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# Presidential Politics: The Social Media Revolution

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# Presidential Politics: The Social Media Revolution

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my grandmother, you understood.
To my parents, you understand.
To my siblings, you will understand.

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I. Introduction

"All we can say today is that there has been created a marvelous agency for whatever use the future may find with the full realization that every great and fundamental discovery of the past has been followed by use far beyond the vision of its creator." – *Herbert Hoover, in reference to the invention of the Television,*[1] *1927*

Social media is without a doubt shaping the future of presidential campaigning in America. The invention of the Internet (a connection of small computer networks to a vast array of computer networks from around the world) has made it possible for people today to create social webs entirely free of physical interaction. In the scope of political campaigning, this notion brings to the table a plethora of new concepts; for starters, online users form an entirely new demographic construction than the typically understood United States voter population. Second, the fundraising game doesn't necessarily depend on who you know but rather how many and finally, the connection of people via social networks online easily translates into volunteer organizations offline. In the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections President Barack Obama watched as the Internet shifted the behaviors and expectations of the American populous, and appropriately realized his campaign strategy needed to reflect those changes. Therefore, this thesis will focus on how the Internet introduced social media and online social networks into politics and how President Barack Obama became the first presidential candidate to seriously integrate social media into his campaign strategy.

Presidential campaigning is one of the most deeply-rooted and arguably contentious traditions in American history. Each campaign is predicted on objectives,

[1] Gallery Four: The Wonder Boy, Herbert Hoover: Presidential Library & Museum, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.hoover.archives.gov/exhibits/Hooverstory/gallery04/.

goals and a new idealized version of what America could be. These concepts are fundamentally relayed via a communications strategy; a system built to convey a campaign message to voters both efficiently and effectively. Understanding the tactics encompassing such a task has been core to the success of presidential campaigns throughout history; the most successful campaigns have been born from a candidate's knowledge of the changing landscape of communication. Although the methods and styles of communication have varied over time, the necessity to convey a message has remained principle to election politics in America. A deeply-rooted tradition of this essential connection is exemplified through American presidencies and campaigns during the course of American history.

**Presidential Communication**

Beginning as early as the mid- 1800's, Presidential candidates utilized symbols, imagery, and song to form a picture of themselves and their campaign messages: "Symbols became commonplace: Abe Lincoln had his split rail, and Theodore Roosevelt became associated with the teddy bear, bull moose, and big stick".[2] Over time, Presidential political campaign tactics evolved. Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower were among the first Presidents to transition coverage of their speeches, news conferences and reports to the nation exclusively from radio to a combination of radio and television. President John F. Kennedy (JFK) used television as a means to convey his political platform and capture his audience. In the 1950's JFK took advantage of many different types of television programming, such as appearances on popular shows or

[2] Richard Wolffe, *The Message* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2013), 81.

panel discussions in order to display his thoughts and ideas directly with television viewers[3]. Kennedy wasn't the first, though, as perhaps one of the most profound examples of the importance of communication in politics came with President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR). In 1924, technological advancements had brought along the age of the radio; at the time there were three million radios in the United States and within the decade that number had grown by more than ten times. Newly elected President FDR recognized the impact the radio could have not only on his political aspirations but also on the way politicians would be able to communicate with Americans forever: "His fireside chats transformed the notion of campaigning, political communication and the powers of the presidency".[4] The radio had a substantial impact on political communication because for the first time the President could be heard from within the comfort of a family's own home creating a sense of intimacy between the President and American families. This intimacy made Americans feel secure, something no other politician at the time could provide. During his 1936 campaign, just two months before the Presidential election, FDR held a fireside chat, one that he began by discussing the many problems he had seen, the ways he would fix these problems and the developments he had made throughout his first term. He wanted to show voters that he had new ideas and expectations for the country in the coming four years.[5] His capacity to utilize the power of the radio and communicate his thoughts and ideas gave him an edge when it

[3] John F. Kennedy and Television, Television and the Red Menace: The Video Road to Vietnam, last modified 2009, http://www.jfredmacdonald.com/trm/ivjfk.htm.
[4] Richard Wolffe, *The Message* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2013), 82- 83.
[5] Franklin Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt: Fireside Chat, The American Presidency Project, last accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15122#axzz2hu3lsaJK.

came to the general election. No other politician of his era was able to harness this medium and effectively communicate to the masses. This innovative approach became a major pillar of his success. Today, President Barack Obama has become the JFK of Television, the FDR of the radio. He is the first candidate and President to attempt to harness the power of electronic media (via the Internet) to communicate and develop relationships with American voters.

**Technology and the Internet's Impact**

In many ways, the core essence of campaigning has remained fairly constant over time; however, there has always been one factor that has made a difference, and that is technology. From the invention of the radio, to the television and now the Internet, technology has grown with time, and so has its influence on campaign communication. The most recent technological shift has been use of the Internet, and the magnitude of its importance on politics has already been made clear. The presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012 were strongly impacted by the utilization of social media, a form of electronic communication using the Internet. Just like many other campaigns in history, 2008 and 2012 were centered on change, the economy and war. Nothing about their messages was entirely new; what was new, however, was the way in which those messages were relayed to the American electorate. Technological advancements created a world where communication between two people could exist entirely without physical contact. Messages and concepts could reach millions of people instantaneously with the click of a button. In the political realm, these changes produced a completely new campaign target, online users. For the 2008 and 2012 elections, the Internet became a campaign battlefield

where the fight for a vote was reduced to "likes," "tweets," and "posts". In the 20th century, campaigning had been mostly a one sided stream of information from the campaigners to the voters. However, social media in the past ten years has allowed for an open dialogue between the candidates and the voters. This two-way street afforded the voter a direct avenue to engage in the conversation, fundamentally transforming the way candidates formulate and execute campaign strategies.[6] Social media has become centrally important to the successful implementation of modern day campaigning much like the emergence of the radio and television were at one point in history (and still are).

To fully understand why and how Internet users have become such a critical target population in the 2008 and 2012 elections it's important to note the Internet's progression over the years and how this mode of communication has become increasingly popular for both voters and non-voters in the United States. In the 1990's Internet communications made it possible to have one-to-many communication with millions of people throughout the nation. Experts could be connected to a far wider audience with high-speed networks and information could be delivered right into the home.[7] At-home Internet use began to expand dramatically in the late 1990's and early 2000's with the introduction of dial-up connections. A report released in 2001 by Pew Internet Project found that 23 million adults were active participants in some sort of online community (a

[6] Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell, "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2012): 1, http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.

[7] Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell, "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2012): 1, http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.

group of users discussing topics of similar interest via the Internet).[8] These online communities developed for a range of different reasons; one such reason was for political engagement, specifically during election seasons. A study done by Pew in 2012 showed that between the 2000 and 2012 elections, there was a 27% increase in the number of Americans who went online for election news.[9] Additionally, Pew found that even from the 2000 presidential election to the 2002-midterm elections, there was a 10% increase in the number of Internet users who actively went online to research a candidate's position on certain critical issues.[10] Voters were beginning to realize that there was a significant source of political information available right at home.

Although the Internet was more accessible than many other sources of political information and became more accepted among voters, in the early 2000's it wasn't the most popular source of election or political information. In 2002, television was still largely the primary source for election news as 66% of all adults watched the television for their primary news source while 33% utilized the newspapers, 13% relied on the radio and only 7% used the Internet.[11] In 2004, the capabilities of Internet connections were again redefined as blogging was introduced to the online world. Writers could create a

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[8] John B. Horrigan, "Obama's Online Opportunities," *Pew Research Journalism Project,* (2008): 1, http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/Obamas-Online-Opportunities/Obamas-Online-Opportunities.aspx.
[9] "Internet Gains Most as Campaign News Source but Cable TV Still Leads," *Pew Research Journalism Project,* (2012): 1, http://www.journalism.org/2012/10/25/social-media-doubles-remains-limited/.
[10] Andrew Kohut and Lee Rainie, "Political Sites Gain, But Major News Sites Still Dominant," *Pew Research Journalism Project,* (2003): 1, http://www.people-press.org/2003/01/05/political-sites-gain-but-major-news-sites-still-dominant/.
[11] Andrew Kohut and Lee Rainie, "Political Sites Gain, But Major News Sites Still Dominant," *Pew Research Journalism Project,* (2003): 2, http://www.people-press.org/2003/01/05/political-sites-gain-but-major-news-sites-still-dominant/.

homepage with their thoughts and experiences prompting many-to-many societal conversations. In 2004, Presidential candidate Howard Dean was the first to incorporate this idea of blogging into his campaign strategy by organizing meetup.com[12] on his campaign website. This made it easy for people with common interests to find each other and arrange meetings face to face.[13] Although much of the content in these online blogs was about the user's personal life, it sparked the age of blogging and the use of the Internet to harvest conversations and communication between people on opposite sides of the country, and even the world[14]. As the Internet became a more popular information hub, political organizations began to shift their focus toward online forms of communication.

By the 2008 campaign, candidate websites were standard for communicating campaign news to citizens. In this election cycle, Hilary Clinton announced her candidacy on her web page and Barack Obama announced his running mate, Joe Biden, via text message to mobile phone users. President Obama also used his website to generate a grass roots campaign to build on John McCain's effort in the 2000 Republican

[12] Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell, "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2012): 4, http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.
[13] Micah Sifry, From Howard Dean to the Tea Party: The Power of Meetup.com, CNN.com, last modified November 7, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/07/tech/web/meetup-2012-campaign-sifry/index.html.
[14] John B. Horrigan, "Obama's Online Opportunities," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2008): 1, http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/Obamas-Online-Opportunities/Obamas-Online-Opportunities.aspx.

primary and Howard Dean's 2004 Presidential campaign[15]. These fundraising approaches were predicated on the notion of raising large sums of money by attracting many donors with each contributing in small amounts[16]. By 2012 voters had become far more comfortable with the Internet making it an enormously important medium through which candidates communicate campaign information. A study by Pew in 2012 found that presidential candidates intensively used their websites as the social hub for their campaigns. Many of the links on other social networking sites led directly back to their main websites putting much focus and attention on the campaign's key messages and talking points.[17] The Internet has been a positive experience for both candidates and voters. A study by Pew in 2013 found that 34% of adults recently contacted a government official or spoke out in a public forum online.[18] More recently, people have slowly been moving away from traditional forms of communication with government officials and more towards online methods. For example, a Pew study in 2012 found that 22% of American adults signed a paper petition while 17% signed a petition online. Also, 21% of American adults contacted a government official about an issue in person, by phone or by

[15] James A. Barnes, "Online Fundraising Revolution," National Journal, last modified April 19, 2008, http://www.nationaljournal.com/magazine/online-fundraising-revolution-20080419.
[16] Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell, "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2012): 4, http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.
[17] Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell, "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2012): 3, http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.
[18] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2013): 3, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

letter while 18% did so online, by email or by text message. Additionally, 7% of American adults called into a live radio or television show to express their opinions and 18% commented on an online news story or blog post about those issues.[19] Over time, people have begun to rely more and more on online channels to express their opinions on certain political issues, especially those pertaining to presidential campaigns.

**Social Networking Sites (SNSs)**

At the center of the most recent online revolution, which began to pick up speed in 2008, are social networking sites (SNSs). Social networking sites consist of websites and applications ("apps") such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube whereby users can engage in conversation online with groups of people in their social networks. The users on these SNSs have increase dramatically from 33% of the population in 2008 to 69% of the population in 2012.[20] Thus, these mediums have become major forums for presidential candidates. In 2008, 60% of Internet users went online for news about politics or the campaign. Additionally, 38% of Internet users went online to discuss politics with other users throughout the course of the campaign and a full 59% used social media tools such as email, instant messaging, text messaging and

[19] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project, (2013): 3, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[20] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2013): 7, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

Twitter to share or receive campaign information.[21] In 2012, 66% of SNS users took part in some sort of political activity on an SNS and 39% of all American adults did so.[22] Accordingly, the significance of these sites has grown from 2008 to 2012 and will continue to grow as time progresses. In 2008, 3% of all adults said they had "friended" a political candidate on these sites and by 2012 that number had grown to 12%. Additionally, in 2008, 3% of all adults indicated that they had started or joined a group on a social networking site organized around political or social issues and by 2012 that number had jumped to 12%.[23] These sites are in some ways a more advanced version of blogging, making them the latest and greatest form of communication in today's fast paced world. One reason is that they allow users to post opinions faster, and receive responses directly from handheld smart phones almost instantaneously. Furthermore, there are word limits on the posts for many of these sites forcing people to be concise with their messaging making it easier to read multiple opinions or comments within a shorter span of time. Most SNS user sites allow embedded URL's ("Uniform Resource Locator", the address of a specific website or file on the Internet) to other sites making them a fairly good resource for pointing users to other information on the web. SNSs are a faster and more efficient way for people to keep in touch, instead of catching up on the phone; posting on Facebook takes minutes and allows those closest to us to know what's

[21] Aaron Smith, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2009): 1, http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/6--The-Internets-Role-in-Campaign-2008/1--Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[22] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2013): 3, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[23] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," *Pew Research Journalism Project*, (2013): 7, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

happening in our lives. This year (2013) in the U.S., there are 49 million monthly active Twitter users[24] and 1.1 million monthly Facebook users.[25] Additionally, the average U.S. citizen spends 16 minutes out of every hour online on social networking sites or forums.[26] For these reasons, political candidates in the 2008 and 2012 elections, especially President Barack Obama, began to introduce themselves on many of these sites, just as President John F. Kennedy desired to be cordial on television and FDR to be dynamic on the radio. SNSs and other forms of social media have grown in popularity and will continue to grow as the age of technology advances even further and faster. Accordingly, a candidates understanding of how to capture this new online audience has proven to be pivotal in the success of presidential campaigns.

**Building the Team**

The story of President Barack Obama's success in social media campaigning begins with his tech team. In the 2012 Election, President Barack Obama's campaign, Organize for Action (OFA), underspent Mitt Romney's campaign on IT products and services by $14.5 million, spending that money instead on an internal IT staff. An analysis on the Federal Election Commission (FEC) filings found that President Barack Obama's Campaign spent $9.3 million on technology services and consulting and $2

[24] Jay Yarow, Twitter Has A Surprisingly Small Number of US Users, Business Insider, last modified October 4, 2013, http://www.businessinsider.com/twitter-has-a-surprisingly-small-number-of-us-users-2013-10.
[25] Facebook Statistics, Statistic Brian, last modified June 23, 2013, http://www.statisticbrain.com/facebook-statistics/.
[26] Matt Tatham, For Every Hour Online Americans Spend 16 Minutes on Social Networks, Experian Marketing Services, last modified April 18, 2013, http://www.experian.com/blogs/marketing-forward/2013/04/18/for-every-hour-online-americans-spend-16-minutes-on-social-networks/.

million on internal technology related payroll. The Mitt Romney Campaign on the other hand spent $23.6 million on outside technology services including “digital media” consulting and data management; Romney’s campaign chose to outsource much of its technology services, President Obama decided to build his own tech team. OFA’s staff amounted to over 1,000 people where Romney’s was around 510. Among Obama’s 1,000 staffers, 30-40% were in the data and technology departments.[27] The key message here is that Obama decided to invest in people and their knowledge instead of equipment and products. Obama had some of the brightest minds in new media on his staff including Joe Rospars, his New Media Director in 2008 and Chief Digital Strategist in 2012. Rospars is also a cofounder of Blue State Digital, the software tool that guided Obama’s social media game by instigating community-building, engagement and mobilization all within Obama’s campaign website and social media tools . Additionally, the Obama team included Facebook Co-founder Chris Hughes  and the 2012 Chief Technology Officer and spearhead of Narwhal (the code name for Obama’s High-Tech Media platform which built complete data profiles of supporters ), Harper Reed . Because social media is still a new tool in presidential campaigning, there was really no “right way” to organize their social media strategy, but by hiring right and investing in his own team, President Barack Obama was able to compile his own data and make assertions and plans based on internal ideas rather than through outsourced and unfamiliar strategies.

[27] “Inside The Cave,” EndageDC, 2013, http://engagedc.com/download/Inside%20the%20Cave.pdf.

**Social Media Defined**

Social media can be defined in many different ways but for the purpose of this paper I will define it as: all forms of electronic communication that people can use to create online communities in order to share thoughts, ideas or any other content.[28] Types of social media included in this paper are SNS, text messages to mobile phones, email, videos, blogs or websites.

**Is Social Media a Worthwhile Campaign Investment for Presidential Candidates?**

Social media is the newest form of communication; therefore a Presidential candidate who learns how to harness it will have the highest potential to be successful in his or her political endeavors. This paper will analyze how social media has become one of the most critical communication strategies (by looking closely at the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections) and why it is crucial that presidential candidates understand how to use and employ it. To do so, I will emphasize three major topics; First, I will evaluate the target online audiences by looking at differing demographic groups such as age, race, education, economic status, gender and party affiliation. Taking a closer look at how these groups differ not only by voting patterns, but also by online political use will illustrate correlations that help shape online campaign strategies centered on the most engaged and most important (in terms of voter turnout) demographic groups online. Second, I will explore how online campaigning has shaped a new age in campaign fundraising. By observing the successes and failures of campaign fundraisers by John

[28] Social Media, Merriam- Webster: An Encyclopedia Britannica Company, accessed November 5, 2012, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media.

McCain in 2000, Howard Dean in 2004 and President Obama in 2008 and 2012, a deeper knowledge of what it takes to fund a campaign on millions of smaller donations becomes apparent. Moreover, I will discuss how the traditional form of campaigning on the ground, (ground wars) have become mixed with the more modern, technological and Internet based version, air wars. By observing similarities and differences between the two I will illustrate how modern Internet based campaigning actually furthered more traditional ground organization as well as online mobilization campaign strategies and how this was helpful in getting more voters to the polls. By attacking these areas I hope to answer three overarching questions: 1) Has social media proven to be effective at increasing voter turnout? (2) Can social media increase an electorate's political engagement by building online communities constructed for political purposes? (3) Through the evaluation of the above two questions, is social media an advisable campaign strategy for future Presidential candidates?

II. Demographics

An overwhelming fact is that 78% of all U.S. adults were online in some way in 2012, but that fact, in and of itself, is not enough to build an online campaign roadmap.[29] Understanding the how, when and why of these users from a demographic point of view can provide keen insights towards deploying an effective and efficient campaign strategy. By looking closely at online users, candidates can target groups that are more likely to read and engage in information posted online. Additionally, the 2012 presidential campaign was the first time two major political party candidates and their supporters exceeded the $1 billion mark in political advertising expenditures, significantly more than the $700 million spent on the 2008 Presidential campaign and the $620 million spent on the 2004 campaign.[30] Thus, by observing how different groups of people use various types of online social media and noting what the frequency of that use is, we can begin to determine how social media can help shape a candidate's messaging to fit the political views of certain demographic voters and potentially increase that group's voter turnout rate. In order for communication to be effective it needs to be tailored to the interests and tendencies of specific users, and online communities. Much like any other demographic group, online communities are no exception. This paper will focus its demographic analysis on: age, race, education, economic status, gender and party affiliation. By analyzing the voter trends of these groups as well as levels of online engagement, I will determine if there are connections that point to positive changes in voter turnout or

[29] Demographics, New Media Trend Watch, last modified June 29, 2013, http://www.newmediatrendwatch.com/markets-by-country/17-usa/123-demographics.
[30] Robert E. Denton, jr, ed., *The 2012 Presidential Campaign* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2014), 78-79.

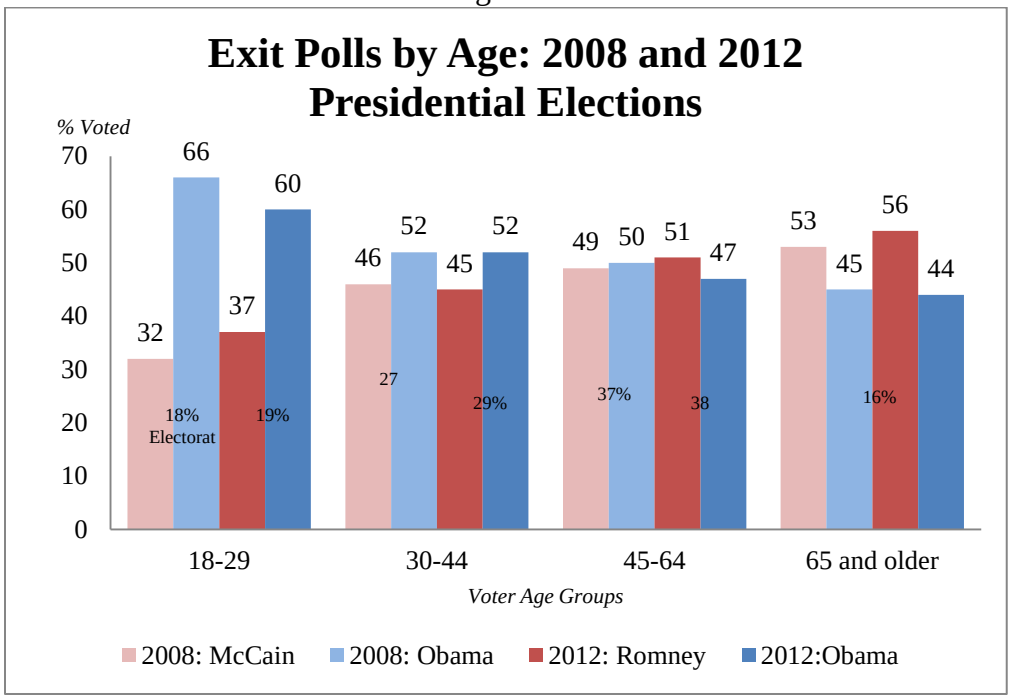
increased political activity online, and specifically in those groups that are not typically involved in "traditional" forms of political activism.

**Younger vs. Older Voters**

"Young adults are the least likely to engage in traditional forms of political activity but the most likely to take advantage of technologically enhance forms of participation"- Shanto Iyengar, Professor of Political Science, Stanford University.[31] Much of the research in recent years has shown that younger generations are more likely than older generations to be online; and what is equally true is that they are overwhelmingly more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate. Dating as far back to the 1992 election, younger voters have supported the Democratic candidate.[32] In recent years, this correlation has held true.

[31] Robert E. Denton, jr, ed., The 2012 Presidential Campaign (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2014), 134.
[32] "Election Results 2008," New York Times, last modified November 5, 2008, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html.

Figure: 1




Source: New York Times

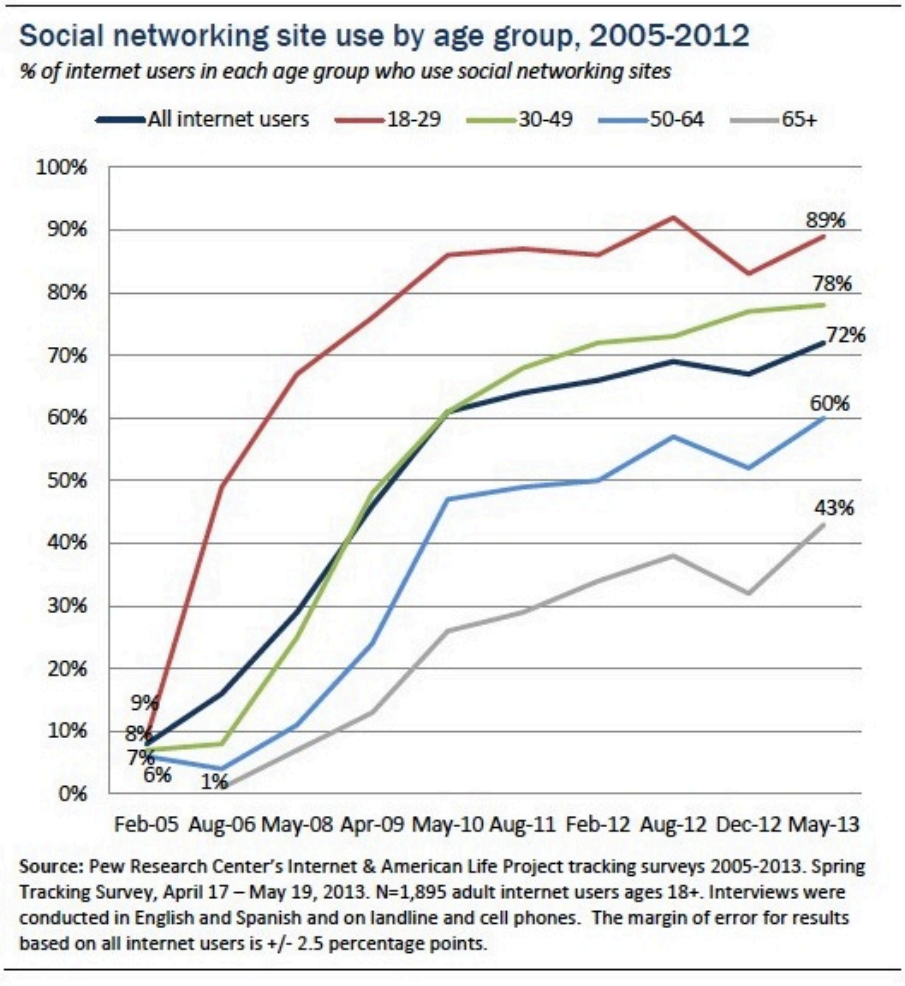
The Exit Poll data illustrated above (Figure 1) shows the differences in votes by specified age groups for President Barack Obama and John McCain in 2008 and President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in 2012. In the 2008 election, President Barack Obama won 66% of the vote among those younger than thirty and in 2012 he won 60% of those votes; in both years he won by substantial margins. Additionally, in both 2008 and 2012 he also won the 30-44 age group by a margin of 5% in 2008 and 6% in 2012. From 2008 to 2012, older voters tended to support the Republican candidate more as 45% of the electorate age 65 and older voted for President Obama in 2008 compared to 53% who broke for John McCain. In 2012 the gap between the candidates for older generations widened slightly, with 44% of those over 65 voting for President Obama and

56% for Mitt Romney. For the 45-64 demographic, President Barack Obama had a slight lead in 2008 but lost this group to Mitt Romney in 2012.[33]

Although Obama lost 6% of the 18-29 voters from 2008 to 2012, he still maintained a sizable lead of 24 points over his opponent in 2012. What was perhaps most crucial to his overall victory was not only that younger voters comprised a substantial share of the total electorate in both of his elections but also, when compared to the 2000 election, this younger group composed a larger share of the total percent of the electorate; the age group 18-29 accounted for 19% of the total electorate in 2012[34] and in 2000, they composed only 15%.[35] Because President Obama dominated the younger vote in 2008 and 2012, the question then becomes, how influential was his online campaign in reaching and engaging these voters and did it result in his success with this age group at the polls (or were younger voters more inclined to vote for President Barack Obama for reasons unrelated to the Internet)?

[33] "President Exit Polls," New York Times, accessed November 5, 2013, http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/results/president/exit-polls.
[34] "President Exit Polls," New York Times, accessed November 5, 2013, http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/results/president/exit-polls.
[35] "Election 2000," Polling Report, accessed November 26, 2013, http://www.pollingreport.com/2000.htm.

Figure: 2




The Internet and social media have typically been tools used predominantly by younger generations. For example, 97% of all American adults ages 18-29 use the Internet; 53% of those age 65 and older do the same.[36] Further, exemplified by Figure 2, from 2005 to 2013 younger generations of Internet users have remained the primary users of social networking sites. In 2013, there was almost twice the number of adult Internet user's ages 18-29 who were active on SNS as there were adults ages 65 and older on

[36] Kathryn Zickuhr and Mary Madden, "Older Adults and Internet Use," *Pew Research Journalism Project* (2012), http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Older-adults-and-internet-use/Main-Report/Internet-adoption.aspx.

these sites. Because of this discrepancy between older and younger Internet users, it is no wonder that younger Internet users are more likely to also be more active political participants online than their older counterparts. For example, a study conducted on the 2010 mid-term elections found that 67% of those that were of the ages 18-29 demographics were online political users, 61% were 30-49, 53% were 50-64 and 26% were 65 and older.[37] Additionally, the same study found that 36% of 18-29 year olds used the Internet as a main source of campaign or election news compared with 29% who were 30-49 years old, 18% who were 50-64 and 7% who were 65 and older.[38] Younger SNS users were also more likely to use SNS such as Facebook and Twitter for political purposes, for instance, younger SNS using voters were significantly more likely than older SNS users (ages 18- 29 vs. age 30 and above) to be active on online social media sites in such ways as: liking or promoting political material, posting thoughts on issues, reposting political content, encouraging others to act, posting links to political stories, belonging to political groups on SNS or following officials or candidates on social media.[39] Further, a Pew research study on the 2012 election found that 44% of adults age 18-24 communicate or speak out publicly about political issues online compared to 22% of adults age 65 and older.[40] Younger voters are also more likely to use a broader range

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[37] Aaron Smith, "The internet and campaign 2010," *Pew Research Journalism Project* (2011): 8, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/The-Internet-and-Campaign-2010/Summary.aspx.

[38] Ibid, 10.

[39] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Politics on Social Networking Sites," *Pew Research Journalism Projects* (2012): 5, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Politics-on-SNS/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

[40] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," *Pew Research Journalism Project* (2013): 5-6, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

of online communication than older voters. This is supported by a Pew study in 2012 which found that 71% of Internet- using registered voters aged 18-49 viewed some type of political video during the 2012 election cycle compared to 64% of those ages 50-64 and 57% of those 65 plus.[41] Additionally, Internet users between the ages of 18-25 posted pictures or videos online related to political or social issues, 7% more than 25-34 year olds and 16% more than people over the age of 65.[42] Another avenue of online communication that political candidates should pay attention to pertaining to this demographic group is smartphone users. For starters, 56% of all U.S. adults access information and communicate across various social media sites from their handheld phones. Among smartphone users who were politically active using online channels, younger voters seemed to be linked to their phones more than older generations. For example, smartphone users between the ages of 18-49 are significantly more likely than smartphone users older than 50 to: "read other people's political comments on a social networking site (52% vs. 30%), to post their own comments on a social networking site (22% vs. 12%) and to use their phone to look up further information about political statements they have heard (43% vs. 19%)".[43] Pertaining specifically to election periods, 24% of cell phone users between the ages of 18 and 29 used their phones to keep up with

[41] Aaron Smith and Maeve Duggan, "Online Political Videos and Campaign 2012," Pew Research Journalism Project (2012): 4, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Election-2012-Video/Key-Findings.aspx.
[42] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 23, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[43] Aaron Smith and Maeve Duggan, "The State of the 2012 Election- Mobile Politics," Pew Research Journalism Project (2012): 7, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Election-2012-Mobile/Overview.aspx.

news related to the election or other political issues while only 16% of the 30 to 49 demographic, 12% of the 50 to 64 demographic and 6% of 65 and older adults did so.[44]

Although younger voters dominate the social media stage, older users are beginning to catch up. The implication is that the Internet is not going to just be a phase of the younger generations; older users realize its practicality and are thus beginning to close the gap. The use of Facebook, Twitter and Google+ has increase greater than 100% for adults aged 55 to 64.[45] Furthermore, referencing again Figure 2, 60% of the Internet users between the ages of 50 and 64 and 43% of online adults over 65 are now SNS users compared to 6% and 1% respectively in 2005.[46] Older generations are not as active as younger generations on SNS; however, they use email and online news sites far more frequently than in the past. For example, 92% of all older Internet users (50-64) and 89% of all senior Internet users (64 and older) send or read email daily. Additionally, 76% of older adults get their news online and 42% of those adults do so daily. Finally, among seniors, 62% look for news online and 34% do so every day.[47]

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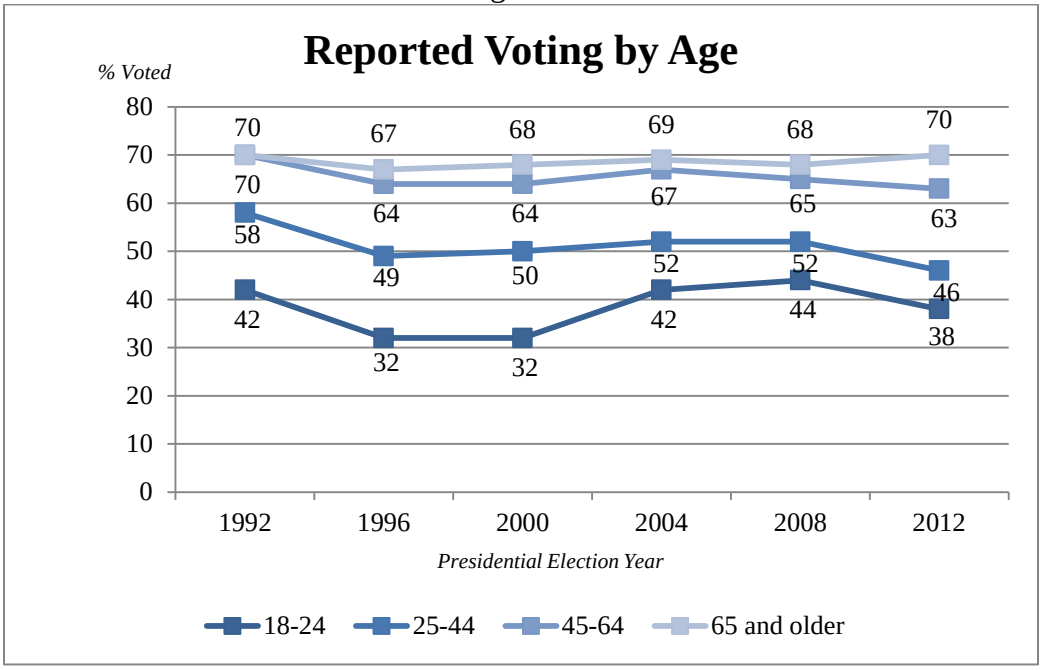
[44] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Politics Goes Mobile," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2010): 5, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Mobile-Politics/Report.aspx.
[45] Jeff Bullas, "12 Awesome Social Media Facts and Statistics for 2013," *JeffBullas.com Blog*, http://www.jeffbullas.com/2013/09/20/12-awesome-social-media-facts-and-statistics-for-2013/.
[46] Joanna Brenner, "Pew: Internet: Social Networking," *Pew Research Journalism Projects* (2013), http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/March/Pew-Internet-Social-Networking-full-detail.aspx.
[47] Frederic Lardinois, "Social Networking Use Doubles Among Older Internet Users," Readwrite, last modified August 27, 2010, http://readwrite.com/2010/08/27/social_networking_use_doubles_among_older_internet_users#awesm=~onL4hTp3Bdx0Jj.

Figure: 3




Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Social media has allowed younger voters to become more politically involved than ever before. For instance, younger voters have typically had lower turnout rates than older voters. As shown in Figure 3, younger voters (age 18-24) have remained well below the voter turnout rates among the other three age groups (25-44, 45-64 and 65 and older). On the other hand, even in the most recent elections (2008 and 2012) voter turnout for those 65 and older remained over 30% higher (note in the graph that voter turnout for the younger age groups decline from 2008 to 2012).

These trends can be understood to exist for various reasons. For starters, younger people tend to travel more making them harder to track and mobilize for political activities. Younger voters also tend to be undergoing major life transitions such as starting families and settling into jobs which place large amounts of stress on the

individual causing depressed voting and political action.[48] However, the Internet has allowed younger citizens to move around these obstacles via social media and mobile devices affording them more time and freedom to express themselves politically. To conclude this section, although social media did not increase overall voter turnout for younger generations, it did play a large role in getting younger citizens more politically involved despite a lack of time. Further, it can be assumed that social media had some sort of effect, whether small or large on President Obama's younger voter turnout in the polls. Because Obama put a lot of his campaign focus online where younger generations are most active, he was able to target this audience which resulted in huge victories for him in this age group. In the future, it would be useful for presidential candidates to be mindful of the impact younger users have on the online political community and how communication online can translate into votes, as it did for Obama.

**Race**

Another significant consideration for understanding online demographic groups is race. In this section, I will focus primarily on differences between Whites and African Americans as they are the most politically active racial groups online and at the polls. To begin, I will analyze how the percent of the electorate for both groups changed from the 2000 election to 2012 as well as how the vote by race broke down by candidate in the 2008 and 2012 elections. For starters, in 2000 White voters composed 80% of the overall racial vote and in 2012 they decreased in share to 72%. Conversely, in 2000 African

[48] John Sides et al., *Campaigns & Elections*, (New York: Norton & Company, Inc, 2012), 336-337.

Americans were 9% of the total share of votes and in 2008 as well as 2012 they were 13%. What is more, in the 2008 election, 55% of White Americans voted for John McCain versus 43% for President Barack Obama.[49] In 2012, President Obama saw a decline in White voters to 39% while 59% voted for Mitt Romney.[50] Further, in the 2008 election, 95% of African Americans voted for President Obama and 4% for John McCain.[51] In 2012, these numbers were about the same with 93% voting for Obama and 6% for Romney.[52] In totality, White voters were the most crucial demographic group to win as they comprised about two thirds of the total electorate in both 2008 and 2012. However, despite their total share of the electorate, African American voters proved to be virtually as important to Obamas' victory as their strength at the polls for both his elections increased. For example, as discussed above, the percentage of the White vote has been declining since 2000 and the share of African American voters has been increasing. Although this has been happening slowly, trends indicate a shift towards equality in the share of the vote by race as well as a significant increase in the share of the African American vote during Obama's two elections. What further indicates the importance of the African American vote for President Obama is that White voters tended to support the Republican candidate far more making them almost impossible for a Democratic candidate to win in these elections: there was a 10 point difference of

[49] "Election Results 2008," New York Times, last modified November 5, 2008, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html.
[50] "President: Full Results," CNN Politics, last modified December 10, 2012, http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/race/president.
[51] "Election Results 2008," New York Times, last modified November 5, 2008, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html.
[52] "President: Full Results," CNN Politics, last modified December 10, 2012, http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/race/president.

White votes between Obama and McCain in the 2008 election and a 20 point difference in the 2012 election. Thus, a major source of President Obama's success is found in the breakdown of his voters by race; 58% of Obama's votes were White and 25% were African American. Conversely, for Romney 91% of his vote's came from White voters and 1.6% were from African Americans.[53] Thus, as will be discussed, Obama's support of African American voters online was crucial to his success at the polls and as they proved to be an essential demographic group to build a strong social media campaign around.

By observing the racial demographics of Presidential voting trends and comparing them to online use and specifically political online use, trends between voter participation and online activity begin to emerge. Overall, White voters tend to be more politically active online than any other racial group. For example, 46% of Whites discuss politics or public affairs online via email, text or SNS versus 36% of African Americans.[54] Additionally, 69% of White SNS users are active on social networking sites compared to 62% of African Americans.[55] Further, 21% of SNS users belong to a group on an SNS that is involved in political or social issues and among that group, 24% are Whites, 13%

[53] Thom File, 2013, "The Diversifying Electorate-Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in
2012 (and Other Recent Elections)," Current Populations Survey Reports, P20-569. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.
[54] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 29, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[55] Ibid, 23.

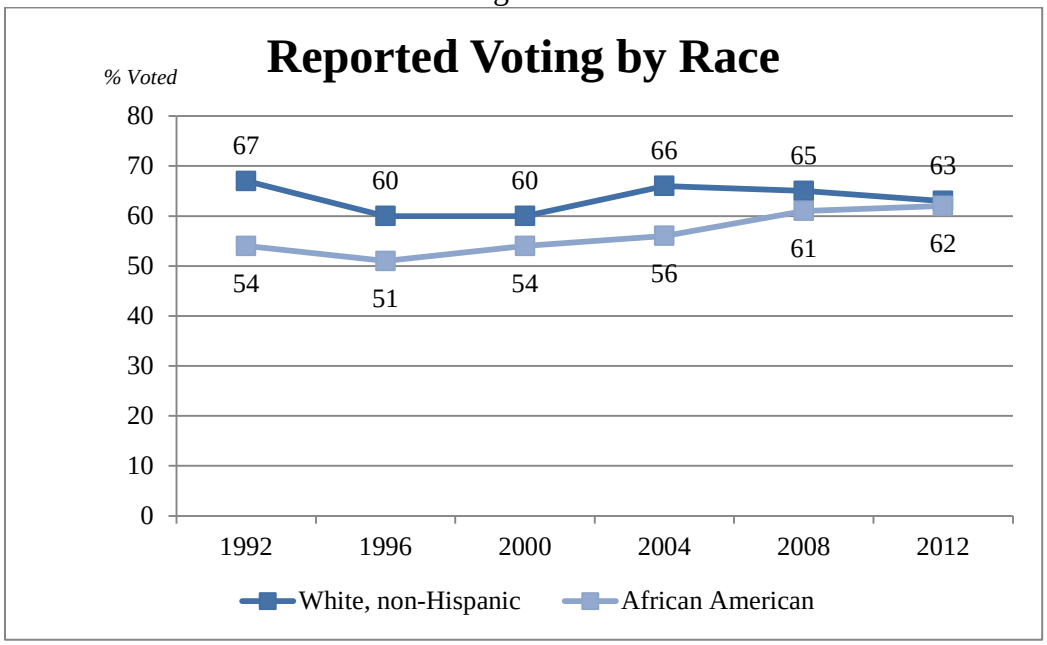
are African Americans and 12% are Hispanics.[56] These are only a few of the many examples which demonstrate that Whites are more likely to be politically active online in various ways. However, almost completely across the board, African Americans follow very closely behind Whites in these online political domains and have even begun to catch up in recent years. For example, from the spring of 2004 to the spring of 2008, the percent of all White voters that looked online for news and information about politics or the campaigns increased by 8%, however, for African Americans, there was a 21% increase. Further, the "digital divide" (the gap between those that have access to technical devices and those that don't) is shrinking among the African American population in the United States. This is true for both African American smartphone users and broadband consumers. From 2009 to 2012 the gap between Whites and African Americans with broadband narrowed from 19 points to 11 points with the percentage of African Americans with broadband increasing by 10%.[57] This means that more, African Americans are beginning to access the Internet and are thus becoming more engaged online. What is more, African Americans are taking further political action online on their smartphone's; 36% of all African American adults used their cell phones for political activities during the 2010 midterm election while 25% of Whites and 25% of Hispanics did so.[58] Moreover, African American SNS users are more likely than White or Hispanic users to say that political sites are important for politics; 38% of the African

[56] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Social Media and Political Engagement," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2012): 4, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Political-engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[57] Demographics, NewMedia TrendWatch, last modified Jun 29, 2013, http://www.newmediatrendwatch.com/markets-by-country/17-usa/123-demographics.
[58] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Politics Goes Mobile," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2010): 4, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Mobile-Politics/Report.aspx.

American SNS population believes that SNS are important for debating political issues with others while only 30% of Whites and 21% of Hispanics believe the same to hold true, 48% of African Americans believe SNS are important for keeping up with political news versus 33% of Whites and finally, 42% of African Americans find SNS are very important for finding other people who share their views about important political issues compared with 22% of Whites.[59] Thus, whether or not African Americans were using online political tools more than Whites is irrelevant to the fact that they place higher value on the importance of the information that is coming from online political sources. Thus, the African American population online has become increasingly more aware of the resources available to them online and as a result they have begun to play a more politically active role.

[59] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Politics on Social Networking Sites," Pew Research Journalism Project (2012): 9, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Politics-on-SNS/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

Figure: 4




Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Through social media, African American voters have been given a platform to communicate politically unlike any communications medium they have used before. Since the passing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, African American voter turnout has drastically increased.[60] As shown in the above graph (Figure 4), African American voter turnout has not only increased by 8 percentage points since 1992, but in 2008 and 2012, it almost corresponded to the White voter turnout rate.[61] Although this change can be attributed to the fact that an African American was running for the Presidency, there is a lot to say about the significance of the online political experience created for this racial group. As studies above show, African Americans were extremely active online (and in many cases, comparable to Whites) despite economic and educational differences when

[60] John Sides et al., Campaigns & Elections, (New York: Norton & Company, Inc, 2012), 334.
[61] "Reported Voting and Registration by Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age Groups: November 1964 to 2012." Voting and Registration, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013. Web.

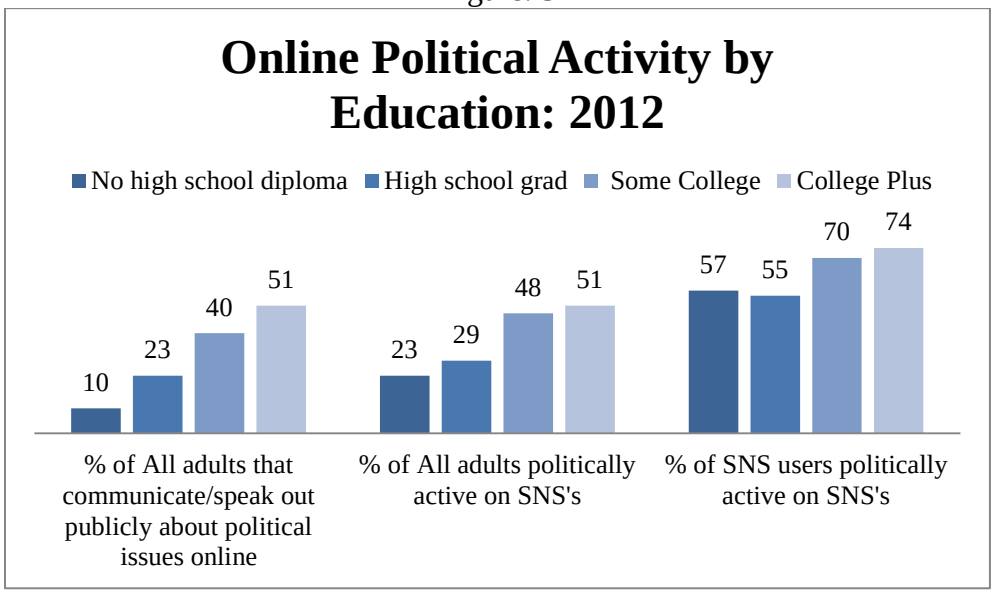
compared to White voters. One explanation for this phenomenon is that social media has created a virtual world where a person's economic status, race, age, gender or education is not the first impression a user develops about another user online. Because of this country's history of slavery and racism against African Americans, the idea that a thought or opinion can be shared online without preexisting judgments on race gives African Americans a secure place to freely express their point of view. Therefore, this shift in social communication had the ability to change the way race interplays with political activity in Presidential elections.

To conclude this section, by evaluating the past two election cycles, White voters were the most important demographic group for candidates to win via social media and the Internet. However, African American voters have become a more significant racial group online, and were therefore crucial for Obama to engage on the Internet. Reasons for their importance were not only that they made up a quarter of his voting population, but that they are also beginning to rival White voters in using online sources as viable and central political (specifically for election period) news and communication hubs. On the flip side of the argument, because both McCain and Romney won the White vote by fairly significant margins, they (Whites) made up about three quarters of the voting population and they (Whites) were more politically active online, it would have been highly successful for both candidates to have integrated a more dynamic online campaign strategy directed toward the White voters by breaking down their vote. With this in mind, it's clear that Republican and Democratic candidates alike need to be ready and willing to attack this online demographic group in the future.

**Education and Wealth**

"Traditional political activities are most common among the well-educated and financially well-off, regardless of whether they take place online or offline. On social networking sites, income-related differences are most modest- but civic engagement in these spaces is still most prevalent among those with higher educational levels".[62] In both the 2008 and 2012 elections, education and income were high indicators of civic engagement; they correlated especially high with online civic engagement activities.

Figure: 5




Source: Pew Research Journalism Center

As exemplified by the graph above (Figure 5), 10% of all adults who communicated or spoke publicly about political issues online in the 2012 election had little high school education and 51% had a college degree or more. Among adults that were politically active explicitly on social networking sites, 23% had no high school

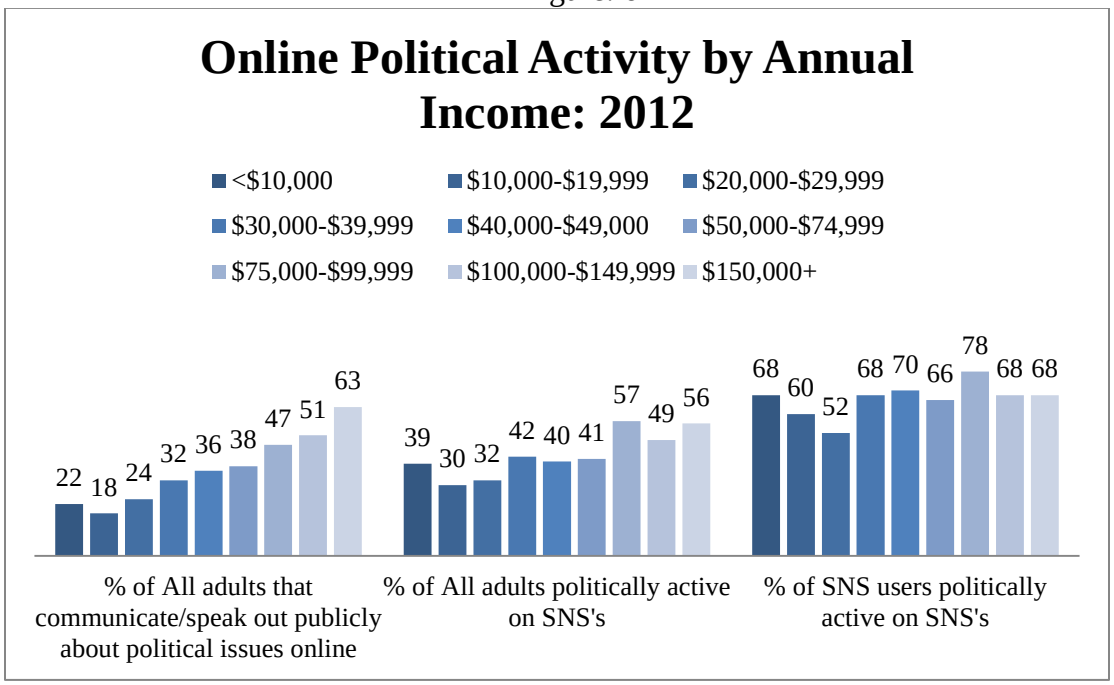
[62] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 4, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

diploma and 51% had a college degree. Finally, observing adults who declared themselves SNS users in the study and used social networking sites to express political thoughts and opinions, 57% had little high school education and 74% had a college degree (to clarify, online users and SNS users differ in this poll, as "online users" refers to users of email, news websites, SNS's etc., while SNS users encompass only those that are on sites such as Facebook and Twitter). In all three types of online political engagement ((1) percentage of adults that are politically active online, (2) percentage of adults that are politically active on SNS, (3) percentage of SNS users that are politically active on SNS), those with higher education levels tended to be more active in these activities than those with less education. An interesting note about this poll was that even though those with a higher education were more likely to use SNS, there was a 13% increase in the number of adults with little high school education who used online resources to express their political opinions versus those who noted using specifically SNSs to do so (The education group "No high school diploma" increased from 10% in the graph measuring the percent of adults that communicate or speak out publically about political issues online to 23% in the middle graph measuring the percent of all adults politically active on SNS). This illustrates that SNS sites were more popular among the less educated than other social media venues because those with little high school education were more likely to say they used SNS specifically more than that they used online resources in general to express political activism.[63] Therefore, if a campaign wished to target low information voters, SNS sites are a better option for doing so as

[63] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 4-6, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

there is a higher chance of reaching this type of voter on SNS than any other social media site.

Figure: 6




Source: Pew Research Journalism Project

Wealth was also an extremely important factor when it came to political activism online. Looking at a similar graph above (Figure 6), 22% of adults who had an income of less than $10k communicated or spoke publicly about political issues online and 63% who had an annual income of more than $150k did the same. Additionally, 39% of all adults who had an annual household income of less than $10k were politically active only on social networking sites; as were 56% with a household income of more than $150k. Finally, 68% of adults with an annual income of less than $10k as well as 68% who had an annual income of more than $150k were SNS users who were politically active on

social networking sites.[64] This data indicates that the wealthier the electorate, the more likely they were going to be active not only online, but also on SNS sites. What is interesting about these figures is that the percent of SNS users who were politically active on SNS sites remained the same for both the highest and lowest income levels. This underlines the fact that SNS users who were active on SNSs were not hindered from being politically active on SNSs because of income differences. Another study found that 17% of political SNS users engage only in political activity on SNS sites and no other online or offline venues. These users tended to be younger, less well-off and less educated than those that participate in other online and offline venues. They also tended to only be mildly invested in the conversations going on, on these SNS sites compared to those that are also involved in other forms of political activism.[65] This furthers the point that SNS sites used for political purposes are inclined to be populated by those with less education and less wealth than other online sources of political activity.

Those with higher wealth and education are also more likely to be politically active in a range of different ways online; 75% of Internet-using registered voters with a college degree watched online political videos compared with 62% of those voters who had some college experience and 60% who did not attend college at all.[66] Additionally, 52% of adults with a household income of less than $50k used their cell phones for

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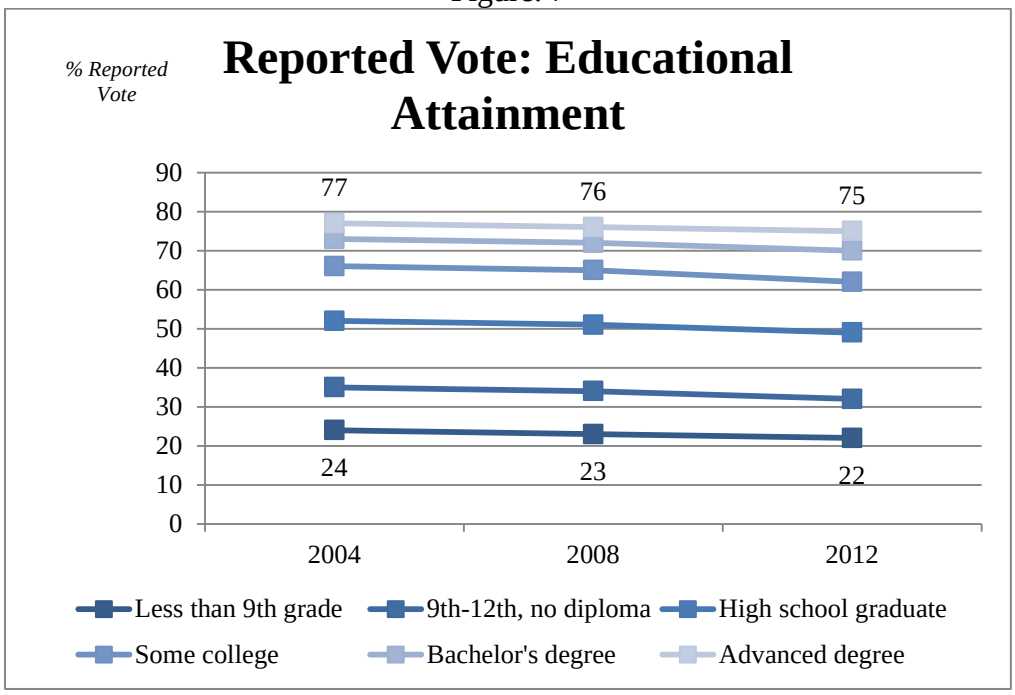
[64] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 4-6, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[65] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 8, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[66] Aaron Smith and Maeve Duggan, "Online Political Videos and Campaign 2012," Pew Research Journalism Project (2012): 4, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Election-2012-Video/Key-Findings.aspx.

political activities during the 2010 midterm elections compared to 68% of adults with more than $50k of household income.[67] Thirty five percent of adults with a high school diploma or less used their cell phones for political activities during the 2010 election while 68% of those with some college or more used their cell phones to the same capacity.[68]

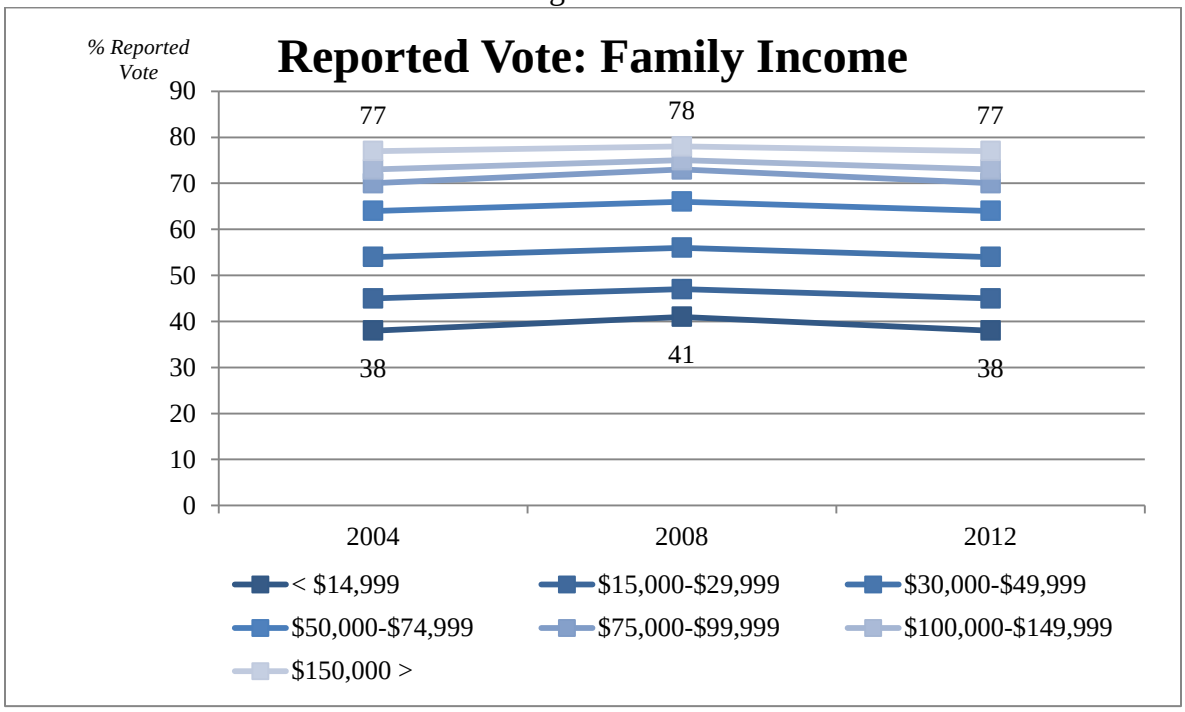
Figure: 7




Source: U.S. Census Bureau

[67] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Politics Goes Mobile," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2010): 7, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Mobile-Politics/Report.aspx.
[68] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Politics Goes Mobile," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2010): 4, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Mobile-Politics/Report.aspx.

Figure: 8




Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As the graphs above conclusively indicate, those with more education and more affluence are more likely to be involved politically online. So what does that say about social media's impact on citizen engagement in political and social issues as well as its ability to increase voter turnout? Well, as exemplified by Figures 7 and 8, overall, voter turnout has been steadily declining year by year for all education levels and as for family income; it has remained steady for all income levels in the past three election cycles. However those who have an "advanced degree" tend to vote around 60% more than those without a high school education[69] and those making above $150,000 are about 40% more likely to vote than those making below $15,000.[70] Thus, through my analysis, social

[69] "Population Characteristics (P20) Reports and Detailed Tables." Voting and Registration, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013.
[70] "Population Characteristics (P20) Reports and Detailed Tables." Voting and Registration, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013. Web.

media appeared to have no serious influence on getting voters to the polls independent of wealth and education level. However, by examining vote distribution by political party over the last nine elections and especially the 2008 and 2012 elections, trends arise that may point to increased voter engagement.

Figure: 9, Reported Vote: Educational Attainment

| | | 1980 | 1984 | 1988 | 1992 | 1996 | 2000 | 2004 | 2008 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Little High School | Democrat | 51 | 50 | 56 | 54 | 59 | 59 | 50 | 63 | 64 |
| | Republican | 46 | 50 | 43 | 28 | 28 | 39 | 49 | 35 | 35 |
| High School Graduate | Democrat | 43 | 39 | 49 | 43 | 51 | 48 | 47 | 52 | 51 |
| | Republican | 51 | 60 | 50 | 36 | 35 | 49 | 52 | 46 | 48 |
| Some College | Democrat | 35 | 38 | 42 | 41 | 48 | 45 | 46 | 51 | 49 |
| | Republican | 55 | 61 | 57 | 37 | 40 | 51 | 54 | 47 | 48 |
| College Graduate | Democrat | - | - | 37 | 39 | 44 | 45 | 46 | 50 | 47 |
| | Republican | - | - | 62 | 41 | 46 | 51 | 52 | 50 | 51 |
| Post Graduate | Democrat | - | - | 48 | 50 | 52 | 52 | 55 | 58 | 55 |
| | Republican | - | - | 50 | 36 | 40 | 44 | 44 | 40 | 42 |

Sources: New York Times, CNN Politics

Figure: 10, Reported Vote: Family Income (Annual)

| | | 1992 | 1996 | 2000 | 2004 | 2008 | | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Under $15,000 | Democrat | 55 | 59 | 57 | 63 | 73 | | |
| | Republican | 23 | 28 | 37 | 36 | 25 | | |
| $15,000-$29,999 | Democrat | 45 | 53 | 54 | 57 | 60 | Under $30,000 | 63 |
| | Republican | 35 | 36 | 41 | 42 | 42 | | 35 |
| $30,000-$49,999 | Democrat | 41 | 48 | 49 | 50 | 55 | $30,000-$49,999 | 57 |
| | Republican | 38 | 40 | 48 | 49 | 43 | | 42 |
| $50,000-$74,999 | Democrat | 40 | 47 | 46 | 43 | 48 | $50,000 and over | 45 |
| | Republican | 41 | 45 | 51 | 56 | 49 | | 53 |
| $75,000-$99,999 | Democrat | - | 44 | 45 | 45 | 51 | | |
| | Republican | - | 48 | 52 | 55 | 48 | | |
| $100,000 and over | Democrat | - | 38 | 43 | 41 | 49 | $100,000 and over | 44 |
| | Republican | - | 54 | 54 | 58 | 49 | | 54 |

Source: New York Times

For example, as shown in Figure 9, Democrats have won the “post graduate” vote the past six Presidential elections along with the “little high school” vote the past nine Presidential elections. President Barack Obama continued the tradition by winning these groups and doing so by landslide margins of 28% and 18% respectively in 2008 and 29% and 13% in 2012. Additionally, Obama won the “high school graduate” vote and the “some college vote” in both 2008 and 2012 even though a Republican candidate had won those voting groups five times in the last seven elections (in 2008 President Obama also won the “college graduate” group for the first time in last five elections at least, but then lost this voter group to Mitt Romney in 2012). Further, looking at Figure 10 on annual family income, in general, Democratic candidates tend to win the vote of the less affluent

while Republicans tend to be more popular among the wealthier. However, in 2008, President Obama won wealth group $75,000-$100,000 and tied John McCain for the $100,000 and more group. In 2012, the Republicans won these groups again (the differences in data are due to differing ways each poll groups annual income distributions together. As there was no data that was grouped the same from 2008 to 2012, this was the only data available).

There are many implications to this data. First, the election data on education in Figure 9 above shows that Obama appealed not only to the most educated in 2008 and 2012, but to all educational levels independent of traditional voting trends. Second, in 2008, President Obama appealed to highly wealthy groups; however, these changes from previous elections were subtle and in 2012 traditional trends were reinstated. Therefore, the major points to make in this section pertain to changes in voting by educational attainment. The most highly educated have historically been the most involved in politics whether by partaking in political action or simply by voting, as was discussed above, the same holds true online and on SNS. SNS are most popular among the highly educated, but they are also extremely popular for those with the lowest education levels. By looking again at Figure 9, it is clear that in both Obama's elections he won the most and least educated groups by larger margins than any other election year dating back to the 1980 Presidential election. It is historically characteristic in American voting trends that those with higher education vote more and are easier to mobilize because they are typically involved in large social networks of people who are equally, if not more politically engaged. Less educated voters are typically less engaged in politics simply because they are less knowledgeable about what is going on in the political realm and are not

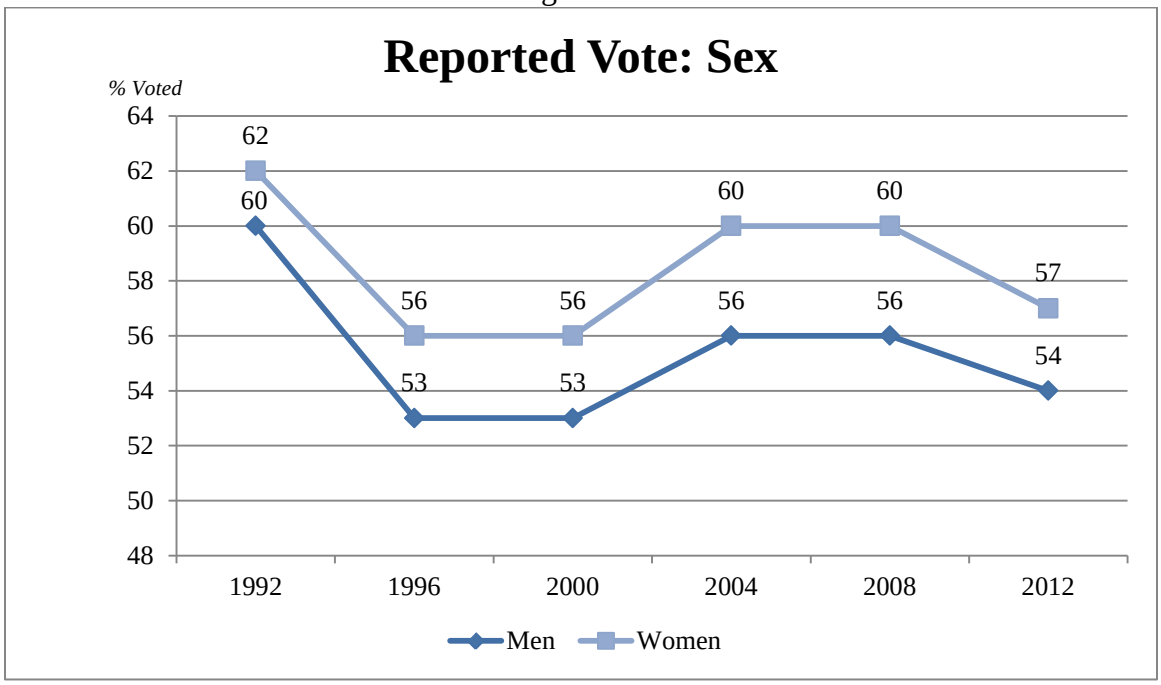
surrounded by people who are aware of the political issues of the time. Thus, because Obama was far more active on SNSs, it is possible that not only did he reach the highly politically active voter group, the most educated, but he also reached the least educated, and the traditionally less politically engaged. Thus it can be further implied that votes among those both highly and lower educated increased drastically in 2008 and 2012, because his social media strategy, specifically his SNS strategy, reached these groups and influenced especially the lesser educated to become politically involved in his election at higher levels than past elections. Thus Obama's strong presence on SNS as well as other social media sites, compared to his Republican counterparts may have been cause for this massive increase in votes for Obama among those less educated

To conclude, the main users of social media were adults with the highest education and the most wealth. Although voter turnout did not increase for any increment of education or family income in 2008 or 2012, it is possible that Obama's campaign did in fact increase voter engagement online among almost all educational levels in both 2008 and 2012 and especially the least educated. The creation of an online social network of engaged followers coming from different educational backgrounds allowed Obama to reach millions of more people than any other President in history online. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the large social network web that he cast over users of all different backgrounds was crucial to his fundraising success.

**Gender**

Gender was the only demographic group that displayed no correlation between voting trends and political involvement online.

Figure: 11




Source: U.S. Census Bureau

For instance, as shown in Figure 11, reported voting has fluctuated in the past six presidential elections with women reporting to vote only slightly above men.[71] Additionally, voting trends for men and women by party affiliation have also remained the same with women voting for the Democratic candidate in the past six elections and men voting for the Republican candidate four times out of the last five elections (Obama won the male vote in 2008 by a 1% margin); women usually represent around 6% more of the electorate. Additionally, over the past six elections, the margins between men voting for the Democratic candidate and men voting for the Republican candidate have remained relatively stable; the same is true on the women's side.[72] Thus, women tend to vote more than men, but as will be discussed next, men tend to be more politically active

[71] "Population Characteristics (P20) Reports and Detailed Tables." Voting and Registration, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013. Web.
[72] "Election Results 2008," New York Times, last modified November 5, 2008, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html.

online than women. For the most part, men use social media tools for political reasons more than women, although the gap is very narrow; however, women appear to use a variety of different online tools at comparable levels to men. A Pew study in 2010 found that, 56% of men were online political users and 52% were women. This same study found that of the 24% of adults that used the Internet as a main source of campaign and election news, 25% were men and 22% were women.[73] This sentiment was true in the 2008 race as well with 50% of men and 43% of women using the Internet, email or text messaging to get news about politics or to exchange their views about the race.[74] Men were also slightly more likely to use their mobile phones for political activities (29% of men, 24% of women). However, men and women were about equally as likely in the use the Internet for civic communication as 34% of men used the Internet to sign a petition, contact a government official or comment on a news story or blog post online or by text and 33% of women did the same.[75] Men and women were also equally as likely to post pictures or videos online related to political or social issues during the 2012 election (11% of both parties). Further, 18% of men and 17% of women sent text messages about political or social issues during this same period.[76]

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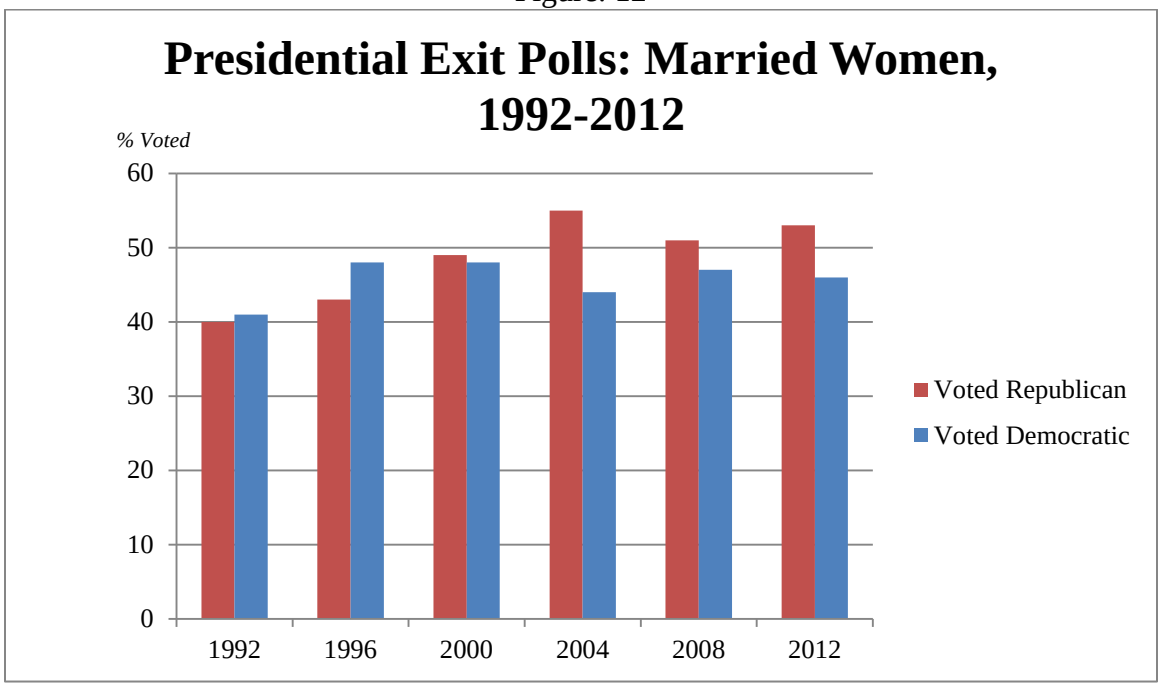
[73] Aaron Smith, "The Internet and Campaign 2012," Pew Research Journalism Project (2011): 8, 10.
[74] Aaron Smith and Lee Rainie, "The Internet and the 2008 Election," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2008): 5.
[75] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 20, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[76] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 23, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

Overall, men were slightly more politically active on social media than women. However, as shown in Figure 11, women tended to vote at higher rates than men.[77] Therefore, although men were slightly more politically active online than women (yet female voter turnout was higher and they voted more for Obama), men and women's voter turnout rates and political party voting trends fell in line with traditional affinities, it is unlikely that Obama's social media campaign had any impact on engaging one sex more than another. However, I will conclude this section by suggesting to future campaign strategists that although they may not find a significant impact of their social media campaign on gender changes in online usage, by looking at married versus non-married voters, especially women, they may find useful differences. As discussed earlier, women are more likely to vote to the left and men to the right; however, looking more closely at the marital status of the female voter can help build a stronger and more targeted online approach to their social media campaign.

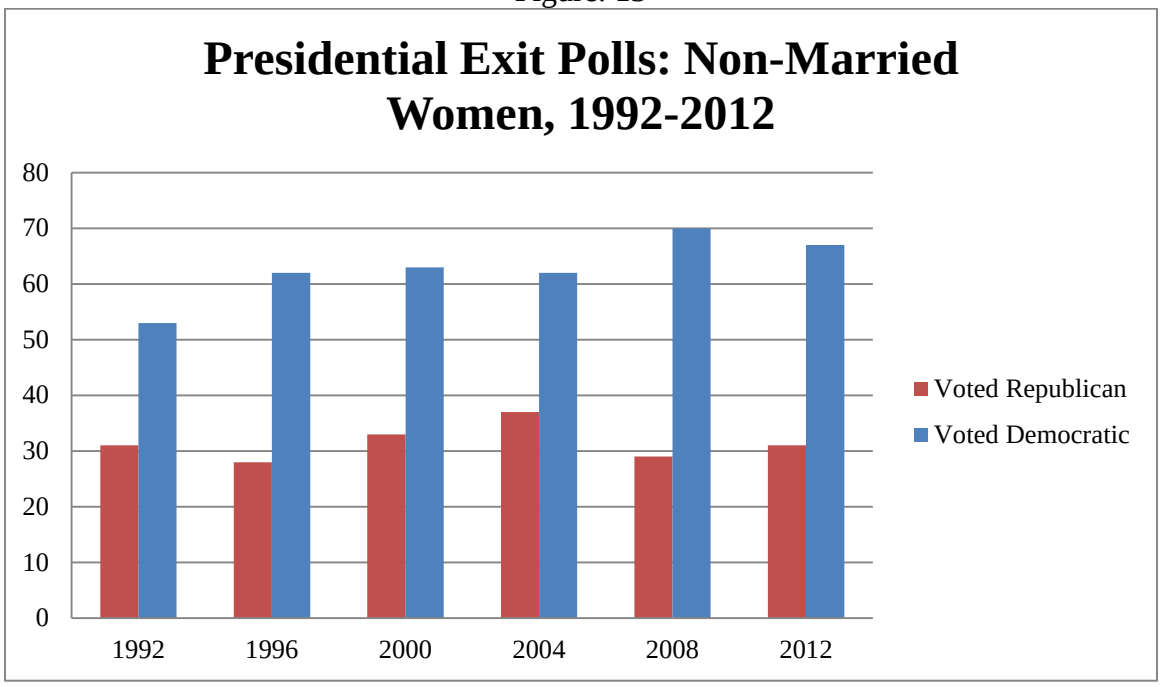
[77] "Election Results 2008," New York Times, last modified November 5, 2008, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html.

Figure: 12




Source: CNN Exit Polls

Figure: 13



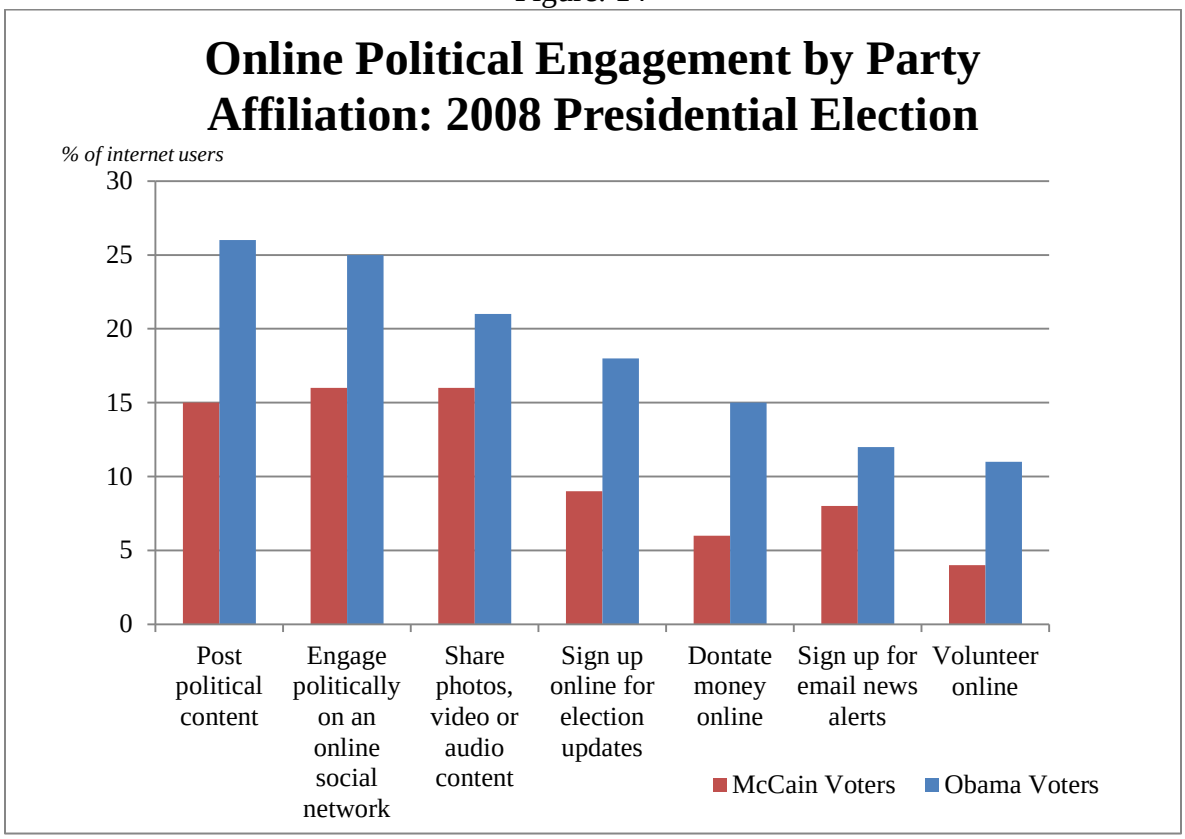

Source: CNN Exit Polls

For example, as Figure 12 shows, married women tend to lean to the right and in Figure 13 the data shows that a significant amount of non-married women vote to the left. Although there are no statistics on online political engagement based on marital status, by knowing that women are more likely to vote than men, one can look at differences in marital status and suggest that a future Republican candidate target married women online because although in general, women are most likely to vote to the left, by looking closer at this group, it seems that married women are far more likely to vote to the right than non-married women. Thus, on the other side of the isle, Democratic candidates would be smart to target non-married women. As brought to the discussion earlier, men are more active online but only by a slight margin to women, therefore, it would be in the best interests of future candidates to target women based on their marital status in order to reap the benefits of online use by translating that involvement into votes at the polls.

**Party Affiliation**

As discussed in the introduction of this paper, the Internet did not become relevant in election politics until the 2000 Presidential election. Since then, changes in Internet used by party have drastically changed. For example, in 2000, 25% of Republicans regularly used the Internet to learn about the Presidential candidate while 24% of Democrats used it to do the same. In 2004, Republican use of the Internet for this purpose increased to 30% and for Democrats it increased to 32%. However, beginning in 2008 there have not only been large increases in use of the Internet for political purposes, but there have been large changes in the amount of use by each party with Democrats surging ahead of Republicans.

Figure: 14




Source: Pew Research Journalism Projects

For example, from posting political content to signing up for email news, Figure 14 shows an array of different ways Obama supporters used the Internet more to participate politically. Even after the 2008 election, those that voted for Obama expected to be kept up to speed on future political events and activities via email, text messages and on SNS more than those that voted for McCain. Just before the 2012 party conventions, Pew conducted another survey to see how many registered voters there were in each party. They found that including leaners (Independents that lean to either party during election time) 48% identified with the Democratic Party and 43% with the Republican Party. Obama had only a slight advantage going into this election compared

to the 12- point advantage he had in 2008 (51% to 39%).[78] Despite a decline in the percentage of voters from 2008 to 2012 that identified on the left, Democratic voters still composed a larger portion of the online community than those identifying as Republicans. For example, a Pew study found that just before the 2012 elections, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to use the following online activities to communicate politically: to "like or promote material related to politics or social issues (52% vs. 42%), to encourage people to vote (42% vs. 36%), to repost political content (39% vs. 31%) and to follow elected officials and candidates for office (32% vs. 27%).[79] A different Pew study in 2012 stated that SNS using Democrats were more likely to say that SNS were important for political activities such as keeping up with political news (48% Democrats vs. 34% Republicans) or debating and discussing political issues with others (32% Democrats vs. 24% Republicans).[80] Over time, Internet use in political activity has drastically increased for members of both parties; however, in both the 2008 and 2012 elections, Obama's fans and followers seemed to be more politically active online through his various social media outlets than Republicans were on their candidate's social media. Consequently, the level of engagement Democrats exhibited online in 2008 and 2012 has thus indicated high levels of correlation with the surge in votes for Obama in these years, especially when compared to election results in 2000 and

[78] "A Closer Look at the Parties in 2012," *Pew Research Journalism Project* (2012), http://www.people-press.org/2012/08/23/a-closer-look-at-the-parties-in-2012/.
[79] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Social Media and Political Engagement," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2012): 2-3, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Political-engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.
[80] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Politics on Social Networking Sites," *Pew Research Journalism Project* (2012): 2, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Politics-on-SNS/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

2004[81]. Republican candidate George W. Bush won both the 2000 and 2004 elections. In 2000 he tied with Al Gore in the popular vote but went on to beat him in a close race by the Electoral College, and in 2008 he beat John Kerry 51% to 48%.[82] These are the only relevant presidential elections to note as the Internet was not prominent in any election before 2000).

The final note on party affiliation and online political engagement is that there seemed to be a strong tie between online use and the intensity of party ideology. For example, in observing those voters who are most loyal to their party and its views, it is clear that the difference in online participation between parties declines. Overall, political SNS users who were either very conservative or very liberal were the most active on SNS. For example, 66% of very liberal SNS users and 64% of very conservative users hit the "like" button for political posts versus 55% of modest liberals, 47% of modest conservatives and 42% of moderates. Additionally, 25% of very conservative SNS users and 24% of very liberal users friended someone who shared their political views compared to 19% of conservatives, 18% of liberals, and 12% of moderates.[83] So, those that were the most loyal to their party identity tended to not only be more active online, but were also equally as active as those on the polar opposite side of the party spectrum. This shows that the more invested in a party's ideology and a party's success the more likely someone is going to be a politically active online user.

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[81] "Election Results," *New York Times*, November 5, 2008, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html

[82] "Election Results," New York Times, November 5, 2008, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html

[83] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "Social Networking Sites and Politics," Pew Research Journalism Project (2012): 8, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Social-networking-and-politics/Summary-of-findings.aspx.

To conclude, there seems to be a correlation between Obama's overall victory and the intensity of political engagement of his voters online. However, the familiar chicken and egg question comes to mind here; did Obama win the social media game because his voters were more politically active online, or because he engaged more voters online? Although my analysis cannot answer this question, in both 2008 and 2012, more Americans identified as liberal and voted for President Obama than those that identified as conservative and voted for John McCain or Mitt Romney. Thus, as discussed above, the stronger the political views the more likely someone is going to be politically active whether that is online or offline. Thus, through this analysis I can claim that because more Americans identified themselves as liberals and voted for President Obama in the 2008 and 2012 elections and because Democrats were more politically active online it is plausible that President Obama's online social media campaign was more effective in assisting the Democrats' larger thirst for political engagement online.

**Concluding remarks**

The purpose of this chapter was to analyze if voter turnout for specific demographic groups fell in line with that group's online political use and if so, how strong these parings were. Additionally, it sought to determine if political engagement and voter turnout increased specifically among demographic groups "traditionally" uninvolved in politics. Through this analysis I found that the demographic groups more politically dominant online were younger generations, Whites, well- educated, highly affluent, Democrats and males. By comparing voting trends by political party and voter turnout for presidential elections (specifically Obama's) I was able to find that certain

groups did find the Internet more suitable for political engagement than more traditional forms. Some highlighted examples include: younger voters are far more involved online than older voters, yet they have traditionally lagged behind older voters in both voter turnout and civic engagement offline, African Americans have significantly caught up to the levels of White voter use online and even exceed their use on some social media channels, finally, the less educated are using SNS for political use far more than most educated. The implications of these findings are twofold. First, the demographic groups more inclined to vote for Obama such as women, younger generations, the less affluent and African Americans were less likely groups to be politically involved in more "traditional" ways such as voting and donating, however, the Internet allowed Obama to reach out to these voters and showed them a new way to get politically engaged. This was one of the keys to his campaign success as his base was able to increase substantially. Second, as shown through Obama's understanding of the importance of political organization online, knowing one's demographic breakdown not only by voter rates and percentages, but also by political engagement online, a candidate can achieve not only a higher volume of votes but also considerable amounts in campaign funding, thus will be the topic of the next chapter.

III. Social Media and Fundraising

Presidential campaign fundraising is what makes or breaks a candidate's chances in the run to the Oval Office. Popularity among citizens is clearly essential, but without the funds to communicate a message to viewers, to be able to share why they are best for the job, to tell their story, candidates have no chance of capturing the hearts, minds or votes of the American people. This chapter will focus on three candidates and their races to the White House as well as how Obama's campaigning strategy changed over time. I will analyze major game changes in campaign fundraising, how they affected the landscape of campaigning and how candidates turned to the Internet to help them reach their fundraising goals. I will specifically look at John McCain's campaign in 2000, Howard Deans' in 2004 and Barack Obama's in 2008 and 2012 as these candidates have produced the greatest results. The successes and failures of these candidates have built the framework for what will become a new age in online campaign financing as the Internet grows and begins to play a more central role in presidential campaigns.

**John McCain: 2000**

Beginning in the 1970's, campaign finance reform has sought to decrease the influence of wealthy contributors to campaigns by encouraging large amounts of small donations.[84] This series of reforms began in 1974 with the Federal Elections Campaign Act (FECA) which worked to reduce corruption and abuse that came with an unaudited and unchecked system of campaign funding. In order to reach eligibility for public funding (the matching of donations by the federal government of dollar sums up to $250

[84] Michael Nelson, The Elections of 2008 (New York: CQ Press, 2010), 164

given by individuals to a candidate's campaign), candidates were limited in many ways including the size of hard money contributions (money given directly to candidates for federal elective office or money that is given to political parties for the purpose of supporting candidates for office[85]) to candidates as well as by the source of campaign contributions. They were also required to publicly disclose all transactions made by candidates and political action committees (PAC).[86] Because such heavy restrictions were placed on candidates, many runners chose to deny public funding. Billionaire Steve Forbes was the first to do so in 1996 and also in 2000 along with candidates Al Gore and Bill Bradley on the left and George W. Bush on the right. One of the only forerunning candidates that did accept public funding in the primaries was John McCain. John McCain was by no means the favored Republican candidate in the 2000 primaries, however, his race lasted far longer than expected because of his choice to accept public funding coupled with his immaculate online campaign fundraising success story.

John McCain's Presidential campaign in 2000 marked the first time the Internet was successful in raising large amounts donations for a presidential campaign. The major players in this campaign were Al Gore and Bill Bradley on the left and George W. Bush, Steve Forbes and John McCain on the right. For McCain, New Hampshire was where he would try his luck at beating Bush who was the party favorite to win the primary. By July of 1999 John McCain had moved ahead of Steve Forbes as George W. Bush's primary

[85] "What is 'Soft Money'?," ThisNation.com, accessed November 20, 2013, http://www.thisnation.com/question/004.html.
[86] Gerald M. Pomper et al., The Election of 2000 (New York: Catham House Publishers, 2001), 94.

contender in New Hampshire and in February of 2000 he beat Bush.[87] This victory lit a major spark in his online game. In almost every television interview post-New Hampshire primaries McCain told viewers to visit his website and donate online, the results were outstanding. Forty eight hours after his victory in New Hampshire, a recorded $810,000 was raised on the Internet with 40% of donations coming from first-time political givers and 34% coming from contributors under the age of 40.[88] At one point after the New Hampshire primary, around $18,000 of contributions were coming in each hour and by the end of the week he had more than $1.4 million in Internet donations. Although most of these Internet contributions were small, averaging around $119 each, combined with federal matching funds, the total amount of money raise from his Internet contributions totaled more than $5 million over a two week period.[89] Thus, McCain became the first presidential candidate to not only raise a significant amount on the Internet but these donations became the lifeline for his campaign. Although McCain did not win the primary in 2000, his success with Internet fundraising carried him much further in the 2000 race then he would have gone without the splurge of Internet donations.[90]

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[87] Gerald M. Pomper et al., The Election of 2000 (New York: Catham House Publishers, 2001), 99-100.
[88] "Election Results 2008," New York Times, last modified November 5, 2008, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html.
[89] Gerald M. Pomper et al., The Election of 2000 (New York: Catham House Publishers, 2001), 101-102.
[90] Michael J. Malbin, The Election After Reform, ed. (Maryland: Rowman & LittleField Publishers, Inc., 2006), 223.

**Howard Dean: 2004**

By the 2004 election, additional restrictions were placed on presidential candidates due to the enactment of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA), widely known as the McCain- Feingold Act in 2002. The BCRA was established to "fix the holes" in the FECA by prohibiting unlimited amounts of soft money contributions (contributions made to political parties for purposes other than supporting a candidate for federal office)[91] to national political parties as well as to restrict certain types of political advertising. Although the BCRA had very little impact on the FECA put in place in 1974, it did make some minor changes that had medial effects on the 2004 elections. One of these changes was an increase in the maximum amount an individual could contribute to a candidate, raising from $1,000 to $2,000. George W. Bush had collected a record number of $1,000 contributions in the 2000 primary and also opted out of public funding in 2004. His task in 2004 was to persuade his former $1,000 donors to increase their contributions to $2,000 in order to stay competitive with those candidates that did accept public funding; this would then increase his fundraising base by $120 million.[92] The BCRA thus changed the fundraising game in 2004 by creating this extra pressure on candidates opting out of public funding as well as by allowing those accepting public funding to obtain more money from the individual. Similar to the 2000 primaries, three major candidates in the race opted out of public funding; George W. Bush (Republican), Howard Dean (Democrat) and John Kerry (Democrat) (Although all three accepted

[91] "What is 'Soft Money'?," ThisNation.com, accessed November 20, 2013, http://www.thisnation.com/question/004.html.
[92] Michael J. Malbin, *The Election After Reform*, ed. (Maryland: Rowman & LittleField Publishers, Inc., 2006), 224.

public funding in the general election). Among these candidates, George W. Bush and John Kerry were the favored to win and Howard Dean was second to John Kerry.

In the 2004 election, Howard Dean became the first candidate to opt out of public spending and to simultaneously rely heavily on Internet fundraising. This decision showed both the potential of online fundraising as well as the recognition that it was not popular enough at the time for Howard Dean to deny public funding and survive primarily on online fundraising. By 2004, the Internet had become more popular for political activity and information seeking; Howard Dean saw this development and its potential to increase his funds in order to allow him to compete with the likes of Senator John Kerry and President George W. Bush. Dean's first major interaction with the Internet came with his use of a website, Meetup.com. Meetup.com arranged meetings in public places between people who shared similar interests and opinions. By the end of his campaign, Dean's Meetup members totaled 190,000. Through the assembly of his supporters and their ability to distribute messages through blogs and emails much faster and to more people than by mail or phone, the Internet became a prime place for fundraisers to be communicated to and for donations to be collected.[93] From April 1, 2004 to September 30, 2004, Dean's Internet donations hit $11 million, of which, $7.4 million were from the third quarter alone. This meant that during the third quarter, half of every dollar collected by Dean's campaign came from people giving on his website.[94]

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[93] Michael J. Malbin, *The Election After Reform*, ed. (Maryland: Rowman & LittleField Publishers, Inc., 2006), 233-235.

[94] Grant Gross, "Election 2004: Howard Dean Profits from Web Campaign," CIO, last modified January 15, 2004. http://www.cio.com/article/32064/Election_2004_Howard_Dean_Profits_from_Web_Campaign.

Despite his success online, Dean was not able to compete financially with the political machines that were Bush and Kerry and went on lose to both in Wisconsin which subsequently terminated his campaign.[95] Dean's approach to online fundraising was the first of its kind; it was a superior version to McCain's as the Internet played a more central role in Dean's overall campaign strategy. He also took the first stab at creating an online social network, what was at the time a relatively new concept and what is considered by many today to be the inspiration and building block for Obama's successful online fundraising campaigns of 2008 and 2012.

**Barack Obama: 2008-2012**

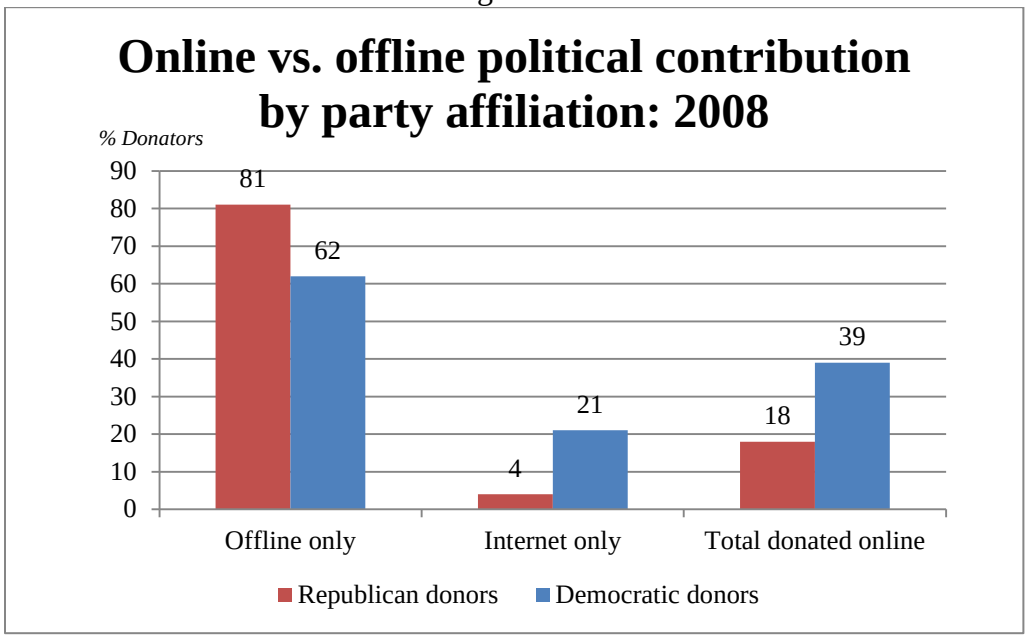
Barack Obama, by and large, outdid both McCain and Dean in online campaign fundraising. In his 2008 presidential campaign, he raised almost $742 million, $46 million more than what John Kerry and George W. Bush raised combined in the 2004 election.[96] In 2012, he raised the bar even higher capping off at $1.07 billion dollars, the most a presidential candidate has ever raised in American history. Many different elements combined to create this result. For starters, in the 2008 and 2012 races, he not only refused public financing in the primaries, he also refused it in the general election, the first candidate (in his 2008 race) to do so since the enactment of the FECA in 1974.[97] By doing this he allowed himself to raise and spend as much as he desired up to Election

[95] Michael J. Malbin, The Election After Reform, ed. (Maryland: Rowman & LittleField Publishers, Inc., 2006), 234.
[96] Michael Nelson, The Elections of 2008 (New York: CQ Press, 2010), 163.
[97] "McCain slams Obama Over Public Funds," USA Today, last modified June 20, 2008, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-06-20-mccain-obama-fundraising_N.htm.

Day giving him a substantial advantage over both McCain and Romney (this was especially useful for him in the 2008 election against McCain because McCain did use public funding in the general election[98]). Overall, online campaign fundraising increased drastically from 2004 to 2012. Although offline donations remained the primary method of campaign funding from the 2008 to 2012 election, total online contributions to political candidates, parties and organizations increased while those offline decreased (from 2008 to 2012, donations online went from 15% to 23% while donations offline decreased from 69% to 60%).[99] Additionally, in 2012, a Pew study polling online contributions from the 2012 election found that in total, 13% of adults made contributions to one of the candidates. Breaking down this 13% by method of donation, 67% donated in person, over the phone or through mail, 50% donated online or via email and 10% donated by sending a text message from their cell phone or using a cell phone application (Note: some people donated more than once and in different ways each time). Thus, online campaign fundraising in 2012 comprised a larger amount of total donations to political candidates than ever before and Obama's campaign captured most of this transformation.

[98] "McCain slams Obama Over Public Funds," USA Today, last modified June 20, 2008, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-06-20-mccain-obama-fundraising_N.htm.
[99] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 10, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

Figure: 15




Source: Pew Research Journalism Projects

For example, Figure 15 shows that in 2008, Republicans were most likely to donate to their candidate offline while Democrats were far more likely than Republicans to do so online. In 2012, the same trends were held in place. A Pew study found that 87% of Republican campaign donors contributed in person, by telephone or by email in the 2012 elections while 57% of Democrats did so. Further, 57% of Democratic donors contributed online or by email compared to 34% of Republicans.[100] So, did Obama cause this increase in Democratic donations online or were Democratic already inclined to do so?

Through Obama's many social media platforms and the way he structured his campaign strategy, it is most likely that Obama instigated this culture around donating online. For starters, he became active online far more than either Republican candidate he

[100] Aaron Smith and Maeve Duggan, "Presidential Campaign Donations in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2012): 2.

ran against (keep in mind that by 2008, the Internet was far more popular than it was in 2000 or 2004). He sent emails, text messages, installed applications for mobile phones, made and maintained a lively website and created many accounts on differing SNS. By doing so he was able to reach far more people on the web than McCain, Dean or Romney allowing him to create a larger web or social network online from which to tap for contributions to his campaign. Additionally, he utilized his website to fund his campaign by allowing visitors to join up to 18 different constituency groups including, women, LGBT and Latinos. By clicking on a group a user receives content targeted to their specific interest group. By doing this, Obama created personal connections with his supporters making them feel important and central to his cause.[101] Second, by utilizing his popularity online he was able to collect far more donations (though they were usually in smaller amounts). This was counter to the approach taken by many presidential candidates up to this point; receiving large sums of money from a few wealthy individuals. However, it worked very well for him by forcing Republican candidates out of their comfort zone and onto his playing field. By the end of June in 2008 Obama had raised $93.6 million from donors making contributions under $200 (which amounted to 50% of his total contributions). In June of 2012, he had risen even more with $112 million from donations less than $200.[102] In fact, a Pew study found that in 2008, smaller

[101] Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell, "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," Pew Research Journalism Project (2012): 3, http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.

[102] Michael Scherer, "The 2012 Money Race: Romney Relies on Big Donors, Wile Obama Taps the Grassroots," *Time*, last modified July 26, 2012, http://swampland.time.com/2012/07/26/the-2012-money-race-romney-relies-on-big-donors-while-obama-taps-the-grass-roots/.

contributions were made about equally online as they were offline; however, larger contributions were more likely to be made offline.[103] In a *Time* article posted in July of 2012, the author stressed that although Romney's campaign dominated Obama in attaining large donations from smaller groups of donors, he struggled to get a large quantity of "everyday people" to each give small amounts to his campaign which hurt him, especially since he opted out of public funding. In 2008, John McCain raised $25.9 million from donors giving less than $200, amounting to 21% of his total campaign contributions. At the same time in 2012, Romney had collected far less from donations under $200 compared to Obama, and even less than McCain, with $22.4 million in donations, accounting for 15% of his total contributions.[104] Obama changed the game. He was able to harness the sheer power of numbers and translate them into dollar signs by connecting with millions of people over the web and creating social networks aimed at funding his campaign.

**Is Online Fundraising a Useful Tool for Campaign Financing?**

To conclude this chapter, I touch on two major elements that have become key factors in the necessity of social media in fundraising in modern presidential campaigns; that is time and efficiency. For starters, the value of time is a major factor that is seriously overlooked in today's world. It is normal to be able to reach a friend across the United

[103] Aaron Smith and Maeve Duggan, "Presidential Campaign Donations in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2012): 2.
[104] Michael Scherer, "The 2012 Money Race: Romney Relies on Big Donors, Wile Obama Taps the Grassroots," Time, last modified July 26, 2012, http://swampland.time.com/2012/07/26/the-2012-money-race-romney-relies-on-big-donors-while-obama-taps-the-grass-roots/.

States within a minute and a click of a button, but in the 1960's that was a concept completely foreign to the world, especially in politics. In 1964, Barry Goldwater would be the first to test the concept of time in fundraising. Compared to the other candidates in 1964, Barry Goldwater was seriously under established and up until that point, fundraising came almost completely through large donations from wealthy donors. Almost no money was raised by candidates through small donations. However, in his campaign, Barry Goldwater became one of the first to successfully fundraise through direct mail by raising $6 million through the mail; Democrat George McGovern was also highly successful in 1972 doing the same and thus raising $25 million.[105] This methodology entailed compiled a list of voters that were most likely to donate a small chunk of money and sent letters to those people hoping for a large number of small donations; demonstrating the exact same concept as Obama's online campaign but through direct mail, not the Internet. The sole difference between Goldwater's campaign fundraising strategy and President Obama's is that the Internet allowed fundraising to happen instantaneously as opposed to weeks of waiting for letters to be sent and for responses to arrive. The fact that Obama could send out an email to Americans all across the country to ask for donations if he was in a close battle for an important state changed the game of fundraising. In Barry Goldwater's days, if he entered a state campaign with little funds and a low chance at winning that state, chances are he would lose. Today, one email can mean the difference between a win and a loss in a state; one message on Facebook can keep a campaign alive longer than ever before. The second element in

[105] Shane D'Aprile, "The Staggering Price of Money," Campaigns and Elections, 2008, http://www.campaignsandelections.com/print/175677/the-staggering-price-of-money.thtml.

President Obama's campaign that cannot be overlooked is efficiency. President Obama and his campaign staff initiated the "Quick Donate" application that could be downloaded and used on all mobile devices. This application meant that with one click of a button users could access their credit card information stored on the BarackObama.com website allowing them to donate faster than ever. The "Quick Donate" app was credited to raising $115 million with more than 1.5 million users. It was also said that donors gave four times more on the site because of its efficiency and when they did donate, they donated three times more the money.[106] Although this is just one example of how President Barack Obama's campaign strategy focused on proficiency, it demonstrates that in the fast paced world that we live in, where expectations for efficiency are much higher than they used to be, President Obama wanted to appeal to his online users and voters needs as much as possible by making it easier for them to donate, much like a company would do for their clients. Therefore, because President Barack Obama understood how important time and efficiency were to campaign fundraising online, he was able to fully exemplify how vital such a tool as social media would be to the success of not only his fundraising, but also to his campaign as a whole.

[106] "Inside The Cave," EndageDC, 2013, http://engagedc.com/download/Inside%20the%20Cave.pdf.

IV. Ground Organization and Mobilization

"We didn't make the assumption that people signing up on our Web site meant that they were going to help the candidate or even vote for him. From the beginning, we had an initiative to take our online force offline"- *Steve Hilderbrand, Deputy National Campaign Director, Obama Campaign 2008*[107]

The ground organization in presidential campaigns has long been the key toward a successful outcome. Knocking on doors, making phone calls, organizing meetings and making appearances all bring the candidate closer to the people. This traditional approach consumes much of a candidate's limited availability and is expensive to deploy. Since the invention of the Internet, there has been a shift towards a more hybrid version of mobilization, a combination of social media and ground game. In both of President Barack Obama's elections, he used all forms of communication to fundraise and convey his message to potential voters. The fundamental goal of Obama's team was to use the Internet to establish a bottom-up grassroots movement thereby building a core constituency of Internet using followers. Through the Internet, President Barack Obama was able to engage and organize his users into social networks such that they could then transform this group into volunteer programs aimed at fundraising as well as voter recruitment. This chapter analyzes how the Internet and social media have been effective for President Barack Obama in gathering supporters and leveraging them to increase his ground game. I will analyze specifically how he utilized his website, email account and SNS accounts to increase his volunteer turnout through the personalization of messaging as well as through the scope of his communication strategy.

[107] John Sides et al., Campaigns & Elections, (New York: Norton & Company, Inc, 2012), 308.

**President Barack Obama: The Hybrid**

*Websites*

As the chapter above discusses, President Barack Obama raised millions of fundraising dollars making it possible for him get out his message through mass media, which is the most expensive form of political campaigning, as well as to organize a strong ground game. He employed the Internet to do what no candidate in history had done as successfully as he had; to communicate, organize and monitor volunteers thereby making it easier to navigate the ground game as well as increase volunteer turnout. Working off the core principles of Howard Dean's 2004 Meetup.com success, President Barack Obama expanded his social media presence by adding various online resources to reach a larger audience and establish online social networks. One of the most crucial methods he deployed was to transform his website into a volunteer organizing and mobilization machine. The purpose of the website was not to persuade people to vote for him, because many of its subscribers were already likely to do so, but rather to get supporters to become actively involved, both online and offline. As one of the BarackObama.com ("Organize For Action" (OFA)) website creators, Jascha Franklin-Hodge explained about the 2008 primaries, the Obama campaign "knew they didn't have the kind of political machine Clinton was going to come in with. They had to build their own machine, and the way to do this was with online tools."[108] Upon logging into the website, users were immediately asked to volunteer by going door to door in their neighborhoods, making calls on behalf of President Barack Obama or hosting campaign

[108] John Sides et al., Campaigns & Elections, (New York: Norton & Company, Inc, 2012), 308.

events. In 2008 Neighbor-to-Neighbor was launched enabling users to access a list of people in their neighborhood that were unregistered to vote. These volunteers were able to print out registration forms and a script making it much easier to go door to door and encourage people to vote on behalf of President Barack Obama. During the 2008 election, this website tool was estimated to have assisted volunteers in making nearly eight million calls.[109] Additionally, supporters were asked to document their activity online so that campaign staff could track those that were more involved and could later seek their assistance in managing volunteer events.[110] The website made it easier for campaign officers to find volunteer staff as well as to recruit community activists from all parts of the country.

President Barack Obama's website today is structured in a very similar way. Its purpose is made clear even in the title of the website, "Organizing for Action". The three main tab's on the page encourage users to either find more information on President Barack Obama and his stance on certain issues, to get more connected with President Barack Obama through other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or blogs, or to encourage voters to "get involved" by "attending an event" or "hosting an event". This tab also includes digital tools and materials to help volunteers carry out their volunteer activities.[111] Conversely, on Mitt Romney's website in 2012, the first page seen by a user was a request to make a financial contribution to his campaign as well as

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[109] Jennifer Aaker and Victoria Chang, "Obama and the Power of Social Media and Technology," *The European Business Review*, 2009, http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/?p=1627.

[110] John Sides et al., Campaigns & Elections, (New York: Norton & Company, Inc, 2012), 308-309.

[111] "Organize For Action," last modified 2013, http://www.barackobama.com/?source=site_20131001_splash#get-the-facts.

to solicit information. Additionally, the Mitt Romney's website had very little information regarding his background or qualification, or what his stance was pertaining to economic policies or other important issues. This configuration left the user relatively uninformed about the candidate. Mitt Romney's website had similar characteristics as President Barack Obama's in the area of asking for volunteers to make calls or host campaign events and both websites also allowed the user to tailor information based on their residing state. However, President Barack Obama's website had links to twice as many social media websites as Mitt Romney's.[112] The success of President Barack Obama's website in organizing volunteers was unparalleled. Wired magazine in 2008 estimated that through his websites approximately 150,000 campaign related events were organized. Additionally, supporters created more than 35,000 groups by geographical proximity. By the end of the 2008 election approximately 1.5 million accounts were created on his website.[113] Additionally, nearing the 2012 elections President Barack Obama's campaign claimed they had 250 million voter contacts, more than twice the voter contacts that the Mitt Romney campaign claimed. Thus, the central purpose of President Barack Obama's website was almost entirely centered on contacting and assisting volunteers in their efforts to expand President Barack Obama's message to other voters while the Mitt Romney campaign saw it more as a chance to fundraise and extend information to existing supporters seriously hindering his ability to capture new voters and supporters.

[112] Robert E. Denton, jr, ed., The 2012 Presidential Campaign (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2014), 142.
[113] "Web 2.0 Case Study: Barack Obama's Use of Social Media," *The Global Human Capital Journal* (2008).

In addition to these mobilization tools on OFA, campaign managers also designed the website to build social networks right on the campaign website. For example, President Barack Obama's campaign website offered users to join up to 18 different constituency groups in which members were sent content targeted to that group. Romney's had a similar page offering information to users about different constituency groups, but unlike OFA, it was not a group that users could join. OFA harvested a place where users with similar interests could engage with others by building social networks on their website. This tool also allowed the campaign to monitor conversations as well as post their own comments or opinions on the pages of these groups. Further, differing from the 2008 election, in 2012, OFA worked to make their website the center for all social media and user engagement. For example, 71% of the links on digital posts led users back to the Obama website while only 5% led to a traditional news site.[114] Additionally, in June of 2012, OFA redesigned their website so that campaign managers could embed YouTube videos directly onto the campaign.[115] By making OFA the center of their online campaign, managers were able to control the content posted on their website while building a strong online reputation as well as generating more data and research on online users by bringing them to the campaign website via social media channels such as Facebook or Twitter.

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[114] Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell, "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," Pew Research Journalism Project (2012): 16, http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.

[115] Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell, "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," Pew Research Journalism Project (2012): 3, http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.

*Narwhal*

Narwhal was the name of President Obama's successful high-tech data platform. Its purpose was to connect previously separate databases to create a complete voter profile accessible to members of various branches in President Barack Obama's campaign. In election 2008, there were many different data reservoirs including one that listed voter beliefs, one with records on email and text messaging registrations, one that listed campaign donors and another that had volunteer information. By 2012, Project Narwhal had not only combined this data, but also intersected its variables making it easier to recognize voters that are most likely to participate on social media channels by engaging others to volunteer and even to switch their vote. Social media was also a valuable tool used to find this data through tests and analysis on behavior and preferences online. For example, by creating an account on Obama's website, the OFA was able to access pieces of information from that user such as whether they make donations, whether they connect through a social feed or if they use a voter registration tool. By gathering data such as this and analyzing it, Project Narwhal was able to target users and specify information to those on SNS and other accounts. Orca, Mitt Romney's equivalent version of Narwhal was extremely less efficient in allowing him to target users on social media as tech advisors failed to do the simple things such as field tests in order to assess user behavior or to properly distribute information and access to its program to volunteers. Thus, the knowledge and organization invested in Narwhal by Obama's staff members resulted in an effective use of social media for voter research as well as a medium to generate new users; it was a highly articulate self-help system. As will be discussed in the next parts of this chapter, social media channels such as Facebook,

YouTube and President Obama's campaign website were crucial in this data collection and social media integration model.

*Email*

Email has also become a central mobilization tool for presidential candidates. This stems mostly from the fact that the medium has been utilized longer than many of the popular social media tools used today. In fact, in the 2012 election it was found that: 43% of American adults were asked by print letter to work for a candidate, go to a meeting, give a contribution or get in touch with a public official; 35% were ask by a telephone call; 32% were asked by email; 23% were asked in person and; 16% were asked on SNS.[116] Accordingly, email has now become a more popular recruitment tool than face to face dialogue and has almost surpassed phone calls; SNS falls only slightly behind that. Email has become a popular tool by campaign strategists because it can be extremely useful in narrow-casting. Narrow-casting is a communication method used to target a smaller audience through media such as direct mail, phone calls or emails in order to get a specific message to a targeted group or individual. This can be effective for candidates because as opposed to broadcasting where information is shared with the general public and thus must be in line with common and public points of view, data compilation allows candidates to discern which voters are more likely to fall in line with certain view points and how these citizens align within certain geographical regions. There are many different ways to use narrow casting, but one clear example from Obama's 2012 campaign was an email sent from senior advisor, David Axelrod,

[116] Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Journalism Project (2013): 11, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx.

primarily to Jewish email users with the title, “What Barak Said About Barack;” the email stated:

“*Micah --*

*You should hear what Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said yesterday about President Obama's support for Israel.*

*Asked on Fox News whether he thought Israelis were "disenchanted" with President Obama, Barak said:*

*"No. Our countries are good friends. And I'm the minister of defense, I can tell you that I can hardly remember ... a better period of support, American support and cooperation and similar strategic understanding of events around us than what we have right now.*

*"The President didn't say that Israel should go back to the borders of '67. He made it very clear that he thinks that Palestinians deserve a state of their own. We also believe in two states ... [a] secure Israel side by side with a demilitarized Palestinian state that will basically have the same area that's West Bank and Gaza Strip had before '67 with certain swaps, with understanding of the transformation on the ground."*

*Over the next 15 months, the other side will do their best to distort the President's record -- particularly on Israel. We've already seen them mischaracterizing the vision he's laid out for a new era of peace in the Middle East. It's up to supporters like us to set the record straight.*

*Please pass this on to everyone you know who cares about the Jewish state and its partnership with the United States.*

*Thanks,*

*David*”[117]

Being able to filter views and topics based on voter ideology and geographic region gives the candidate more flexibility to appeal to a variety of different constituents. Further, out of the many forms of broadcasting, email is a better timesaving tool as compared to phone calls or direct mail. Because of the Internet, a message on email can reach citizens with a click of the button which means information on campaign

[117] Micah L. Sifry, “Barak and Barack: Obama 2012 Narrowcasting to American Jews,” TechResident, August 5, 2011, http://techpresident.com/blog-entry/barak-and-barack-obama-2012-narrowcasting-american-jews.

fundraisers, discussion groups or phone-banks can be communicated much faster than any other tool.

In both campaigns and in both elections, email was highly used to mobilize and communicate to citizens; however, President Barack Obama's email campaign seemed to be slightly more useful in his ground game in a myriad of different areas. For starters, in August of 2008, Mitt Romney had 4 million email subscribers,[118] post 2012 election; President Barack Obama had a 30 million subscriber email list.[119] An eDataSource study found that this substantial difference in email subscribers may have been because President Barack Obama's emails were sent not only to organic subscribers (subscribers that sign up on their own but are usually found through the web or campaigning events) but also to third party networks such as company, Silver Carrot's www.fitandfabliving.com and Tranco's www.political2cents.com while Mitt Romney's list was composed only of organic subscribers. This meant that President Barack Obama was casting his email net much wider than Mitt Romney. Additionally, campaigns from Mittromney.com averaged about 650 thousand subscribers per email campaign composing about 16% of their subscriber list. Conversely, President Barack Obama's campaign averaged 1.4 million subscribers per campaign making up only about 3.5% of their subscriber list (Obama had a similar strategy in 2008. He had 13 million people on

[118] G.B. Heidarsson, "Obama's Email List 10 Times Stronger Than Romney's," August 30, 2012, http://blog.edatasource.com/obamas-email-list-10-times-stronger-than-romneys/.
[119] Byron Tau, "President Obama's Data a Powerful Tool for Democrats," *Politico Magazine*, July 7, 2013, http://www.politico.com/story/2013/07/2014-elections-president-obama-email-list-93871.html.

his email list and these users received 7,000 variations of more than 1 billion emails[120]). This indicates that President Barack Obama's campaign was superior at targeting specific groups of his email subscribers. Each of his individual email campaigns composed a smaller portion of his subscriber list implying that he was better as sending emails to more specific groups of people allowing him to specify information rather than send broad emails to larger groups of people.[121] Strongmail, an email marketing provider to companies such as MasterCard, Sony and AT&T performed an assessment of these candidates' email strategies in order to ascertain areas of success. The analysis found that President Barack Obama's average email open rate was 10.7% versus Mitt Romney's 6.4%. They attributed this mainly to President Barack Obama's personalization of emails and to his ability to geographically target users based on location. One President Barack Obama email subscriber described that he had received an email invitation to a "Weekend of Action" event just miles from his apartment; an event he would not have otherwise known was happening and was impressed in the campaigns ability to communicate such specific information to him. Mitt Romney's content on the other hand was far less precise and often included long drawn out emails extensively detailing topics such as his economic strategy or Paul Ryan's budget plan.[122] Specialized emails to users were immensely important for the organization of President Barack Obama volunteers as

[120] Jennifer Aaker and Victoria Chang, "Obama and the Power of Social Media and Technology," The European Business Review, 2009, http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/?p=1627.
[121] G.B. Heidarsson, "Obama's Email List 10 Times Stronger Than Romney's," August 30, 2012, http://blog.edatasource.com/obamas-email-list-10-times-stronger-than-romneys/.
[122] Al Urbanski, "Obama vs. Romney: The Email Faceoff," *Direct Marketing News*, October 24, 2012, http://www.dmnews.com/obama-vs-romney-the-email-faceoff/article/265192/.

they provided his supporters more opportunities to connect within proximate geographic locations of events. The content of President Barack Obama's emails also made recipients feel needed, as if their contributions to the event were going to make a significant difference. However, both campaigns did have high delete and spam rates indicating that in the future, candidates could continue to benefit from understanding email users even more.

*Social Networking Sites*

SNS, like email, can also be used to display information to millions of people with the click of a button. President Barack Obama's social networking site strategy was similar to his email campaign strategy in 2012. The goal was to tailor messaging to targets based on the interests and desires of users. Thus, like email his SNS campaign worked to target users based on voting trends and geographic location. One way they accomplished this, which differed from their strategy on email, was to emphasize passing campaign messages on Facebook and other SNS sites through a user's "friends" or "followers" on their own pages rather than from the campaign itself; they wanted to make their content viral, but viral to a specified audience. As Obama's Chief Scientist, Rayid Ghani stated, "The more local the contact is, the more likely (People) are to take action".[123] In terms of ground organization, President Barack Obama's campaign wanted messages to come from a user's "friend" or "follower" more so than from the campaign itself. As studies have shown, seeing a friend post or comment on content is more effective in getting a response than seeing the same information posted from its main

[123] Derrick Harris, "How Obama's Data Scientists Built a Volunteer Army on Facebook," *Gigaom*, December 8, 2012, http://gigaom.com/2012/12/08/how-obamas-data-scientists-built-a-volunteer-army-on-facebook/.

source.[124] The campaign did this by collecting data on content generators (Content generators are SNS users who create content about President Barack Obama on their page. This can take many different forms including, sharing a news article, posting and opinion on their own or a friend's wall or posting a message straight from the candidate's campaign) within SNS communities then compiling lists of those users who were actively creating content about President Barack Obama and organizing those users based on geographic region. Thus, when the campaign posts content on these specified users walls they can assume that their content would be shared with other users in the same geographic region. This tactic was designed to increase a user's likelihood to volunteer because if a friend posts content and shows signs of political activism the user's friend who sees the material may be more inclined to get involved. Although no studies have been published on the volume of volunteer work resulting from SNS posts from campaigns requesting volunteer work, we can assert that because President Barack Obama was far more active on SNS than John McCain and Mitt Romney and that he generated more user content, that the information that was posted by the campaign reached its intended user audience more so than those posted by his contenders. For example, in 2008, President Barack Obama had 3 million "friends" on Facebook, outperforming John McCain by nearly four times and over 115,000 Twitter followers, more than 23 times that of John McCain (Twitter was relatively new in the 2008

[124] John Wihbey, "Facebook Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization," *Journalist's Resource*, September 19, 2012, http://journalistsresource.org/studies/politics/digital-democracy/facebook-61-million-person-experiment-social-influence-political-mobilization#.

election).[125] In 2012, President Barack Obama had about 28 million Facebook friends compared to Mitt Romney's 1.6 million[126] and 21.5 million Twitter followers opposed to Romney's 1.6 million.[127] Additionally, President Barack Obama received twice the Facebook likes as Mitt Romney, 18 times the Twitter Retweets and about one and a half more YouTube comments, likes and views.[128]

Although Obama was active on an array of other social networking sites, Facebook was easily his chief data source and his most used online network. In October of 2012, Facebook had one billion users and was ranked the second most visited website in the United States.[129] Thus, it is no wonder that this website was an essential campaign battleground for both the 2008 and 2012 elections. Although these points address why Obama was active on Facebook, they do not address why he was so successful. For starters, Obama had a four year head start on gathering voters on his Facebook page, four years that Romney had to make up in 18 months. Additionally, as discussed in the Demographics chapter, the majority of Facebook users tend to be between the ages of 18 and 29 years old (86% of Facebook users are 18-29, 73% are 30-49, 57% are 50-64 and

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[125] Jennifer Aaker and Victoria Chang, "Obama and the Power of Social Media and Technology," The European Business Review, 2009, http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/?p=1627.
[126] Liam Crawford, "Obama vs. Romney Facebook Reach: The Results Will Surprise You," *PolicyMic*, August 15, 2012, http://www.policymic.com/articles/12788/obama-vs-romney-facebook-reach-the-results-will-surprise-you.
[127] Robert E. Denton, jr, ed., *The 2012 Presidential Campaign* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2014), 136-139.
[128] "How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media," *Pew Research Journalism Projects*, (2012), http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-social-media/.
[129] Robert E. Denton, jr, ed., The 2012 Presidential Campaign (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2014), 136.

35% are 65 and older[130]), they typically lean to left and in both 2008 and 2012 they voted extremely high for Obama. The Obama campaign also realized that 85% of these younger users were friends with an Obama 2012 Facebook application user and 50% of the 18-29 year old demographic were unreachable by phone because most of them own only cell phones.[131] As a result, Facebook developed into one of the primary vehicles for reaching their younger voters. As discussed earlier, President Barack Obama's campaign reached their younger voters on Facebook by launching the "targeted sharing" Facebook strategy which used comprehensive data from swing states to target users (most likely younger users) who were either non-registered, likely to switch their vote or likely to share and engage in content about President Obama on their pages. As OFAs Chief Technology Officer, Harper Reed explained,

> "We knew if someone was interested in health care or reproductive rights based on an Internet interaction on Facebook or a response to an email. Essentially, we used the technology to make sure you're the right person to receive a particular message. Then we'd ask people if they wanted to share this message. We'd look through his or her friends and ask, 'Who are the most important people for us to share this with?' And from there, we would share with these people, which continually built our base. So if you were sharing something from the campaign, it would register on Facebook."[132]

OFA was able to use 600,000 Facebook followers to contact 5 million voters, additionally; analysis has shown that 20% of those 5 million voters took some sort of action such as registering to vote. President Obama's campaign also used email to get

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[130] Shea Bennett, "Social Media 2013: User Demographics For Facebook, Twitter, Pintrest and Instagram," *Mediabistro*, March 19, 2013, http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-user-demographics_b38095.
[131] "Inside The Cave," EndageDC, 2013, http://engagedc.com/download/Inside%20the%20Cave.pdf.
[132] Linda Marsa, "Obama's Game-Changing Tech Guru," Discover, September 10, 2013, http://discovermagazine.com/2013/oct/11-harper-reed-game-changer#.UpRRt8Ssim5.

voters engaged on Facebook. Older voters tend to be extremely active on email so OFA sent messages to users inviting them to create and account and requesting that they contact six other users on email to do the same.[133] Facebook was not only a crucial data collection hub, but also a great place to integrate the many different forms of social media, allowing for better results from exposure to a wider variety of Americans.

Thus, overall, SNS was used far more extensively by President Barack Obama than John McCain and Mitt Romney. President Barack Obama also received more of a response from his users than either Republican contender. Additionally, President Barack Obama's campaign SNS strategy was far more developed than either John McCain or Mitt Romney. These indicators strongly suggest that President Barack Obama's SNS campaign was far more successful than John McCain or Mitt Romney in relaying volunteer engagement news and information to more people and more importantly, to the right people

**President Barack Obama's Distinct Advantage from 2008 to 2012**

One component that seriously hindered Mitt Romney in the 2012 campaign but gave President Barack Obama a distinct advantage was the development of the social media platform in 2008. President Barack Obama was able to leverage the 2008 platform to make his 2012 social media strategy that much stronger. For example, in 2008, he had gathered a list of 13 million people on email that followed and supported him. This meant that before his 2012 race he could send test messages to voters from his 2008 race to see

[133] "Inside The Cave," EndageDC, 2013, http://engagedc.com/download/Inside%20the%20Cave.pdf.

which headlines received the most feedback thereby giving him a head start in understanding his voter profile as well as building a strong volunteer base. Mitt Romney, on the other hand, had not only come off a tough primary race, but he also had no foundation from which to leverage as John McCain had a relatively non-existent online campaign in 2008. As Zac Moffatt, Mitt Romney's campaign digital director put it, "We had to build a plane while flying it, so we were constantly learning new things".[134] In fact, following the 2008 election, President Barack Obama's staff created a website called Change.gov, which asked people to share with the President and his transition team their stories and ideas about what they were hoping to see with the new administration. Twenty seven percent of President Barack Obama voters visited this site expecting to remain mobilized and up to date on the President's transition process in to the next elections as compared to 9% of John McCain voters who visited similar websites geared towards building the future Republican Party presidential elect.[135] Thus, even throughout the transition process from 2008 to 2012, President Barack Obama's administration used the Internet to maintain a mobilized army of online users, in order to keep them engaged and ready to support the 2012 election.

**Concluding Remarks**

In both the 2008 and 2012 campaigns, President Barack Obama utilized social media in three major ways to organize a strong and effective ground game; a campaign

[134] Jennifer Martinez, "Data Drove Obama's Ground Game," *The Hill*, November 9, 2012, http://thehill.com/blogs/hillicon-valley/technology/266987-data-drove-obamas-ground-game.
[135] Aaron Smith, "Post-Election Voter Engagement," Pew Research Journalism Projects (2008): 3-4.

website, email and SNS accounts. First and foremost, his campaign website became central for uniting and equipping volunteers for many activities, primarily going door-to-door. Email was utilized to personalize content based on the voter's location in order to make users feel needed as well as to increase the likelihood of their ability to attend events. Thirdly, President Barack Obama's lead campaign strategists were able to filter information to users by employing content creators as content sharers of campaign information working off the assumption that users on SNS are more likely to take action when campaign information comes from a "friend" or "follower" versus a campaign coordinator. Unlike his competitors, President Barack Obama saw social media not only as an information hub or a campaign financing center, but also as a ground game organizer. He understood how social networks can be shaped online in order to communicate information to volunteers effectively and efficiently saving his campaign time and money in the process.

## V. Conclusion

Throughout the history of presidential elections in America, campaign strategies have evolved commensurate with the changing technologies of the time. From word of mouth, to whistle stop stump speeches on the caboose of a traveling train, to fireside chats on the radio, to television debates and finally, today with the revolution of the Internet. The underlying notion remains that as technology changes, so do the methods by which candidates convey their platforms. Each new technological advancement has brought with it new ways to understand and communicate to the electorate. By tracking voter engagement on and through the new frontier of social media, presidential candidates are able to engage differently in hopes of potentially impacting voter turnout much like the revolution of television revealed a completely new voter demographic. The political landscape was forever changed with the introduction of television. Prior to the wide adoption of the television era, most voters received their news through alternate sources, mostly print and radio. President Barack Obama's use of social media in the 2008 and 2012 elections once again created a new voter demographic and formed a deeper understanding of the electorate. As analyzed in this paper, the use of social media has created greater impact on presidential campaigning than any technological advancement to date.

For example, in his 2012 campaign, President Barack Obama's strategies combined multiple different data sets on voter characteristics such as donation trends, ideology and geographical location in order to create a more complete voter profile. This voter profile informed campaign strategists about attributes such as which voters were most likely to be politically engaged online, which candidates were most likely to

volunteer and even, which voters were most likely to switch their vote. By understanding voters better through this data, campaign strategists could then use social media as a means to communicate specific interests using narrowcasting. Targeting users proved far easier using social media platforms such as email and Facebook because unlike television or the radio, messages via email can contain content specified to the users' interests thus making that user feel more important and more connected to the candidate's platform. As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, targeting voters online resulted in increases in voter engagement and voter turnout at the polls for some of President Obama's key constituents. For example, younger voters became far more politically engaged on social media sites than ever before coinciding perfectly with President Obama's landslide victory of the 18-29 age group, in both 2008 and 2012. Further, throughout the last six elections, voter turnout for African American voters has slowly increased. Still, in 2012, it increased so much so that voter turnout for African Americans fell by only one percentage point as compared to Whites. Although President Barack Obama's grasp on social media cannot be entirely paired to his 2008 and 2012 campaign victories, through my analysis I conclude that social media did assist his overall campaign success. However, the degree to which his campaign strategy had a small or large impact on his overall success is not conclusive. Although the current use of social media has already changed the landscape of presidential campaigns, much like previous introductions of technological advancements, it too has unseen potential in future presidential elections and will continue to evolve over time.

Campaign success appears to be a fusion of technology and campaign strategy. With traditional broadcasting methods, i.e. radio and television, communication worked

only one way, from the candidate to the electorate. However, social media, via the Internet, has created a two way street of open dialogue between users and candidates as well as from user to user. The construction of these social networks and communities online is the element that will harvest the most success for candidates down the road. One of the leading thinkers pertaining to online social media today is Dr. Michael Wu, Chief Scientist at Lithium Technologies and author of *The Science of Social*. According to Dr. Wu, just a presence on Facebook and other social media sites was not enough to get President Obama his victories in 2008 and 2012, "It (his social media presence) was not a direct consequence, in and of itself. I don't think that cuts it. You see more posts of Obama, but does that actually guarantee you to win?" [136] For that reason, Dr. Wu suggests an even further level of political engagement on behalf of the candidate; he suggests that the fostering of online social communities is what will really result in voter turnout and engagement: "A lot of citizens today actually feel that 'whether I vote or not, it doesn't make a difference'. A lot of people don't do anything, they don't engage civically. If you have a community where the citizen can engage with the government, then that's a really great platform for them to be able to communicate their needs to the government."[137] Online communities differ from other types of social media discussed in this paper, in that many forms of social media such as Facebook and Twitter are held together by pre-existing relationships between individuals while communities are held

[136] Dr. Micheal Wu, Interviewed by author, Phone Recording, July 25, 2013.
[137] Dr. Micheal Wu, Interviewed by author, Phone Recording, July 25, 2013.

together by a common interest of a large group of people.[138] So for Dr. Wu, online communities take social media one step further by allowing citizens to engage with others on issues that align with their interests and passions. OFA began to dabble with these concepts in 2012 by allowing users to join different demographic groups. However, if a candidate were to create an entire online community for the benefit of the citizens to engage in conversation on topics close to them, that candidate is more likely to see higher levels of engagement and trust in their ideas and campaign platforms. As Dr. Wu stated, "Trust is no longer a commodity that is acquired but rather a benefit that is bestowed". The majority of American citizens do not trust the government or their politicians; in fact they are far more likely to trust their neighbor than their politician. Therefore, if these online communities are built purely for the benefit of the citizens, people may be more willing to trust the content being put forward on the site. This free exchange of ideas and associated content could be monitored by the candidates in order collect data on trending topics and points of interest. Candidates could also interject their ideas and thoughts, as necessary, in order to illustrate compassion and understanding of the points of views being expressed. Therefore, my suggestion for future presidential candidates is to not only actively engage on all social media channels as discussed in this paper but to most importantly, take advantage of online community concepts in order to engage citizens while also being able to track and understand their needs and concerns. President Barack Obama engaged social media users in a way that no other candidate had previously

[138] Dr. Micheal Wu, "Community vs. Social Network," Lithosphere, June 6, 2010, http://lithosphere.lithium.com/t5/science-of-social-blog/Community-vs-Social-Network/ba-p/5283.

attained, but this was just the tip of the evolution iceberg. The use of the Internet has and will continue to evolve and influence presidential politics in America for years to come.

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