

Social Networking and the Web Campaign: Observations from the 2010 Election for the
U.S. House of Representatives
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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In
Political Science

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6 December 2011
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Web Campaigning, Social Networking, Social Capital, Identity Theory,
House of Representatives

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ABSTRACT

Scholars and political candidates have frequently viewed online political participation as a weaker and less meaningful form of political involvement than traditional, offline activities. This thesis presents an overview of the literature on political participation and the Internet in order to understand the origins of this view and why participation on social media may be uniquely meaningful in comparison with other Internet-based activities. Examination of social media using Resource Theory and Social Identity Theory justify this unique status by highlighting and rationalizing social media's exceptional capacity to build and maintain weak-tie networks while also generating an intimacy between constituents and candidates. Social Identity Theory also provides an argument for the potential of social media for reaching and mobilizing first-time participants through its capacity to passively reach and attract constituents for non-political, personal and identity-serving reasons. This thesis then shows how social media-enable first-time participants may be more inclined to continue and expanding their participation over time, thereby substantially affecting participation trends in the United States. Using case studies composed of qualitative data collected on candidate views of the Internet and social media in U.S. House campaigns, this thesis examines the state of Web campaigning in 2010 in comparison to the theoretically "archetypal" Web campaign in order to provide indications of whether the prescribed theoretical activities deliver meaningful citizen engagement and valuable returns to campaigns.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first and foremost like to thank my thesis committee for their assistance and encouragement. I very much appreciate the guidance and support provided by Drs. Craig Brians, Jeremy Hunsinger, and Timothy Luke, as their expertise and feedback made the completion of this thesis possible. I also would like to thank my wife and my son for their support and patience, while I completed this project. I also appreciate my colleagues in the U.S. Department of State, in Europe, and on Capitol Hill for the active debate surrounding this topic; in particular, I appreciate U.S. Ambassador to Romania Mark H. Gitenstein, members of “Eruptie Anti-Corruptie,” and the people of “Restart Romania” who trusted me to put these untested ideas into practice.

Perhaps most importantly, I appreciate the subjects interviewed for the case studies in this thesis. Without your expertise, this thesis would not have been possible. Interviews of these individuals were conducted in accordance with the approval granted by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board on 5 April 2011, pursuant to IRB 11-384.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Social Networking and Social Capital

Social capital declined in the United States since 1950, due to the decline in social connections, undermining the active civic engagement required for a healthy democracy (Putnam 1995). Putnam (1995) highlighted the decline in membership in civic organizations as a particular cause of this decline, and he observed that one major problem facing democracy in the United States was that individuals did not migrate to new social organizations/activities. Putnam posited that the decline in participation in social organizations/activities lead to fewer forums for developing social capital and, ultimately, less civic engagement (Putnam, 1995). But, “[as] membership in traditional civic associations declines, we see in these new [online, social] networks a new frontier for cultivating social capital, which candidates, elected officials, and civic leaders can tap when they want to mobilize citizens for political action” (Williams and Gulati 2010).

Social networking sites may represent a new forum for building social capital because social networking sites – such as Facebook - facilitate the generation and maintenance of social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007). Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found that Facebook facilitated both bridging¹ and bonding² social capital in contrast to the Internet writ large, whereas both the Internet and Facebook were found to be strong predictors of maintained social capital³. Extrapolating, Ellison,

¹ Bridging social capital is social capital which establishes “weak ties” or loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another but typically not emotional support (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007).

² Bonding social capital is social capital which is found between individuals in tightly-knit, emotionally close relationships, such as family and close friends (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007).

³ Maintained social capital is a third dimension of social capital introduced by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) which is intended to describe the ability to maintain valuable connections as one progresses through life changes

Steinfeld, and Lampe (2007) proposed that social networking – more generally than Facebook alone - also facilitated the generation and maintenance of bridging and bonding social capital.

Though social networking was found to have the capacity to strengthen bonding social capital, it is more prominently suited to easily and cheaply build and maintain bridging social capital and weak tie networks (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009). Social networking sites such as Facebook also provide satisfaction of informational needs, which are a key ingredient for strengthening weak ties and promoting collective action (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009). Social networking is also an emerging as a mechanism for developing norms of trust among its users, which facilitates social capital and civic engagement within weak-tie networks (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009).

Political campaigns must attend to social networking not only to keep up with the competition, but also because individuals use these networks – and more generally, weak-tie networks - for exchanging information and sharing perspectives (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007; Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009). An online political community is one type of weak tie network that is valuable to candidates for this reason, as they can be used “to find potential supporters and to learn about the issues that are most important to those participants” (Pirch, 2010). From a simple advertising and presence perspective, with “the most popular social networking Web sites – MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube – all rank[ing] among the ten most visited sites on the Web, [...] social networks have become a medium to which campaigns must attend” (Williams and Gulati 2010).

1.2 Scholarship on Web Campaigning and the U.S. House of Representatives

“Web campaigning [is] those activities with political objectives that are manifested in, inscribed on, and enabled through the World Wide Web”(Foot and Schneider 2006). Each election cycle from 2000-2008 for the U.S. House of Representatives witnessed an aggregate increase in the number of campaigns incorporating Internet-based campaign techniques or expanding the uses of the Internet for political ends (Panagopoulos 2010). While the 2004 presidential election was notable for the significant expansion of Web campaigning – through integration of online fundraising, volunteer organization, and more dynamic forms of communication –the 2008 presidential election was viewed as revolutionary, adding a new dimension to political campaigns through the integration and widespread use of social media (Williams and Gulati 2010).

The impact of the Internet and social media in Web campaigning is thus neither a simple extension of everyday politics nor something that is entirely unique and devoid from the traditional campaign. Rather, Web campaigning is both hindered and helped by traditional campaign thinking. Researchers tend to conclude that decision-making vis-à-vis the Web campaign is largely dependent on campaign resources, constituency characteristics, the candidate’s “home style,” and the circumstances of the election – just as in the traditional campaign (e.g. Best and Krueger 2005; Bimber 2001; DiMaggio et. al. 2004; Herrnson et. al. 2007; Narro et. al. 2008).

Many researchers studying the impact of the Internet in U.S. political participation focused their studies on the resource economizing function of the Internet, as resources do a very good job of explaining why some people *do not* participate, even if

they do not necessarily explain why some people *do* participate (e.g. Adler, Gent, and Overmeyer 1998; Bennion 2005; Bimber 1999, 2001; DiMaggio et. al. 2004; Herrnson 2004; Jennings and Zeitner 2003; Krueger 2002; Marlin 1999; Panagopoulos 2010; Paolino and Shaw 2003; Tam Cho and Gimpel 2007; Xenos and Moy 2007). Research examining the link between constituency characteristics and political use of the Internet is in many ways an extension of the studies on the relationship between resources and political use of the Internet; the constituency-based studies generally attempt to ascertain what, if any impact the Internet had on political participation due to the change in resources required for participation online and the availability of these resources to the particular constituency or subset of the constituency (e.g. Benjamin 2006; Best and Krueger 2005; Dalton 2006; DiMaggio et. al. 2004; Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, and Hindman 2007; Howard 2005; Krueger 2002; Leigh and Atkinson 2001; Overton 2004; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010; Tolbert and McNeal 2003).

Several scholars have found that conducting research in this field was well served through concentration on the U.S. House of Representatives because campaigns at this level exhibit a level of professionalism and competition that help to rule out variables witnessed when studying elections for lower level office (Adler, Gent, and Overmeyer 1998; Dalsgaard 2008; Herrnson 2004; Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, and Hindman 2007; Rackaway 2010). In parallel, the U.S. House of Representatives consistently represents the largest volume of contests in any given two year cycle, so it is well suited for providing the volume of data required for monitoring trends, including adoption and use of the Internet in campaign politics (Jarvis and Wilkerson 2006; Herrnson 2004).

Many of these scholars who studied the impact of the Internet in political contests in the United States – inclusive of contests for the U.S. House of Representatives - concluded that the Internet holds tremendous power to change the landscape of political participation; however the extent to which this potential has been realized was disputed. Some researchers found that the Internet either exacerbates gaps in political participation or has not made a significant change in political participation (e.g. Best and Krueger 2005; DiMaggio et. al. 2004; Herrnson et. al. 2007; Krueger 2002; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010). Others posited that the Web has changed or has the capacity to change political participation in a significant, positive way (e.g. Dalton 2006; Foot and Schneider 2006; Lee and Kerbache 2005; Overton 2004; Panagopoulos 2010; Paolino and Shaw 2003). Generally the conclusions in both camps are founded on the importance, necessity, or changing importance/necessity that resources have and have had on accessing and using the Internet for political ends; this noted, the prevailing view is that access to more information and modes of communication positively affects democratic practices, regardless of whether that access is expanded or distributed equally (Coleman and Gotze 1999; Habegger 2011).

In this respect, availability of more information and more, diverse modes of communication must be available for citizen's to access and exploit the participation-promoting aspects of the Internet. Political campaigns are one major producer of online political information and the corresponding Web presences serve as increasingly important focal points for political communication (Prior 2007). Because of this, understanding candidate views and decisions vis-à-vis online political communication becomes central to understanding how, or to what degree, the Internet changed and is

changing the landscape of political participation. “Understanding how campaigns use the Web, and why they use it in particular ways, is thus a foundational step toward understanding the relationship between the Web and electoral politics” (Foot and Schneider, 2006).

To examine the relationship between Web campaigning and electoral politics in the U.S. House of Representatives, this thesis will document elements of the history of Web campaigning, with a particular eye toward integration of Internet-based technologies into U.S. political campaigns. This is intended to provide a historical context and foundation for studying Internet and social media use by U.S. House candidates during the 2010 election cycle.

1.3 Web Campaigning: 1992-2008

1.3.1 1992-1996

In 1992, the Internet was used by the Clinton presidential campaign to provide additional information to viewers and to facilitate communication with and among elite supporters. “The first use of the Internet by a presidential candidate was undertaken by the Clinton campaign in the 1992 election” (Bimber and Davis 2003). The content was composed of full text of candidate speeches, issue-based position papers, and campaign-produced, biographical information about the candidate. The use of the Internet attracted little attention from journalists and even less from voters, likely due to the fact that Internet availability and use was not particularly prevalent (Bimber and Davis 2003). The Clinton campaign’s online target audience was primarily elite supporters, using the Internet to create discussion groups among elite supporters and – to a limited extent – to organize and communicate via email (Foot and Schneider 2006).

With the introduction of Mosaic 2.0 in 1994, more candidates developed websites, but use of the Internet in political campaigns was still not widely prevalent, because (Bimber and Davis 2003; Foot and Schneider 2006). Among the first candidates to use the Internet in an election for the U.S. House of Representatives were Tom Campbell (R) and Jerry Estruth (D) in a 1995 special election in California (Foot and Schneider 2006). However, it was not until the 1996 elections that the use of Web sites became common (Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, and Hindman 2007).

1996 was viewed as a transition point in the use of the Internet for political ends, as it signalled both an expansion in sponsorship of Web sites by prospective legislators as well as the first notable use of the Internet by a candidate for national office to communicate with perspective voters. In 1996, both major party and several minor party presidential candidates had Web sites, as well as nearly half of the Senate and about 15 percent of House candidates” (Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, and Hindman 2007). 1996 presidential candidate “Lamar Alexander was the first to use the Internet for campaigning when, during the primaries, he participated in interactive online sessions with users” (Bimber and Davis 2003). Prior to this, the Internet was primarily used as a medium for posting what many analysts have come to call, “brochureware” or “virtual billboards.” These “brochureware” sites simply replicated online the material the campaign was distributing and posting offline (Foot and Schneider 2006; Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, and Hindman 2007).

Another milestone in 1996, was presidential candidate Bob Dole’s infamous announcement of his campaign Web site during a nationally-covered presidential debate; this was important, since it set a meaningful precedent for use of traditional media to

promote the online aspects of the campaign (Bimber and Davis 2003). “[By] 1996, candidates for all offices began to feel they needed some kind of exposure to the Web to appear competitive and up-to-date” and traditional media played an important role in shaping this view, by proliferating stories covering and evaluating the quality of candidate Web presences (Bimber and Davis 2003). “For most candidates in 1996, merely being on the Web, or demonstrating knowledge of the Web, was Web campaigning” (Foot and Schneider 2006).

1.3.2 1998-2000

By 1998, use of the Internet by congressional-level campaigns continued to expand, but the high cost prevented many from sponsoring Web sites. In 1998, more than a third of U.S. House candidates and more than seventy percent of U.S. Senate candidates had campaign Web sites, in contrast to 1996, where four out of five U.S House candidates and a majority of U.S. Senate candidates did not have campaign Web sites (Bimber and Davis 2003). Congressional campaigns attempted to replicate the efforts of the 1996 presidential campaigns to use the Internet for fundraising and volunteer solicitation, though more than half of all congressional Web sites failed to capitalize on these features (Bimber and Davis 2003; Marlin 1999). Use of email for internal campaign use and use of Web sites as brochureware were still the most popular functions of Internet use by candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives (Bimber and Davis 2003). In 1998, the growing cost of a Web presence factored into decision-making vis-à-vis the Internet, especially in minority, independent, or underfunded campaigns, and “campaigns were reluctant to devote large sums [of money] to electronic campaigning” (Bimber and Davis

2003). “One campaign manager admitted that he would not spend much on a Web site because “I don’t know what it is worth” (Bimber and Davis 2003).

This observation noted, 1998 was also an important election cycle for studying the use of Internet in campaign politics because of the Ventura campaign for governor of Minnesota. Specifically, in 1998, independent candidate Jesse Ventura used the Internet to “answer charges by opponents or news media, to update supporters on the activity of the campaign, and to mobilize supporters” (Bimber and Davis 2003). The Ventura campaign accomplished these objectives most notably through an extensive email list used for recruiting volunteers and mobilizing voters on election day (Bimber and Davis 2003; Marlin 1999).

In an attempt to draw comparisons with the role of television in the 1960 election, many were quick to dub the 2000 elections as the “first Internet election” (Foot and Schneider 2006). In some ways this was true, as fifty-five percent of U.S. House candidates and seventy-five of Senate candidates deployed campaign Web sites, and there was more widespread use of the Internet for strategic ends, integrating online efforts into traditional campaign efforts (Bimber and Davis 2003). In the presidential election, “Gore and Bush focused their campaign advertising in ways that are relevant to long-term trends in technology and media. [...] 60 percent of advertisements by the two campaigns focused on domestic policy issues and 31 percent on the personal qualities of the candidates, generally continuing the trend of emphasizing personality that had been growing stronger since the mid-1980s” (Bimber and Davis 2003).

[In 2000], the online presence of the candidate became more than an afterthought or an online brochure, as had been true in earlier elections. Al Gore’s primary site featured a section where visitors could pose questions to a

campaign. Steve Forbes's staff carried around digital cameras and satellite transmitters so feeds could be uploaded to the Internet site. Not only did more Web sites exist, but they connected to numerous facets of the campaigns, including fundraising, volunteer solicitation, voter reinforcement, and voter mobilization (Bimber and Davis 2003).

Online fundraising was a particularly large area of growth in the 2000 elections. After the 1999 Federal Election Commission (FEC) ruling, authorizing candidates to raise money online and receive matching funds for those donations, many candidates began incorporating online donation capabilities into their Web sites (Tam Cho and Gimpel 2007). Candidates also began to use email to direct supporters to Web sites to make donations, with the 2000 Bush-Cheney campaign averaging \$200,000-\$300,000 in donations after each emailing (Bimber and Davis 2003). "The difference [of the Internet in the 2000 presidential election] was in the speed with which the candidate could profit financially from his new momentum;" candidates could reap the benefits of a media windfall in hours, versus in days or weeks as had been the case prior to online donating, allowing campaigns to turn the donations into more media advertising in short order (Bimber and Davis 2003; Tam Cho and Gimpel 2007).

2000 also marked the first election cycle in which campaigns began incorporating means for involvement of volunteers in an online-only capacity. In 2000, "[for] the most part, campaigns had learned from earlier efforts that many Web site visitors preferred online activism rather than the traditional campaign activities of licking envelopes or placing literature on doorknobs" (Bimber and Davis 2003). This, in turn, led to the development of online "toolkits," which would enable Web site visitors to download materials, literature, and guidance for writing letters to local newspapers, organizing their

communities, fundraising, etc... without the need for physical interaction with campaign staff.

By 2000, campaigns also began seeing the value in having large, sortable lists of emails for more targeted solicitation, which presented the key issue of how to acquire email addresses without purchasing email lists and running the risk of deterring potential supporters by sending unsolicited emails (Bimber and Davis 2003). Methods for acquiring email addresses were extremely straightforward, with the most prominent methods being Web site solicitation to sign up for email announcements and physical sign-up lists at events. Once comprised, campaigns sought to evaluate the frequency of email contact, in order to be effective but not intrusive (Bimber and Davis 2003).

In 2000, there was a larger constituency online than in previous elections and candidates began using the Internet more interactively, making Web campaigning a more dynamic activity. These uses ranged from chat sessions with Web site visitors, the introduction of virtual town halls, campaign discussion forums to link supporters with one another, and even the introduction of opponent-driven parody sites (Bimber and Davis 2003). The audience in the 2000 campaign also expanded with the greater availability and affordability of Internet connections. In 2000, much like the elections both before it and after it, candidates assumed and built their Web sites with supporters and undecided voters in mind – with the greatest emphasis being on supporters – as it was widely believed that the Web could not persuade a voter to change from supporting one candidate to another (Bimber and Davis 2003). In this respect, the Internet continued to largely serve as a reinforcing and supporting medium.

1.3.3 2002-2006

In 2002, Web campaigning functions introduced in the 2000 presidential campaign were again replicated and more widely deployed by candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and state governorships (Foot and Schneider 2006). However, there was little by way of new and innovative uses or strategy, resembling the tradition of simple replication in midterm elections (Bennion 2005). In this regard, it was not until 2004 that the complexity and strategic value of the Internet took a notable shift in campaign politics (Foot and Schneider 2006).

The most notable shifts observed in the 2004 election were the transition of the Internet from an e-billboard into an e-headquarters and the growing use of the Internet for political ends by constituents. The Howard Dean presidential campaign's use of the Internet is most particularly remembered for this contribution as it "demonstrated, on a national level, how a political organization could use the Web as a platform for a large-scale national movement," with Dean being most renowned for his use of MeetUp.com (Foot and Schneider 2006). In 2004, the proportion of adult Americans online expanded to nearly sixty-five percent, with more than one third of American adults reported using the Internet for political purposes, forty percent identifying the Internet as an important source of political information, and twenty-seven percent reporting that online political information impacted the way they voted (Foot and Schneider, 2006).

2006 was the year that – across-the-board – campaigns institutionalized the widespread use of the Internet (Reich and Solomon, 2007; Rackaway 2010). Reich and Solomon (2007) observed three primary areas in which Web campaigning was utilized in 2006: 1) Building Community; 2) Watching As It All Unfolds; 3) Mobilizing the Masses. Reich and Solomon (2007) specifically observed campaigns at all levels using the

Internet to build virtual communities to accomplish many of the same goals that were traditionally tackled using house parties and canvassing. Campaigns widely adopted and deployed online video and audio, providing for “on-demand” first-order connections to candidates. Campaigns also used Internet technologies to facilitate people-to-people mobilizing using email to equip volunteers with talking points, resources like Google Map mash-ups for targeting households in their area, and text-message initiated voter registration (Rackaway 2010). In 2006, campaigns were also feeling pressure from the electorate to incorporate Web campaigning techniques.

A 2006 survey showed that voters expect campaigns to use the Internet for campaign outreach. Eighty-seven percent of respondents to the survey expect political candidates to have a Web site; seventy percent expect campaigns to use email for direct voter communication; two-thirds expect candidates to use the Internet for fundraising, post video commercials on their Web sites, and run online ad campaigns; half expect campaigns to have blogs and podcasts (Rackaway 2010).

1.3.4 2008 - 2010

2008 was the first election that started and “finished” online (Smith and Rainie 2008; Panagopoulos 2010). Then-candidate Barack Obama, as well as his competitors - Hillary Clinton and Ron Paul – started their campaigns with an online video (Panagopoulos 2010). Many political pundits and average observers alike, posited President Obama “finished” the competition through his personalization and use of electronic media, including social media, websites, email and mobile connections (Cohen 2008; Miller 2008; Stirland 2008; Smith and Rainie 2008).

Candidates strategically deployed and integrated social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, campaign Web sites, MeetUp.com, and third-party political and donor sites with Google maps and analysis tools. All of these tools combined to mobilize

many new voters and set records in voter turn-out, fundraising, and attention to the election (Smith C. 2010; Smith and Rainie 2008). Some candidates, most notably Obama, went so far as to create their own social networking sites (e.g. www.mybarackobama.com), “allowing millions of supporters to create profiles, connect to other Obama fans, plan and attend events, and help raise money for the senator” (Panagopoulos 2010).

One of the lessons learned from the 2008 campaign was the sense of informality between candidates and their supporters - generated by online videos, personal messages, social media, and other new media outlets - translated into money and votes. “By creating this sense of intimacy, candidates were able to draw support from ordinary people, who may be less enthusiastic about politics and to garner a large online base of first-time donors” (Panagopoulos 2010). Digital video, blogs, citizen journalism, online news sources, and, most particularly, social media were among the new technologies credited with changing Web campaigning and giving candidates the online tools to replicate the informality and warmth of in-person, offline interactions (Panagopoulos 2010).

This evolution noted, the transformation in the role of the Internet in campaigns presented new challenges for candidates and campaign staff (Panagopoulos 2010). In contrast to finding creative ways to collect email addresses in the 2000 elections, 2008 forced campaigns to generate creative, viral media and new media gimmicks to generate attention to the campaigns. Similarly, as opposed to managing the appropriate frequency of email contact in the 2000 election, 2008 presented the issue of balancing messaging and grassroots campaigning with message control and campaign discipline

(Panagopoulos 2010). In place of brochureware, mass emailing, and candidate/campaign-centered two-way dialogue with campaign supporters, 2008 taught campaigns that political discourse and content could no longer be successfully generated exclusively by the campaign (Panagopoulos 2010).

Initial scholarly and journalistic reflections on the 2010 midterm elections suggest that adoption and use of new Web campaigning techniques in elections for the U.S. House of Representatives resembled the 1998, 2002, and 2006 midterm election cycles (Smith C. 2010). Again, the techniques and technologies pioneered in the previous presidential election, were replicated and more widely adopted by candidates for lower office (Kotecki Vest 2010). However, since the 2008 presidential elections, “a substantial segment of the U.S. voting age population is using [social media,] which makes the sites [more] relevant and important for inclusion in campaign strategies” (Gueorguieva 2010). The case studies conducted as part of this study further confirm these observations, with candidates noting in particular that many of the ideas incorporated in their own campaigns were an attempt to replicate the online successes of the 2008 presidential campaign. Taken collectively, the Internet and social media appeared poised to play a major role in the 2010 midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives.

1.4 Contributions and Significance

This thesis seeks to contribute to the body of literature on political participation and the Internet in two ways. First, it provides firsthand data on candidate views of Web campaigning and, in particular, the use of social media for political ends; this addresses Williams and Gulati (2010) observation that “[to] date, there are limited data to directly

assess and demonstrate whether and how much benefit candidates are reaping from online campaigning.” Second, this thesis presents some basic practices for a theoretically “archetypal” Web campaign in terms of both meaningful citizen engagement as well as political efficacy. These “archetypal” tenets are derived from empirically proven research discussed in chapter two.

These contributions are significant because it is traditionally difficult to get firsthand perspectives and insights into campaign views, tactics, and strategies. For this reason, information collected during the interviews was documented in the case studies even where not entirely germane to this thesis for use by future researchers on this topic. Specifically, candid insights into candidate perceptions may be of use to future researchers seeking context for empirical studies. Second, through comparison of real-world Web campaign activities with theoretically “archetypal” Web activities, this thesis provides a potential blueprint for Web campaigning “best practices” which are supported by both concrete examples of success as well as theoretical grounding, which indicates the observed accomplishments could be replicated successfully.

1.5 Research Question and Thesis Structure

Understanding the perceived value of the Internet to political campaigns and candidates is of central importance, as the Internet is a proven venue for generating social capital (Williams and Gulati 2010). Generation of social capital through use of the Internet by campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives may ultimately lead to increased participation, which is important for a healthy democracy (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010; Putnam 1995). The importance of the 2010 campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives is of particular interest as it was the first full-cycle election,

where social media was widely used by House candidates and campaigns (Kotecki Vest 2010). Further, the U.S. House of Representatives consistently represents the largest volume of contests in any given two year cycle, so it is well suited for providing the volume of data required for monitoring trends, including adoption and use of the Internet in campaign politics (Jarvis and Wilkerson 2006; Herrnson 2004).

This thesis focuses on the Web campaigning activities of candidates and campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives, and centers on the views of U.S. House of Representatives, the strategic incorporation of the Web campaign into the overall campaigns, the campaign decision-making processes, the exemplary uses of the Internet, and the lessons learned from the 2010 campaign. This thesis provides qualitative data on whether and how much benefit candidates *believe they* are reaping from online campaigning, and, thus, the overarching question that this thesis seeks to address is:

- How is the use of social media and the Internet for political campaigns perceived by candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives?

This general research question is shaped by two additional questions:

- How do candidate perceptions of the uses of social media impact the utility of social media in political campaigns?
- How does candidate involvement in the social media campaign impact the success of the Web campaign?

This thesis hypothesizes that candidates for the 2010 U.S. House of Representatives viewed the Internet and social media as resource economizing tools. If viewed this way, it stands to reason that the utility of social media in the campaigns was

marginalized because it was viewed as a tool for saving candidate time and money versus a location for investment of candidate time and money. To support this hypothesis, this thesis offers a literature review that draws on research studying political participation, online political participation, technology adoption, and the impact of social media. The objective of the literature review is to provide a context for the study of political participation (offline and online) in order to provide a context for the popular -- but not necessarily well-founded -- view that participation on the Internet and social media is weaker and less meaningful than traditional, offline activities; the literature review also provides an overview of more recent research which indicates that, while “weaker,” political participation on social media may indeed be meaningful and lead to more active civic engagement.

In chapter 3, the thesis examines political participation on the Internet using Resource Theory and Social Identity Theory in an attempt to provide a rationale for why social media may lead to new people participating politically and in a meaningful way. Important to the campaign, this thesis then highlights some potential uses of the Internet and social media, which should be particularly useful to political campaigns from a theoretical perspective. This thesis then documents those areas where social media and the Internet are well suited for both attracting new, more meaningful participation as well as useful to political campaigns in order to provide five general tenets for an “archetypal” Web campaign.

In chapter 4, three cases studies are presented consisting of qualitative data on whether and how much benefit candidates *believe they* are reaping from online campaigning. The case study data were derived from interviews with candidates and

campaign staff as well as press surrounding three 2010 campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives, highlighting noteworthy similarities and differences between the cases through comparative analysis. This chapter examines the decision making processes observed, attitudes of candidates and campaign staff toward the use of social media and the Internet in the campaign, evaluation of success and failures in the Web campaign, and highlighting additional points of potential interest.

Chapter 5 compares the case study observations with the theoretically “archetypal” Web campaign in order to provide indications of whether the prescribed theoretical activities deliver meaningful citizen engagement and valuable returns to campaigns when put into practice. The thesis examines the decision-making processes observed, attitudes of candidates and campaign staff toward the use of social media and the Internet in the campaign, evaluation of success and failures in the Web campaign, and highlighting additional points of potential interest.

Finally, this thesis concludes by speculating on the broader implications of the study’s findings. Specifically examined are how might these results apply to the 2012 election, what are the potential applications of the findings, and what are the ways in which the study could be improved and/or used in future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter is intended to provide an overview of the literature studying the Internet and political participation, with a specific eye toward understanding the origins of the view that online political participation is a weaker and less meaningful form of political involvement than traditional, offline activities. The review begins with some basic definitions for understanding the terminology and context for the general issue, then leads into discussion literature related to online political participation, and closes with a discussion of the impact of social media. The objective of this literature review is to provide the foundation for the argument for the concept that social media may be uniquely meaningful in comparison with other Internet-based activities

2.1 Defining Political Participation

Students of comparative politics do not have a generally accepted definition of political participation, let alone a definition for the more narrow conventional political participation (Conge 1988). However, the disagreement over definition can generally be tracked along six major issues: Active versus passive forms, aggressive versus nonaggressive behavior, structural versus nonstructural objects, governmental versus nongovernmental aims, mobilized versus voluntary actions, and intended versus unintended outcomes (Conge 1988). Conge (1988) defines, these issues as follows:

1. Active versus Passive Forms: Should political participation be defined in terms of action – voting, campaigning for a political party – or should it include passive forms – a feeling of patriotism, an awareness of political issues?
2. Aggressive versus Nonaggressive Behavior: Should a definition of political participation embrace civil

disobedience and political violence, or should it be limited to more “conventional” activities.

3. Structural versus Nonstructural Objects: Should efforts to change or maintain the form of government be included in the definition of political participation, or should the definition be limited to efforts to change or maintain government authorities and/or their decisions?

4. Governmental versus Nongovernmental Aims: Should political participation be limited to behavior directed toward government authorities, policies, and/or institutions, or should it include phenomena outside the realm of government?

5. Mobilized versus Voluntary Actions: Should behavior be sponsored and guided by the government to enhance its welfare be called political participation, or should the term be confined to behavior initiated by citizens in pursuit of their interests?

6. Intended versus Unintended Outcomes: Should behavior that has an unintended consequence for a government be defined as political participation? (Conway 1988)

Given an awareness of these competing views, this thesis relies on the definition put forward by Conway (1991):

[The] term political participation is being used here to mean those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government authorities, or the policies of government. These activities may be supportive of the existing policies, authorities, or structure, or they may seek to change all of these. This definition emphasizes active involvement that is instrumental or goal-oriented. However, political participation also includes passive kinds of involvement, such as attending ceremonial or supportive activities, or paying attention to what is happening in the government or in politics (Conway 1991; Krueger 2002).

The Conway definition is used based on Krueger’s 2002 observation that “[Conway’s] definition is particularly appropriate when considering participation in

cyberspace, [as the] boundaries between passive and active are increasingly blurred on the Internet through the use of Web sites and various information-gathering technologies” (Krueger, 2002). Use of this definition also helps to alleviate some of the traditional criticism of relying on a narrow definition of political participation, such as the one put forward by Verba and Nie (1972), as it does not confine the definition of political participation for the purpose of the immediate research interest (Conge 1988).

Studies on political elections generally fall within this framework of studies focused on political participation because voting is one such behavior designed to affect the choice of government personnel and/or policies (Conge 1988; Putnam 1995; Verba and Nie 1972; Lijphart 1997; Conway 1991; Nagel 1987; Leighley 1995). In many cases, studies on political participation in campaigns for political office focus on the most tangible assets (i.e. fundraising, recruiting volunteers, etc...) in a particular campaign, which may partially explain why studies focusing on the relationship between campaign activities and political participation are frequently examined using resource-based analysis (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995).

Within this framework, there is a significant body of political science research that looks to explain political participation by understanding who participates, why they participate, and how they participate (Almond and Verba 1963; Barnes and Kaase 1979; Conway 1991; Milbrath 1965; Nagel 1987). These studies tend to attempt to explain political participation in terms of socioeconomic status, gender, age, race, education level, and affluence (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Best and Krueger 2005; Leighley 1995; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010). The subset of this body of research that focuses on political participation in the United States is also heavily dependent on

resource-based models and resource implications, given the high correlation between material resources and the other major variables (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Best and Krueger 2005; Leighley 1995; Narro, Mayo, and Miller 2008; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010; Tolbert and McNeal 2003).

The general prescription for SES-derived problems tends to reside in a form of political mobilization to reduce the costs or increase the benefits of political participation, again to overcome or reduce resource barriers (Leighley 1995; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). SES models tend to also suggest that creation of more opportunities for political involvement for those who are not participating may also help to improve participation; however, these suggestions are infrequently realized given that campaigns direct “mobilizing techniques (i.e. direct mail, door-to-door canvassing) are typically directed at high status individuals or neighborhoods” because they deliver the highest return for the individual campaign (Leighley, 1995).

2.2 The Resource-Based View of Online Participation

Many of those that advocate the Internet simply reinforces the gap in political participation reason that those engaged in politics (online or offline) are those endowed with the necessary resources to participate (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010; Krueger 2002). With the addition of a new medium such as Internet – which requires different resources and skills to access and use it – some researchers found that the individuals who take advantage of the Internet are still those with the requisite material resources for traditional participation (Krueger, 2002). This reinforcement perspective relies on the assumption that traditional resources for offline,

conventional participation should also facilitate online political participation (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995).

However, there are grounds to doubt this reasoning. Specifically, analysis through using Resource Theory demonstrates that it is more likely that different resources are required for participating online than offline (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). Specifically, several scholars have discussed the importance of an individual's online skills and access to reliable Internet at home as being important predictors for participation online (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010). Following this analysis, Best and Krueger (2005) found that the Internet was a new political opportunity because it stood to advantage potential new participants who possessed the requisite skills for online participation, which helped to overcome barriers precluding offline participation.

Continuing this reasoning, Best and Krueger (2005) found that while online political participation does not appear to differ significantly from conventional participation in principle, the divergence exists primarily in *who* uses the Internet instead of engaging in traditional, offline forms of participation. Best and Krueger (2005) found that this divergence occurs as the resources required to access and use the medium are more immediately available, more widely diffused, or more familiar to one group than another. In this respect, several scholars found that despite the new opportunity for participation presented by the Internet, the reinforcement perspective prevailed because socioeconomic status, higher education, age, race, and – to a lesser extent – gender were also strong predictors of whether an individual can and will use the Internet for political purposes as well (Best and Krueger 2005; DiMaggio et. al. 2004; Riggins and Dewan 2005; Saebo, Rose, and Flak 2008; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010). The collection

of these studies on the participatory gap online – commonly referred to as the digital divide – received significant attention from participation scholars over the past 15 years, as in the research of Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, and Hindman (2007), Best and Krueger (2005), Narro, Mayo, and Miller (2008), and Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (1995, 2010).

Understanding what promotes or prohibits online participation has been the subject of considerable research in this field. In most cases, political scientists tend to conclude that the Internet holds tremendous potential to change the landscape of political participation in the United States. Failure to realize this potential is frequently attributed to unequal constituent resources, most described in terms of first and second order digital divides access, for example, unequal access to the Internet and differences in “online skills,” respectively (DiMaggio et. al. 2004; Krueger 2002). This perspective again returns to a reinforcement perspective, with a large body of literature suggesting that the resources necessary to participate in an online environment are dependent on the resources to participate offline (DiMaggio et. al. 2004; Horrigan and Murray 2006; Kling1999; Bimber 2000; Smith, A. 2010).

Similarly, the successes of the Internet to positively impact political participation were viewed as resource-based, because the resource economizing functions of the Internet lowered the barriers of entry (Best and Krueger 2005). This particular concept introduced the idea that, in addition to simple access, quality of access - particularly at home - may also contribute to whether a person will participate politically online (DiMaggio et. al. 2004; Best and Krueger 2005; Krueger 2002). These studies concluded that access to quality Internet at home was both resource-driven and geographically driven (Best and Krueger 2005; DiMaggio et. al. 2004).

2.3 Participating Online: Newly Mobilized or Switching Modes

Additional studies on the Internet and political participation have attempted to understand whether online and offline participants are the same people, or the same kinds of people. In short, these studies have found mixed results.

Some scholars found that the Internet did not significantly attract new or different participants than traditional, offline political activities. Some studies found that introduction of Internet-based political activities neither increased the volume nor broadened the diversity of participants (Benjamin 2006). Others, found that neither access or use of the Internet to obtain campaign information is predictive of political activity, with exception to campaign giving (Bimber 2001; Tam Cho and Gimpel 2007)

Others found compelling evidence that the Internet did indeed attract new and different participants than traditional, offline political activities. Tolbert and McNeal (2003) found that those who use the Internet as a news source are more likely to vote and be politically active. Xenos and Moy (2007) similarly found that those who are exposed to political information on the Internet are more politically active. Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2008), found that three Internet activities – reading news online, having sent or received e-mail for or against political candidates, and taking part in chat room discussion – to be positively related to voter turnout.

Noting these discrepancies, this thesis relies on the prevailing view of more recent research that the Internet increases political participation in aggregate, if only in certain subsets of participation, such as political donations or voter turnout (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010; Xenos and Moy 2007; Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2008). However, these scholars tend to also find that the Internet does not disrupt long-standing

patterns of participatory inequality in U.S. politics because online participation was also determined to be heavily dependent on resources (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010).

Political social networking may be one exception to the resource-based reinforcement view that the Internet does not attract new or different political participants (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010). Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2010) found that “[among] those who are politically engaged on social networking sites, 44 percent are students, and 33 percent are students under twenty-five.” While this led Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2010) to conclude that this statistic may dampen the impact of social networking on diversifying participation, it clearly demonstrates that social networking brings new people into the political process and increases the aggregate number of individuals participating politically, because of the impact on young voters.

While the observation of increases in pure volume of political activity is noteworthy, there is a persistent concern that the quality of participation diminishes online (Krueger, 2002; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2010). In many of the areas where the Internet has attracted new participants, it has been in “weaker” forms of participation, requiring less personal investment and yielding less impact on policy and governance (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2010). However, interactive forms of participation - such as that on social media - may lead to other modes of political participation or may be influenced by other modes of political participation (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2010). Political activity on Facebook pages or blogs may also passively expose friends to political activity, even if “[what] is written about political or social issues on Facebook pages or as comments on blogs may be read by friends or by no one at all and is less likely to be viewed by public officials or their staffs than are ordinary communications”

(Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2010). Because social media may lead to other modes of political participation, be influenced by other modes of political participation, and may passively expose new participants to political activity, social media stands out as unique among Internet-based platforms for engaging individuals to participate politically.

2.4 Impact of Social media on Political Participation

Social media influences political participation when it uniquely facilitates the generation and maintenance of social capital (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009). Scholars have also shown that social media - by virtue of building and maintaining weak-tie networks - exposes people to political information and ideas, engages people in activities that lead to activities in the future that have amore meaningful impact on policy and governance, and attracts first-time participants that would not likely engage offline (Schlozman, Verba, Brady 2010; Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009; Williams and Gulati 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010). extension, can influence positively users' life satisfaction, trust and public participation.” Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) further found consistent evidence that intensity of Facebook use and Facebook Groups use was positively associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, social trust, and civic and political participation.

Despite this, not all researchers have come to the conclusion that the Internet and social media generate social capital, and such conclusions tend to hinge on whether the individual researcher views use of the Internet either as a form of entertainment and diversion or a means of information acquisition and community building (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010). Valenzuela, Park, and Kee

(2009) found that social network sites⁴ fall into the latter because they are - by definition - a medium for establishing social communities built on information acquisition and information sharing. This noted, Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) also observed that not all functions of social networking had a statistically significant, positive relationship with political participation. Specifically, they found that:

“only Facebook Groups use had a statistically significant positive relationship [with political participation... and, further, the face that] intensity of Facebook use did not have a significant relationship with participation, [suggested] only certain features of Facebook are associated with political participation” (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee, 2009).

Even then, the relationship between Facebook Groups and generation of social capital was not large, even though it was significant. Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) rationalized that this should not come as a surprise, and “it would be quite troubling if a sole technological platform such as Facebook determines young adults’ stock of social capital.” Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) observed that one possible reason for the low associations may also be that researchers cannot accurately capture political activity on Facebook, citing the possibility of a follow-on study that asked respondents if “they listed any particular 2008 U.S. presidential candidate on their profile.” They noted this type of study may not fit with the traditional concept of measuring participation, but it would fit well with how Facebook users may be using the network politically and, perhaps, deliver more accurate and substantial results.

⁴ This thesis uses Boyd and Ellison’s (2007) definition of social network sites. Specifically, social network sites are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd ad Ellison 2007).

Social media were also found to have a statistically significant impact on electoral outcomes, in contrast to general Internet-based political activities, quite possibly because of its ability to improve political participation and generate social capital (Williams and Gulati 2010). Focusing solely on races for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006, Williams and Gulati (2010) found that, controlling for traditionally relevant electoral variables, the number of the incumbent's Facebook supporters and the challengers' supporters had a significant effect on the incumbents final outcome: "A 1 percent increase in the number of supporters for incumbents increased their final vote percentage by 0.011, while the same increase in number of Facebook supporters for challengers reduced incumbents' vote percentage by 0.015" (Williams and Gulati 2010).

Few technologies or communications strategies can claim such bearing on political elections, and it may be the "weaker" forms of participation on social networking sites that will increasingly impact electoral outcomes in the future because of their capacity to generate weak-tie networks (Williams and Gulati 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007). In their study on the Facebook and social capital, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found that Facebook was most effective in forming "bridging" social capital and in building and maintaining weak-tie networks. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) observed that "[online] interactions do not necessarily remove people from their offline world but may indeed be used to support relationships and keep people in contact" at a lower time/resource cost to the individual. Political candidates, like any other Facebook user, are similarly able to build and maintain weak-tie networks at a lower resource cost, which may explain the capacity of social

networking to significantly impact political elections (Williams and Gulati 2010; Steinfield, Ellison, and Lampe 2007).

The principal reason for this impact on political elections is that social media expands people's weak-tie networks (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010). Weak-tie networks matter because they are a strong predictor of political participation, and social media is a proven means of establishing and expanding weak-tie networks (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010). One reason for this is that by expanding people's weak-tie networks, social media leads to more political participation due to increased weak-tie discussion and exchanges of political information (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010). In a purely quantitative sense, individuals with larger weak-tie networks also tended to engage civically more than individuals with smaller weak-tie networks (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010). In this vein, Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela (2010) observed that:

“(1) The relationships between online and offline network size and civic engagement are positive and familiar in strength; (2) Weak-tie discussion is the strongest predictor of civic behaviors; (3) Weak-tie discussion largely mediates the association between participation and network size online and offline; (4) Online networks entail greater exposure to weak ties than offline networks.”

Despite this, many researchers and politicians remain unconvinced of the Internet and social media's ability to increase the quantity and quality of meaningful political participation in the United States (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010). This thesis argues that the Internet and social media *could* increase the quantity and quality of meaningful political participation in the United States and that - even if the online political activities are not identified as meaningful - they facilitate entry of new and diverse participants into the U.S. political process. This thesis contends that the problem

is not the technologies or the constituency, but rather it may be a failure of campaigns to incorporate on the technologies in the most appropriate and successful manner. The next chapter provides an argument for this perspective through an examination of the Internet and social media through the lenses of Resource Theory and Social Identity Theory.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Analysis of the Internet and Social Media

As discussed in chapter two, social media is increasingly viewed as an effective means of promoting meaningful political participation in the United States as well as beneficial tools for political campaigns. Resource Theory (e.g. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995 – 2010; Krueger and Best 1998-2006; Bimber and Davis 1998-2007, and Howard 2005) - and Social Identity Theory (e.g. Tajfel and Turner 1986; Huddy 2001) are two theoretical frameworks that can help explain why social media is uniquely equipped for promoting meaningful political participation in the United States. These theories are also two compatible frameworks for understanding how the Internet and social media could deliver benefits unavailable to campaigns that operate purely offline.

3.1 Resource Theory

Resource Theory provides explanatory power for how the Internet may attract new participants by reducing the barriers of entry. Resource Theory, when applied specifically to social media, also helps to explain why social media is an effective tool for facilitating and maintaining weak-tie networks.

As noted in chapter two, the majority of the existing literature on the impact of the Internet on political participation has approached the topic through various applications of Resource Theory. Specifically, these studies often explore the ability of the Internet to reduce the barriers of entry to political participation by reducing the resources necessary to participate (Krueger 2002; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). Resource Theory extends from the tradition of analyzing political participation through the lens of socioeconomic status, though resources tend to be the foundation of socioeconomic

differences in participation and thus yield a stronger explanatory power (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, 1995).

Resource theory highlights the importance of time, money, and civic skills in determining participation, though the theory does not contend that these resources are needed for all forms of political activity (Krueger 2002). Resource theory-based studies frequently come to the conclusion that the Internet reduces the cost of participation and *has the potential* to significantly broaden the pool of political participants in the United States. Consequently, researchers also focus on why the Internet has failed to reach this potential, concentrating efforts on first and second order digital divides as well as correlations between traditionally disparaged groups and persisting – even widening – gaps as a consequence of the Internet (Boyd and Ellison 2007).

Resource theory - as in the research of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995 – 2010), Krueger and Best (1998-2006), Bimber and Davis (1998-2007), and Howard (2005) - uses a soft rational choice framework that focuses primarily on the costs rather than the benefits of participation (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). The foundation for this approach is that while resources “may not explain why some people do participate, [they] do a very good job of explaining why some people do not participate” (Krueger 2002). Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) empirically bolstered the credibility of this foundation through their finding that money, time, and civic skills have powerful effects on overall political activity.

Resource theorists, such as Krueger (2002) and Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995), have found that the time-enhancing features of the Internet may reduce the amount of time required to participate politically – improving as the speed of individual

Internet connections is increased and proliferated (Krueger 2002). Online social networking is an effective means of facilitating and maintaining weak-tie networks, precisely because of the resource economizing features that it provides its users (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007). Online social networking allows its users to easily and cheaply connect with other users to form networks, exchange information, and discuss ideas (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010).

The Internet also requires a different set of skills to participate politically than traditional civic skills, and some evidence suggests that those endowed with computer and Internet proficiencies may not possess more traditional resources, suggesting that the medium may inherently be suited to facilitate the participation of new and different people (Krueger 2002). Specifically, “since the Internet draws on a different set of resources, the same individuals [that are disadvantaged offline] may not be disadvantaged online, thereby expanding the scope of those participating in politics” (Krueger 2002). Social networking is particularly effective for reaching more diverse audiences by simple virtue of its popularity, as MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube – all rank among the ten most visited sites on the Web (Williams and Gulati 2010).

Models employing resource-based explanations for political participation are particularly strong quantitatively, as they are often built on tangible metrics – dollars, hours, number of letters written, etc... - allowing scholars to quantify explanatory variables which are less likely to vary in meaning from respondent to respondent. However, this basis requires scholars to apply the assumption of “equal motivations to participate in the population” in order to conduct meaningful analysis (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, 1995). This assumption is required, as the methodology necessarily holds

motivations or benefits of participation constant while analyzing the impact of costs or potential inhibitors to participation (Krueger 2002).

As a consequence, resource models fail to capture the impact of individual preferences and social identity in the decision to participate politically, due in large part to the difficulty in clearly defining and quantifying preferences and identity (Huddy 2001). Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) did not necessarily consider this restriction a drawback of resource models, as they observed that while political interest and political efficacy certainly facilitate political activity, they – along with other measures of psychological engagement with politics - are “perilously close to the activity itself.” Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) continued that, in this regard, while measures of psychological engagement with politics made them robust predictors of participation, they were also “relatively trivial (and possibly spurious) explanations.” Identity motivations for participation likely do not follow this particular line because satisfaction is derived from the social benefits vice the actual activity itself. Specifically, individuals participate for the identity benefits of the action vice the other psychological benefits that the individual derives from the activity, thereby differentiating from the activity and avoiding a spurious correlation (Huddy 2001).

3.2 Social Identity Theory

One theoretical approach for incorporating identity into the study of political behavior is the Social Identity Theory, as elaborated by Henri Tajfel, John Turner, and colleagues (Huddy 2001). Social Identity Theory is effective for demonstrating why social media may draw new participants into the political process for reasons other than interest in the specific candidate or political activity itself. Social Identity Theory also

explains why political participation on social media may be noteworthy, as it stands to reinforce characteristics in individuals that yield meaningful participation. In this respect, Social Identity Theory provides an argument for why social media may significantly impact participation patterns in the United States in a positive manner, as these benefits are likely derived from the identity-serving features of social networking and social media (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007).

Tajfel and Turner (1986) articulated Social Identity Theory as a means of explaining intergroup behavior based on the concept that a portion of an individual's self-concept is derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group (Tajfel and Turner 1986). This strand of Social Identity Theory places a key emphasis on the psychological motivations that lead a group member to endorse or disavow an existing group membership (Huddy 2001).

Within this general definition, self-categorization researchers such as Lakoff (1987) and Neisser (1987) built on Tajfel's early work to more fully develop the cognitive origins of identity, shifting the paradigm to what is known as the "prototype theory" (Huddy, 2001). Prototype theory as articulated by Lakoff (1987) is a probabilistic structure of categorization, wherein group members are rated as "more typical" or "better members" in comparison to the prototype of the group; the prototype can either be an actual person representing the most typical member or a fictional character who embodies the most common attributes shared among group members (Lakoff 1987).

The strength with which one associates to the prototypical member affects the formation and development of social identity (Hogg and Hains 1996; Hogg, Hardie, and

Reynolds 1995; Huddy 2001). However, the strength of association is variable because salience of self-categories is intrinsically variable and fluid (Huddy 2001). This variability occurs because individuals place varying emphasis on different individual identifiers (age, race, political affiliation, ...) in different situations (Huddy 2001; Hogg, Hardie, and Reynolds 1995). Huddy (2001) further observed that young people are more averse to taking on extreme political identities, preferring “independent” or “moderate” labels to strong partisan identifiers, which she attributed to individuals feeling closer to or further away from a group prototype or key values endorsed by prototypic members (Huddy 2001). Identification with the group prototype is key because it facilitates stronger in-group identity (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

While social identity is driven by the need for positive distinctiveness, individuals also derive identity-serving value from being viewed as part of a bigger group (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Survey research shows that “social identities are adopted by degrees and represent something intermediate between all-encompassing group identity and a distinctively unique persona,” especially in the case of political identities (Huddy 2001). More accurately, majority groups evince weaker in-group identities than members of minority groups because identities need to “confer the optimal mix of distinctiveness and common attributes” (Brewer 1991; Huddy 2001). This is important because individuals with stronger in-group identities tend to be more active on behalf of the group than individuals with weaker in-group identities (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

The balance between positive distinctiveness and in-group identity is both impacted by and, in turn, impacts personal self-esteem (Tajfel and Turner 1986). “[Some researchers] argue that group members with low self-esteem should be more motivated

than others to boost the group's standing and exhibit in-group bias" (Huddy 2001). This is important because Facebook usage might provide greater benefits for users with low self-esteem and low life satisfaction because it facilitated bridging social capital when used more intensely (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007). Taken collectively, low-esteem users may be particularly attracted to and satisfied by participation on social networking sites to the benefit of campaigns. Once brought into the group, these low-esteem users should be more motivated to boost the campaigns standing, and they likely reap greater personal benefit from online activity because of the expansion of their weak-tie networks (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009). In this respect, social media may serve as an introductory medium to political participation for individuals with low self-esteem, which may lead to greater, offline participation in the future.

Important for the potential long-term impact on patterns of participation, social media may create more partisan participants because expansion of weak-tie networks can lead to higher self-esteem (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Greene 1999). Given Greene (1999)'s observation that "most American citizens do exhibit some level of social identification with their preferred party and perceived membership in a political group," "friending" or "following" a particular partisan campaign may be identity and esteem serving. Of particular concern, feelings of partisanship may be reinforced because, for many partisans, level of partisan social identity is positively correlated with self-esteem (Greene 1999; Kelly 1988).

In this respect, given Rosenberg's (1962) finding that individuals with higher self-esteem were relatively more interested in public affairs and, consequently, more likely to participate politically, social media may also facilitate more *partisan* political

participation - in addition to more participation in pure volume. This is further reinforced Greene's (1999) finding that identification with one's preferred party significantly increased the amount of partisan political behavior, even when controlling for interest and strength of partisanship.

Thus, over time, social media could generate a new cadre of individuals interested in public affairs by transforming low esteem individuals into high esteem individuals, who exhibit higher levels of partisanship and in-group bias but also participate more actively.

3.3 Five Tenets of an “Archetypal” Web Campaign

Having documented some areas where social media may be unique apart from other Internet-based political activities, this thesis offers the following five tenets for an archetypal Web campaign. The word “archetypal” is used to mean a campaign that is both effective for the campaign, but also socially responsible by promoting citizen engagement and democratic practices. Thus, an “archetypal” Web campaign should:

1. Employ Personal and Informal Web Communication Techniques:

More personal and informal Web campaigning techniques may be most effective for removing real or perceived barriers between candidates and constituents; this may help facilitate feelings of likeness with the candidate, thereby enhancing the candidate's prototype status. When a candidate is viewed as a group prototype, individuals may be more motivated to “friend” the candidate for their own identity needs and support the candidate both during the campaign and on Election Day.

This tenet is based on the research of Lakoff (1987), Hogg and Hains (1996) and Hogg, Hardie, and Reynolds (1995). Specifically, through humanizing Web campaign

techniques, the candidate will, in theory, better communicate his or herself as the group prototype. In doing so, candidates will improve the strength with which individuals identify with the campaign and improve the attachment that individuals feel toward the candidate on a personal level.

2. Create Networks within Networks:

Because individuals need to both establish positive distinctiveness as well as a group identity, campaigns stand to benefit by creating networks within networks. Providing slight distinctions between groups can help alleviate the feeling of “just being another number,” while helping the individual feel as though he or she is a relatively unique and valuable member of the larger group. If executed correctly, campaigns may be able to build stronger in-group identities.

In creating networks within networks, individuals will be given more opportunities for establishing positive distinctiveness while deriving the benefits of being viewed as part of a bigger group (Tajfel and Turner 1986). In doing so, campaigns will be able to strengthen the in-group identities of the constituents, which is important because individuals with stronger in-group identities tend to be more active on behalf of the group than individuals with weaker in-group identities (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

3. Empower the Individual:

By making the individual constituent feel as though he or she is a meaningful member of the campaign, supporters are transformed into advocates, contributors, volunteers, and votes for the candidate (Williams and Gulati 2010). This means being responsive and connecting with individuals once they have made the decision to “friend” or “follow” the campaign. Finding meaningful ways to communicate an appreciation for

the individual beyond “Thanks for the add” may also signal a connection with the candidate and a feeling of positive distinctiveness.

4. Establish Online “Elite” Nodes:

Reach out to individual online supporters and ‘tap’ them to form their own sub-networks. This not only transforms a supporter into an advocate, gives this individual positive distinctiveness, and creates sub-networks, but it puts this individual in the role of prototype, which may attract new members to the campaign who may not identify as readily with the candidate. This also capitalizes on the resource economizing functions of social media and allows the campaign to grow its weak-tie network faster.

Tam Cho and Gimpel (2007) demonstrated that the most effective fundraising techniques often used elites as nodes. Campaigns frequently returned year after year to host the same campaign fundraising events, when there was a particular influential individual who could corral prospective donors and motivate them to make campaign contributions. In establishing an online elite node network, campaigns can capitalize on digitally well-connected individuals to conduct online “canvassing” for the campaign. Reposting of campaign content, commenting on campaign content, and generating pro-campaign content will create more opportunities for passive exposure for the campaign, while also enlisting a volunteer who might not otherwise participate in campaign promotion.

5. Promote Political Tolerance:

Given that online social networking may be particularly prone to promoting partisanship, users and candidates participating online alike have a responsibility to promote tolerance. This may also be particularly useful to campaigns attempting to

attract young voters, given Huddy's (2001) finding that young people are more averse to taking on extreme political identities, preferring "independent" or "moderate" labels to strong partisan identifiers. More importantly perhaps, for the long-term health of online participation, promotion of political tolerance is important given the possible propensity of social networking to promote hyper-partisan behavior.

Chapter Four: Observations from the 2010 Elections

4.1 General Context

The Republican Party gained 63 seats in the House, marking a return to a divided government and the largest seat change since 1948 and the largest in a midterm election since 1938. Public attention was focused on the then recent bailout of Wall Street and the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), signed into law by President George W. Bush, continued by President Obama, and viewed as a major problem caused by Washington “insiders” (Bernis 2011). This set a climate for incumbents and supporters of TARP to be instant targets to lose their seats, as many could not understand why “Wall Street” received a bailout when “Main Street” was hurting.

After the passage of the “Patient Protection and Affordability Act (2010),” it too became a primary issue in the 2010 campaign and a rallying point for the conservative wing of the U.S. political spectrum due to outrage over the health care sector becoming more socialized, polling a net opposition to the Act of over ten percentage points (Real Clear Politics 2011). Republicans successfully shaped the election as a referendum on the Obama administration, convincing wide swaths of voters that the economic problems faced by the United States were caused by Obama, Democrats and too-moderate-Republicans.

The 2010 elections were also distinguished by resurgent, ultra-conservative movements marked most notably by the rise of the new constructed, grassroots “Tea Party” movement. The Tea Party movement was considered to be a libertarian and conservative populist movement that emerged in 2009 that defined itself by its focus on: Reduced government spending, opposition to taxation, reduction of the national debt and

federal budget deficit, and adherence to an ‘originalist’ interpretation of the U.S. Constitution (Halloran, 2010). The more mainstream Republican Party also took a turn to more conservative principles in creating the “Pledge to America,” which was frequently viewed as a play on the “Contract with America,” from the 1994 election cycle. The “Pledge to America” focused on four main agenda items: Jobs, Cutting Spending, Reforming Congress, and Defense. The Tea Party did not focus its energy solely against Democrats but also took aim at many incumbent Republicans; Tea Party candidates upset established Republicans in several states, generally targeting those who were considered too “moderate” for the conservative cause, with supporters significantly overlapping with the Republican base (Newport, 2010).

4.2 Case Studies

The following case studies are derived from interviews conducted by the author. Those interviewed included candidates and campaign staff who participated in the 2010 election for the U.S. House of Representatives. These interviews were conducted in accordance with the approval granted by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board on 5 April 2011, pursuant to IRB 11-384.

The subjects interviewed were all adult candidates who ran for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010 and adult members of campaign teams for candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit interview participants. The sample began using personal contacts (candidates, sitting congressman, and campaign staffers) of the author, who informally expressed interest in such a project. The author personally contacted these personal contacts and obtained consent to participate in open-response interviews.

Each interview was conducted with the expectation of that all subject responses would be kept confidential, generalized by descriptors of the subject such as role in campaign, party, age of the subject, and relevant commentary describing the nature of the election. Subjects were given the opportunity to designate what identifying information may be used in the resulting case study, allowing respondents to keep their identities confidential, to the degree they wished. Individual-level results of the study will not be released to anyone other than individuals working on the project without the subject's written consent.

The interviewed subjects gave open-ended responses in reaction to the following prompts:

- Question 1:* Please tell me about your role and experience with political campaigns, focusing on campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives that have used an internet or social media component.
- Question 2:* Please describe the characteristics of the candidate, the election, and the electorate in your own words.
- Question 3:* What types of data or information did your campaign use in making decisions regarding internet or social media use?
- Question 4:* What level of resources was committed to the internet aspects of the campaign, including financial, time staff resources? If staff was devoted to this aspect of the campaign, what experience did the staff have or what training was given?
- Question 5:* How was online content managed? How involved was the candidate in the decision-making?
- Question 6:* How were tactical and strategic decisions made? How involved was the candidate in the online strategy?
- Question 7:* How important was the internet and/or social media to the campaign? What function or functions was the internet or social media intended to perform?
- Question 8:* What were the successes and highlights of the internet aspects of the campaign? What would you have suggested should have been done differently?
- Question 9:* How did you view the opposing campaigns internet presence? Did it play into your own decision making vis-à-vis the internet and/or social media?
- Question 10:* Do you know of any additional people who I may call regarding this study? May I use your name as a reference when I call?
- Question 11:* Do you have any questions or concerns about this interview?

4.2.1 The Cautious Choreographer

4.2.1.1 Context

The subject for this case was a Republican candidate in western state, whose district was evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. For source identity protection, we will call this candidate Owen. Owen possessed a college level education, had a military and law enforcement background, was Caucasian, and over fifty years of age at the time of the election. Owen had statewide name recognition, but moderate campaign resources after close, contested previous elections.

Having participated in and won several previous elections, Owen had a strong donor list. Because of this, Owen did not have to work to gain recognition or donors within the Republican Party, but faced the persistent challenge of winning independent voters in this divided district. Owen was an established, but junior, member of congress, winning previous elections by margins ranging from two to five percent. Owen's district was a mix of major metropolitan and rural communities. Elections in Owen's district regularly attracted outside and nationwide attention because it was consistently viewed as a swing district because of the divided constituency. Owen was a not polarizing figure in his district, but elections in the district were generally decided by which candidate could get their base to the polls.

4.2.1.2 Campaign Objectives

Because Owen's district was a divided, swing district, Owen's objective was to convey that he was a moderate, with a voting record that demonstrated he was both principled but could also reach across the aisle in order to both attract out-of-state donors but also because appealing to moderates was important to Owen's reelection strategy.

Owen's biggest challenge was demonstrating that he continued to deliver for his district, and he focused on non-polarizing issues such as public safety and security and education. Owen believed the election was his to lose, and he was facing a Democratic opponent whom he had faced in a previous election.

Owen believed he needed to first succeed in winning his base then in winning independent voters, as he thought liberal voters were less likely to switch party lines. Owen built a considerable campaign treasury, amassing and spending over \$2.5 million in the 2010 cycle, fifty percent of which came from large individual donations. Because Owen needed to reach independent voters he spent over \$1.7 million on media, including approximately \$500,000 on the Web campaign. Owen assessed that his campaign was one of the most robust Web campaigns of the 2010 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives.

4.2.1.3 Role of the Internet and Social Media

Owen's Web campaign utilized Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and a traditional Web site complimented by mass emails. Owen personally made Twitter posts, both on the campaign trail and when in session in Washington D.C. in order to convey an image of constant attention to the issues. Owen observed that use of Twitter generated mainstream media hits. Owen used multiple advertising agencies and attempted to integrate his television and print content with his online content, using the non-Internet outlets to direct voters to the Web for additional information and content.

Owen used his Web site as the center of the Web campaign, integrating social media into one centralized location. Owen's Web site focused on soliciting donors and volunteers, demonstrating he had delivered for his district since the previous election.

Owen used his Web site to collect money, volunteers, and “ideas” from his constituency and to collect positive press and information on his policy positions to demonstrate knowledge of the current issues as well as success in dealing with past issues.

In terms of social media, his Facebook page was used to link constituents with one another and as a forum for discussion; his Twitter account was used to give an “informal” look into Owen’s own thoughts and activities; YouTube was used for informative and entertaining content, and Flickr was used to show his connection with his constituents by displaying photos of himself with members of the district delivering for the district. Owen also posted content generated by his advertising agency – as though it was generated by supporters – on his Web site and YouTube channel to convey the image of a movement vice a simple campaign; Owen’s team attempted to do this by giving the impression that others outside his campaign had an investment in and ownership of Owen’s accomplishments and objectives.

4.2.1.4 Decision Making Process

Owen had a strong communication director, whom he gave considerable autonomy. The communication director became the clearinghouse for both offline and online media content, and it was very hierarchical and scripted. The objective of the communication director was to ensure that Owen was always painted in the best light, his campaign was a movement about accomplishing for the district rather than reelecting Owen, and all types of media were linked in some way. The communication director was receptive to in-house ideas, but also spent considerable resources on professional advertising strategies and tactics. Intern staff drafted media content, but all content was edited and approved by the communication director before being posted or released.

4.2.1.5 Web Management

Owen hired a dedicated Web master to work under the communication director. The Web master was responsible for creating and maintaining the Web presence year-round under the direction of the communication director. Owen relied on his communication director to manage content, which was generated by both the campaign but, more often, by professional advertising agencies. Owen only generated content on the Twitter site, with the Web master posting and responding to content on all other online outlets. Owen was generally cautious about the content and did not employ a wide range of gimmicks.

4.2.1.6 Successes and Failures

Staff believed that the biggest failure of the Web campaign was that there was never a true commitment to using the medium, only to having all of the right boxes checked. The team succeeded in putting together a quality Web site, Flickr account, Facebook page, and YouTube channel but it all felt very hollow, robotic, and choreographed, as the majority was designed by the advertising agency; staff believed this was not due to what was generated by the advertising agencies, but rather the decision by the communication director to only pick what was safe, as the communication director believed the Internet was a place where elections could be lost but not won.

In this context, the Twitter account populated with content that Owen wrote himself appeared a grand success and incredibly fresh when contrasted with the other mediums. The staff reflected that it was the only outlet, aside offline, in-person contact with Owen, which gave the impression that the campaign was approachable and

personable. In this regard, the staff working on the Web campaign made an effort to highlight and put the Twitter feed at the center of the online presence, thereby putting the real candidate at the center of the campaign. To do this, the staff used technological services that would have the Twitter feed auto-populate to additional outlets such as Facebook, Poleet, and Yatterbox, among others.

4.2.1.7 Campaign Self-Evaluation

Owen's team observed that they essentially saturated the district with Owen's name and outspent the competition into irrelevance. They believed that their team was not necessarily more clever than the other side, but absolutely more prevalent. This mattered when competing in a divided district, as independent voters who were willing to vote Republican or Democrat, generally voted based on name recognition alone. In this regard, Owen's team concluded that the Web campaign was simply an additional means of saturating the district with Owen's name. While there was considerable spending on the Web presence, it was built in order to compliment traditional print, radio, and television advertising.

Owen's use of social media generated press hits, but there was a general assessment that the best means of reaching voters was through television. Owen spent a majority of his time focused on offline mobilization, using the Web presence as a reference for constituent follow-up rather than primary interaction. The campaign placed emphasis on an airtight Web campaign, noting that the Internet would not win them the election, but it could lose them the election if it were anything less than professional. It was this mantra that likely drove spending and decisions vis-à-vis the Internet, investing to keep up appearances, to be present, and to stay ahead of the competition to appear

“more put together,” vice a genuine interest in using the Internet and social media for political mobilization.

4.2.2 The Uphill Battle

4.2.2.1 Context

The subject for this case was a Republican candidate in a dominantly Republican, southern state, whom we will call James for source identity protection. James possessed an advanced, professional degree, was Caucasian, and over fifty years of age at the time of the election. James’s campaign treasury was strong after winning several previous elections, and he had statewide name recognition. Having participated in and won several previous elections, James had a strong donor list.

Because of this, James did not have to work to gain recognition or donors, but rather, James was perceived as having reached across the aisle to work with Democratic President Obama, and, as a consequence, was a target of his own party and the Tea Party movement. James was an established member of congress, winning previous elections with well over 60% of the vote. James’s district was the wealthiest and among the most conservative and elderly in a very conservative state. James’s election attracted significant outside attention, including considerable, negative attention from ultraconservative pundits with a national audience and connections to the Tea Party movement.

4.2.2.2 Campaign Objectives

James believed his biggest challenge in the 2010 election was winning despite the perception of many in his district that he was too moderate. Ultraconservative pundits with a national audience and connections to the Tea Party Movement targeted James as

being too moderate and having betrayed his party and his party's values to cater to President Obama. James, unlike some of his more conservative colleagues, recognized climate change and had more liberal position on energy. While James attempted to reach out to his district and convey his side of the story, he also realized that the older population within his district considered print and mainstream television media to be irrefutable conveyors of facts. In this respect, James thought it would be critical to attempt to reach new constituencies as well as educate his district on the realities of the issues and why James made the decisions he made in order to win this election.

4.2.2.3 Role of the Internet and Social Media

For James, the Internet and social media played a larger role in the 2010 election than in any previous election. James adapted his campaign style to incorporate some of the new platforms popularized by the 2008 Presidential candidates, particularly citing influences from both Barack Obama and John McCain. James particularly enjoyed using Twitter, which he found effective for generating mainstream media hits. James personally wrote two "tweets" a day, which populated to his website, keeping it current in hopes of attracting return traffic on a daily or semi-daily basis. James also found that clever tweets would also lead to follow-up interviews and help him to generate and shape press hits. James noted that – for his campaign – Twitter was as effective for placing a story as was a traditional press release. James observed that when he released information in "updates" via Twitter, versus a press release, it gave the impression that it was a developing story, which in turn attracted journalists.

James's team also sent mass emails, but he readily observed that this method was not as effective for reaching undecided or opposition voters. James was conscious of the

fact that emailing was only useful if the receiver decided to open the message and follow through on the content, be it to watch a video, read text, or make a contribution. In this regard, James surmised that since his email list was a list of people who registered for the emails, the people opening them were likely supporters. James also used Facebook and maintained a professional website, spending approximately \$325,000 – of his \$600,000 total budget –on media, with approximately \$100,000 spent on the Web campaign.

4.2.2.4 Decision Making Process

James employed a communication director but also involved himself significantly in this part of the campaign decision-making. While James generated Twitter content from his Blackberry, most other content was generated by an ad agency and approved by his communication director. For potentially controversial issues, James would approve the content on his own. James had a concept of what he wanted the Web campaign to look like, but relied heavily on his professional staff and ad agency for the nuts-and-bolts of the Internet presence. James did not use his volunteer staff to generate or manage content.

4.2.2.5 Web Management

James also used his long-time advertising agency to generate content as well as a professional Web site developer to make and update his Web site, both of which he used in previous elections. James provided concept and direction to the Web developers and encouraged the advertising agency to take risks and come up with several off-the-wall gimmicks to generate media hits and attention to the campaign, be it online or offline. With these outside inputs, James would personally look through the advertising gimmicks and pick from among them for use by his campaign. James employed professional staff

to maintain the Web presence, but also took advantage of popular, free platforms that integrated content between various sites.

4.2.2.6 Successes and Failures

James believed that the greatest success of his Web campaign was a YouTube video, the concept of which came from his advertising agency. The video was made with the intention of using an entertaining gimmick. James knew the video had gone viral with a young audience when just weeks after it was released, he was at a Republican donor dinner in Washington and he noticed several young staffers giggling to themselves, only to reveal that they had seen the video. Many of the YouTube clips from the show went viral both within and outside of his district. James observed that while this generated name recognition and a favorable view with a young audience, his campaign's after-election analysis found that this same demographic did not show up to vote in his district in the 2010 election.

4.2.2.7 Candidate Self-Evaluation

In James's view, the biggest problem was that despite his use of the Internet and social media to transmit information and convey his message, "he was a mortal and <a particular ultraconservative pundit> was a god." James's primary problem was that the debate and the conversation were not founded on the basis of a set of facts, and certain media outlets were taken as more credible and truthful than the campaign's own media and press releases. Two things that James reflected on after the election were, first, people are responsive and mobilized by fear, and, second, belief in the credibility of the source of news is more important to the average consumer than the content contained therein. In James assessment, this was the downfall of his campaign when he attempted

to critique the credibility and basis of fact espoused by the particular ultraconservative pundit.

When James was defending his moderate voting record, he was met by an electorate that was incited that these very votes and perceived abandonment of the strict conservative doctrine, which his electorate widely believed was the cause for the poor state of the country. When James attempted to rationalize with the electorate, he was labeled as out of touch. James observed that while his campaign used social media and the Internet, it was used more powerfully against him because people were more open to receiving messages that confirmed their perspectives than his messages that attempted to challenge their views. He noted that it seemed as though social media was more effective in echoing print and other accepted mediums to reinforce mediums, but not necessarily to change them. Use of social media against James came in the form of an organization launched with the sole purpose of voting anyone into office but James. This organization used YouTube videos and a Web site to propagate the idea that James was out of touch.

James's statements also drew attention from a media pundit from James's own party, who made a point to attack James personally and regularly on his show. It was clear to James that he had lost when he realized his district found the pundit more credible than James, a politician. James reflected that this may have been part true because of the demographic of his electorate, which viewed newspapers and television media as conveyors of fact versus opinion-based talk shows with the primary goal of attracting viewers. James also reflected that it may have been a function of the campaign context, that incumbent politicians, regardless of party, were not trusted.

By the same token, James claimed that he was victim to factually unfounded emails spread among this demographic who assumed that if it was written, the information must be true. When James could no longer rationalize his position, he was neutralized. In this regard, James observed that with the integration of the Internet, politics has taken a significant shift from a conversation based on facts and decisions to an emotionally charged dialogue that need not be fact-based as much as personality-based. James noted that gimmicks, Internet platforms, and social media outreach worked, but the source mattered more than the content.

James noted that his team underestimated the power of the organization created to oust him from office. He believed initially that the anti-James organization would work to his benefit, as his district would realize the depths of the opposition's extremity and irrationality. In this regard, James calculated he made a fatal mistake when the organization first appeared and posted a video about James, as his team – finding the video so completely unfounded – forwarded the video to James's email list asking his constituency to "look at this craziness." Unfortunate for James, in the anti-incumbent climate, many of his supporters bought into the video.

4.2.3 The First-Time Candidate

4.2.3.1 Context

The subject for this case was a democratic candidate in a slightly Republican-leaning, western state, whom we will call Ron for source identity protection. Ron possessed an advanced, professional degree, was Caucasian, was under thirty years of age at the time of the election in a field of older candidates, and did not come from independent wealth or have the support of wealthy backer(s). Ron's strategy was to win

the democratic base first before looking to the general population; in Ron's district, this demographic largely lived in the urban city centers of the state, possessed advanced degrees, were Caucasian, possessed an above-average median income, and were younger.

The atmosphere in this state was more Republican leaning than in the previous election, which Ron attributed to the electorate's perceptions of White House policy (most saliently a generally negative view of "Obama Care"), as well as a strong presence of the newly constituted Tea Party movement. The election also drew attention due to contested primaries in both the Republican and Democratic nominations for the district. The incumbent was an established member of congress, having won several election cycles, and most other candidates had experience running for office in the state and some level of district-wide name recognition. Ron did not have a recognizable name in the general electorate but did have some connections with the state-wide political elite.

4.2.3.2 Campaign Objectives

In order to win the election, Ron thought the campaign needed to generate name recognition in order to leverage the democratic base heading into the primaries. Ron received positive feedback from the state-wide political elite and his early supporters that his platform and position on the issues were a significant strength. Ron assessed that in addition to his lack of name recognition, his youthful appearance and age were also liabilities; in the primary, Ron's democratic competitors seized on this refrain and attempted to paint the picture that Ron was inexperienced and, thus, ill suited for national-level office, despite the fact that Ron had more experience on Washington's Capitol Hill "doing the job," than any of his opponents, short of the incumbent. In this regard, Ron's communications plan was built to attempt to generate name recognition,

demonstrate confidence and competence, and to raise funds, while constantly conveying maturity and professionalism.

The length of the campaign and the intensity of the primary competition forced Ron to focus a tremendous amount of his personal attention on fundraising and connecting with the statewide political elite, to show major financial and political backers that he was the most serious and capable candidate and the most worthwhile investment. Ron found that he spent most of his personal time engaged in face-to-face and telephone communication with elites or at public events engaging the masses. With Ron's focus being on what he identified as high-reward engagements, Ron relied on his campaign team to manage much of the logistics, administrative work, and impersonal aspects of the campaign, within which Ron categorized the Web campaign. Given the belief that the party's base and his most likely supporters were focused in the urban centers of the state, the campaign focused attention on outreach in these locations.

4.2.3.3 Role of the Internet and Social Media

Ron viewed the Internet and social media as complementary to traditional, offline campaign activities. Ron felt as though he was *expected* to have a strong Internet and social media presence due to perceptions of him as the youngest candidate. Ron specifically employed a Web site, Facebook page, Twitter, and generated video content. Ron used the Internet for internal campaign communication, replicating and providing his positions on the issues, two-way interactions with voters, and fundraising. Ron did not employ many gimmicks, use members-only access areas to the digital content, or facilitate peer-to-peer or grassroots organizing through outlets like MeetUp.com.

The role of the Internet and social media changed throughout the life of Ron's campaign, due in large part to changes in the personnel employed. More specifically, Ron changed communication directors multiple times, changing the emphasis placed on the Internet and social media. Throughout all of the changes, Ron maintained that the Internet's purpose was to demonstrate momentum and forward movement to the mainstream media that he was a serious candidate, as he did not attract frequent mainstream media hits. Ron believed that this demonstration of momentum and forward movement helped his fundraising effort, as it helped him convey to potential donors that he was a worthwhile investment.

Ron's first campaign communication director participated in Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, working in social media and Internet outreach. This individual was consumed with the capacity of the Internet to win an election and believed that an Internet-first strategy was the key to Ron's success. This communication director focused a considerable amount of his time and energy – almost two days per five-day week – on Facebook, attempting to “friend” voters on behalf of Ron and generating content on the Facebook page to keep the content fresh. Offline mobilization was not widely integrated into the communication director's plan. The problem was, the online effort did not translate to the offline campaign.

Another of Ron's campaign communication directors took a differing approach. This director focused more on traditional outlets, drafting content and making press releases. He was a professional consultant with a tendency to focus on the use of press releases, emails, and, to a lesser extent, YouTube videos. Ron described his final director as a balance between the two aforementioned directors; he made significant use of

Facebook and Twitter, but also used email and press releases. Ron believed the more balanced approach was most effective and led to the greatest growth in campaign support.

4.2.3.4 Decision Making Process

While Ron gave his team an overall vision for the campaign, he was not involved in the specifics of the content generated for the Web campaign. Ron relied on his hired staff to make decisions as to time spent on various communication outlets, allowing the communication directors flexibility in the strategy of campaign communications. Ron relied on his communication directors to manage content of press and Web releases, with Ron providing input and correcting when necessary. Ron's first communication director trained intern staff on social media and throughout the tenure of the first director. Content was generated by interns and published without professional oversight.

After a couple of months, it was clear that Ron could not trust the intern staff and, by extension, this communication director to generate content on Facebook and Twitter that represented Ron in the way Ron required. This led to the next communication director taking over content generation and pulling the intern staff off of social media. While the strategy and tactics employed by the campaign changed, the change in communication directors was the most notable shift.

In each case, Ron trusted his directors to make the decisions regarding social media, and focused his own time and effort on offline mobilization. Neither the change in communication directors nor the Web presence of the opponents factored into Ron's own decision making or attitude toward the Web campaign. His opponents were still employing brochure-ware, static sites and text-only emails (albeit with color). If the opponents motivated Ron in any way, it was Ron's sense that his team was ahead and

needed to stay ahead. Resources significantly drove Ron's decision-making vis-à-vis the Internet, and it was clear to Ron that as he raised more money, his Web presence, strategy, and tactics improved.

4.2.3.5 Web Management/Online Mechanics

Ron attempted to foster a "free-flowing" strategy vis-à-vis the Internet, which could adapt as more information became known. Ron's team tracked when emails were opened and attempted to determine what types of people they were. They also used Google analytics to collect information on Web traffic, including information on origin and visit frequency. Ron observed more national traffic on mass-email days, but generally, 90% of the traffic was from the local electorate, clustered in the major cities with a few rural pockets. The Web strategy was then, in theory, adjusted based on the incoming information. The analytics also demonstrated that Ron was reaching his target audience, though not at the volume Ron desired.

Ron's first campaign Web site was done by a family member, and it received little traffic. Ron changed his Web site part way through the campaign and hired a political specialist through an advertising agency. Ron's first Web site had a blog, but Ron only received four or five comments from outside individuals. The new site tied all of the media and Internet outlets together and was user-friendly allowing the campaign to update and maintain the site on their own. Though appreciative of the family donation, Ron observed that hiring a professional specialist paid considerable dividends. Ron rarely generated content, relying largely on his communication director and on intern staff to generate content. Ron parted ways with one communication director because the

content generated did not reflect Ron in the light he wanted to be perceived in and the communication director failed to adapt.

4.2.3.6 Successes and Failures

Ron found that the most successful use of the Internet was to serve as a focal point for connecting participants and providing them more information; however, Ron found that he had to first meet someone offline and drive them to the various Web outlets. Ron thought his social media presence was most successful in the late stages of the campaign. In one particular case, Ron raised over thirty thousand dollars in a single month, largely online. Ron observed that his campaign raised the most funds and received the most online traffic immediately following outreach emails.

On these days, Ron's team observed a spike in online traffic, including significant traffic outside of the electorate, indicating that the emails were being forwarded to friends and family around the country. Ron's single best fundraising email was written as though Ron was driving on the road and sending the message from his phone. It was an informal note, using his first name, and it was short and signed with the tag "Sent from my <phone>." The note was so convincing that even Ron's close friends and family were calling Ron immediately after the message was sent to talk to him about the email. This led to Ron raising approximately two thousand dollars in the first hour.

Ron's team analyzed the successes of the emails and the resulting donations and found that by sending emails at certain times and on certain days, his campaign would connect with different donor pools. Ron's campaign found that emails sent on Tuesdays or Wednesdays were the best days for fundraising emails, as well as emails that were originally transmitted at 0930 or 1000 local time. This would give prospective donors all

day to donate, and it attracted a pool of potential donors, dominated by attorneys, stay at home husbands and wives, and financial services brokers, according to internal campaign analytics.

Ron observed that weekday afternoon emails were considerably less successful. Sunday evenings were the second most successful day and time, as they attracted more blue collar and state-employed workers. Ron surmised that this was due to the blue collar work force having the time and Internet connection to view the emails at home but not at work; Sundays also delivered a higher than average number of state-employed workers, whom Ron's team supposed faced restrictions on uses of government computers for personal use and political ends.

Ron's Website also helped Ron reach out to individuals in the more rural areas and get them involved in the campaign, despite a campaign strategy focused on the urban centers. Specifically, Ron's Website provided an option for individuals to "provide feedback," and Ron's efforts to solicit ideas from the electorate through the Website were well received, most particularly by rural voters.

Another interesting facet of Ron's campaign was his communication director's effort to reach out to local, political bloggers. Though Ron observed that he needed to first meet individuals offline in order to direct them online, Ron also attracted initial traffic to his Website by inviting bloggers to view the site. Many of these bloggers then wrote about Ron on their own Websites which exposed Ron's campaign to new audiences and expanded the reach of his campaign, resulting in some – if only nominal – new supporters of his campaign.

One of the biggest challenges posed by the Internet was one particular exchange with a member of the electorate who did not understand Ron's position on health care. When the individual emailed Ron to clarify and solicit more information about Ron's position, Ron wrote back. The individual was actually a member of the Republican blogging corps who then reposted parts of the email and labeling Ron as a "flip-flop."

One problem that Ron's team had in using Facebook for direct fundraising was caused by Facebook delaying message delivery when the message was sent to a large number of people. The candidate's most notable gimmick was to do a "money bomb," playing on the reported amount of money the main Republican contender had in his bank account, \$531,000⁵. Specifically, Ron wanted to raise money in increments \$5.31 on May 31st. The problem was the message was delayed by Facebook for three days, ruining the gimmick; Ron thought this as one big pitfall of social media, as the hold placed on the message by Facebook ended up making the campaign look less professional.

4.2.3.7 Candidate Self-Evaluation

Ron was not enthusiastic about the results of his Web campaign. Ron began his online presence with a Web site built by his brother supplemented with a Facebook page, gradually integrating tools like Twitter and the third-party fundraising site Act Blue. Content was at first managed by his unpaid volunteer staff, largely college students who were supervised by Ron's communication director, but Ron quickly learned his lesson and made content generation/management the responsibility of professional staff.

⁵ The specific numbers \$531,000, \$5.31 and May 31 are changed to protect the source of the information, though principle of the gimmick was as stated.

Ron employed multiple campaign communication directors, upon whom Ron relied on for the campaign communication strategy—inclusive of Web strategy and content. Ron focused most of his time and effort being the face and voice of the campaign, interacting with donors and voters in person or over the telephone. Ron’s campaign decision making appeared to be resource driven. As a first time candidate without independent wealth, Ron focused his personal efforts “working the phones,” speaking with and meeting potential donors and the state’s political elite, and as he could afford more professional staff, he employed more professional staff.

As a first-time, young candidate, one of the principle campaign issues was generating name recognition, especially without attention from the mainstream media; Ron noted this forced him to focus his time in areas apart from the Web campaign. Also among the more major issues, Ron believed that one of the short-comings of his campaign – inclusive of the Web campaign - was the lack of continuity caused by the multiple changes in communication director.

4.3 Observations

4.3.1 The Decision-Making Process

The variance in decision-making was notable among the candidates in these studies. Interesting, all candidates self-admittedly advised that his personal style, interests and abilities as well as his perception of the medium were the top factors that drove decision-making vis-à-vis the Web campaign. Candidate decisions regarding how closely to monitor or participate in the Web campaign were not generally made in a scientific manner and were largely informed by anecdotal data. The candidates’ decisions to participate in one activity or another, to delegate or assume responsibility, or

to develop Web-based tactics and strategies were influenced more by the candidate's trust in his staff, his personal interest in a particular activity or outlet, and his technical ability/understanding than by scientific studies or data.

Each candidate similarly advised that most important to the division of financial and staff resource was his own perception of the effectiveness of the medium. No single candidate had any particular academic or scientific justification for his gauging of the effectiveness of the Internet and social media; these "value assessments" and resulting decisions appeared to be based wholly on perception/conjecture or advice given by staff. Interestingly, only one senior campaign staff member out of the three interviewed campaigns had any academic experience with the Internet in political campaigns, and the staffer's experience was limited to one graduate-level course which provided an overview of campaign activities. All other staff understanding of Web campaigning was derived from volunteer work on other campaigns – most notably the 2008 presidential campaigns. There was no formal training given either in house or sponsored externally for Web campaigning in any of the three interviewed campaigns, except for mentoring interns.

Outside of these two candidate-identified decision-making influences, other factors that candidates mentioned in the course of the interview but did not specifically highlight as being influential in the strategic and tactical decision-making in the Web campaign were the campaign context, the candidate's self-perception, and the campaign's financial resources.

4.3.1.1 How the Campaign Context Mattered

Campaign context appeared to drive the decision making process with regard to the Web campaign more than any other factor outside of the verbalized influences of

perception of the medium and personal style, interests and abilities. Of the three subjects, James noted the most obvious context-factors that shaped both his campaign's strategy and Web tactics. Most notably, James's assessment that he needed to reach out to new demographics and reshape his image – through provision of information –drove him to be more invested in the Web campaign, both in terms of his own time and the campaign's resources. James consciously made the decision to invest more in the Web campaign with high hopes to replicate the success of the 2008 presidential campaigns in order to reach younger and, potentially, first-time voters.

Perhaps more interesting in James's decision making process was that he turned more heavily to the Internet and social media after he became a target of national, ultraconservative pundit/entertainers. One particular pundit/entertainer was among the most popular shows on the most popular news network in James's district, and, based on feedback from the electorate, James found that his constituents were extremely trusting of this particular outlet and pundit/entertainer. James also found that the anti-incumbent context of the campaign made individuals less trusting of politicians on the face-value of his or her word, further increasing the stock the electorate placed in the mainstream media. Thus, in addition to outreach, James sought to use the Internet to link his views and accomplishments to alternative, yet credible and mainstream, media which provided a different view of James and James's positions. Taken together, James looked to capitalize on the ability of the Internet to swing new and independent voters by establishing new links and "winning" them by providing a vast basis of facts.

4.3.1.2 How the Candidate Mattered

None of the candidates acknowledged studying data sets pertaining to the availability or use of the Internet in their districts while making decisions vis-à-vis their Web campaign. None of the candidates studied or made strategic decisions based on the demographics of their district, despite both James and Ron using their respective Web campaigns to target particular demographics: younger voters in the case of James and urban voters in the case of Ron. While resources certainly dictated the scope of the Web campaign operation, candidates advised that campaign context and self-perceptions mattered more in terms of relative attention given to the Web campaign in comparison to other potential uses of campaign resources. The individual candidate also appeared to influence his Web campaign decision-making to the largest extent by his own perceptions of the need to reach new and/or independent voters in all three cases. Ron's perception of the electorate's expectations of him also compelled Ron to feel as though he must have the most professional Web presence.

Though each candidate was involved in the overall strategic planning, including allocation of resources between the offline and online dimensions of the campaign, each of the candidates also relied on ad agencies and professional communication directors to make the strategic decisions regarding the Web campaign. By contrast, each candidate noted that he played the most significant role in decisions regarding the offline campaign. This noted, each candidate exhibited the greatest involvement in the Web campaign when he was interested in the particular platform (i.e., Twitter in the case of Owen and James) or the gimmick/content required a personalized touch. All three candidates noted that the most notable successes of the campaigns occurred with more personalized and

informal Web content as well as greater involvement of the candidate himself. Ron and James noted specific Web-based campaign events that they were more intimately involved with as being the highlights of their overall campaigns – not just the Web campaigns. Specifically James’s viral entertainment video and Ron’s “sent from my <phone>” fundraising email were noted as having yielded the greatest one-off contribution – online or offline - to their primary campaign objectives: name propagation and fundraising.

4.3.1.3 How Resources Mattered

The influence of resources in campaign decision making was most notable in the scope of the various online productions. Greater sums in the general campaign fund led to greater proportions contributed to the online campaign in each case. This may provide an indication that the candidates viewed traditional media outlets as being first-order communication outlets, but also that there were diminishing returns or a possibility of over-saturation of traditional outlets, leading campaigns to increasingly turn to the Web once comfortable with the campaign presence on television and radio.

Resources did not dictate the number of online platforms or frequency that they were updated. Each campaign had a presence on the major social networking sites, a campaign Web site, and the ability to organize volunteers, communicate with supporters, and raise funds online. Differences existed in whether these functions were managed by professional staff. The division in resources was most obvious when contrasting first-time candidate Ron with incumbents James and Owen. Ron noted explicitly that his lack of funds led him to publish a family-member generated Web site vice a professionally constructed Web site initially. Ron also noted that resources also impacted his initial

decision to allow interns to craft and review campaign content on the Internet, while using professional staff for “higher order” campaign functions, a decision that Ron came to regret. Both James and Owen noted explicitly that professional staffs were responsible for these functions throughout the campaign.

Ron also observed that he would have been more involved in the online campaign if he did not feel as much pressure to communicate with potential large donors and political elite personally or via telephone. Ron noted that he felt he needed to demonstrate momentum through fundraising in order to win grass-roots and independent support; Ron deemed that he needed backing of large donors and political elite before he would have the momentum to attract independent support. Ron thought that as a first time candidate without a large or deep donor pool or the established backing of political elite, he had to focus his own time in managing these contacts which precluded him from participating in the online campaign.

4.3.2 Campaign Attitudes

Each of the campaigns viewed the offline component of the campaign as the most important aspect of the campaign. In all three cases, each campaign attempted to mimic the 2008 presidential elections, highlighting John McCain, Ron Paul, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama’s campaign approaches; interestingly, each highlighted the presidential campaigns from their own party as being more influential to their respective Web campaigns. Notably, both Ron and James were disappointed with the overall return on their Web campaign outside of a few highlights and platforms; Owen did not have any significant feelings toward the Web campaign, positively or negatively, simply viewing it

as an additional outlet for advertising (a nonchalance possibly correlative with the fact that, of the three, only he succeeded in winning his election).

Ron was generally sour on the Web campaign throughout, putting effort into the Web campaign because he believed it necessary for his image. Ron found it difficult to attract Web traffic and observed that he needed to first meet people offline in order to drive them to the online campaign presence. Though fundraising was the primary focus of the campaign throughout the election cycle, and though Ron attributed an Internet-based tactic as having the greatest one-off return on this objective, Ron conveyed that he felt as though he was ‘milking the same cow’ rather than attracting new donors or grassroots support via his Web-based fundraising. In this regard, Ron viewed his Internet presence as possibly improving his fundraising return due to convenience to the donors, but he anticipated that he would have had roughly the same donor pool with or without the Web presence.

James’s expectations and dependence on the Internet changed throughout the life of the campaign. James noted that he did not pay significant attention to the Web campaign until he felt that he needed to stem the negative tide generated by damaging attention from ultraconservative entertainers/pundits and the anti-James video and email. While it is impossible to tell, James’s case may indeed be exemplary fodder for the view that elections can be lost but not won online, a point noted by James himself. James highlighted that his opponents’ use of social media and the Internet proved more effective in bringing James down than James’s own Web campaign for re-election. James advised that he became increasingly invested in the online campaign as it became clear that he needed to reach new audiences, but in the end, James felt let down by the results of the

Web campaign. According to his own internal campaign analysis, James's most successful one-off to reach new voters effectively exposed James's to a new, younger electorate, however James noted that this demographic did not show up to vote on election day, leading James to view the contact as meaningless in the end.

4.3.3 What Worked and What Didn't?

The observed instances of greatest success were the instances that were the most personable and informal. James and Owen both noted that they had the strongest communication with constituents via Twitter in contrast to email, Facebook, and the Website, despite the fact that they had more traffic to Facebook and the campaign Websites than traffic to Twitter as well as a more robust email list than number of followers on Twitter. James and Owen both viewed Twitter as giving an insight into their own thoughts in real time and conveying an image that they were focused on the issues, but also approachable and personable. Owen thought that his Twitter comments made people feel connected directly to him, giving an impression that this was a venue for being in direct contact with their representative, whereas, official email or Facebook correspondence was filtered through staff.

James and Ron both observed a similar phenomenon in their big one-off successes. Ron noted explicitly that after his fundraising email signed "Sent from my <phone>," he received several phone calls from friends, family, and close supporters in the following minutes and hours, each of which promised to make a donation. The phone calls gave Ron the impression that the recipients felt as though they were being mailed from Ron's personal, more exclusive address book in a direct appeal from Ron, leading to greater donations due to a feeling of personal connection. While it wasn't an expanded

pool of donors, it resulted in his established pool giving more and larger amounts in this one-off occasion.

When prompted, James observed that it was possible his ambitions did not marry well with the demographic realities of his district, namely that it was among the oldest in the state, with lower rates of Internet usage; worth noting, it was also among the wealthiest, most educated, most Caucasian, and most conservative. James advised that while his objective with the Web campaign was to reach new, young voters, but his district did not have a substantial population that fit this target audience. In this respect, while he was disappointed with the turnout of the young vote, James acknowledged that there may not have been much of a young vote to turn out in terms of pure volume, and he had no way of determining whether his activities improved turnout of the young vote in terms of percentage of the target demographic.

Ron was disappointed with the effort required to build his Facebook friend list and Twitter follower list, as he did not judge that he benefitted from passive exposure to potential, new supporters⁶. He faulted his first communication director for spending too much time reaching out to “friend” supporters on Facebook, vice generating “buzz” about the campaign which would attract supporters to the Web presence. Ron believed that in his district, electronic contact did not yet satisfy the needs of his electorate.

⁶ While tertiary and anecdotal, this author became aware of Ron’s campaign by passively seeing friends of the author make posts on Ron’s Facebook page causing this author to be exposed to the existence of the campaign without actively searching for it.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Conclusion

5.1 Analysis

This analysis is built on the foundational concept that campaigns are intuitively benefit driven and cost restricted. It is assumed that campaigns will attempt to maximize their resources in order to derive the greatest benefit, restricted in scope and forced to make tradeoffs due to cost limits. This concept is supported by the observations of the candidates discussed in the case studies, in that each deployed relatively similar technologies and Web platforms on drastically different budgets, thus scope and professionalism of the Web campaign were the two factors most significantly impacted by cost limits.

In addressing the overarching research question of how the use of social media is perceived by candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives, the studied candidates could not readily make an informed assessment of their own Web campaign successes or failures outside of anecdotes of particular events. In short, candidates also appeared to continue to view the Internet as a campaign tool vice a dimension of the general campaign. The efficacy of the Web campaign in the eyes of the candidates interviewed resided in the Internet's ability to support offline campaign functions through resource saving-features; none of the three candidates viewed the Internet as a parallel domain for carrying out campaign functions and expanding the campaign network. As a consequence, Web deployments were not strategic, and content was generally viewed as communication function rather than a candidate function.

The consequence of this view was that all Internet-based activities and platforms, inclusive of social media, were used primarily to reinforce offline communiqués, expand

on television and radio advertising, and to compliment mass mailings to more efficiently solicit campaign donations. The interviewed candidates had widely varied judgements of the ability of the Internet to reach new audiences, and even in the case where this was the primary function of the Web campaign, tactics employed were traditional advertising gimmicks with chance events that proved successful.

Each of the campaigns attempted to replicate the 2008 presidential campaigns through proliferation of the same types of Web presences; however they failed to construct a strategy that effectively attracted constituents to the Web content, mitigating the utility of the Web campaign. This attitude toward the Internet and social media not only restricted the effectiveness of the Web campaign but also restricted the opportunities for the electorate to take advantage of the medium vis-à-vis the campaigns. In this regard, the value of this qualitative study is perhaps in interpreting what worked and why in order to provide insights into what campaigns could do to better capitalize on the Internet and social media in campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives in the future.

5.1.1 Social Media and Passive Exposure

The Internet has long been hailed for its economizing functions and ability to reduce the barriers of entry for would-be political participants. As highlighted previously, social media generates social capital through its building and facilitation of social ties at a much higher rate and in a more meaningful way than other online mediums (Smith C. 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007; Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010).

One reason that Social media appears to be unique within the Internet is because it is a forum for passive exposure of content and passive learning. In Post-Broadcast Democracy, Markus Prior (2010) highlights the importance and value of passive exposure to political content via television commercials, noting that knowledge affects turnout and turnout affects elections (46-47). The key to Prior's argument was that viewers, while in the course of using the media with the conscious interest in television's entertainment content, were exposed to political content through commercials and other forms of unintentional exposure. Similarly, it seems that social media also provides a mechanism for passive exposure and learning.

Social media appears to rely on passive exposure for networks to grow. While users will seek out individuals or content with which they have an immediate interest, social media inherently builds passive exposure through functions such as the Facebook or Myspace Wall, YouTube suggested and popular videos, and recommended Twitter feeds. The key to campaigns capitalizing on this phenomenon is in understanding the critical mass of users who actively seek a page required to generate sufficient passive exposure to cause the page, channel or feed to grow without significant campaign investment in steering individuals to the page. While it is likely a different inflection point in different campaigns or special interests, it seems likely that this contributed to the (in)effectiveness of the Web campaign in the studies in this thesis. This is one possible area for future study.

In contrast to Owen and James, Ron found that the social media components of the Web Campaign only acquired new participants in a meaningful volume when Ron's staff was actively driving them to the page; this may give credence to the need to use

online elites as nodes, as it would deliver results through better delegation. In contrast with Owen and James, whose campaigns attracted national attention for respectively being a swing district and an incumbent under threat of losing his primary, it seems natural that the body of individuals seeking out the pages out of interest would be larger in comparison to Ron, the first-time candidate who was simply attempting to generate name exposure. However, House candidates in general may not attract enough interest outside of a few exceptions to generate the kind of passive exposure required for the campaign or a particular Tweet or video to go viral, absent an exceptionally clever gimmick. This would seem true because it is likely there is not enough interest in the campaign itself to build the critical mass required to generate passive exposure in a significant volume. This is also an area for further exploration.

5.1.2 Lesson's Learned

While it is unclear what is required in terms of volume of followers required to generate sufficient passive exposure for a campaign to grow without a campaign driving individuals to the page, there does appear to be value in using offline and other mobilization techniques to drive individuals to the campaign's social media presence. The most successful campaign activities, online or offline, in all three campaigns were activities that employed personal and informal Web communication techniques. Ron's use of a fundraising email that appeared to be sent from his <phone> made individuals feel as though they were personally and informally communicating with Ron and part of a valued sub-group. This likely gave individuals a feeling of positive distinction, while also a perception of being part of a smaller in-group. According to Ron, this appeared to

make people feel as though they were personally empowered to help, which may have strengthened ties between Ron and the fundraising network.

By contrast, while James's video generated name-recognition and campaign attention, it was likely due to the entertainment value of the content. Individuals likely reposted and distributed the content because they found it humorous and /or endearing. In this respect, distribution of the campaign content may have only served individual identities by helping them appear fun and light-hearted in their own social networks because proliferation of this type of content by no means attached the electorate to the campaign. In this respect, the campaign failed to connect with constituencies despite putting forward a personal and informal campaign gimmick. By this same coin, this type of campaign gimmick was likely ineffective for moderate Republican incumbents in exceptionally conservative districts during the 2010 campaign cycle because of the national messaging that these individuals were out of touch. To this end, this type of advertising may have actually made James appear more out of touch and less professional given the campaign climate.

Owen and James's uses of Twitter were positive examples of using personal and informal Web communication to convey an image of the professional politician focused on the issues. This is more likely the type of communication that incumbents need to establish and maintain, as it is the prototype that conveys professionalism while also connecting in a personal way with individuals, helping to overcome real or perceived barriers with the constituencies. Twitter, as employed by both Owen and James, was also useful for empowering individuals, as both candidates regularly responded to individuals who commented on their "feeds." This likely created feelings of positive distinctiveness.

This could have been improved upon if the campaign had taken this a step further and communicated directly with individual commentators and asked them to establish their own sub-networks on a topic that they had discussed on the Twitter feed. This would likely further empower the individual through a personal communication that signals the individual is important. This individual then becomes an elite note, transforming into a campaign advocate and assisting with organization of networks within the greater network.

Based on the observations of these case studies it seems clear that personal and entertainment-driven content is most successful in generating name recognition, raising funds online, and in expanding campaign networks for use online and offline. Previous research indicates that most individuals who participate meaningfully online likely have an individual interest in politics, with the economizing feature of the Internet allowing those individuals to participate more efficiently.

In summary, these case studies revealed the following four lessons to be learned:

First, it seems as though communication that appears to come from the candidate strengthens ties within a weak-tie network and may even leverage action out of stronger ties. Putting more emphasis on informal and personable small touches needs more attention from the candidate. Ron's email that was "sent" from his personal phone likely capitalized on the in-group tendencies highlighted in other research by Tajfel and Turner (1986), as it led to both new, first-time donations as well as the largest donations from repeat donors.

Second, giving the impression that an individual is within a valued subgroup of the campaign, will likely capitalize on the social identity needs of individuals

within the group. Campaigns need to make better use of active participants on their social media sites and transform them into advocates. Developing strategies for creating sub-groups, then fostering a sense of value and purpose within the sub-groups may lead to higher returns because of stronger feelings of association with the campaign. This may also explain why Facebook Groups had such a large impact on civic engagement – as observed by Williams and Gulati (2010) - as the Facebook Group itself is a subgroup with a clearly identifiable cause or purpose. One means of doing this may be finding ways to link issue-based networks to the campaign, just as campaigns tend to solicit interest-based donations.

Third, content generated online has an advantage over television or radio ads because when used correctly, it can convey the image of direct contact and communication with the candidate, similar to a telephone call or in person meeting.

Online content allows constituents to ‘eavesdrop’ on other conversations, which can create both intimacy but also generate passive learning similar to personal meetings, which is good for both campaigns and political participation. Twitter feeds that were maintained by the candidate himself had the largest number of followers and led to the more mainstream media hits generated by a statement made online. Using this tactic allowed the studied campaigns to get free media hits on television, on the radio, or in print. Facebook and Twitter content that gives the impression that it was made by the candidate, vice generic announcements or reprint of information, had larger followings. James and Owen observed that these types of personal content made the pages feel more dynamic and original; Ron noted that his original content was more likely to be picked up by a blogger and discussed on third party sites.

Fourth, based on previous research on developing donor networks, one aspect of the Web campaign that was lost on all three studied campaigns was the use of elite nodes for facilitating online networking. While common for campaigns to use elites as nodes to facilitate donor networks (Tam Cho and Gimpel, 2007), the concept of using elite nodes to support the online network was absent from Web campaign strategies, short of campaigns ‘hoping’ that supporters would forward campaign emails to family, friends, and colleagues. Part of the problem is that campaigns appear to continue to view the Internet and social media as tools for accomplishing ‘real’ campaign functions, versus a new dimension of a campaign, which is capable of performing all traditional campaign functions. Web campaign strategies are geared almost exclusively to capitalize on the cost-saving functions of the Internet to attract supporters to participate in previously resource-excluded or resource-restricted functions (i.e., failing to read about the campaign or donate to the campaign because of real or perceived time restrictions, connect with a campaign because of the lack of requisite civic skills, etc...). All of the studied campaigns failed to take the next step with their online social networks and transition active or digitally well-connected users into online elite nodes.

Elites are frequently used for hosting fundraising parties, giving political endorsements to win over individuals who may still be weighing their options, and – in the era of the Internet – for organizing Meet-Up groups outside of the direction of the campaign. In social networking for political campaigns, elite nodes may not be from the same strata of traditional elites because they likely possess a different set of technological and civic skills, though they likely also exemplify the strong social skills of traditional elites. Use of online elite nodes allows campaigns to effectively “sign-post” digital

yards. Tapping individuals with strong social networking skills but perhaps a lesser interest in politics and political campaigns yields a new domain for political participation that allows the tapped individual to become more invested in the political process, both making the form of participation more meaningful for that individual but also making that individual a more reliable supporter of the campaign.

Direct communication to incentivize particular Facebook or other platform users with robust contact networks and dynamic personal pages gives a campaign a wider forum for passive exposure, which generates name and campaign recognition. Elites also become more personally invested and possibly heightening the probability that they will leverage their own strong-tie networks for the benefit of the campaign, as in the case of traditional donor networks. Reposting and commentary on campaign content by individuals on their personal pages is likely an easy, low-cost means of advertising but also an easy, low-cost means of engaging the individual. This helps to transition the Web campaign from a “push” oriented communication medium reliant on driving individuals to the page, to a self-sustaining “push-pull” medium. Other online political elites such as Bloggers, may also help to generate exposure and confidence in the campaign in much the same way that both endorsements and media exposure can support a campaign.

5.1.3 Comments on Participation and Tolerance

The persuasiveness of mass media communications is a topic that has been prevalent in research in the social sciences (e.g., Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield 1949; Klapper 1960; Sears and Whitney 1973; Neuman 1986; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams 2004; Gerber et. al. 2007). One of the theoretical observations

of this thesis is that, even though social networking is primed to potentially increase political participation in pure volume, it may not be a healthy growth. In contrast to the observations of Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) regarding negative radio and television advertising, social networking has the potential to substantially increase the probability of negative campaign politics, without consequence to a particular candidate or campaign.

This thesis hypothesizes that the primary reason for this reality is that Web campaigning on social networking sites more likely traps participants into cyclical one-sided information spaces, as the passive exposure to information is dependent on the individual's friend groups and personal preferences. This poses a risk to healthy democracy and participation as online participation then becomes a partisan exercise rather than an exchange of conversation on the issues. Gerber et. al. (2007) found that one-sided information is especially influential, as it makes individuals more resistant to accepting outside information – likely regardless of the factual accuracy of the insider or outsider information.

Similarly, campaigns have little incentive to promote tolerance in a meaningful fashion. As campaigns are one of the significant drivers of online political participation, they are unlikely to promote tolerance if they benefit from intolerance. Campaigns necessarily seek to maximize their ends and would benefit greatly from one-sided information spaces that support the campaign; this may be a reality already observed by candidates, given the studied candidates focus on their respective political bases.

5.2 Applying the Analytical Framework

Many researchers have provided arguments for why use of the Internet for political ends can be advantageous for its resource economizing functions (e.g. Brady,

Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Adler and Overmeyer 1998; Best and Krueger 2005; DiMaggio, Hargittai, and Ceste 2004; Herrnson 2004; and Narro, Mayo, and Miller 2008). While many of the noted authors discussed these economizing features in the context of their implications for democracy in the United States, by either standing to widen or narrow the participation gap, most germane to this thesis is the clear finding that the time-enhancing and cost-saving features of the Web are valuable to both campaigns and constituencies. The interviewed candidates and their campaigns appeared to more readily recognize this feature of the Internet, which possibly explains the uses of the Internet and social media in these campaigns as well as the personal investment made by the candidates into the Web campaigns.

Specifically, short of the use of Twitter by candidates Owen and James, all of the candidates delegated (or relegated) management of the Web campaign to communication directors. Each of the candidates appeared to view the Internet and social media as a real-time, inexpensive way to communicate with donors, solicit and accept donations, and publish campaign-related content. While some had hopes that the Internet and social media would help them reach new voters, the approach was a view of the Internet and social media as an additional, cost-effective advertising mechanism. The candidates very clearly viewed the Internet and social media as cost-effective compliments and alternatives to traditional campaign communication and fundraising outlets.

The trend that larger campaign coffers led to higher percentages of the campaign budget dedicated to the Web campaign may also be a telling trend, if representative on a larger scale. This type of spending pattern on the Web campaign would indicate that the Web campaign may be viewed as a tool of convenience or luxury rather than of necessity,

much as individuals tend to spend less on convenience or luxury items versus necessities when money is tighter.

At the same time, each of the candidates noted that they had higher returns on their investment in the Web campaign as the election proceeded. This is likely due in part to having more robust email lists as well as lists of “friends” and “followers” in the later stages of the campaign; however, it is also likely due to the evolution of the view of the candidates – most particularly Ron and James – throughout the campaign, with greater and more frequent personal involvement toward the end of the campaign.

The successes noted by Owen and James with regard to Twitter, of the entertainment video as noted by James, and the “Sent from my <phone>” fundraising email noted by Ron are all indications that the Internet has tremendous power to generate funds, attention to campaigns, and name recognition for candidates. The common theme amid all of these activities is that they were the activities in which the candidates were most intimately involved – or at the least – the electorate *believed* that the candidate was intimately involved. Social identity theory stands to explain why these activities proved successful and why clever social media outreach can derive benefit to both individuals and campaigns, beyond simple resource economizing functions.

When taken together with Resource Theory, application of Social Identity Theory as presented by Tajfel and Turner (1986) provides a framework for understanding why individuals may be drawn to participate or traffic Twitter or Facebook sites but not attend an in-person political rally, would be willing to watch and forward a campaign video but would not press their strong-tie networks to support a campaign, and would donate to someone they view as a friend but not necessarily a politician. While there are certainly

resource economizing functions at play with each of these activities, the research of Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009), Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007), and Williams and Gulati (2010) shows us that individuals also derive personal satisfaction and value from the identity enhancing features of social networking sites. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe showed that individuals exhibit identity forming tendencies through their social networking activity, most specifically by outwardly showing their likes, dislikes, and preferences, inclusive of their political or entertainment preferences.

Campaigns can capitalize on these features when the identified purpose of the campaign or the campaign material is identity enhancing for the individual. In example, if it is popular to be associated with a particular social cause, placing such a cause at the center of the online presence – just as a candidate would with his or her speeches and campaign material – would likely attract more supporters to the page; perhaps more useful, however, would be for the campaign to generate issue-based subgroups wherein the candidate presents his or herself as the champion of the cause instead of the focus of the page. In this way, the campaign is able to reach multiple subgroups, which generate their own value and wider range of unique, identity-enhancing subgroups.

Use of these groups in such a way that the candidate is viewed as an accessible and present partner, likely helps to replicate the offline experience of meeting a candidate in person, strengthening the tie between the candidate and individual voters, capitalizing on in-group bias of members in the fashion presented by Huddy (2001). Twitter was likely successful for Owen and James for this reason, as it created a sense of accessibility to the candidates, but also – through back-and-forth dialogue – a sense of community and relationship.

While the entertainment video is possibly the best example of a gimmick that could be used online or offline, such a gimmick would likely receive the largest exposure online versus offline, as 100,000 plus individuals will not likely show to an event to physically watch the same event. The reason why this type of gimmick video and other entertainment-type videos are so successful, also likely stems from the identity enhancing features to the individual voter. However, in this case, individuals likely share the video through their own social media outlets hoping to be a source of entertainment for their peers on social networking sites; this allows people to be exposed to the campaign and generate name recognition for the candidate with an audience who may not have an interest in politics. While this can be effective for generating widespread name-recognition, it may also explain why James was disappointed come Election Day, as it would seem as though the individuals who recognized him through the video, may not have been interested in politics or the election. In this respect, while entertaining videos are valuable for generating baseline name recognition, they are probably not useful for mobilizing political activity.

Behind each of these identity-enhancing features of social media is the reality that they work because the resource economizing features of social media help to build, facilitate, and maintain weak-ties as suggested by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007). Weak-ties are valuable for the campaign as they generate passive exposure and learning. For identity, social networking sites are built to encourage larger weak-tie networks (Yang 2010).

One particular subset of the population who may become more active in politics as a consequence of social media, by virtue of its identity-enhancing features, are low-

esteem users. This noted, Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) also found that social media may magnify low-esteem users motivation or effort to boost in-group standing because of the greater benefits afforded through the generation bridging social capital; this in turn supports Huddy's (2001) assertion that group members with low self-esteem should be more motivated than others to boost the group's standing and exhibit in-group bias (Huddy 2001). The fear in this regard, is that the in-group bias in the context of Web campaigning is likely increased division along partisan or issue-based lines. Over time, this may only be exacerbated by the fact that for many partisans, the level of partisan social identity is positively correlated with self-esteem (Greene 1999; Kelly 1988). In short, this line of reasoning extending from Social Identity Theory may indicate that social media could more rapidly transition individuals with low-esteem and higher in-group bias, to higher-esteem individuals with greater levels of partisanship.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the most important implications of the emergence of social networking in the 2010 Web campaigns appear to stem from the venue's ability to generate and facilitate social capital. Social networking sites have become new venues for the exchange of ideas between citizens and for citizen engagement with political campaigns, filling the void marked by the decline in civic organizations in the United States. However, as of the 2010 elections, candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives did not yet appear to have reconciled this reality and still generally viewed the Internet – inclusive of social media – as a simple resource economizing tool.

When examining the implications of this study, among the first things that stand out is these candidates' attitude toward weak-tie networks. While the incumbents

interviewed both recognized the value of social capital in office, each of the candidates tended to view the means of generating social capital as an elite-filtered and elite-dominated process. Each campaign attempted to put their campaign in good standing with major donors and political elites invested in their particular election without a true-to-form interest in grassroots or broad-based support. In this regard, each of the candidates placed a premium on face-to-face and telephone contact with elites, leveraging them for campaign funds and political support, but none of the campaigns attempted to use their elite supporters online.

Somewhat ironically, the observed instances of greatest success were not platforms or new Web-based functions that reduced the barriers of entry to participation; rather, it was the activities that sought to establish a connection with the electorate by conveying personal and informal contact between would-be supporters and the candidate that resulted in the greatest returns to the campaign. To this end, Web campaign strategy appears to be out of touch with the types of Internet-based functions that can propel campaigns forward, happening upon them by chance vice strategically coordinated deployment of them. Instead, campaigns appear to simply install the requisite online tools and platforms that constituents had come to expect in terms of interacting, communicating, organizing, and fundraising, rather than study and execute this dimension of the campaign similar to other core functions such as fundraising or volunteer recruiting.

Online participation may also be weaker than offline participation because of the candidate attitude toward online campaigning, namely that it is a domain that can be lost but not won. It is clear that there is much for campaigns to gain by going online, but the

paradigm must shift to use the Internet and social media for facilitating weak-tie networks in addition to use as a resource economizing tool. The range in commitment and application of social media tools was telling, both of the medium, but also of candidates and generations. While the old campaign playbook may be wearing out, the new one clearly has not yet been written.

Candidate resources continue to play a significant role in media, be it major, traditional television and radio spots or use of the Internet and social media. The greatest difference between our first-time candidate Ron and our seasoned veteran Owen was in the overall expenditures and, consequently, professionalism of the respective Web campaigns. In this respect, analyzing whether and how much benefit candidates are reaping from online campaigning is difficult to capture as campaigns cannot yet clearly associate benefits that are derived from the Internet outside of a few major, one-off events. For the interviewed campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives, the Web campaign was about a Web presence for the overall campaign and there was never a candidate-involved discussion about Web tactics or strategy in any of the cases. This appears to signal that the Internet and social media continue to be viewed as technological supplements to the campaign rather than a core campaign function to be mapped out, managed, and candidate-oriented like any other major campaign function such as fundraising or public appearances. In many ways, the Web campaign was simply handled like a press release – necessary and useful but delegated and untouched by the candidate.

This thesis also tends to support the hypothesis that “campaigns with more organizational resources have given a higher priority to online organization as well. And

the effectiveness of that organization most likely goes hand in hand with an effort to transform online supporters into off-line volunteers and advocates” (Williams and Gulati’s 2010, 288). Secondly, the interviews also supported the fact that - even if the medium is emerging in importance in the eyes of the academic world or even the voter’s perspective –candidate perceptions will shape the use by campaigns and the scope of the Internet’s political reach. If candidates fail to engage in a meaningful way online, it should be no surprise that online interactions continue to not be viewed as meaningful.

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