomes whether the same factors that explain candidates' viability and electability also apply to their online equivalent, Facebook support. In company with journalists and political pundits, many campaigns view social networks as uniquely positioned to reach a heretofore marginally active segment of the electorate and engage them in the political process. In more pragmatic terms, they represent an as yet poorly tapped source of campaign contributions and votes, but also a longstanding pool from which to draw volunteers. In close elections, if a potential influx of political supporters from this group proves easier to leverage than converting the undecideds or those predisposed to the other party's candidates, it is well worth pursuing.

“Most of the people that use Facebook are younger students aged 18-22, only a fraction of whom were eligible voters in the last election. We are really trying to look to target new voters, to have a place for them to network with other supporters and be a part of the campaign.”⁵

The first set of explanatory factors includes attributes of the specific candidates and election contest: incumbency status, political party, competitiveness of the race, and amount of funding (Jacobson, 2009). Incumbency carries well known advantages, notably name recognition and greater campaign resources, that collectively lead to more media coverage, strong poll standings, and ultimately, high reelection rates. A well funded campaign has many of the same advantages, and in House races attaches to incumbents far more often than to challengers, although open seat candidates can be well endowed especially if the race is competitive. As noted above, Democrats hold an edge in the Facebook community and have more actively pursued online mobilization strategies than Republicans (see for example, Sabato, 2009; Rasiej and Sifry, 2008; Stirland, 2007 and Thompson, 2008). A competitive race is simply more exciting, and as a result, generates greater media attention, and in turn, voter interest. Top tier candidates also generate more online attention, namely blog buzz (Williams, 2008), which leads to an expectation that competitive races will generate higher support on Facebook as well.

The second set represents indicators tied to attributes of candidates' constituencies, namely demographic attributes correlated with citizen access to and use of the Internet: education, income, ethnicity, age, and urbanization. The Facebook community is similarly skewed in favor of college educated, more affluent, white, urban and younger citizens.⁶ The closer a congressional district resembles this profile, the larger the pool is from which to draw potential Facebook supporters. Moreover, voter turnout is higher among

⁴ Including those who had no supporters because they had no Politician page, i.e., the entire sample of 814 rather than just the 588 with pages, and coding them as zero slightly increases the correlation between Facebook supporter numbers and vote share (.290) or won lost dichotomy (.320).

⁵ “Ryan,” campaign staff of Sen. John Sununu (R-NH), telephone interview, October 28, 2008.

⁶ See data from <http://www.quantcast.com/facebook.com#demographics>, for example.

college educated, more affluent and white citizens; it is lower in urban areas and in younger age groups.⁷ Among those aged 18 to 29, however, differences among urban, suburban and rural areas disappear, and were not especially pronounced for the over 30 age group in the 2006 midterm elections.⁸ If registering support for a candidate on Facebook constitutes political participation that is analogous to traditional forms, i.e., their online equivalent, then characteristics associated with higher levels of voting and related political activities also should serve to increase the pool of potential Facebook supporters within a congressional district.

Finally, some campaigns evidenced more activity on their Politician pages than others. It would be useful to know whether those efforts paid off in higher numbers of supporters. Politician pages allow two types of activity, those initiated by the campaign and those initiated by fans or supporters. To ascertain which of these generated more Facebook supporters and to what extent, the page content of a subset of 200 randomly selected candidates was examined in more detail. Counts were tallied on four features: campaign event posts and video uploads, fan photos and supporters' wall posts. Many campaigns indicated they simply could not keep up with posting on a regular basis, acknowledged that they often they did not have much content to update on a daily basis, and noted the need for a young and/or technologically savvy staff member to support their Facebook outreach effort. Given these difficulties, campaigns would want evidence that this is worth the investment of time and resources. Generating significantly more supporters would be one indication that it is, particularly if those supporters can be energized to volunteer, contribute, and proselytize their Facebook friends and peers more generally.

Data and Methods

The sample for this study consists of all Democratic and Republican nominees for the 2008 House of Representatives. Representatives Dennis Kucinich (D, Ohio, 10th district) and Ron Paul (R, Texas, 14th district) were eliminated from the analysis because they also were seeking their party's presidential nomination. To identify candidates who had their own Facebook page, each name was entered into Facebook's internal search engine within the "Politicians" section, double checking for nick names and correct spelling. We coded whether candidates had established a page, and how many supporters they had at several time points: June 1, 2008, June 30, 2008, October 28, 2008 and June 1, 2009. This primary data set was supplemented with a subset of 200 of these House candidates whose pages were coded for the use of various features.⁹ The four reported in this paper are the posting of event information and videos by the campaigns and the posting of photos and comments on the wall by supporters. Finally, the quantitative data and its interpretation have been enriched by over 50 interviews conducted with representatives of the 2008 House and Senate campaigns.

⁷ See data on the 2006 midterm elections reported by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Table 2, for example <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p20-557.pdf>>.

⁸ See data from The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, July 2007 <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS07_QuickFacts_Midterm_06/metro_07.pdf>.

⁹ We conducted interviews with representatives from 53 different campaigns who had first-hand knowledge of the campaign's Internet strategy and operations between October 13 and December 10, 2008. The potential respondents for our interviews came from a list of 192 House and Senate contests that we had selected to monitor closely throughout the fall campaign season. We selected our sample by first identifying the races that were deemed competitive in the *Cook Political Report* on September 25, 2008. This procedure provided us with 96 contests and 192 candidates. We then randomly selected 96 contests out of the remaining non-competitive contests to complete our sample. Of the 384 candidates in our sample, 55% were Democrats, 34% were incumbents, 30% were competitive, 26% were women, and 10% were members of a minority ethnic group.

Analysis and Findings

The dependent variable, number of Facebook supporters, represents the count as of the end of October, 2008 and includes only the major party candidates. The supporter numbers for Dennis Kucinich and Ron Paul were eliminated from the analysis because of the confounding effects of their presidential campaigns. That leaves 588 cases, or 72.4% of the remaining 814 major party candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2008 who had a Politicians' Page. The resulting sample slightly over-represents Democrats and under-represents challengers because these groups activated Politicians' Pages in differing proportions. While 78.7% of Democrats activated pages thereby allowing them to acquire supporters, only 65.7% of Republicans did so. Fully 93.2% of incumbents had Politicians' Pages, while only 70.8% of candidates for open seats did so, and the percentage for challengers drops to 48.9%.

The independent variables in the models predicting Facebook supporter numbers include four electoral characteristics and four indicators of constituency-demand. Dummy variables were constructed for Democrats, challengers and candidates to open seats, with Republicans and incumbents serving as the reference categories. The indicator of a campaign's financial resources is the total net receipts collected between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2008.¹⁰ The fourth electoral variable is competitiveness of the race. A race was coded as competitive if it had been designated as a toss-up, leaning toward one party, or likely for one party by the *Cook Political Report* on November 3, 2008.¹¹ The indicators for constituency-demand were: (1) the percentage of residents over 24 with a college degree,¹² (2) the percentage of residents classified as white, (3) the percentage residents under 18, and (4) the percentage of residents living in rural areas.¹³

Table 1, column 2 reports the results of this initial model. Neither the percentage of residents living in rural areas nor the percentage of residents classified as white is significant. Table 1, column 2 reports the final model, which eliminates those two variables. The adjusted multiple R squared is negligibly affected (reduced from .205 to .204); the signs of the coefficients are the same and their significance levels are virtually unchanged. The standardized Beta coefficients in the final model show that campaign contributions is the most important variable.¹⁴ Money increases a candidate's visibility, through traditional vehicles like advertising and media coverage. This finding suggests it also affects and is reflected in new media barometers such as Facebook support.

Incumbents (the reference category, hence their negative coefficients) have between 165 and 167 more supporters than challengers and open seat candidates, all else being equal. Incumbency represents a campaign resource that enhances fundraising, name recognition and media coverage, which together explain their high reelection rate in the U.S. House of Representatives. Here we see the advantages of incumbency reflected in Facebook supporter numbers as well. In terms of partisan advantage, the unstandardized coefficient in the final model shows that after controlling for other variables, Democrats have 120 more supporters than Republicans. This is consistent with research showing a Democratic edge in

¹⁰ Data on campaign contributions were obtained from the Federal Election Commission: <<http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/ftpsum.shtml>>.

¹¹ See <http://www.cookpolitical.com/charts/house/competitive_2008-11-03_17-12-33.php>.

¹² Because median income correlates .797 with per cent college educated, it is omitted from the analysis to avoid problems with multicollinearity.

¹³ These data are from the 2000 Census and were obtained from the U.S Bureau of the Census. Residents under age 18 in 2000 would be aged 8 to 26 in 2008, the best available measure for capturing the young voting age population that year.

¹⁴ Dividing the candidates' fundraising receipts by 1,000,000 changes the unstandardized coefficient to 151.603 with a standard error of 23.041.

online campaigning (Rasiej and Sifry, 2008; Stirland, 2007 and Thompson, 2008). It also likely reflects the skewed partisan distribution and relatively youthful demographic of Facebook, which heavily favored Democrats in 2008 (Sabato, 2009).

[Table 1 about here]

Although a higher percentage of college educated increases supporter numbers, a higher percentage of young people has a negative impact on Facebook support. While this latter finding belies the reasoning that more young citizens should increase the pool from which potential Facebook supporters are most likely to be drawn, it is consistent with the traditional pattern of lower voter turnout in this age demographic. Online participatory behaviors such as registering support for candidates on Facebook is similarly depressed in districts with higher percentages of youth. Substituting the percentage of citizens aged 65 and older for the percentage under 18 does not change the other coefficients or their significance levels, and only slightly reduces the overall variance explained: more senior citizens has a positive impact on supporter numbers, but not a statistically significant one. The importance of age is most evident if the percentage of citizens between 18 and 65 years old is substituted, however. Now it is statistically significant ($p < .001$, unstandardized coefficient = 28.668 and standard error = 8.514), with the other coefficients in the model and explained variance virtually unchanged (data not shown).

Calculating separate regression models for incumbents and non-incumbents (challengers plus open seat candidates) essentially replicates these results with the notable exception of competitiveness of the race and percentage under 18 (see Table 2).¹⁵ While competitive races hurt incumbents (who are 62% of the sample of 588 major party candidates in the combined models), competition helps non-incumbents. In the former case, the coefficient is significant at the .10 level, but in the latter case, which has a much smaller sample size, it does not even approach significance. The difference in variation between these groups should be noted: only 21% of incumbents are in competitive races whereas 46% of non-incumbents are. The standardized (Beta) coefficient for non-incumbents' fundraising receipts is, as in all of the models, much larger than those of the other independent variables; more noteworthy is that it is also 50% larger than the Beta coefficient for fundraising in the incumbent model. Money is the one key differentiator for challengers and open seat candidates when it comes to attracting Facebook supporters. The well documented advantages money brings to traditional campaigning apparently spills over into online media as well.¹⁶

[Table 2 about here]

It is reasonable to expect that candidates who have active Facebook pages, either because of their own updating of content or as a result of postings by current supporters, will generate more new supporters as a

¹⁵ Another, but less important difference is that while a high percentage of young people significantly diminishes incumbents' Facebook supporter numbers, that negative impact does not approach significance for challengers and open seat candidates.

¹⁶ Entering an additional variable, the Power Index reported in Roll Call (http://www.congress.org/congressorg/power_rankings/overall.t#house) increases the variance explained to 25%. The coefficients were unchanged with the exception of party, which is no longer significant and becomes negative (-15.168). In other words, some of what the party variable taps in the original incumbent model is a reflection of the members' power; controlling for that, incumbent Republicans do as well, if not a little better, than their Democratic peers in attracting Facebook supporters. Competitiveness of the race, still non-significant, switches to a positive coefficient (11.363), just as it did in the non-incumbent model. The standardized Beta coefficient for Power Index is now twice as large as that for campaign receipts (.336 vs. .175) confirming that there is a power component behind successful fundraising. Power, even more than money, affects Facebook supporter numbers. Power correlates with Facebook supporters +.404 and fundraising correlates +.331; money and power correlate with each other +.237.

result. Facebook makes it easy to notify friends and others in a person's network when new content is published. To capture this broader range of Facebook activity, 200 candidates were randomly selected for a detailed analysis of their profile pages. In that sample, between 100 and 138 of those who had garnered supporters by the end of October also evidenced other Facebook activity through supporters' wall posts, fan photos, or their own posts about campaign events or videos uploads. Difference of means t-tests show that in all four cases, the average number of supporters is higher for those with active pages than for those who had no activity on their pages. Only two of these differences are significant at the .05 level however, wall posts and campaign video uploads (see Table 3).

Wall posts evidences the largest difference in the two groups' supporter numbers, regardless of whether activity is defined as present or absent or by using the median or mean value as the cutpoint. The correlation between Facebook supporter numbers and number of wall posts is +.843. A possible explanation for this finding is that wall posts represent low effort activities. Indeed, all but 7 of the 138 candidates in this sample who have Facebook supporters also have wall posts. Raising the cut point from some vs. none to the median or mean, increases the difference in Facebook supporter numbers between the more active and less active groups. Supporters contribute wall posts and/or vice versa; but enthusiastic supporters, i.e., supporters who generate high numbers of wall posts, are even better. The gap in supporter numbers widens as the criterion for classifying candidates as more active vs. less active recipients of wall posts becomes higher and more restrictive.

There is negligible difference between those with and without fan photo activity. The explanation for this finding applies the same degree of effort principle. Events are time sensitive and thus require continuous updating to keep current. In this sample, only one third of the candidates who have Facebook supporters engaged in this activity. Posting campaign videos was more common: 43% did so. Campaigns that do not engage in an activity that is relatively common and easy to do are penalized in Facebook supporter numbers more than campaigns passing up more time consuming or difficult activities for which there is less peer pressure. We would expect that as more campaigns create a presence on social networks and learn how to use and exploit their features, these differences will become larger and statistically significant, replicating the pattern for supporter wall posts.

[Table 3 about here]

Discussion and Future Research Directions

The variance explained in the regression analyses does not exceed 20 per cent for any of the models, which indicates that important explanatory variables are missing. Much of the difficulty lies in obtaining data that would measure theoretically important constructs for all of the Congressional candidates. We would want to know some specifics about their campaign strategies and activities, both traditional and online. A labor intensive, but potentially fruitful tack would be to count the number of stories mentioning each candidate in local news media outlets and blogs. Detailed analysis of FEC reports might reveal the amount of money campaigns were allocating for advertising and what kinds. Interviews with staff members might elicit the ways and degree to which candidates were promoting and using online media in their campaigns. Campaign event analysis might explain surges in particular candidates' supporter numbers.

This additional data collection and analysis, however, is premised upon the assumption that online support responds to the same influences and in similar ways as do traditional measures of candidate viability and electoral success, poll standings and vote share. There is some evidence this is not the case for online media, at least not for Facebook support as observed in the 2008 Congressional elections. Those who had exceptionally high increases were well known, powerful newsmakers such as Speaker of the House Nancy

Pelosi and Barney Frank, Chairman of the House Financial Services Committee.¹⁷ After the election, Rahm Emanuel, who became White House Chief of Staff, saw a large surge in his Facebook supporters. These outliers notwithstanding, the average monthly increase in supporter numbers for House incumbents has been low (between 4 and 6%) and essentially flat over the four periods for which we have data: June 1, 2008, June 30, 2008, the end of October 2008 and end of June 2009 (see Table 3). In contrast, the presidential candidates' Facebook supporter numbers grew at a strong pace, showing a large surge between the conclusion of the first contests in Iowa and New Hampshire (early January 2008) and the conclusion of the Super Tuesday contests in early February. After that they grew at a slower rate, but were still fueled by the ongoing contest between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and solidification of support behind the presumptive Republican nominee John McCain.

"De-friending" may be fraught with social consequences, but de-supporting politicians seems less so. Losing presidential candidates generally lost Facebook supporters after their primary and caucus defeats (Williams, 2008), but prior to the general election in November, only two House candidates lost supporters. William Jefferson (D, LA, 2nd district) lost only 6, but John Spratt (D, SC, 5th district) lost 189 or 55% of his total for June. Although Congressman Spratt is a social and fiscal conservative, his notoriety seems to stem from a spate of publicity that identified him as the person to whom Former DNC Chair Don Fowler made a joke in poor taste about the disruptive effects of Hurricane Gustav on the Republican National Convention. This provides additional evidence supporting the conclusion that for lower level offices like these House races, only highly publicized events seem to have the capacity to move supporter numbers one direction or the other.

[Table 4 about here]

The major hurdle for research into the role and value of social networks in campaigns currently, however, is that they simply have not yet engaged a sufficient threshold level of supporters. The mean number for major party Senate candidates who created Politicians' pages in 2008 was 4,102, up from 2146 in 2006, and for House candidates it was 573, up from 125 in 2006 (Williams and Gulati, 2009). This limitation is widely recognized by campaign staff members. Their examples of how Facebook was used in their campaigns itemize its use as contacting young voters who use cell phones and are hard to reach, sending out event e-mails to Facebook friends and supporters, finding volunteers who they otherwise would not have been able to reach, and serving as a support group for people who already support the candidate. Campaigns generally made a strategic calculation that it was better to stick with familiar campaign tactics they knew had been used successfully in their districts for past elections.

"In a younger district, Facebook would have played a larger role. For this election, we could not afford to spend too much time beefing up Facebook because press releases and other methods are more important and effective ways of campaigning in this district."¹⁸

Comments from the campaign staff member for the winning incumbent in this 13th Congressional district were nearly identical. Another took a very pragmatic view concluding that, "it wasn't any different or any more than any other part of our campaign, I would guess. The biggest benefit of Facebook is that it is free. So in terms of value, it is probably one of the best things that we can use to connect to voters."¹⁹ Facebook enthusiasts acknowledge the low numbers, but spin them as a positive contribution. "I'd have to say that if

¹⁷ Keith Ellison (D, MN, 5th district) was also among those gaining the most supporters from June to October 2008. He is the first African American elected to Congress from Minnesota and the 1st Muslim to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

¹⁸ "Melissa," campaign staff of Christine Jennings (D-FL).

¹⁹ "Ryan," campaign staff of Roger Wicker

the campaign gained one more vote from Facebook that it beyond doubt improved the campaign.”²⁰ Another expressed a similar sentiment, “Just the fact that over 300 younger generation voters are tied in with the campaign in some way and will receive updates when they are available is a success in and of itself.”²¹

The adoption and sophistication of campaign websites increased over time and disseminated from higher to lower levels of office. Over the course of this evolution, they became campaign tools in their own right and more fully integrated into candidates’ overall campaign strategies (Bimber and Davis, 2003; Klotz, 2004; Chadwick, 2006; Foot and Schneider, 2006; Williams and Gulati, 2006). Based on this study of Facebook, social networks appear to be following a similar trajectory. When candidates began using Facebook in 2006, only 32% of Senate and 13% of House candidates activated profiles (Williams and Gulati, 2007). By 2008, those percentages have increased to 89.6% of Senate and 72.4% of House candidates (Williams and Gulati, 2009). In 2008, it was the presidential candidates, and most notably Barack Obama, who evidenced the most sophisticated use of this new online tool (Stirland, 2008). We expect to see this momentum continue in the 2010 Congressional elections.

Campaign staff members who often expressed skepticism about Facebook’s current value were resigned to, if not sanguine about, its role in future campaigns. These quotations from telephone interviews with over 50 representatives of 2008 Congressional campaigns are illustrative (Williams and Gulati, 2009).

“Right now the campaign is not ready to jump into the Facebook phenomenon. We’re taking a conservative approach and watching closely what other campaigns are doing to make changes in the next election.”²²

“In the next elections... people are going to have to start using it and other online tactics. It’s going to become as basic as cold-calling voters.”²³

“New features are going to always come up, new programs will be developed for it. It was six degrees, then Friendster, MySpace, now Facebook. I think we are going to see this trend continue to grow, whether or not it’s with Facebook or something else I can’t say, but it will definitely be around. I think with more projects and more media attention, campaigns will have no choice but to use this type of technology in their strategies.”²⁴

“Facebook is relatively new compared to the political process and I think that it will become a lot bigger than it is now. It is a very minimal aspect of campaigns now, but as time goes on, Facebook will be more prevalent in every campaign and at every level, whether it is presidential, congressional, gubernatorial, or even for state legislature.”²⁵

²⁰ Campaign staff of Payne

²¹ Campaign staff of Dent

²² “Peter,” campaign staff of Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL).

²³ “Patrick,” campaign staff of Bobby Bright (D-AL)

²⁴ “Shawn,” campaign staff of Parker Griffith (D-AL), telephone interview, October, 20, 2008.

²⁵ “Kurt,” campaign staff of Craig Williams (R-PA)

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Table 1						
OLS Regression Analysis of Facebook Supporters in in the 2008 House Races						
Independent Variables	Initial Model		β	Final Model		β
<i>Party (Republicans=reference category)</i>						
Democrats	121.478 ***		0.121	120.135 ***		0.119
	<i>38.359</i>			<i>37.420</i>		
<i>Incumbency Status (Incumbents=reference category)</i>						
Challengers	-166.768 ***		-0.151	-165.199 ***		-0.150
	<i>47.087</i>			<i>46.556</i>		
Open seat candidates	-169.193 **		-0.096	-166.929 **		-0.095
	<i>70.514</i>			<i>69.874</i>		
Contributions received	0.000 ***		0.300	0.000 ***		0.300
	<i>0.000</i>			<i>0.000</i>		
Competitive seat	-91.106 *		-0.084	-90.308 *		-0.083
	<i>49.325</i>			<i>49.172</i>		
Percent w/college degrees	7.993 ***		0.147	6.294 ***		0.115
	<i>2.73</i>			<i>2.132</i>		
Percent under age 18	-30.273 ***		-0.173	-30.632 ***		-0.175
	<i>7.324</i>			<i>6.725</i>		
Percent white	-0.634		-0.074			
	<i>1.213</i>					
Percent rural	1.411		0.016			
	<i>1.416</i>					
Intercept	761.595 ***			797.563 ***		
	<i>247.671</i>			<i>196.968</i>		
N	588			588		
Adjusted R ²	0.204			0.205		
Standard error	446.135			445.749		
<i>Note: Bold entries are unstandardized coefficients; standard errors are in italics.</i>						
<i>* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001</i>						

Independent Variables	Incumbents	β	Non- Incumbents	β
<i>Party (Republicans=reference category)</i>				
Democrats	142.781 **	0.122	50.152 ¹	0.096
	<i>58.051</i>		<i>32.062</i>	
Contributions received	0.000 ***	0.282	0.000 ***	0.403
	<i>0.000</i>		<i>0.000</i>	
Competitive seat	-131.815 ¹	-0.092	10.182	0.020
	<i>79.601</i>		<i>39.512</i>	
Percent w/college degrees	7.426 *	0.118	3.162 ¹	0.110
	<i>3.281</i>		<i>1.781</i>	
Percent under age 18	-39.556 ***	-0.206	-0.778	-0.008
	<i>9.937</i>		<i>6.201</i>	
Intercept	933.864 ***		4.067	
	<i>303.408</i>		<i>169.126</i>	
N	367		221	
Adjusted R ²	0.179		0.198	
Standard error	526.941		232.674	
<i>Note: Bold entries are unstandardized coefficients; standard errors are in italics.</i>				
<i>* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001</i>				
<i>¹ p < .10</i>				

Updating Activity	Average # Updated	Average # Not Updated	Significance	R2 Supporters & Updating
Wallposts	365.95	83.57	*	0.843
<i>N</i>	131	7	¹	138.000
Fan Photos	355.87	339.88		0.264
<i>N</i>	85	51		136
Campaign videos	357.26	231.18	*	0.125
<i>N</i>	43	57		100
Campaign events	341	244.42		0.126
<i>N</i>	35	65		100
<i>*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001</i>				
¹ <i>Substituting the Mean cutpoint the values are 659.42 vs. 175.40 (p < .001); substituting the Median cupoint, the values are 548.49 vs. 147.24 (p < .001)</i>				

Table 4								
Comparison of Change in Facebook Supporters for Presidential and House Candidates in 2008								
Office	Time 0	Time 1	%Per Month Change	Time 2	%Per Month Change	Time 3	%Per Month Change	Avg Per Month Change
Presidency	20900.29	35459.270	57.6%	74619.13	103.3%	86155.53	30.6%	63.8%
N	15	15		15		15		
House Incumbents	316.46	349.860	4.0%	433.410	6.0%	632.850	5.7%	5.9%
N	179	380		367		320		
<i>Note: Presidency Time 0= Oct. 07, Time 1=Jan. 07, Time 2= Feb. 07, Time 3= Jun. 08</i>								
<i>House Incumbents Time 0=Jun. 08, Time 1=Jun. 30, 08, Time 2= Oct. 08, Time 3=Jun. 09</i>								