

INTERNET TOOLS IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: A DIALOGIC APPROACH

by

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(Under the Direction of Kaye D. Sweetser)

ABSTRACT

This intensive case study examines the online tools used by presidential candidates in the 2008 election through the lens of the dialogic theory of public relations. An in-depth content analysis of all tools candidates publicized on their official Web sites was conducted to determine whether dialogue or monologue was used to communicate online. The data suggest that while candidates used the Internet to communicate, they did not use all dialogic features available to communicate with target audiences. In addition, candidates used online tools as a public relations function for self-promotion, rather than a means for two-way communication with voters.

INDEX WORDS: Dialogic theory of public relations, Internet communication, Political communication, Public relations, Two-way communication, 2008 election, Dialogue

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B.A., Marshall University, 2007

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2009

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May 2009

DEDICATION

To my husband, Jeremy Rhoten. Thank you for your never-ending support, constant encouragement and unbelievable patience. Sometimes I need a reminder that I am capable of great things. With this project, and in life, I thank you for being my constant reminder. I appreciate all of your help, and I never could have done this without you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the chair of my thesis committee, Kaye Sweetser, for her patience, commitment, and guidance in leading me through this process. Without her expertise, this never would have been possible. I would also like to thank my committee members, Spencer Tinkham and Ruthann Lariscy, for their constant help throughout the past year. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Tinkham for lending his statistical knowledge and Dr. Lariscy for encouraging me to pursue my research passions beginning in her public opinion course.

Finally, I would like to thank my sister, Sara Schnably, for coding over her Christmas break without a single complaint. And of course, I would like to thank my husband, Jeremy Rhoten, for spending countless hours saving Web pages and coding.

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CHAPTER ONE: PURPOSE OF STUDY

Introduction

Political communication, like public relations, attempts to send a message to a public and influence behaviors or attitudes. While the emphasis in political communication relies on persuasive strategies, it too requires building a relationship with various target publics (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). “Political communication, revolving around campaign messaging on issues and image in order to get a candidate elected, in this regard can be appropriately seen as a hybrid of public relations and strategic communications” (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008, p. 176). Using this logic, public relations theories of communication can be used to examine political communication (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). As a result, the dialogic theory of public relations, which states that ethical relationships can best be developed through dialogue or two-way communication, can be used to examine political communication.

With relationship building as a key facet of public relations, for example two-way symmetrical communication, many online scholars have found success with the dialogic theory of public relations for examining online communication. In fact, a majority of the previous research concerning the dialogic theory of public relations has focused on online communication, as many of the Internet’s interactive tools allow for real-time communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002). It is these dialogic capabilities that make the Internet so important in dialogic research. Organizations, and even political candidates, now have the opportunity for direct communication and feedback from target publics as opposed to traditional media that provide one-way or monologic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002). With the many interactive and dialogic tools

available online today, it is important to examine what tools are being used and how these tools are actually communicating with the electorate.

In the past decade, the Internet has continued to grow as a tool for political candidates (Williams & Trammell, 2005). As candidates have continued to add the Internet to their publicity plans, Americans have increased their use of the Internet for political news (Tedesco, 2004). For example, in January 2008 the Pew Internet Research Center found that 24% of Americans were using the Internet as a main source of information concerning the presidential campaign. In addition, in June 2008, with five months until the election, 35% of Americans had already watched online videos concerning the campaign and 10% used social networking tools to find political information (Pew, 2008). As a result, Internet usage is on the rise as well as the usage of individual online tools. With so many candidates and voters using the Internet for political means, it is important to study online political public relations.

Purpose of Study

The dialogic theory of public relations can be applied to online political communication to examine the dialogue, or lack thereof, between candidates and potential voters online (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Taylor & Kent, 2004). Research has suggested that the Internet's interactive features, some of which can be classified as dialogic features, can positively impact a voter's overall perception of a candidate and agreement with his or her policies (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2005). In addition, a user's overall experience on a candidate's Web site can be positively increased when easy navigation exists and interactive features are made available (Kamali & Loker, 2002). These findings suggest the importance of incorporating interactive features into a candidate's online presence.

The purpose of this study is to examine online political communication through a census of the 2008 presidential and vice presidential candidates' Web sites. The theoretical framework of this study involves the dialogic theory of public relations, explicated by Pearson (1989) and further examined by Kent and Taylor (1998).

A review of the literature concerning Internet usage by political candidates in previous election cycles reveals that candidates had yet to fully utilize online dialogic features (Stromer-Galley, 2000; Williams & Trammell, 2005; Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, & Martin, 2005). This study attempts to reexamine this subject and conduct an intensive case study content analysis of the online tools used by candidates to determine if candidates are still failing to realize the capabilities of online communication tools.

Rationale

Through dialogue, a means of two-way symmetrical communication, relationships can develop and flourish. This concept is important in public relations, as the main goal in public relations is to build mutually beneficial relationships with publics (Cropp & Pincus, 2001). As a result, it is important to study dialogue in relation to public relations. This study does just that by applying the dialogic theory of public relations to online political communication. The Internet allows for ethical two-way communication through dialogue (Selnow, 1998), making it important in the overall research of the dialogic theory of public relations. This study will examine Internet usage by presidential candidates through their online tools to determine if candidates are participating in dialogue and building mutually beneficial relationships with potential voters. Unlike examining an organization and its contact with target publics, this study is important because it examines how the leaders of this country are communicating with and reaching publics.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Roots of Dialogic Communication

Politicians attempt to reach voters through a variety of media including television, newspapers, magazines, radio and the Internet. However, the Internet allows politicians to take communication a step further than traditional media. While traditional media allow for one-way communication, the Internet is fertile ground for dialogic communication. In public relations, two-way symmetrical communication has been deemed the most ethical means of communicating with a public as it allows a relationship to develop (Grunig, 1989). As a result, candidates using dialogue are participating in two-way symmetrical communication and allowing a relationship and mutual understanding to occur.

The term dialogue stems from several disciplines including psychology, rhetorical communication, and philosophy. It is an essential aspect of human existence and human communication. Dialogic communication can be described as a two-way transaction, not simply a one-way monologue (Johannesen, 1971). True dialogic communication consists of at least two parties coming together to listen and communicate without the influence of ego and without imposing one's views on the other (Johannesen, 1971). Communicators can attempt to persuade, however, each participant is seen as equal and is accepted "as a unique individual" within the conversation (Johannesen, 1971, p. 375). A core concept of dialogic communication is to openly see and hear the other person and his message. The participants and the relationship they establish are deemed more important than the actual message or medium used (Johannesen, 1971). For example, researchers of dialogic communication focus their studies on the

“transaction” taking place instead of the effects, individuals involved, or the message being sent (Stewart, 1978, p. 184). Psychiatrists and psychologists such as Eric Fromm, Carl Rogers, and Jack Gibb have described dialogic communication and its main principles in their “conceptions of effective human communication” (Johannesen, 1971, p. 374).

Opposite of dialogic communication is monologue, which consists of one-way communication similar to propaganda (Johannesen, 1971). While dialogue encourages open and unbiased communication, a monologue communicator “seeks to command, coerce, manipulate, conquer, dazzle, deceive, or exploit” (Johannesen, 1971, p. 377). In monologue, feedback and responses are simply a means to further the sender’s purposes. In dialogic communication, personal gain is avoided and individual agendas are put aside to allow for open communication (Friedman, 1955). The overarching goal of monologic communication is to “get audience consensus with the speaker’s views, to get others to do what he wants, and to impose his truth on someone else” (Johannesen, 1971, p. 377). This conflicts with dialogic communication, which attempts to foster open and unbiased communication with the purpose of making responsible decisions and building “trusting relationships” (Johannesen, 1971, p. 382). The goal of dialogic researchers is to identify and dissect the relationship built as a result of the dialogue (Stewart, 1978).

As shown, dialogue attempts to build open relationships through two-way communication. Public relations practitioners have a similar goal of establishing and maintaining a relationship between an organization and its publics. In creating these relationships, dialogue is extremely important to public relations practitioners as ethical relationships between an organization and its publics require two-way communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Philosopher Martin Buber, “the father of the modern concept of dialogue,” focused his research on the relationships man establishes through dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 22). His philosophy of human existence centered on encounters rather than the actual existence of individuals, as he described the importance of relation or the “‘between’ - the reciprocal relationship of whole and active beings” (Friedman, 1955, p. 60). Specifically, he defined the human existence through I-It and I-Thou experiences. Buber’s I-It refers to the realization of an object and takes place inside man rather than between man and the world he is experiencing, meaning it is “entirely subjective and lacking in mutuality” (Friedman, 1955, p. 57). I-Thou concerns creating and realizing a relationship. It is these relationships, Buber believed, that give meaning to life. In the I-Thou, it is not the object that is important, but rather the relation of the individual to the object. Through I-Thou, the “personality and personal” come into existence (Friedman, 1955, p. 57). “Reality exists only in effective, mutual action, and ‘the most powerful action, without reserve...the united I and the boundless thou’” (Friedman, 1955, p. 72).

According to Buber, man uses both I-Thou and I-It in everyday life; however, when man can no longer transfer between I-It and I-Thou and instead solely uses I-It, destruction results (Friedman, 1955, p. 62). But, it is not the I-It that is the evil; it is the loss of relation that causes problems.

Neither universal causality nor destiny prevent a man from being free if he is able to alternate between I-It and I-Thou. But without the ability to enter relation and cursed with the arbitrary self-will and belief in fate that particularly mark modern man, the individual and the community become sick, and the I of the true person is replaced by the empty I of individuality (Friedman, 1955, p. 62).

Human existence is based on the relationships between men. According to Buber, each person has a personal sphere, but when two people come together, a “sphere of between (das Zwischenmenschliche)” is created (Freidman, 1955, p. 85). Buber refers to the “unfolding of this sphere” as “the dialogical” (Friedman, 1955, p. 85). In public relations, dialogue is experienced between an organization and its publics rather than between two men (Taylor & Kent, 2004). Buber’s dialogical is what is shared between the two, instead of one person or even the pair together. From the dialogical comes “authentic human existence” (Friedman, 1955, p. 86). This leads to genuine dialogue, which is different than genuine conversation. Genuine conversation occurs within dialogue and is when participants speak to each other. This does not include observers or those who do not actually speak. However, genuine dialogue can be either verbal or nonverbal and includes creating a mutual relation between the participants. Actual words do not have to occur to create a mutual relationship, instead the purpose is to understand each other and to “experience the other side” (Friedman, 1955, p. 87).

In public relations, the dialogical is created between an organization and its publics. Through two-way communication, dialogue can be created and an ethical relationship can develop. In this essence, two-way communication can be seen as the process that leads to dialogue and ethical communication in public relations (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Like Buber, rhetorical communication scholar, John Stewart argues the importance of the relationship rather than the message or participants. Stewart (1978) argues that four foci can be used to describe dialogical perspective research. The first focus explains that researchers concentrate on the relationship not the communication, participants, or message (Stewart, 1978, p. 184). The second focus recognizes experientialism and the fact that researchers can utilize experiential methods rather than experimental methods to research dialogic communication

(Stewart, 1978). The third component focuses on subjectivity and self, and the final focus Stewart addresses is holism and the need to “embrace a multitude of ... variables” (Stewart, 1978, p. 185).

One focus relevant to public relations is the phenomenological foundations of relationships communication. By this, Stewart means that “knowledge emerges in the meeting of, or relationship between, subject and object in consciousness” (Stewart, 1978, p. 186). Specifically, reality in this sense is the relationship not the individuals or objects (Stewart, 1978). He then alludes to Buber’s specifications for dialogue in his argument that “one can appropriately apply concepts of self disclosure, self assertion, empathetic listening, etc., only after gaining a clear understanding of the meaning of ‘relationship’ or ‘between’” (Stewart, 1978, p. 184). Buber and Stewart, while using differing philosophies, believe the importance of dialogue lies in the relationship created. This is important in public relations as one of the criticisms of the field is the potential for excessive partisanship. If publics are included in decision-making and a relationship is created, the mentality “My country, right or wrong,” is eliminated and an open and empathetic relationship can develop (Sullivan, 1965, p. 419).

Carl Rogers (1951) provides a different approach to describing dialogic communication. In Rogers’ research and writings, he focuses his attention on client-centered psychotherapy, using a nondirective approach. Client-centered therapy emphasizes the importance of relationships between the client and therapist more so than other schools of thought (Rogers, 1951). The purpose of this nondirective approach is to make responsible decisions and achieve deep understanding through relationships (Rogers, 1951). In public relations, a dialogic relationship is created similarly to a relationship created through a client-centered approach.

Rogers' description of a relationship for nondirective client-centered therapy is similar to Stewart and Buber's description of a dialogic relationship. All three are important in understanding the history and development of dialogue. In client-centered therapy, the relationship cannot develop if each party is not genuine and open (Rogers, 1961). Rogers (1961) believes one cannot fully understand another without first understanding himself. A relationship will also be hindered if the therapist sees his client as "an object to be dissected, diagnosed, manipulated" (Rogers, 1951, p. 21). This is important in public relations as an organization could potentially manipulate its publics through propaganda. In this type of public relations communication, only one-way asymmetrical communication would occur, eliminating dialogue and ethical relationship building (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). According to Rogers, a therapist experiencing this mindset would not be able to successfully practice the nondirective, client-centered approach, as a public relations practitioner would also not be able to ethically practice dialogue. In nondirective therapy, if a therapist is genuine and accepting, the client can discuss without fear. Trust is developed and the client feels free to express his feelings, emotions and thoughts (Rogers, 1951). By accepting the individual for who he is and showing no judgment or power over the client, the client will be able to benefit and learn from the therapeutic sessions.

However, a therapist that can successfully implement this approach would value and respect the relationship created. Overall, the therapist must have an open and respectful attitude toward others. In terms of public relations, this type of practitioner would value the feedback from publics and create open lines of communication to enable this feedback to flourish. A two-way symmetrical model of public relations would possibly enable this respect and openness to occur (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Another important aspect of client-centered therapy includes going beyond observing and actually participating with the patient in a dialogue. A passive approach is deemed unacceptable as it creates feelings of rejection or lack of worth in the client. Instead, a therapist should “clarify and objectify the client’s feelings” (Rogers, 1951, p. 27). To do this properly, an empathetic and understanding dialogue between client and therapist must develop. For example, an empathetic statement can be taken as understanding and encouraging toward more discussion. However, a declarative statement can be deemed biased and judgmental by the patient (Rogers, 1951). This can limit open dialogue. Participating in the conversation is more beneficial than acting as an outsider or observer (Rogers, 1951).

Rogers’ client-centered therapy uses principles similar to dialogue to create a relationship of mutual respect. Rogers’ principles for building relationships, like those of Buber and Stewart, are similar to the ideas behind an ethical dialogic relationship. By understanding Rogers’ client-centered therapy, researchers can better understand a dialogic relationship.

In public relations, Kent and Taylor (2002) identify empathy as an essential aspect of creating a dialogic relationship. “Empathetic communication is important because practitioners can improve their communication by ‘walking in the shoes’ of their publics” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 27). In addition, a supportive atmosphere should be established to foster better communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002), similar to Rogers’ ideas in client-centered therapy.

Overall, the nondirective method of psychotherapy attempts to foster understanding and responsible decision-making through a relationship. This relationship requires the therapist to treat the client as an equal, actively and empathetically participate in the conversation, eliminate judgment and bias, and finally respect and accept the client. By entering this relationship in this way, the client and therapist will be able to get the most out of the relationship and experience

(Rogers, 1951). This can be important in public relations as a relationship that serves both the publics and the organization is valuable and effective (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Carl Rogers' description of nondirective therapy is related to dialogic communication (Johannesen, 1971) and can be linked to the field of public relations. Richard Johannesen developed six components of dialogic communication that can be used to practice ethical public relations including: genuineness, accurate empathetic understanding, unconditional positive regard, presentness, spirit of mutual equality, and supportive psychological climate to describe dialogical communication (Johannesen, 1971, p. 376). Genuineness describes the idea that each person should be open and honest during the communication without the hindrance of personal agendas. According to Kent and Taylor (2002), the same ideas are true for that of an organization and its publics when developing a dialogic relationship. Commitment and genuineness enable an open and unbiased relationship to develop in public relations.

Johannesen's accurate and empathetic understanding refers to the concept of seeing and feeling the other person's position on the issue being discussed. In public relations, this would involve the organization's empathy and sympathy toward a public's view on an issue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Unconditional positive regard involves accepting the other person, possibly without accepting his ideas or behaviors. In this component, each person values the other and what the individual brings to the conversation. In this respect, an organization should be open to its publics, even if they do not have the same stance on an issue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Presentness involves paying attention, being truthful, and becoming completely involved in the transaction. "One avoids being an onlooker who simply takes in what is presented to him or an observer who analyzes" (Johannesen, 1971, p. 376). Instead, one listens attentively, digests the information, and responds without fear. The spirit of mutual equity refers to the lack of power or superiority

among those within the communication transaction. Participants work toward “responsible decisions,” be it favorable or unfavorable toward their individual position. Finally, supportive psychological climate involves encouraging each other to express opinions openly and freely. Judgment is avoided and assumptions are reduced (Johannesen, 1971). Johannesen’s components of dialogue can be utilized by public relations practitioners wanting to create ethical dialogic relationships with publics.

Rogers, Buber, Stewart, and Johannesen believe that dialogue consists of much more than a conversation between two individuals. As Johannesen demonstrates with his six principles of dialogic communication, several conditions must be met before true dialogic communication can occur. However, once those conditions are met, a relationship can develop (Johannesen, 1971).

Dialogic Communication and Its Role in Public Relations

In the field of public relations, dialogic communication, which can be likened to symmetrical communication, has been equated with ethical communication (Pearson, 1989a; Pearson, 1989b; Grunig, 1992; Sullivan, 1965).

While a wide array of definitions of public relations exist, several contain similar characteristics and concepts. For example, “establish(ing) and maintain(ing) mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics,” is a description of public relations that many scholars agree is appropriate (Cropp & Pincus, 2001, p. 192). In addition, “public relations, broadly defined, concerns an organizations’ communications with its various publics” (Cropp & Pincus, 2001, p. 192). And, not only does public relations have various publics, but it also occurs in a variety of contexts such as healthcare, sports, or politics.

Sullivan (1965) linked dialogic communication and public relations by identifying three values in public relations: the technical value, the partisan value and the mutual value (Pearson,

1989b; Sullivan, 1965). Sullivan believed three systems of values could be used to describe the communication between an organization and its publics.

The first value, the technical value, involves much more than just the communicated message. This value focuses on the actual sending of a message and the techniques used to target and reach an audience.

Technical values involve pride of craft: respect for the materials employed and the means used to shape them, scorn for shoddy short cuts, deep personal satisfaction with the finished work which even though unsigned, bears in its lines the craftsman's bench marks (Sullivan, 1965, p. 413).

The technical value does not involve the actual content of the message a practitioner intends to send, meaning truth and accuracy are not a consideration. Instead, this value focuses on the job itself and the skills used to achieve an organization's goal (Sullivan, 1965). Sullivan describes three subcategories under his technical category including strategic, creative, and productive values. Strategic values involve an analysis of the situation, choice of method, and analysis of the outcome, while the creative value involves the usage of a specific skill or technique. Finally, the productive value involves the practical application of the public relations practitioner's skills (Sullivan, 1965).

Sullivan's partisan value concerns responsibility. When a practitioner works for an organization, he places faith in the company and the managers as honest and truthful. This assumption allows the practitioner to work without constantly second guessing his superiors. This trust enables a practitioner to focus his time and energies on gaining positive public opinion for an organization through technical skills (Sullivan, 1965).

These [values] commit public relations to the cause it serves and demand loyalty, trust, and obedience to the persons who represent the cause. Such values are highly personal and serve as a measure of the relationship between the managers of an enterprise and the men who serve as public relations council (Sullivan, 1965, p. 412).

Four subcategories of values are found under the partisan value including commitment, trust, loyalty, and obedience. Problems can arise within this value when management is not honest, ethical, and trustworthy. Sullivan uses an example of a practitioner asked to communicate messages from management using “blind faith” (Sullivan, 1965, p. 426). This does not allow the practitioner to know whether the message is in fact honest and trustworthy. Or, a practitioner might be asked to use only management’s ideas and conduct “one-way communication” eliminating other positions on an issue, eliminating dialogic communication (Sullivan, 1965, p. 426)

Finally, mutual values are the rights of human beings. This value holds that each person has rights that should be respected by others. But, the opposite is also true, and the same person must also respect others’ rights (Sullivan, 1965). Two of these rights applicable to public relations include the right to accurate and true information and the “right to participate in decisions which affect him” (Sullivan, 1965, p. 428). The right for a man to participate in a decision that could affect him comes into play in public relations as the profession “is charged with the exchange of ideas between the groups involved with the institution” (Sullivan, 1965, p. 431).

Sullivan’s mutual value of public relations, according to Pearson (1989b), emphasizes the importance of dialogue over monologue in the practice of ethical public relations. This value explains the rights of all individuals to accurate and full information, and therefore a dialogic

relationship would best be suited for establishing a relationship with full disclosure (Pearson, 1989b). The second value, or partisan value, according to J. Grunig and L. Grunig (2000) is similar to one-way asymmetrical communication to be described below.

In Grunig's excellence studies, the ethical implications of dialogue versus monologue can be seen in his conclusion that two-way symmetrical communication (similar to dialogic communication) is the most ethical method of practicing public relations (Grunig, 1992). Grunig's research of symmetrical and asymmetrical communication was based in Thayer's 1968 explanation of diachronic and synchronic communication (Grunig, 1992).

Thayer believed "synchronizing the behavior of a public with that of the organization so that the organization can continue to behave in the way it wants without interference" is not as ethical as diachronic communication in which the goal is to "negotiate a state of affairs that benefits both the organization and the public" (Grunig, 1992, p. 287; Thayer, 1967). Thayer relates diachronic communication and synchronic communication to monologue and dialogue. He believes the two are modes of intercommunication, or communication between two or more entities. His description of synchronic modes of intercommunication includes two goals (Thayer, 1965). The initial goal is to change the state of mind of a person to be that of the speaker, followed by achieving what the speaker wants through the other person's actions. These goals both involve altering a person to become harmonious with the speaker either in action or cognition (Thayer, 1965).

The diachronic mode of intercommunication differs in that the result is a new state of mind between the speaker and listener, not just the listener. The difference in diachronic versus synchronic intercommunication is that in diachronic communication the change occurs to and between both individuals whereas only the listener is affected in synchronic communication

(Thayer, 1965). Thayer provides an example using a conference within an office. A conference called to discuss and brainstorm a new policy would be diachronic as it involves jointly coming up with a solution. However, a conference to explain a new policy would be monologic as one party is simply telling the other party what the policy is, without discussion or mutual input (Thayer, 1965).

Grunig modified Thayer's ideas, as he researched symmetrical and asymmetrical communication methods. He then went on to define four models of public relations using symmetrical and asymmetrical communication (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). These four types involve dialogue and monologue in their nature. The types include press agency, public information, two-way symmetrical, and two-way asymmetrical (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). These four models have developed and changed throughout the course of history, dating back as far as the ancient Romans and Greeks. The press agency model utilizes propaganda to influence an audience using only favorable information and neglecting any unflattering details concerning the organization. It is a one-way method of asymmetrical communication and an example is sports promotion (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). However, the public-information model of public relations involves one-way communication like press agency, but changes to symmetrical communication. Unlike the deceitful methods of the press agency model, this model strives for truth and valid information. An example of this type of public relations would be nonprofits or government offices (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The two-way asymmetrical model of public relations is similar to the previous type, yet it uses two-way communication. While the press agency model aims at persuasion through propaganda, the two-way asymmetrical model attempts to persuade through "scientific persuasion," and an example would be a competitive business (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 22). Finally, the two-way symmetric model's purpose is a

“mutual understanding” between the sender and receiver (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 23). Unlike the asymmetrical model that sends information favorable to the organization sending, the symmetrical model focuses on accurate information in dialogic form rather than a monologue. The importance of this model is the nature of the feedback. In asymmetrical communication, feedback is merely used to better the source’s persuasive tactics. However, with the symmetric model, the sender is just as likely to be influenced as the receiver through the dialogic feedback that occurs (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This is important in understanding dialogic relationships established through public relations tactics.

Grunig’s excellence studies, which began in 1985, searched for an overarching theory in public relations. The study began with a review of all public relations literature and ended up producing a broad theory of public relations. The resulting theory “integrates most of the wide range of ideas about and practices of communication management in organizations. The general theory integrates most of the available body of knowledge in public relations and expands it to an even more powerful body of knowledge” (Grunig, 1992, p. xiv). It was this general theory of public relations, the excellence theory, that developed from the studies conducted by Grunig and his team.

Grunig’s excellence theory of public relations communication has similar principles to Buber’s I-It and I-Thou dialogic philosophy. The purpose of the excellence study was to explain why public relations is practiced as it is today. It examined organizations and their inclusion of public relations into the dominant coalition, which in turn was found to determine how public relations was practiced within a specific organization. It was found that when public relations managers were a part of the dominant coalition, or members of upper management understood public relations, then practitioners were more likely to have a choice in the type of public

relations model practiced at the organization (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). Excellent public relations departments were allowed to participate in decision-making, had access to top management, and engaged in symmetrical communication with target publics. Symmetrical communication in public relations has been defined by Grunig as more ethical than asymmetrical communication, which involves manipulating publics through public relations tactics. However, symmetrical communication involves creating a relationship and developing an understanding between an organization and its publics (Grunig, 1989). Through symmetrical communication, public relations is able to become the “voice of social responsibility and ethical decision making” (Grunig & Grunig, 2000, p. 27).

Grunig has conducted many studies since he began researching theories of public relations. One of his conclusions is that two-way symmetrical communication in public relations is the most ethical approach to practicing public relations (Grunig, 1989). However, while two-way communication has been deemed socially responsible, it can be manipulative when used asymmetrically. For example, if a company only sends favorable information and leaves out damaging information that can greatly affect the consumer in a negative way, asymmetrical communication would be manipulative in this instance. However, symmetrical communication focuses on the truth, not just what is best for the company. As a result, two-way symmetrical communication is the most ethical way to build relationships (Grunig, 1989). The two-way symmetrical model of communication has similar characteristics to dialogue, and the one-way asymmetrical model, press agency, resembles monologue. Buber, like Grunig, also believed dialogue or two-way communication is more ethical than monologue, or one-way communication. As demonstrated, Grunig’s excellence theory of public relations communication has similar principles to Buber’s philosophy of dialogue. While similar concepts

are investigated by both theories, this paper will solely focus on the dialogic components of communication.

The Resulting Dialogic Theory of Public Relations

Several scholars have examined the link between dialogic communication and the practice of public relations (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Pearson, 1989a; Pearson, 1989b; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Kent, Taylor & White, 2001; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). The result has been a shift from an abstract dialogic philosophy in Buber's work to a more practical dialogic theory of communication (Taylor & Kent, 2004). The resulting theory is the dialogic theory of public relations created by R. Pearson (1989a).

Two primary moral imperatives are incorporated into Pearson's theory including communicating with all affected publics and using dialogue in this communication. The secondary moral imperatives include monitoring the created relationships through research and creating plans for dealing with problems within the relationship (Pearson, 1989a). These moral imperatives describe the ethics of Pearson's theory.

In developing his theory, Pearson first describes the concept of public relations through definitions that were available in the literature. However, in his second part, Pearson describes a view of public relations derived from the idea that organizations interact through "dialogical interplay" and that "public relations is the management of the dialectical interaction among inter-organizational discourses" (Pearson, 1989a, p. 374-375).

Six dimensions of dialogue have been identified by Pearson and describe dialogic communication in public relations. He begins with the "degree of organization/public understanding of and agreement on the rules governing the opportunity for beginning, maintaining and ending communicative interaction" (Pearson, 1989a, p. 381). This involves the

communicative process and how easily publics are able to contact and provide feedback to an organization. Pearson also believes in the importance of the “degree of organization/public understanding of and agreement on the rules governing the length of time separating messages, or a question from its answer” (Pearson, 1989a, p. 382). This dimension varies especially considering the type of communication method. For example, face-to-face communication will provide instant responses where as letters will require more response time. The “degree of organization/public understanding of and agreement on rules governing opportunity for suggesting topics and initiating topic changes” is also important to ethical dialogical communication in public relations (Pearson, 1989a, p. 382). This dimension involves power, either realized or perceived, and includes asking questions that are not “normally discussed” (Pearson, 1989a, p. 382). The “degree of organization/public understanding and agreement on rules for when a response which counts as a response” is important to developing a relationship with a public (Pearson, 1989a, p. 383). This dimension examines when a response is acknowledged by the organization, not whether or not a response is in fact given. In addition, the “degree of organization/public understanding of and agreement on rules for channel selection” can better open the lines of communication between an organization and its publics (Pearson, 1989a, p. 383). This examines how to communicate through a dialogic relationship. For example, mass media would be used as a last resort and channels with more open lines of dialogic communication would be better. Finally, Pearson believes the “degree of organization/public understanding of an agreement on the rules for talking about and changing the rules” is essential to ethical dialogic communication in public relations (Pearson, 1989a, p. 384). Pearson describes this dimension as the most important because without this level of

comprehension, intellectual capacity on other dimensions would not be easily obtained (Pearson, 1989a, p. 384).

Previously, some scholars believed dialogue was a difficult method of creating and establishing relationships within public relations, the problem being the constant change and variability that can occur in a dialogic relationship with publics. To establish a truly dialogic relationship, two-way symmetrical communication is required, creating an uncontrollable variable (Pearson, 1989a). In addition, another reason for a lack of dialogic approaches in public relations stems from the idea of organizational superiority or what Pearson calls “the organization-knows-best approach” and the “sophistical approach” (Pearson, 1989a, 376). This view looks down on the publics as knowledgeable entities capable of providing meaningful feedback. However, Pearson’s theory argues that it is this variable relationship that creates the most ethical relationship through two-way symmetrical communication (Pearson, 1989a).

Kent and Taylor (2002) reexamined Pearson’s dialogic theory of public relations more than a decade later and formally explicate the theory. Together, they found that while more professionals are using the two-way symmetrical approach to communicating and building relationships with their publics, the concept of dialogue has been used more often in relation to ethical practice (Kent & Taylor, 2002). A shift in theory has also moved from a focus on communication management to communication in relationship building, bolstered by Grunig’s emphasis on relationship building.

While the excellence theory and its two-way symmetrical communication is from a strategic management position, the dialogic theory of public relations is strategic, but stems more from a relational approach that focuses on public relations’ ability to build relationships (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001).

Given the field's shift to a more relational approach to public relations, the concept of dialogue may now best capture the process and product of relationship building. Dialogue is more than a framework for understanding interpersonal relationships, it can also be used to understand mediated relationships such as those created by communication through the Internet (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001).

The main difference between two-way symmetrical communication and dialogic communication is the ending result. In two-way symmetrical communication, the focus is on the procedure and creating the lines of ethical communication. However, in dialogic communication, the purpose is to create the conversation. "Dialogue is the product rather than the process" (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The purpose of dialogic communication is the relationship itself. It is not a process with steps to follow, instead it occurs because of communication and relationships (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This links back to Buber's explanation of true dialogue and his belief that human existence is what occurs between two people, either verbally or nonverbally. The exchange, or the between, is dialogue (Friedman, 1955). As a result, using this theory, the public and organization would meet on even ground and communicate through dialogic means.

From previous studies on dialogue, Kent and Taylor have created five main points concerning dialogue. Combining previous research like Pearson's six dimensions or Johannesen's six components of dialogue, Kent and Taylor (2002) have created main points that help build a formal dialogic theory of public relations. These include mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment.

Mutuality involves the notion that organizations and publics affect each other and are therefore linked. It includes two main points, the first being collaboration. In collaboration, the

organization and its publics must come together and allow each to openly see the other's side of the topic, eliminating competition. There is not a right and wrong position, just open conversation in which two parties attempt to understand each other (Kent & Taylor, 2002). The second aspect of mutuality is the spirit of mutual equality, in which the relationship is created with both parties on equal ground. Through this, open dialogue can occur without the fear of retaliation or shame (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

The next tenant of dialogue is propinquity, or ability and participation of each party in the dialogic exchange. "For organizations, dialogic propinquity means that publics are consulted in matters that influence them, and for publics, it means that they are willing and able to articulate their demands to organizations" (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). This feature has three main points. The first being immediacy of presence, or communicating before a decision has been made or an action conducted. The second aspect of propinquity is temporal flow. This focuses on a "shared future for all participants" by examining the past and present. Finally, engagement involves effort and being accessible to the other member of the relationship. Being honest and transparent is essential.

The third tenant of dialogue is empathy, which involves seeing the issue from the other person's view and being sympathetic and supportive to their needs. Three sub-points fall under this category, the first being supportiveness. Dialogue is not an argument or a debate where one side has the correct answer. Instead, each group should foster the participation of the other. In addition, communal orientation, involves orientating a public with the community and publicizing the organization's social responsibility to foster a relationship with the community. Finally, confirmation, involves acknowledging the other person or group even if it is possible to simply ignore them (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

The fourth point concerning dialogue is risk. As previously mentioned, dialogic relationships are variable and the organization is unable to completely control what publics say or do. Three components make up the risk aspect of dialogue. Vulnerability comes from the lack of control in dialogue. However, as Kent and Taylor (2002) note, “It is through self-disclosure and risk that relationships are built and the possibility for change on the part of participants exists ... Each encounter offers the possibility of growth” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 28). Another part of risk is unanticipated consequences, which stem from the fact that dialogic relationships are variable and not rehearsed. Finally, recognition of strange otherness involves understanding that each party involved is different, and this positively affects the relationship. While risk is involved with the dialogic theory of public relations, the benefits of dialogue (less miscommunications, shared knowledge, etc.) outweigh the risks (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Finally, commitment is the fifth tenant of dialogue. Three sub-heads fall within the commitment category. The first is genuineness, where the relationship is put above individuals. By doing this, the most beneficial decision can be made. Commitment to the conversation is the next point, meaning information should be truthful and manipulation avoided. This fosters an understanding of each party’s position on an issue. Finally, commitment to interpretation involves putting prejudices and bias aside and being open to understanding the other position. As Buber, Johannesen, and Rogers’ research each also show, true dialogue according to Kent and Taylor involves putting differences aside and coming together to openly listen and communicate with one another (Friedman, 1955; Johannesen, 1971; Rogers, 1951; Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Kent and Taylor also discuss how to create dialogic communication within the field of public relations in their theory explication. Through three practices, building interpersonal

relationships, building mediated dialogic relationships, and a procedural approach to dialogue, dialogic relationships can be incorporated into daily activities. Building interpersonal relationships involves training employees on how to engage in dialogue internally as well as externally. Building mediated dialogic relationships means communicating with publics through different channels and providing a means of response to those the organization is communicating with. For example, television advertisements should display a phone number or e-mail address for publics to respond. Finally, a procedural approach to dialogue involves the process of dialogue such as training employees and opening the lines of communication to foster dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

This theory explication ends with Pearson's tactics for creating dialogue between an organization and a public (Kent & Taylor, 2002). These procedures include: everyone affected by the organization should be seen as a public, and therefore communicated with; no topic should be avoided; the structure of communication can be changed when needed; and challenging the structure and enacting change is beneficial to the relationship (Pearson, 1989a). Dialogic relationships are fluid and changes will need to occur. "Probably the most important consideration for ethical communication is the recognition that inter-organizational communication systems cannot be structured perfectly and that the need to challenge their efficacy in producing legitimate outcomes is a constant requirement" (Pearson, 1989a, p. 330).

Overall, the dialogic theory of public relations according to Kent and Taylor (2002) involves creating relationships through dialogue to ethically communicate with all publics affected by an organization.

Public Relations and Political Communication: Two Disciplines, Similar Goals

Public relations and political communication share similar purposes and overall goals. As previously mentioned, many scholars agree that the overall goal of public relations is to build mutually beneficial relationships with an organization and its publics (Cropp & Pincus, 2001). Similarly, the goal of political communicators is to “engage publics and move them to action” (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008, p. 176). Political communicators possess goals and intentions similar to that of public relations professionals, “in this regard (political communication) can be appropriately seen as a hybrid of public relations and strategic communication” (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008, p. 176) As a result, the dialogic theory of public relations can be used to examine political communication and the relationships created between candidate’s communication teams and voters, especially concerning the Internet.

Online Political and Public Relations Communication

Dialogue is an ethical way to communicate with publics, and the Internet provides several dialogic features and tools that a campaign team can use to establish dialogue with potential voters. The Internet takes traditional media channels (newspapers, magazines, radio, and television) and combines their characteristics (audio, visual, and text) into a new multimedia form of communication (Selnow, 1998). Perhaps more importantly, the Internet also allows for audience feedback, creating a two-way exchange of information. Through the Internet, public relations practitioners, as well as political campaign teams, can “engage in direct dialogue with their publics about a variety of issues” (McAllister & Taylor, 2007, p. 230). Traditional media simply “deliver information; they don’t receive information from their audiences” (Selnow, 1998, p. 21). The lack of feedback in traditional media facilitates a communication style that is controlled by the sender. It consists of preconceived messages not capable of adapting to

audience members or audience feedback. This type of communication can be defined as one-way communication flowing in a top-down format (Selnow, 1998, p. 21).

The Internet's capability for two-way communication potentially provides voters with the ability to participate and take part in the political process. "Because of the feedback loop made possible over the Internet, through e-mail or on-line 'chat,' citizens can have direct input into the process of governance" (Stromer-Galley, 2000, p. 115). In addition, "the Internet satisfies the need to take action. Sending a message gives a sense of involvement and peace of mind; after all, you didn't just *sit* there, you *did* something. Action sometimes is its own reward" (Selnow, 1998, p. 23). Traditional mass media are thought to have a limited impact on individual's voting decision. Instead, opinion leaders have been deemed more influential. According to Katz (1957), in his redefining of the two-step flow hypothesis, he noted that voters cited opinion leaders as influencing their personal opinions (Katz, 1957). "If the media played a role, it was as reinforcer, not persuader" (Selnow, 1998, p. 8).

However, the Internet can provide "personal exchanges" and "simulate the give-and-take of interpersonal exchanges" (Selnow, 1998). According to Williams and Trammell (2005) the Internet provides "a controlled, nonlinear medium that provides opportunities to connect with citizens in a more personal way" (p. 561). Through this personalization, or feedback, the Internet can mimic traditional interpersonal exchanges which separate it from traditional mass communication channels (Selnow, 1998). Political candidates are given "unmediated and inexpensive access to voters while also offering new technological options for communication and information presentation" (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2007, p. 425). In this sense, the Internet can be seen as a productive and inexpensive communication tool.

Several elections have seen the use of the Internet as a means of political communication. In addition, with each election, candidates have progressively integrated the Internet increasingly more into their communication strategies (Sweetser Trammell, 2007). While Internet usage by political communicators has varied from year to year, in the past 12 years, a candidate's presence online has become essential to a communication campaign (Druckman et al., 2007).

The 1996 presidential election was the first year the World Wide Web was available for candidate usage to communicate with voters (Selnow, 1998). Internet usage by the public had almost doubled from the previous year, with about 22% (7 million) Americans using the Internet for news and information (Pew, 1998). Important for political communication, about 10% of eligible voters used the Internet for political news and three percent cited the Internet as a main source of information in the 1996 election (Pew, 1996). Overall, only 23% of Internet users reported seeking "very helpful" material concerning the presidential election from the Internet (Pew, 1996)

However, the congressional and local races saw more Internet users in 1996. In the congressional race, 33% of Internet users said they utilized the Internet concerning the race, and in local races 24% of Internet users said they went online for information (Pew, 1996).

Specifically, traditional news sources such as television stations' and newspapers' Web sites were described as the most commonly used sites for political information, rated useful by 25% of users (Pew, 1996). While the Internet was available in the 1992 election, it was not used for its Web sites and was more of a "novelty" than information source (Selnow, 1998, p. 77).

However, in 1996, many candidates began incorporating a simple Web site into their campaign plans for a variety of reasons.

First, political campaigns had become engulfed in media by this time. Budgets were enormous and television and radio were important advertisement media. However, the Internet offered a communication channel that was not only cheaper than other mass media, it provided a variety of tools to communicate (Selnow, 1998). At this time in the Internet's history, Web site creation and maintenance was relatively cheap compared to traditional communication channels.

In addition to its inexpensive nature, the Internet was also incorporated into political communication in the 1996 election because of its familiar format, stemming from its incorporation of traditional media forms (Selnow, 1998; Druckman et al., 2007). For example, Web sites contained text and photographs, similar to print media. In addition, audio could be downloaded, similar to radio broadcasts. It is important to note that the Internet is much different than traditional sources, it just incorporates several features of traditional sources making it easier for people to utilize (Selnow, 1998).

Unlike television and radio, the Internet does not require cameras, expensive speakers and microphones, or a production staff, making it more convenient than other traditional forms of communication. In fact, in 1996, many of the Web sites were created and maintained by new campaign staff and volunteers (Selnow, 1998). In addition to convenience, the content candidates publish on the Internet is controllable as opposed to traditional sources. Candidates could choose what they posted and how it appeared, eliminating many of the risks involved with traditional media channels (Selnow, 1998). Although the Internet was utilized by both voters and candidates, these experiments with online communication during the 1996 election played a minor role in political communication (Pew, 1998).

Candidate Internet usage in the 1996 election was rather simple and mirrored traditional news media. One-way communication dominated, as two-way communication and interactivity

were avoided (Stromer-Galley, 2000). In the 1996 presidential election, practically all serious candidates included a Web site in their communication campaigns (Tedesco, Miller, & Spiker, 1999). Biographies and an explanation of a candidate's position on an issue were the most commonly posted items. Interactivity was incorporated into the Web sites, however, this interactivity was not human or dialogically related (Stromer-Galley, 2000). Instead, the type of interactivity used was "media interaction," which occurs when users are given a choice in what to see, how to see it, and for how long (Stromer-Galley, 2000, p. 118). An example would be a hyperlink, but the hyperlinks used in the 1996 election mostly linked internally. As a result, the information posted during the 1996 election was more traditional in nature, similar to an online brochure (Tedesco et al., 1999).

According to Stromer-Galley (2000), human interaction through online means was avoided in the 1996 election because of the burden a dialogic relationship would create, the loss of ambiguity through a dialogic relationship, and campaign teams were concerned with the loss of control that would occur if anyone could post anything on a candidate's Web site (Stromer-Galley, 2000).

Overall, candidates did incorporate the Internet into their communication plans in the 1996 election (Selnow, 1998), but candidates did not fully utilize all capabilities, especially human interaction through online tools. Web sites were used similar to traditional media advertisements with one-way communication (Stromer-Galley, 2000).

The 2000 election showed increases in Internet usage by both campaign teams and the public from the previous presidential election cycle. It was this election year that "established the Internet as a major source of election news and information" (Pew, 2000, p. 2). The number of Americans using the Internet increased 14% from the previous 1996 election. The main

reason cited by those using the Internet was its convenience, and 53% said they chose to use the Internet because it offered information unavailable through traditional sources (Pew, 2000).

The 2000 election cycle also brought changes in how Web sites were used by political communication teams. Candidate Web sites were used to provide information to the public. Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore's Web site displayed information that was updated several times a day and contained pictures to go with the stories posted on the site. This is similar to results found within this study. Gore posted 502 photographs on his Web site and Republican candidate George W. Bush posted 67 pictures (Verser & Wicks, 2006). In addition, 88% of the politicians running for the Senate created and used Web sites in their communication campaigns (Puopolo, 2001). Similar to the 1996 election year, candidates posted their position on issues and biographical information. However, interactive features were also incorporated into the sites. For example, Hillary Clinton ran for Senate in 2000 and incorporated a variety of interactive tools into her site. According to Puopolo (2001), Clinton's site used almost double the interactive features of the other Senatorial candidates in the election, including fund-raising, e-mail, hyperlinks, audio and video files, voter registration, and search tools (Puopolo, 2001). In this study, Puopolo found that Clinton used 88% of the coded interactive tools and her overall goal on the Web site was "to communicate directly, without third party intervention" (Puopolo, 2001, p. 2042). This direct communication creates a "personal touch" which is one reason public relations is so productive and effective with publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 323). However, Puopolo's description of this direct communication does not include feedback or dialogic communication. Instead, the interactive features included links, even to outside sources; her video productions, *Hillary TV*, and many other textual and audiovisual tools (Puopolo, 2001).

In addition to Gore and Clinton, Senator John McCain made use of the Internet in the 2000 election cycle. McCain, who was running against George W. Bush in the primary, found himself behind Bush who had already received several official endorsements and had a more populous state (Tomlinson, 2003). However, McCain innovatively integrated the Internet into his campaign to elevate himself to the level of contender. In December 1999, McCain's team launched McCain Interactive on his Web site, which created an online location for each state to create grassroots campaigning efforts. Through this feature, each state could organize supporters, create events, and make the most of their resources (Tomlinson, 2003). This feature eliminated the cost and time that traditional event planning took on the campaign trail. As a whole, McCain Interactive provided an innovative feature that allowed McCain supporters to communicate and organize themselves in an efficient and cost effective manner (Tomlinson, 2003).

Overall, although candidates made strides from the 1996 election, candidates still had not fully utilized the capabilities of the Internet in 2000 (Williams & Trammell, 2005), especially the relationship building aspect so crucial to improving communications between an organization, or in this case a candidate, and his or her publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

While candidates utilized the Internet as a communication tool in the 1996 and 2000 election cycles, it was not until the 2004 election that the Internet became a main channel for political communication. In fact, the 2004 election has been cited as "the first major Internet election in the United States" (Williams & Trammell, 2005, p. 560). The Pew Research Center also commented on the Internet in the 2004 presidential election, calling it "a breakout year for the Internet in politics" with 37% of Americans and 61% of Internet users logging on for political purposes (Pew, 2004, p. i). In addition, one in five Americans at the time of the Pew

2004 survey cited the Internet as a primary source for political information (Pew, 2004). Of registered voters, a prime demographic for studying political news, an increase in Internet usage as a primary means of political information rose more than 50% from the previous 2000 presidential election (Pew, 2004).

In terms of which type of media Americans used in 2004, the Internet rated higher than in previous years. For example, Internet users chose the Internet (28%) over radio (17%). Those users with broadband service even chose the Internet over newspapers with 38% to 36% respectively (Pew, 2004, p. ii). Also, Web sites from network news shows ranked 5th overall as the medium used to obtain information regularly (Pew, 2004).

The increased Internet usage by Americans in the 2004 election was augmented by several factors. First, more than 50% of Americans had at least six years of online experience and more than 80% of Americans had at least three years (Pew, 2004). Also, the number of broadband users had multiplied to 10 times that of 2000. Users also were more likely to check headlines while online, similar to checking news channels while channel surfing on television. Finally, Americans were able to get news information from Web sites that are not designed solely for news (Pew, 2004).

Candidate usage of the Internet as a means of communication also grew dramatically in the 2004 election cycle. With an increased number of online tools available, candidates took advantage and increased their online communication plans. While not all online tools were thought to have made a large impact on the election, it is important to note their integration into mainstream political communication. Specifically, online tools such as blogs, e-mail, and fund-raising were used at unprecedented levels (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005; Williams & Trammell, 2005; Panagopoulos & Bergan, 2007).

Although blogs were developed as a communication tool in 1999, the 2004 election was the first time candidates used the tool to communicate with voters (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005). Specifically, Howard Dean, 2004 Democratic primary presidential candidate, became the first American candidate to use “blogs as a communication tool with the electorate” (Williams et al., 2005 p. 178). Normally, candidates tend to run a safe campaign using traditional communication methods that have been proven to be effective. But, when a candidate tries something new and takes a risk that turns out successful, everyone, including the media, takes notice (Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006). Dean accomplished just that when he and his campaign manager, Joe Trippi, successfully integrated Blog for America onto Dean’s Web site. However, Dean’s blog was not used dialogically, “interacting *at* citizens rather than interacting *with* citizens” (Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006, p. 129). But, Dean did successfully use blogging to raise money, gather supporters, and inform the public of his views, which soon caught the attention of other candidates. Many other candidates followed Dean’s example and began communicating with voters through blogs (Trammell, 2007). For example, Wesley Clark, democratic primary candidate, also took blogging seriously and hired Cameron Barrett, a renowned blogger at the time, to create his online blog presence (Williams et al., 2005). Although blogs were not thought to be a significant factor in the 2004 election, they did offer a new means of direct communication with voters (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005).

Candidates also integrated e-mail messages into their communication campaigns in 2004. Previously, many candidates found it difficult to smoothly integrate e-mail into their campaigns, and the e-mail messages were not consistent with the candidates’ Web sites (Trammell & Williams, 2004). However, the 2004 election did show an “advancement” in usage of e-mail messages (Williams & Trammell, 2005). Specifically, e-mail messages were

personalized and each candidate used a different style to communicate, with the most popular issue being the war in Iraq. In addition, fund-raising was the most common topic mentioned, with the Kerry campaign being more open concerning asking for monetary assistance (Trammell & Williams, 2004). The e-mail also asked for supporters to take action and become involved with more than just donations. For example, candidates appeared to be encouraging viral marketing to help spread their messages (Williams & Trammell, 2005). However, more importantly through these campaign e-mail, candidates attempted to foster a relationship and create a more personal conversation with the recipients by using language such as “we” (Williams & Trammell, 2005, p. 572). This is a step toward dialogic communication.

Online fund-raising was an important tool in the 2004 election, as more people were comfortable making Internet payments. Once again, Dean was a leader in incorporating online fund-raising into his communication campaign. Many other candidates followed, including the front-runners Kerry and Bush (Panagopoulos & Bergan, 2007). In Panagopoulos and Bergan’s (2007) examination of the differences between online and offline donors in the 2004 election, many similarities were found. In fact, the only major difference was the age of the donor. Online donors were more likely to be younger than offline donors, tapping into a new segment of the market. Overall, Kerry raised \$82 million online and Bush \$13 million, making Internet fund-raising an important campaign tool (Panagopoulos & Bergan, 2007).

The candidates in 2004 not only increased their Internet tool usage, they also incorporated more interactivity into their communication campaigns (Williams & Trammell, 2005). For example, the Republican incumbent and all of the Democratic candidates, 10 to be exact, participated in two-way communication through blog and Web site use. Candidates posted items and the public commented through interactive features (Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu,

Landreville & Martin, 2005). However, research revealed that candidates during the 2004 primary election were still hesitant to insert hyperlinks to outside sources. Analysis uncovered that 70% of the links used were to internal sources within the Web site (Williams et al., 2005). While the Internet was widely used in the 2004 campaign, it still had yet to be used to its full capability in a presidential election.

The mid-term election in 2006 was important in that more online tools were available than in 2004. One of the most important new tools in the 2006 election cycle was YouTube (Pew, 2006). Previously, video was difficult to disseminate to large audiences. However, with YouTube, anyone with a camera, computer, and Internet connection can post video clips online for millions to view. Candidates now had to be conscious of what video was taken and monitor their presence online (Pew, 2006). Facebook was another new tool that was used in the mid-term election to reach voters. Facebook, the most commonly used social networking site by political campaigns in the 2006 election, provided every candidate with a profile that could be personalized and used to reach potential voters (Williams & Gulati, 2007). A total of 1.5 million (2.64%) of Facebook users became associated with a candidate or issue during the election on Facebook, and 32% of Senate and 13% of House candidates posted profiles (Williams & Gulati, 2007).

The 2008 presidential election has been attracting attention for its unprecedented use of social networking sites and online video clips (Pew, 2008). For example, Cozma and Postelnicu (2008) conducted a study on the 2008 presidential primary and voter usage of the social networking tool MySpace. With a majority of the top 10 most-visited Web sites being social networking sites, research on social networking Web sites in relation to politics is important (Cozma & Postelnicu, 2008). Cozma and Postelnicu examined the uses and gratifications people

cited when visiting candidate's MySpace pages. They found that most people visited candidate profiles to interact with other supporters. They also cited information seeking and entertainment as two secondary reasons for visiting political candidates' profiles (Cozma & Postelnicu, 2008). More interestingly, they noted that 67% of those surveyed reported "increased candidate liking after exposure" on MySpace (Cozma & Postelnicu, 2008, p. 22). As a result, the study of online tools, including social networking Web sites, is important in the study of political communication.

In addition, almost double the number of Americans from the 2004 election have cited regularly using the Internet for campaign information during the primary stages of the 2008 race. The highest increase in usage has been among young adults age 18 to 29 who have cited using social networking Web sites for campaign news and information. This number is up from 20% in the 2004 election (Pew, 2008). However, older Americans still choose traditional news sources like television and newspapers over the Internet. While 42% of 18-29 year olds are using the Internet for campaign news, only 15% of Americans 50 and older use the Internet for campaign news. In contrast, 50% of those 50 and older use local news for campaign information, as compared to only 25% of young adults (Pew, 2008).

Overall, television is still the most used source of political information. However, its lead is slowly declining. In 1992, before the Internet was utilized in politics, television was the top choice for information among 68% of Americans (Pew, 2008). But, in December 2007, the Internet had risen to 15% while television fell 8% to 60% (Pew, 2008). Newspapers have also fallen as a result of Internet usage from 20% in 1992 to three percent below the Internet, or 12%, in 2007. As a result, it will be interesting to see what types of media voters are choosing in this

2008 election cycle. In addition, it has yet to be determined how candidates will utilize the Internet and its dialogic and interactive features to reach voters in the 2008 election.

Dialogue and Its Online Potential

As previously mentioned, the Internet is growing as a source of information and political news, nearly doubling the numbers from 2004 (Pew, 2008). As a result, political communicators need to recognize and utilize the Internet as an important communication channel. The Internet allows the capabilities of print (text) and broadcast (sound and video) to be brought together into one medium (Kent & Taylor, 2002). More importantly, the Internet provides one option that newspapers, television and radio (with the exception of call-in broadcasts) cannot provide: real-time participation (Kent & Taylor, 2002). It is within this real-time participation that dialogic communication can occur. While the Internet cannot actually create a relationship, it can influence how these relationships are developed. If interactive features are utilized, dialogic communication can occur. However, monologic communication can still occur online if publics are unable to use interactive features or provide feedback (Taylor & Kent, 1998).

As dialogic communication builds ethical relationships, the Internet can be used for its dialogic features by a communication team. With the growth of the Internet and its capabilities for communication, it is important for public relations professionals, as well as political communicators, to understand how to build and maintain a relationship online. However, Taylor and Kent in 2004 found that while the ability for dialogue exists, it is not being used to “facilitate dialogue between elected officials and their constituents” (Taylor & Kent, 2004, p. 59).

This study examines the 2008 presidential race and each candidate’s use of the Internet, especially the new online tools such as social networking sites, to determine if dialogic features are being used to create a dialogue, or if they are being used for one-way communication.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Because of the depth of information within each online tool, or unit of analysis, this study is not only a content analysis, but also an intensive case study.

Content analysis has historical roots in communication research and has been deemed one of the more popular methods of analysis for mass communication researchers in modern society (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988). Over the years, content analysis has evolved from an informal method of analyzing written and spoken information into a systematic and objective statistical tool for examining communicated content (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988). The overall process of content analysis “involves drawing representative samples of content, training coders to use the category rules developed to measure or reflect differences in content, and measuring the reliability (agreement or stability over time) of coders in applying the rules” (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998, p. 2).

Not all researchers completely agree on a singular definition of content analysis. Berelson (1952) puts an emphasis on systematic and objective quantification of manifest content in his description as important aspects of modern content analysis. However, while Krippendorff (1980) agrees with Berelson’s systematic and objective aspects, he disagrees with Berelson’s beliefs on the quantification of manifest content. Instead, Krippendorff believes the context of the message must be considered as well as the receiver’s inferences (Krippendorff, 1980). However, looking beyond the manifest content can jeopardize objectivity (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988).

Objectivity is common to many types of analysis, as it eliminates bias and allows a study to be scientifically replicated (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988). Replication requires variables to be operationally defined as specifically as possible to ensure different researchers could complete the same study (Riffe et al., 1998). Content analysis' systematic nature involves the need "to apply consistent criteria in a rigorous and careful way" (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988, p. 198).

Meaning in content analysis research is garnered through the comparisons and relationships drawn from a content analysis. Simply counting variables provides lists, but once researchers identify relationships and conduct comparisons, true discovery can occur (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988).

Content analysis, like many methods of research, does have its drawbacks. First, examining beyond the manifest content into the areas of latent content can hinder objectivity. Manifest content is the meaning society gives to something while latent content is the meaning an individual gives, which varies from person to person (Riffe et al., 1998). A coder must be cautious not to insert personal judgment into his results. Another limitation of content analysis is the fact that sometimes numbers can be deceiving. Perhaps a variable is only coded once, not ranking high on a numerical scale. However, this variable could have been extremely traumatizing or dramatic, having a much larger impact than a content analysis would indicate. To reduce this problem, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis can be utilized to achieve more accurate results (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988).

Even with its limitations, content analysis is an accepted and reputable method of research in the social sciences, especially communication studies. Content analysis is not essential in every research situation, however, researchers cannot fully examine and analyze communication without examining the content of the communication taking place. As a result,

mass communication research is an excellent field for the application of the content analysis (Riffe et al., 1998).

Kaid and Wadsworth (1988) provide seven steps for completing a successful content analysis including: 1. developing a hypothesis, 2. selecting a sample, 3. defining categories, 4. training coders, 5. coding, 6. computing reliability, and 7. computing validity. This study uses Kaid and Wadsworth's (1988) seven steps to create a quantitative content analysis of political candidates' usage of online tools. Other studies concerning Web sites and their potential for dialogic communication have also utilized a content analysis (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2004; McAllister & Taylor, 2007). This study examined the potential for dialogue versus the presence of dialogue. Specifically, this study examined online tools used by political candidates and examined them through the lens of the dialogic theory of public relations.

Research Questions

Previous research suggests that political candidates are using the Internet for campaign communication; however, they are not fully utilizing the interactive and dialogic features available through various online tools (Stromer-Galley, 2000; Williams & Trammell, 2005; Williams et al., 2005). With almost double the number of Americans from the 2004 election cycle citing regularly using the Internet for campaign news (Pew, 2008), research on candidate Internet communication is essential. Four research questions were created to explore if and how candidates were utilizing dialogue in their online communication campaigns.

RQ1: To what extent were the overall Web presences of the candidates incorporating dialogic features?

RQ2: Which political party used more dialogic features?

RQ3: How were the dialogic features related?

RQ4: Which online tool was the most dialogic?

Sample

The universe for this study included all online tools employed by presidential candidates in the 2008 election to communicate with voters. Specifically, this sample included only tools listed on the candidates' official Web sites. A tool is operationally defined as any online site or specific service a candidate employs to communicate with voters that is linked to from the candidate's official Web site. Tools are not part of the Web site, but an additional and stand-alone online presence. For example, a Facebook profile is a tool, just as a YouTube presence would be. As a result, the sample for this study included all online tools publicized on the official presidential or official vice presidential Web sites of Senator Barack Obama, Senator Joe Biden, Senator John McCain, and Governor Sarah Palin.

A final code sheet was created and included seven indices with 42 variables in addition to 10 ratio-level variables. The Web page for each online tool was saved between October 28 and November 4 for the sample dates of October 21 through November 4. These dates were chosen because they were directly before the election, ensuring a peak communication period in the election cycle. Each coder used the archived tools to complete the coding process.

Indices and Coding Procedures

Following the methods of Seltzer and Mitrook (2006), Taylor and Kent (2004), and Taylor, Kent, and White (2001), this study employed a code sheet to systematically analyze candidate Internet usage through the lens of the dialogic theory of public relations. To analyze these tools, seven indices were adapted from Taylor et al.'s (2001) initial categories and

included: ease of inference, usefulness of information to media publics, usefulness of information to potential voters, conservation of visitors, return visits, and dialogic loop (potential and actual two-way communication). Within these seven indices, multiple variables were dichotomously coded as either present or absent in keeping with conventional dialogic indices.

Previous studies such as Taylor et al. (2001) content analyzed Web sites to measure dialogic capability. Previous dialogic studies have used indices because these indices examine “multiple concepts within a single construct rather than the isolation of a singular concept via multiple items” (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 274). However, alphas within previous studies have been low (.11-.66) for each index (Taylor et al., 2001). Previous studies explain that the low reliability scores of the indices had to be closely examined as “indicators of the multiplexity of each dialogic feature rather than as pointers toward measurement validity, which is better assessed by intercoder reliability” (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 274). To increase validity, this study used indices adapted from previous studies.

This study adapted seven indices to identify dialogic features from the original Taylor et al. (2001) categories. In addition, specific variables within each index were modified to fit political communication as in a study by Taylor and Kent (2004). As a result, the seven indices and 52 variables used in this study were all modified from previous dialogic communication studies. Specifically, of the 52 variables, 42 were coded dichotomously as either present or absent, and the remaining 10 were ratio-level variables that required the coder to count the number of something for each unit of analysis.

To code the variables within each of the seven indices, a code sheet was developed from Taylor et al. (2001) and Seltzer and Mitrook (2007). A team of three coders was then established to examine each unit of analysis, also known as each online tool. The original code sheet, which

had 32 items, was used to examine activists groups' Web sites. Other studies have borrowed from this code sheet, including a study concerning online politics (Taylor & Kent, 2004). This study attempted to do the same by modifying the original list to ensure all items were appropriate and relevant to online political communication. The indices and variables included on the code sheet are described below.

Ease of inference was the first index in this study and is essential for online dialogue. If a Web site is easy to navigate and understand, then visitors will be more likely to return. Specific features that create user-friendly navigation include site maps easily found on the home page, major links easily found on the home page, a search engine on the home page, and low reliance on graphics (Taylor et al., 2001). The specific variables identified and coded as either absent or present within this index were links on the home page, location on site map, whether or not an account was required to access site, presence of a search engine and low reliance on graphics. Together, these five items on the code sheet provided insight into the ease of inference index. Previous studies reported an alpha of .29 (Taylor et al., 2001), while this study reported an alpha of .14.

Usefulness of information is another essential feature in building online dialogic relationships. While many publics can be targeted on the home page of a Web site, specifically the media and potential voters were isolated as the two main publics in this study. Features used to communicate with potential voters include a prominently displayed logo, linking to other political figures, information on volunteering and donating, and a clear mission and philosophy statement (Taylor et al., 2001). Features used to communicate with the media include a statement of policy and position on issues, press release information, information on members

and supporters of the candidate, video, audio and text copies of speeches and presentations, and downloadable graphics (Taylor et al., 2001).

Specifically, this study utilized nine variables within the media usefulness index including: press release information, video copy of speeches, audio copy of speeches, textual copy of speeches, pictures of the candidate, downloadable graphics, statement of policy, statement of position on issues, and information on member/supporter base. These variables were all coded as either present or absent within this index. Previous studies reported an alpha of .50 (Taylor et al., 2001), and this study reported an alpha of .77.

The variables on the code sheet for the usefulness to of information to voters index included: mission statement/philosophy statement, information on donating, information on volunteering, links to other political candidates, and a prominently displayed logo. These were all coded as either present or absent. Previous studies reported an alpha of .46 (Taylor et al., 2001), while this study reported an alpha of .58.

Conservation of visitors involves keeping visitors on the Web site as long as possible. This can be done by reducing advertising and obscuring links. In addition, external links can be used to create credibility and legitimacy in the much larger political realm (Taylor, et al., 2001). For this study, the conservation of visitors index was observed through two variables including visitor communications with each other and how often the site was updated. Both of these were dichotomously coded as either present or absent on the code sheet. Previous studies have reported an alpha of .11 (Taylor et al., 2001), while this study reported an alpha of .87.

When visitors frequent a candidate's Web site, a relationship can develop. The return visits index involves how likely the site is to attract repeat visitors. As a relationship cannot fully develop through one visit, this is an important aspect of communication. Online features that can

encourage visitors to return include bookmarking tools, updates, a calendar of events, invitations to return, current news and information, and the ability to receive information through e-mail (Taylor et al., 2001). Specifically, this index contained nine variables coded as either present or absent within each tool. These variables were links to external sites, advertisements other than for the candidate, links to affiliated groups, bookmarking tools, e-mail opportunities, updates to site within 48 hours, recent news stories posted within 48 hours, calendar of events, and explicit invitation to return. Previous studies reported an alpha of .59 (Taylor et al., 2001), and this study reported an alpha of .71.

The final index, dialogic loop, according to Taylor et al. (2001), has been divided into two indices for the purpose of this study. While previous studies only utilize one dialogic loop index, this study attempted to further analyze the dialogic loop by breaking it into two separate indices: potential for two-way communication and actual two-way communication. This was done to see if the potential for communication is present and whether two-way communication is actually taking place. The dialogic loop index is one of the most important indices, as interactivity from both parties is required for a dialogic relationship to fully develop. Features that provide the potential for two-way communication include a provided e-mail or phone number to contact the candidate, a method of posting to the Web site such as a Facebook wall, opinion polls and surveys, and the ability for visitors to request e-mail updates (Taylor et al., 2001). The second category under the dialogic loop index includes actual two-way communication in which the candidate or campaign staff respond to visitors' inquiries or comments. This can be accomplished through responding to e-mails, phone calls, or Web site posts, and through the sending of regular news updates. To have a truly dialogic relationship, the

visitor as well as the candidate must participate in the conversation, making the actual two-way communication aspect of the dialogic loop index essential in this study.

The variables present on the code sheet for the dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index include the ability to contact the candidate through e-mail, contact the candidate through phone, contact the candidate via post to the online tool, complete opinion surveys, complete opinion polls, and request news updates. These too were coded as either present or absent. The variables on the code sheet within the dialogic loop: actual two-way communication index included: response to e-mail, response to phone call, response to online post and regular news updates are sent. Previous studies have reported an alpha of .66 for the dialogic loop index. This study reported an alpha of .66 for dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication and .35 for dialogic loop: actual two-way communication.

Together, these seven indices were used to identify possible dialogic features that could enable dialogue to occur. The variables located within each index were placed into a code sheet, organized by each index, and dichotomously coded as either present or absent separately for each tool. See Appendix A for the detailed codebook given to each coder.

In addition to the 40 variables that were coded as either present or absent within each index, two extra variables were added including updated downloads and information on candidate and online tool is presented in first person. These variables were also coded as either present or absent and provided a deeper look into the dialogic usage within each tool. Finally, 10 ratio-level variables were also included in this study. These questions were open-ended and asked coders to count the number of something including: the number of press releases, videos, audio clips, pictures, links to other candidates, links to affiliated groups, posts or comments,

bookmarking tools, members/supporters, and links to external sites. A total of 52 variables were examined for each unit of analysis. See Appendix B for a copy of the code sheet used by coders.

Implementing the Coding Process

Three coders were trained to participate in this content analysis. Initially, all coders participated in an intense training session, coding content together. However, once coders reached an acceptable level of intercoder reliability (.85 or higher) they began coding separately. Each coder worked individually and followed the codebook's guidelines. For each online tool, the coder began at the candidate's home page. Coders recorded whether the link to the online tool was present directly on the home page. Then, each tool was visited through the link provided. Coders examined the tool and followed the 52-item code sheet derived from Taylor et al. (2001).

Assessing Reliability and Validity

This study utilized intercoder reliability to ensure objectivity. While other methods of reliability testing exist, intercoder reliability is the most common method for content analysis (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988). Specifically, this study utilized the Holsti's formula for testing intercoder reliability. The formula for calculating Holsti's intercoder reliability is:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N1+N2}$$

In this case, the *M* stands for the number of coding decision two coders have in common, while *N1* is the total number of decisions for one coder and *N2* is the total number of coding decisions for the second coder (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). In this study, to be deemed a reliable study, the answer to this formula had to be .85 or above. The overall intercoder reliability for this study was .903.

Validity is more difficult to test than reliability (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1988). In this study, adapting categories and variables from previous studies increased the validity of the study. Face validity was used to determine if the coding instrument actually measured what it was designed to measure.

Data Analysis

As prior use of the dialogic method has not resulted in favorable or acceptable factors, this study immediately adopted the traditional method of creating summative indices based on prior studies. This data treatment was supported by higher alphas than previous uses of this coding instrument. In this study, several independent variables exist including: gender, political ideology, online tool, and the political office seeking. The dependent variables are the seven dialogic indices.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The previous section outlined the method employed in this study and presented the indices used in data analysis. This chapter will explain the actual results of the data analysis.

Using an in-depth case study quantitative content analysis examining the dialogic features present within each online tool ($N=41$), the research questions here examined the extent to which candidates used dialogic features, how this usage varied based on political party, which tools were most dialogic, and how the dialogic features were related. Overall, the goal of this study was to examine how candidates were using online tools to communicate with potential voters in the 2008 presidential election.

Online Tool Demographics

The unit of analysis for this study was each individual online tool used by presidential and vice presidential candidates ($N=41$) publicized on their official Web sites. Democrats employed 30 tools and Republicans used 11 tools. Each tool was coded as either McCain only ($n=9$), Obama only ($n=21$), McCain/Palin ($n=2$), Obama/Biden ($n=9$), Palin only ($n=0$), and Biden only ($n=0$). It is important to note that at the time of this study, October 21 to Nov. 4, 2008, neither vice presidential candidate had a Web site concerning the presidential race. Biden's official Web site contained information only concerning his Senate position. In addition, Palin did not have an official Web site; instead she merely had a biography on the Alaska government Web site. Because of this, no tools were coded as Palin only or Biden only.

The Online Tools

A variety of online tools were examined in this intensive case study content analysis. First, the official Web sites of each candidate were closely studied. These Web pages were similar to any other Web site. They contained graphics, pictures, videos, and external links. In addition, both candidates had a rather similar layout and overall site. One interesting item on each home page was the presence of a splash page, a highly graphic landing page. After typing in the actual address of each candidate's home page, a splash page was first seen by users. In both cases, the splash page had a large picture or graphic and was developed to match the home page. A small text message appeared and then linked to information concerning donating and volunteering. At first glance, this page appeared to be the home page of each candidate, but upon deeper analysis, a small button was then available to skip to the main Web site.

Once at the candidates' Web sites, navigation was rather simple due to a mixture of graphics and text. In addition, the information provided from each candidate was extremely similar. They each included biographies of themselves, pictures, their stance on issues, and information concerning their political philosophies. Even the colors were similar. Both candidates utilized a red, white, and blue color pallet, just in different ways. For example, the Obama site contained more light blues, while the McCain site contained more dark red and dark blue.

It was through these Web sites that the other online tools, the units of analysis, examined in this study were found. The tools were either linked to externally (Facebook, MySpace, Eventful) or located on the page itself (blog, Action Center, McCain Space). A description of each online tool examined in this study is provided below.

The bookmarking tools examined in this study including Delicious, Stumble, Feedburner, Digg, and Newsvine allowed users to virtually bookmark Web sites. By doing this, users were able to save personal collections of Web sites for individual use or to share with others. All of the bookmarking tools examined in this study were created by third parties, and the candidates subscribed to the tools by creating an account. These tools were not created by the campaign; instead they were used by the campaign to help communicate with voters.

To use these tools, one could choose to save a page by “adding to bookmarks.” The bookmarked page would then be saved in the individual bookmarking tool and this allowed users to organize, recall, and share their favorite pages. An account on this third-party site was required to save pages with a bookmarking tool. As a result, the bookmarking tools in this study were unable to be thoroughly examined for layout and design.

Many browsers offer a bookmarking tool that can save pages directly to the toolbar of one’s computer; however, the bookmarking tools examined in this study were social bookmarking tools. These tools were offered by separate Web sites online and were kept within that site, not directly on the toolbar of a computer. In addition, the bookmarked sites were then able to be seen by other subscribers. For example, if a person using Digg bookmarked Obama’s blog, other Digg subscribers could view the bookmarked site. These social bookmarking sites allowed users to share favorite pages.

Several video sharing tools were also examined including BarackTV and YouTube. BarackTV was a campaign-created tool, meaning it was developed specifically for Obama to use to communicate with voters. With this tool, users watched videos concerning the Obama campaign. The design of this page was very creative. The page displayed a variety of pictures, and the pictures were actually links to the videos. While some users might have found this

difficult to navigate (a high reliance on graphics), the page was different and interesting. However, one-way communication as opposed to two-way communication was used within this tool as users were not able to make a comment on the videos. Instead, users simply watched videos, a prime example of monologic communication. The YouTube video tool did allow for two-way communication. Through this third-party tool, users watched posted videos, commented on videos, rated videos, posted their own videos, and created a profile. The overall look of the two YouTube profiles was extremely similar. The candidates basically created an account and filled in the appropriate information, then posted videos. There was not much difference between the two candidates within this tool.

Twitter, as examined in this study, was used to communicate up-to-date information with target audiences. The candidate created a profile and other Twitter users were able to “follow” the candidate by receiving updates. Typically, Twitter updates can contain links to other Twitter conversations or people, links to external sites, and up to 140 characters of text. Connections can be made when users choose to “follow” each other. By choosing to “follow” each other, these users can then see each other’s updates. See Figure 1 for a screenshot of Obama’s Twitter page. Another tool for direct interaction examined in this study was the official Web site blogs. The blogs allowed the candidates to directly interact with target audiences. Through the blog, candidates posted information, pictures, links, and videos that readers were able to comment on. However, users were prevented from making comments without creating an account with the campaign. See Figure 2 for a screenshot of the McCain blog.

MySpace was a third-party social networking tool examined in this study. Users, in this case the candidates, utilized this tool to create personal profiles making it possible to post pictures and videos, create a blog within the tool, and make online friends. They were also able

to send and receive comments or messages with other users. Like YouTube, the look and design of this tool was very similar between the two candidates. Not many differences were found as the candidates simply created profiles and filled in the different applications such as an internal blog. Facebook was another third-party social networking tool examined in this study. This tool, like MySpace, allowed users to create a profile, make online friends, post pictures, post videos, and make a blog within the tool. See Figure 3 for a screenshot of Obama's Facebook page and Figure 4 for a screenshot of McCain's Facebook page. LinkedIn, a more professional social networking site, was another third-party created tool examined in this study. Typically, this tool enables users to connect on a professional level, with the profile resembling an online resume. Coworkers and previous employers can make professional recommendations that can be used when applying for future jobs. Within this study, Facebook and MySpace were more social tools, while LinkedIn was used more for professional means.

Other third-party social networking sites examined in this study were designed more for specific groups of people such as BlackPlanet, MyBatanga, MiGente, Glee, Eons, Faithbase, The Democratic Party Builder, and AsiaAve. These sites, unlike MySpace or Facebook, were designed for specific groups such as African Americans, Latinos, homosexuals, baby boomers, Christians, Democrats, and Asians. However, these sites were like Facebook and MySpace in that users could create a profile, post comments, pictures, and videos, create a blog, make online friends, and send and receive comments or messages. The major difference between these tools and Facebook or MySpace was that these tools allowed users to communicate with other people of similar background and similar interests.

Overall, all of the social networking tools were designed similarly. Some of the information from tool to tool was exactly the same for Obama, and the candidates basically

established accounts and filled in predetermined information. As a result, the look and feel of the pages was extremely similar.

Several of the online tools examined in this study were political in nature and created just for the campaign. Under the Radar was a tool used by the Obama campaign to fight negative campaigning. In addition, this tool was designed to match Obama's home page through color and layout. It had the same feel and means of navigation as well. If a user was able to easily understand the Obama home page, then he could also successfully navigate and understand Under the Radar. Specifically, with this tool, users reported exaggerated, harmful or inappropriate information. After reporting the over-the-top negative campaigning, the information was added to the Under the Radar database and possibly stopped. See Figure 5 for a screenshot of Obama's Under the Radar tool.

Fight the Smears was another tool utilized by the Obama campaign that concerned negative and harmful campaigning. This tool, like Under the Radar, was designed to match the Obama home page. With this specific tool, users found "facts" from a candidate's campaign in response to "smears" by the other campaign. For example, if a voter received a spam e-mail with accusations he believed untrue, he was able to report it through this tool and find "correct" information directly from the campaign. The goal of this tool was to provide "accurate" information and to clear up any rumors. The Action Center tool, unlike Fight the Smears and Under the Radar, was used by both campaigns. However, even though both campaigns used the Action Center tool, the Action Center tools were separately created for each candidate. This was not a third-party tool that both candidates utilized; instead it was hosted separately by each candidate. Both candidates created a separate Action Center on their official Web sites, yet, the Action Centers were used in the same way. Each Action Center provided users with a place for

voters to gain information concerning taking action in the campaign. Both of the tools matched the candidates' official Web sites and flowed nicely with the overall format and look of the home pages. Specifically, these tools allowed users to register to vote, download flyers, make phone calls, recruit friends, find local events, get local contacts, and more. However, to get this information, users had to create an account with the candidates.

Other tools were candidate specific. For example, Mybarack.com was a tool created by the Obama campaign to get people involved in grassroots efforts. By creating an account with this tool, a user had access to local events, local campaign contacts, and the tools necessary for creating a personal blog. McCain Space was used by the McCain campaign similarly to Mybarack.com. With this tool, users created an account and a personal profile where they could then post pictures and interact with other McCain supporters. Through this tool, users received information on the campaign and could volunteer to help with a tool designed similar to a social networking profile. Another tool examined in this study, McCain Nation, allowed users to get involved locally by providing a calendar of events within the person's zip code. In addition, users had the ability to create events and could even post them to the online calendar. See figure 6 for a screenshot of the McCain Nation tool. Finally, McCain's National Leadership Team tool was a method of getting people involved similar to McCain's other tools. Through this, users were able to find information about the McCain campaign, volunteer to spread the word about McCain, and donate money.

Eventful was another third-party tool examined in this study. Eventful allowed users to create a profile and keep an up-to-date calendar of events. Users were able to join or create groups, post their own events, and create online friends. In addition to Eventful, Web site downloads was a tool examined in this study. This tool allowed users to download information

to help promote a candidate such as logos, signs, posters, flyers, fact sheets, and even ring tones. The Fundraising Web site tool was basically an online store. It contained a variety of items for users to purchase including bumper stickers, hats, and shirts, and was set up similar to the typical online store such as Amazon. Through this store, shoppers were able to purchase everything from shirts and hats to buttons and bumper stickers. Pictures of everything for sale were available and items could be purchased directly from the site.

A Closer Look at the Tools

Of the 41 online tools examined in this study, 7 were used by both political parties including Facebook, official blog, LinkedIn, Action Center, MySpace, YouTube, and official Web site ($n=14$). For example, both candidates had a link to a Facebook profile publicized on their official Web sites. But, the remaining tools ($n=27$) were only used by one party. For example, Obama used the online tool Glee, while McCain did not.

In addition, the online tools examined in this study were grouped in relation to type of tool. For example, the candidates used social networking sites ($n=13$) such as Facebook, MySpace, and AsiaAve. In addition, tools pertaining to photograph sharing ($n=1$), bookmarking ($n=5$), and video sharing ($n=3$) were used. Tools used to interact directly with potential voters included the official blogs and Twitter ($n=3$). Candidate specific tools such as McCain Space or MyBarack.com were also used ($n=4$).

Other tools were more difficult to classify into a standardized category. For example, Obama employed an online calendar of events ($n=1$) and a texting option tool ($n=1$) to reach voters. In addition, both candidates utilized political specific tools such as Fight the Smears and Under the Radar to communicate specifics concerning the race ($n=8$). And finally, both candidates had an official Web site ($n=2$) that linked to all of the tools examined in this study.

RQ1: The Extent To Which Candidates Were Using Dialogic Features

The first research question was aimed at investigating the extent to which candidates used dialogic features to communicate online. To answer this question, this intensive case content analysis used descriptive statistics to examine the seven dialogic indices. Overall, the data suggested that candidates used some dialogic features to communicate. See Table 1 for the means and standard deviations within each index. To compare the indices, which each contained different numbers of items, mean scores were normalized in order to equally compare each mean score. The highest mean within all seven indices was the 2-item conservation of visitors index ($\underline{M}= .90$; $\underline{SD}= .94$). Another high mean score was within the ease of interface index ($\underline{M}=2.24$; $\underline{SD}= 1.09$), which indicated the degree to which users could easily navigate each tool. This was important because the ability to successfully navigate could encouraged a user to remain on a certain page. The 9-item media usefulness index also had a high mean within this study ($\underline{M}=2.80$; $\underline{SD}= 2.25$). However, the 5-item usefulness of information to voters index ($\underline{M}=1.41$; $\underline{SD}=1.32$) was not as frequent as the media usefulness index. This result showed that candidates were quite often using features that applied to the media, rather than focusing intensely on voters. The return visits 9-item index ($\underline{M}=2.05$; $\underline{SD}=1.87$) was lower than most indices except the dialogic loop indices. Finally, the 6-item dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index ($\underline{M}=1.07$; $\underline{SD}=1.21$) had a mean that differed from the 4-item actual two-way communication index ($\underline{M}=.22$; $\underline{SD}=.53$).

Looking at the specific variables across all of the 7 indices, the most common individual variable present was low reliance on graphics, (70.7%; $\underline{n}=29$). This was followed by the links to external sites variable (68.3%; $\underline{n}=28$). Other frequently occurring variables included pictures

present (65.9%; $n=27$), ability to post to the online tool (61%; $n=25$), tool listed on homepage (58%; $n=24$), and videos present (56%; $n=23$).

The 4-item dialogic loop: actual two-way communication index had the lowest frequency of all indices. Within this index, one variable was never coded as present within this study: the response to online post, (0%; $n=0$). Response to e-mail was another extremely infrequent variable (2.4%; $n=1$). Finally, within the dialogic loop actual two-way communication index, the variable news updates sent was infrequent (7.3%; $n=3$). The highest frequency within this index was not very high in relation to other indices. For example, the highest frequency was within the response to phone call variable (12.2%; $n=5$).

Other indices had variables with low frequencies; yet, the overall mean within each index was higher. Specifically, these low frequency variables included explicit invitation to return (0%; $n=0$), online opinion surveys (4.9%; $n=2$), online opinion polls (4.9%; $n=2$), calendar of upcoming events (7.3%; $n=3$), and links to other politicians (7.3%; $n=3$).

In addition to the nominal variables making up the 7 dialogic indices, 10 ratio-level variables were examined to provide a greater depth of understanding of the features within each tool. The results for these variables can be found in Table 2. The ratio-level variables included items such as number of pictures, videos, and members/supporters. Some of these variables contained extremely high means as there were extremely high numbers reported by the coders. These emphasized the fact that this study was an intensive case study. While the overall number of tools examined for this study was only 41, the amount of data examined within each tool was extremely high. For example, the highest mean among the ratio-level variables was within the number of members/supporters variable ($M=113,948.88$; $SD=396,200.59$). This showed that some tools had extremely high numbers of members/supporters, but because of the large

standard deviation, other tools contained very few members/supports or possibly no information on members/supports. This variable was followed by number of visitor posts or comments ($\underline{M}=3,770.51$; $\underline{SD}=10,974.45$). This made sense because normally one must be a member/supporter to make a post. In addition, not everyone who was a member or supporter chose to make a comment. Therefore, it made sense that the number of members/supporters was higher than the number of posts. Finally, another variable, number of pictures present, had a high mean and standard deviation ($\underline{M}=171.1$; $\underline{SD}=840.42$). This was different than the number of supporters or posts. If only 171 people supported the candidate, that would not be a very large reach or imprint among potential voters. However, 171 was high for an average number of pictures present on each tool.

The remaining ratio-level variables had means below 100. The lowest mean was number of links to other candidates ($\underline{M}=.07$; $\underline{SD}=.264$). Other low means included number of bookmarking tools ($\underline{M}=.37$; $\underline{SD}=.994$) and number of audio clips ($\underline{M}=.54$; $\underline{SD}=1.65$).

Overall, after taking standardization into account for the indices, the media usefulness index showed a higher mean than the usefulness of information to voters index. In addition, the dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index had a higher mean than the dialogic loop: actual two-way communication index, showing unactualized potential for dialogue.

RQ2: Political Party Versus Dialogic Features

The second research question investigated how each political party used the dialogic features. Overall, in terms of political parties, the Democrats had more tools ($\underline{n}=30$) than Republicans ($\underline{n}=11$). The data were split in terms of political party for further analysis. Then, each of the 7 indices were analyzed separately for Republicans ($\underline{n}=11$) and then again for Democrats ($\underline{n}=30$). The mean and standard deviation for each index according to political party

can be seen in Table 3. Democrats had the highest mean ($\underline{M}=2.93$; $\underline{SD}=2.13$) in the media usefulness index. The highest mean for Republicans ($\underline{M}=2.45$; $\underline{SD}=2.62$) was also in the media usefulness index.

In comparing Democrats and Republicans within specific indices, Democrats had higher means in all but two indices. Within the conservation of visitors index, Democrats had a mean only .01 lower than Republicans ($\underline{M}=.90$; $\underline{SD}=.92$ versus $\underline{M}=.91$ $\underline{SD}=1.04$). In addition, within the dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index, Republicans had a higher mean than Democrats ($\underline{M}=1.00$; $\underline{SD}=1.14$ versus $\underline{M}=1.27$; $\underline{SD}=1.42$). However, in all other indices, Democrats had a higher mean than Republicans.

In addition, how candidates used dialogic features within each tool was examined. Overall, Obama's tools ($\underline{n}=30$) were coded as having a total of 328 total dialogic features present. McCain's tools were coded as having only 115 total dialogic features. However, after averages were taken, the results showed that while Obama did use more online tools, he used them much the same as McCain. Obama's tools averaged 10.94 variables present, and McCain averaged 10.45 variables present. This suggested that while Obama used more tools, he did not necessarily use more dialogic features within each tool.

Overall, the Democrats used more tools than Republicans, and showed higher means within most indices. But, the overall dialogic score within tools showed candidates used dialogue at about the same rate.

RO3: Which Dialogic Features Were Related?

The third research question examined how the dialogic features were related to one another. A correlation was used to determine if the dialogic features were related to other

dialogic features. Overall, when comparing the seven indices, several correlations were found to be significant.

The ease of interface index was significantly related to the usefulness of information to voters index ($r=.31$, $p<.049$), conservation of visitors index ($r=.36$, $p<.019$), return visit index ($r=.63$, $p<.001$), and the dialogic loop: potential index ($r=.40$, $p<.31$).

The media usefulness index was significantly related to the usefulness of information to voters index ($r=.77$, $p<.001$), the conservation of visitors index ($r=.63$, $p<.001$), the return visits index ($r=.69$, $p<.001$), the dialogic loop: potential index ($r=.63$, $p<.001$), and the dialogic loop: actual index ($r=.31$; $p<.047$).

The usefulness of information to voters index was significantly related to the conservation of visitors index ($r=.49$, $p<.001$), the return visits index ($r=.53$, $p<.001$) and the dialogic loop: potential index ($r=.40$, $p<.009$).

The conservation of visitors index was significantly related to the return visits index ($r=.60$; $p<.001$) and the dialogic loop: potential index ($r=.60$, $p<.001$).

The return visits index was significantly related to the dialogic loop: potential index ($r=.80$, $p<.001$) and the dialogic loop: actual index ($r=.35$; $p<.027$).

Finally, the dialogic loop: potential index was significantly related to the dialogic loop: actual index ($r=.52$, $p<.001$).

A correlation was also performed to determine if the indices were related to the ratio-level variables such as number of press releases or number of members/supporters. Overall, the media usefulness index was related to the most ratio-level variables. The media usefulness index was significantly related to five ratio-level variables including number of press releases ($r=.39$, $p<.01$), the number of videos ($r=.34$, $p<.03$), the number of audio clips ($r=.38$, $p<.01$), number of

links to affiliated groups ($r=.35$, $p<.03$), and the number of visitor posts or comments ($r=.35$, $p<.02$). The ease of interface index was significantly related only to the number of bookmarking tools ($r=.52$; $p<.04$). The usefulness of information to voters index was significantly related to two of the ratio-level variables including number of press releases ($r=.33$; $p\leq.04$) and the number of audio clips ($r=.38$, $p<.02$). The conservation of visitors index was significantly related to the number of visitor posts or comments ($r=.38$, $p<.01$). The return visits index was significantly related to four ratio-level variables including the number of press releases ($r=.35$, $p<.03$), number of audio clips ($r=.36$, $p<.02$), number of links to affiliated groups ($r=.52$, $p<.001$), and number of visitor posts or comments ($r=.49$, $p<.001$). The dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index was significantly related to four ratio-level variables including the number of audio clips variable ($r=.37$, $p<.37$), the number of members or supporters ($r=.41$, $p<.009$), number of links to affiliated groups ($r=.44$, $p<.004$), and the number of visitor posts or comments ($r=.67$, $p<.001$). Finally, the dialogic loop: actual two-way communication index was significantly related to the number of members or supports variable ($r=.51$, $p<.001$).

Overall, several significant relationships were found among the indices and the ratio-level variables. All indices were related to at least one other index and to at least three ratio-level variables. The media usefulness index was significantly related to the most indices, 5. The next highest number of relationships was within the return visits index, which was correlated with 4 other indices and 6 ratio-level variables.

RQ4: Which Tools Were Most Dialogic?

The final research question examined which of the online tools was the most dialogic through descriptive statistics. However, in doing this the total number became lower ($n= 34$) in that some tools were used by both candidates. Tools were not counted twice as being used

separately in this analysis. Instead, the number of total dialogic variables overall was counted. For example, both candidates' results for YouTube were examined simultaneously. If a variable like low reliance on graphics was reported as used by both candidates, it was only counted once. In doing this, an overall dialogic score for how YouTube was used by the candidates was developed.

An overall dialogic score for each tool was calculated by counting the number of dialogic variables present within each tool. Of the 34 separate tools examined (excluded counting tools twice that were used by both candidates), 9 tools had one dialogic variable present including: Team McCain, National Leadership Team Tool, McCain Space, Newsvine, Fundraiser tool, McCain Nation, Mybarack.com, Stumble, and Delicious. These tools all required an account to access, and therefore were only coded as having one of the dialogic variables. The next lowest tool, Twitter, was coded as having 7 of the 42 possible dialogic variables present. This was followed by the Democratic National Party Builder tool and Web site downloading tool, which both had nine of the 42 dialogic variables present.

The tools with the highest number of variables present were the official Web site with 30 of 42 variables present and the official blog with 29 of 42 variables present. Two popular social networking sites, Facebook and MySpace, followed with 20 of the 42 variables coded as present.

Tools used by both candidates constituted the top five tools. These were official Web site (30 of 42), official blog (29 of 42), Facebook (20 of 42), MySpace (20 of 42), and YouTube (17 of 42). The other two tools used by both candidates, LinkedIn and Action Center, had 11 of 42 variables and 9 of 42 respectively. See Table 4.

Overall, the official Web site, which served as an online home base for both candidates, was the most dialogic tool in this study. In addition, social networking sites contained high levels of dialogic features as well as the popular video-sharing tool YouTube.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results chapter presented information on how candidates in the 2008 presidential election used dialogic features to communicate online. Specifically, the research questions examined the extent to which candidates used dialogic features, which political party used more dialogic features, how the dialogic features were related, and finally which tools were most dialogic. This chapter will present an interpretation and discussion of the previous results and reexamine the importance of this study.

The research questions posed in this study attempted to examine online political communication in relation to dialogue. Overall, the goal was to examine how presidential candidates were not only communicating, but also engaging in dialogue online. By examining all online tools publicized on presidential candidates' Web sites, this study was able to glimpse how candidates used the Internet to connect with voters. Specifically, this study looked for dialogic features to determine if candidates were communicating through dialogue or through monologue. This added to the dialogic theory of public relations literature as well as the body of knowledge concerning online political communication.

This study was important not only because it added to existing literature, but it also examined the dialogic theory of public relations in a new way. While the dialogic theory of public relations was created only 20 years ago (Pearson, 1989a), it has been reexamined (Kent & Taylor, 2002) and used in several studies to date (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Taylor & Kent, 2004; Kent & Taylor, 1998). In addition, several studies have used this theory in relation to online communication, and others such as Taylor & Kent (2004)

have specifically used this theory in relation to online political communication. This study built on previous research and once again investigated online political communication. However, instead of examining one online tool, such as a blog, this study attempted to gain an overall look into how candidates were communicating online. By examining all online tools present on each candidate's Web site, a broader understanding of online political communication was potentially reached. In addition, this study also examined the dialogic loop more closely than previous studies. Instead of one dialogic loop index, this study divided the index into two dialogic loop indices including potential for two-way communication and actual two-way communication. In doing this, information concerning the dialogic loop was separated into potential and actual, providing a look into the potential for dialogue within a tool versus the actual dialogue taking place. This moved the literature forward and examined unactualized potential, whereas previous studies simply examined actual and potential as one index. Overall, this study provided a broad look into how presidential and vice-presidential candidates were communicating online with target audiences.

In addition, this study thoroughly examined all tools, delving into many aspects of each tool. Because of this, this study could also be considered an intensive case study. Previous studies have examined one tool, and some studies have thoroughly examined a feature within a tool (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). This study was different in that it investigated all tools, counted all posts, members/supporters, pictures, etc., while also searching for dialogic indicators. Because of this, the total number of tools examined was low, but the amount of manifest content examined within each tool was extremely high. For example, Obama had 2,304,514 friends and McCain 616,215 friends on Facebook alone. This was just one example within one variable. Overall, the coders had to carefully count and examine a diverse amount of information to

complete this study, making it not only a quantitative content analysis, but also an intensive case study.

RQ1: The Extent To Which Candidates Were Using Dialogic Features

Research question one examined the extent to which candidates were using dialogic features. One of the highest means was located in the 9-item media usefulness index (\underline{M} =2.80; \underline{SD} = 2.25). However, the 5-item usefulness of information to voters index was lower than the media usefulness index (\underline{M} =1.41; \underline{SD} =1.32). This was interesting in that the candidates appeared to be using these tools to directly communicate with the electorate; however, the results showed that the online tools were actually more often being used as a traditional public relations tool to communicate effectively with the media. This was important as potential voters visited a candidate's Web site, they received more monologic communication, meant for the media rather than engaging in dialogue.

Specifically, the most frequent variables within the media usefulness index were pictures of candidates coded present in 27 of the 41 tools, videos (23 of 41), and information on member/supporter base (20 of 41). Within the usefulness of information to voters index, the most frequent variables were information on donating (18 of 41) and information on volunteering (16 of 41). This data showed that the variables found within the media usefulness index were present within more tools than the variables within the usefulness of information to voters index. For example, the highest frequency within the media usefulness index was 27 of 41, while the highest frequency within the usefulness of information to voters index was 18 of 41. While some of the variables intended for the media could also have been helpful to potential voters, these variables more frequently represented monologic communication without harnessing the capability to engage in dialogue.

In addition, the index with the lowest mean was the dialogic loop: actual two-way communication index. This was striking because true dialogue requires two-way communication. While the potential for two-way communication was there, it was not fully utilized. This was in agreement with findings from campaigns more than a decade ago by Stromer-Galley (2000). Research from the 1996 and 1998 elections suggested that while candidates were using the Internet to communicate, the campaigns were not using all of the dialogic features available for true interactivity (Stromer-Galley, 2000). In addition, in the 2004 presidential election, the findings were similar. Specifically, candidates such as Dean incorporated various Internet capabilities into the communication campaigns. However, the candidates were not fully utilizing all of the dialogic features available (Williams et al., 2005; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006).

In addition, the data within the dialogic loop: actual two-two way communication index had the lowest scores. Specifically, the highest variable present was response to phone call (5 of 41). This was not even close to the highest variable within other indices. The ease of interface index's highest variable was low reliance on graphics (29 of 41), the media usefulness index's pictures of candidates (27 of 41), the usefulness of information to voters' information on donating (18 of 41), conservation of visitors' last updated time or date posted (20 of 41), return visits' links to external sites (28 of 41) and the dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication's ability to post to online tool (25 of 41). As a result, the data showed that actual two-way communication appeared to be the lowest priority within each candidate's online usage, as the variables within the index appeared present the fewest times. This was important as two-way communication, or dialogue, could not fully develop if communication was not provided from both parties. In this case, target audiences had the ability to contact a candidate be it

through an e-mail address, phone number, or directly through the online tool (dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication). However, candidates were not fulfilling their half of the relationship by responding to these methods of communication such as returning a phone call or posting back to their online tool (dialogic loop: actual two-way communication).

Another interesting result was located within the ratio-level variables. The variable number of links to other candidates had one of the lowest means of all variables ($M=.07$; $SD=.264$). This suggested that while candidates were promoting themselves through various tools, they were not promoting other political candidates, not even those within the same party. Instead, candidates appeared to be only self-promoting in their Internet usage. This was similar to results from 2004, which found candidates used their online presence to strictly self-promote, not to better their party or even candidates with which they were affiliated (Tedesco, 2004).

Specifically, only three tools (7.32%) were coded as having links to other candidates including MiGente, AsiaAve, and the Texting Tool. But, overall 28 tools (68.29%) had links to external sites. This showed that candidates were linking externally; they just were not promoting other candidates.

Overall, the results from this study suggested that candidates were communicating more with the media than potential voters. In addition, the dialogic loop: actual two-way communication index's variables were coded as the least frequent. However, this was arguably the most important index as it concerned the actual two-way communication, or dialogue, taking place. Also, the dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index had a higher mean than the dialogic loop: actual two-way communication index, meaning the candidates had unactualized potential for dialogue, in keeping with previous findings in past elections (Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006).

These results are important to public relations, as they suggested the dialogic features within the various online tools were not fully realized. Instead, a pseudo-dialogue was occurring to communicate with target audiences. While candidates used dialogic tools with dialogic features, they did not utilize all of the dialogic features available within these tools. Instead, candidates employed these tools as traditional means of communication and provided more opportunities for monologic rather than dialogic interaction. Simply using dialogic tools does not mean a dialogic relationship will develop. As a result, public relations practitioners need to fully understand the tools they are incorporating into their communication plans in order to fully utilize all dialogic features available. Simply applying these online tools as a means of monologic communication limits the relationship that can develop and flourish through public relations.

RQ2: Political Party Versus Dialogic Features

Overall, Obama ($n=30$) utilized more online tools than McCain ($n= 11$). However, upon deeper analysis, the results suggested that while Obama did use almost triple the number of online tools, there did not appear to be a large difference in how the tools were used. In fact, the results suggested that while Obama utilized more tools overall, he did *not* utilize more dialogic features within each online tool. Instead, both candidates appeared to use similar amounts of dialogic communication to communicate online with target audiences.

However, an impact and difference was seen in the reach each candidate had online. If Obama used 30 tools compared to McCain's 11, this gave Obama more opportunities to reach more people. In reaching more people, Obama had the potential to establish and maintain more relationships with more potential voters. As a result, while both candidates used dialogic

features at about the same rate, Obama had more chances to actually establish a relationship through dialogue online.

This finding is important to public relations campaigns as the campaign goal is typically to reach as many members of the target audiences as possible to spread a message. For example, if an organization wanted to inform its publics about an upcoming charity event, the company would attempt to reach as many people as possible to increase the turnout at this event. By using more online tools, potentially more impressions could be made, meaning more people would be likely to attend the event. In addition, using a variety of tools could reach a more diverse crowd. As a result, public relations practitioners should carefully consider the number and types of tools they incorporate into their communication campaign to help them reach a maximum number of individuals from their target audiences.

Another interesting result concerned the types of tools used by each candidate. Obama used several social networking tools that were created for specific target publics. For example, AsiaAve, MyBatanga, Migente, and Glee were all social networking tools utilized by Obama. However, Obama is not a target audience of any of these tools as AsiaAve is for Asians, MyBatanga, and Migente are for Latinos, and Glee is for homosexuals. While Obama is none of these publics, he still chose to have a profile on these networks. Perhaps this was because Obama and his Democratic campaign realized that their voters were not a single cohort. By creating profiles on these social networking sites, Obama and his campaign were reaching different minorities with campaign information. For example, within just his minority social networking sites, Obama had 549,407 friends or supporters. That was more than half a million people that McCain missed an opportunity to reach because he chose to use only the mainstream networks. Within the mainstream networks, Obama had 2,304,514 Facebook friends, 823,032

MySpace friends, and more than 500 LinkedIn connections. McCain had 616,215 Facebook friends, 5,348 MySpace friends, and more than 500 LinkedIn connections. Overall, Obama reached 3,677,453 people and McCain 622,063, with a difference of 3,055,390. Perhaps if McCain had chosen to include minority social networking sites, he could have closed the gap with Obama. These results suggested that Obama was more inclined to specialize and communicate with a broad range of people, while McCain chose to simply use the few major sites to communicate with the general public. In addition, the depth of involvement in this case for Obama was deeper than McCain as Obama utilized many more tools.

Nevertheless, while Obama used minority networks to communicate with a broad range of people, he did so half-heartedly. First, many of his profiles on minority networks used exactly the same content, meaning information was basically pasted from one tool to another. This showed that Obama did not take the time to tailor his messages to different audiences. If these people felt different enough to create their own online culture-based community to address their needs, Obama should have created his profile with information altered to the needs of each group. Instead, he provided general information to each minority site. This could possibly have done more harm than good, as his online presence within these communities was not adapted to fit each community. By doing this, he appeared uninterested in the diverse communities and their specific needs.

Overall, in terms of dialogic communication, the results do not suggest candidates were fully utilizing all dialogic features available through their online tools. Specifically, the results suggested the two candidates were averaging about 10 dialogic variables coded as present per tool out of the 42 possible dichotomous variables on the codesheet. Following public relations theory, the candidates should have used two-way symmetrical communication to build ethical

and meaningful relationships with potential voters (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). However, from analysis, it appeared that candidates were more often using the public-information model of public relations, which involved one-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Candidates were providing information and including some dialogic features, but they were not fully utilizing all of the two-way features available. Because of this, candidates were not able to build “mutual understanding” between the candidate and voters (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.22). The feedback loop, which is essential to ethical two-way communication, was, for the most part in this study, ignored and monologue was taking place. This was similar to previous studies which found candidates were using the Internet, but not all of its dialogic or interactive features (Stromer-Galley, 2000).

RQ3: Which Dialogic Features Were Related?

Research question three was important because it examined significant relationships among indices and variables. Several indices and variables were logically linked and the significant relationships were as follows. The ease of interface index was related to 4 indices including the conservation of visitors and return visits indices. These relationships made sense as more people would probably stay on a site longer and return if it was easy to use. In general, ease of interface is extremely important in online communication as users have almost unlimited choices. Instead of two local newspapers or five local news channels, Internet users have millions of Web sites at their fingertips to use for news and information. As a result, the easier the navigation, the more likely people will be to stay and return.

In addition, the conservation of visitors index was related to the return visits and dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication indices. This was a logical link because if visitors liked a site enough to continue using it, then they would logically be more likely to return to that

site in the future. In addition, sites that provided potential means of dialogic communication could entice people to remain on the site. In online communication, keeping visitors interested and on the Web page is essential. If this could be done through providing current news updates, contact information and a way for users to voice their opinions, then communicators should definitely consider including these aspects when establishing sites.

Another significant relationship was found between the return visits index and the dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index. This relationship suggested that users would be more likely to return if the potential for two-way communication were included in a site. Specifically, within this study, users could have experienced more benefits and involvement in the site if the potential for a dialogic relationship was present. The inclusion and possibility of participation could have encouraged visitors to return, a goal of most Web sites. As a result, the potential for two-way communication was linked to getting visitors to return and view the content of a site multiple times.

Finally, when examining the relationships among the indices, the dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index was significantly related to the dialogic loop: actual two-way communication index. This was probably the most obvious relationship of all, as actual two-way communication could not occur if the potential for dialogue was not present. By providing dialogic means of communication, actual two-way communication could flourish and meaningful relationships could have develop with potential voters.

In addition to comparing the indices to each other, the indices were also tested for relationships with the ratio-level variables. To begin, the media usefulness index was related to a relatively high number of ratio-level variables, 5, in comparison to most other indices. Two of these relationships were very obvious including the index's relationship with the press release

and audio clip variables. In terms of public relations, developing a relationship and communicating with the media is important. In addition, to get information to the media, public relations professionals have to make it available (such as through press releases or audio clips). These results suggested that candidates in this study were taking online communication with the media seriously, as it had a relatively high mean score and significant number of relationships to ratio-level variables.

However, the usefulness of information to voters index was only related to two ratio-level variables including number of press releases and the number of audio clips. This was interesting in that these tools were supposed to be communicating with the electorate; however, these correlations suggested a more media-focused approach to communication. The Internet provides a unique opportunity for candidates to communicate directly with target publics and for these publics to provide feedback directly to the candidates (Kent & Taylor, 2002). An example of a ratio-level variable from this study concerned with this type of two-way communication was number of posts or comments. With this variable, voters could have read the content provided by the candidate and then commented directly to the tool. The candidate then had the opportunity to comment back to the voter. This would have been an example of two-way symmetrical communication, or dialogue, taking place online within this study. However, the press releases and audio clips variables provided traditional monologic communication that did not involve building an ethical two-way relationship between candidates and potential voters. Instead, with these two types of variables, candidates were merely sending information to voters and eliminating the Internet's unique ability for direct feedback (two-way symmetrical communication).

Overall, these results suggested that users were more likely to remain on and return to a candidate's site if the online tools included the potential for dialogue and were easy to navigate and use. This was an important finding, especially to public relations professionals, as the Internet provides so many Web sites and online tools, target audiences have almost unlimited choices. Keeping visitors on a specific site and encouraging them to return is therefore essential in establishing and maintaining relationships in public relations.

In addition the results also suggested that the online tools in this study were being used as public relations tools to communicate more with the media than the public. This was important as these online tools appeared to be communicating directly with potential voters, but more often than not, they were communicating with the media through monologic communication. The ratio-level variables associated with actually establishing dialogue were not related to the usefulness of information to voters index. And, more ratio-level variables were related to the media usefulness index, 5, as opposed to the usefulness of information to voters index, 2. This was surprising, as these tools were apparently being used to communicate directly with potential voters; however, they were actually communicating more traditionally with the media. This was in line with previous research from 2002 that suggested candidates were using the Internet for self-promotion rather than interaction with potential voters (Tedesco, 2004).

RQ4: Which Tools Were Most Dialogic?

Overall, 41 separate online tools were examined for dialogic features. Of the 41 tools, 7 tools were used by both candidates. Of the 7 tools used by both candidates, 5 had the most dialogic features present of all tools. This meant that tools used by both candidates contained the most dialogic features. The question then became why. Perhaps these tools were used by both candidates because they were the more adopted tools in this study. For example, the Pew

Internet and American Life project reported that in June 2008, with five months until the election, 35% of Americans had already watched online videos concerning the campaign and 10% used social networking tools to find political information (Pew, 2008). In addition, if these were the more popular tools, it would be logical that candidates would take the time and put forth the effort to include more dialogic features in them rather than in other, lesser known tools. For example, if the person in charge of the Obama Facebook account knew more people would visit it than the AsiaAve account, then perhaps he/she would have spent more time creating and updating the Facebook account than the AsiaAve account. This leads to the question: Is it better to have a few tools, putting lots of time and effort into each tool, or lots of tools, quickly creating and then neglecting to accurately update. Both have pros and cons. With lots of tools, one has more reach and can possibly contact more individuals. With few tools, one might not reach as many people, but a more meaningful relationship could develop with the people who do see these tools.

Nevertheless, candidates could also have incorporated more dialogic features into these popular tools because their campaigns were more familiar with using these tools. For example, if a campaign member creating the Obama Facebook account was already familiar with Facebook, it would be easier for him/her to utilize all that was available when creating a Facebook profile. In contrast, if the campaign creator of AsiaAve had never used the tool and did not know how to successfully navigate the applications, then fewer dialogic features would probably have been included.

A final possibility for the high usage of dialogic features within these tools could have been their inherent capacity for dialogue. However, social networking tools such as AsiaAve have about the same capacity for dialogue as Facebook or MySpace, meaning this was probably

not a major factor. For example, when examining Facebook versus AsiaAve both had the ability for users to create a blog, post pictures, post videos, make friends, post to a guestbook/wall, and send friends a message. In the structural sense, these two tools were basically the same tool. They both enabled the same actions and served the same purpose. However, one was marketed to a general audience and the other to a minority audience. This appeared to be the only major difference between the two sites. In addition, AsiaAve, a minority directed tool, had less dialogic features than the extremely similar Facebook, a mainstream directed tool, within the Obama campaign. This did not imply anything positive about the Obama campaign's outlook on minorities and the importance of reaching them. However, McCain completely neglected to even create an AsiaAve account. Overall, these results suggested that candidates were not putting as much effort, if any, into reaching minority groups as they were mainstream society.

Of the tools used by both candidates, the most common type of tools were social networking sites. This could be because social networking sites were increasing in usage and popularity at the time of this campaign (Cozma & Postelnicu, 2008). As a result, both campaigns thought it important to include social networking tools into their online communication campaigns.

Bookmarking tools were also found to be commonly used tools within this study. Obama utilized Digg, Newsvine, Stumble, Delicious, and Feedburner. This was important in that subscribers to these bookmarking tools not visiting the Obama site could still find information concerning the Obama campaign. For example, Obama had a Delicious link on his official Web site for visitors to bookmark his information. By providing the link within the site or blog, he made it easy for bookmarking users to mark his information. If it was easier for users to bookmark, then more people would probably have bookmarked Obama's information. With

more people bookmarking his information, his ratings would possibly have been higher and his information could have been found easier within the bookmarking site by other bookmarking users. As a result, by providing so many bookmarking options, Obama made it more probable that his news stories or blogs would be bookmarked more often and seen as more popular than if he did not provide these links.

The bookmarking tools used by Obama in this study were an example of viral marketing or viral advertising. Viral marketing, in the business sense, involves customer communication as a means of popularizing a product or brand. The communication is sent to consumers who then share the information with friends who then share the information with their friends, exponentially increasing the number of people to hear about a company's brand (Chiu, Lee & Chen, 2007). In the public relations sense, viral marketing is a way to spread information about an organization, in this case a political candidate. In this study, when users bookmarked something from the candidate, other users could see it and potentially send it to other people. The number of people to see the information may have exponentially grown and helped promote the candidate. As a result, by including bookmarking links, Obama was more likely to increase his reach and his communication with more potential voters.

In terms of public relations, this research question is important to practitioners as they choose how to communicate online. Some tools inherently contain more dialogic features while other tools incorporate dialogic features more seamlessly than others. As a result, it was important to examine how these tools were used in this study to determine how to easily use them in the future. Many times, when conducting a public relations campaign, practitioners find themselves limited on time, staff, and money. Therefore, a campaign might not be able to physically accommodate all online tools available. By knowing which tools were used the most

dialogically in this study and what was included to make these tools dialogic, practitioners could then create an online communication campaign that best fit their client's needs with limited time and a limited budget.

Reliability

Previous studies have reported low alphas for all dialogic indices (Taylor et al., 2001). However, previous researchers have noted that the low alphas were a result of the indices measuring “multiple concepts within a single construct rather than the isolation of a singular concept via multiple items, as in a scale. The reliability scores [were] thus provided as indicators of the multiplexity of each dialogic feature rather than as pointers toward measurement validity, which is better assessed by intercoder reliability” (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 274).

This study expanded the typical data set of previous dialogic theory of public relations studies to include multiple online tools, as opposed to examining one tool. By doing this, the reliability of most indices increased. In fact, the alphas for all but two indices in this study were higher or the same as the alphas in previous research. The ease of interface index in this study had an alpha of .14, but a previous alpha of .29 was reported (Taylor et al., 2001). In addition, this study separated the dialogic loop index into two indices including dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication and dialogic loop: actual two-way communication. This was done to see more explicitly if candidates were using the dialogic features available to actually communicate with voters. The previous alpha for the dialogic loop index was .66 (Taylor et al., 2001). However, in this study, the potential index had an alpha of .66 and the actual index had an alpha of .35. But, this was not surprising as the dialogic loop index was separated for this study and therefore could not easily be compared to the previous dialogic loop index alpha.

The increase in the reliability of the alphas in this study as opposed to previous studies could have been a result of the inclusion of a greater number of tools. Previous research examined a single tool such as a blog. However, this study examined a variety of tools, including blogs, Web sites, and MySpace pages used by political candidates. The increase in tool variety may have contributed to the higher alphas.

Overall, this study reported higher alphas than previous dialogic theory of public relations research. By increasing the data set to include a greater breadth of tools, the overall reliability of the indices rose.

Limitations

This study, like all others, had limitations. First, this study examined all online tools publicized on presidential candidates' Web sites. While this study examined a census, the total number of separate units of analysis was only 41. Similar studies have examined Facebook posts for example, and analyzed several hundred posts, whereas this study analyzed only 41 tools. However, this study took a step back and looked at a larger picture instead of focusing on one aspect of online communication. But, in doing this, the same amount (if not more) information was analyzed. For example, this study analyzed all of Facebook, not just wall comments, pictures, or applications. Because of this, coders examined large amounts of data within each tool. In this respect, this study was seen as more of an intensive case study. If the total number of tools had been 150, for the scope of this project, the study would have been very difficult. Because, while this study only examined 41 tools, it did so in an extremely thorough manner. Each tool was completely dissected and all posts, pictures, and members/supports were counted and analyzed for dialogic features. This study went more in depth than previous studies that only examined one tool or one part of a tool. While the total number of units analyzed was low, it

was because this study wanted a thorough look at each tool, not just a glimpse into one aspect of each tool. Nevertheless, only having a total of 41 units made data analysis difficult. Descriptive statistics were used more than inferential as a result of the low number of tools. More research needs to be done from this perspective in analyzing a wider breadth of tools.

Another limitation was the dialogic loop: potential and actual indices. The dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication index could have been affected by the need to set-up an account within certain tools. For example, within the scope of this study, Facebook allowed users to post comments to a wall. Therefore, the dialogic loop: potential for two-way communication variable ability to post or comment to online tool would have been coded as present. But, an account was required to make a comment. Because of this, the final and possibly most important part of the dialogic loop, actual two-way communication, could not be initiated. Since coders could not post to the wall, it was obvious that candidates would not post a comment back, and the variable response to post or comment would not have been coded as present. However, it is important to note that within Facebook, for example, Obama had 30,060 wall posts and McCain 12,020 during the time of this study. Within all of those posts, none were made by the candidate. All of the posts were from members or supporters, not the candidate. Because of this, one could assume that if a post was made by a coder, it probably would not have been answered. Nevertheless, the fact that an account was required to create contact in some circumstances could have affected the final numbers for the actual two-way communication index.

Another limitation was within the ratio-level variables' means and standard deviations. While the means for some variables were extremely high, for example number of members/supporters ($M=113,948.88$; $SD=396,200.59$), the standard deviations were also

extremely high. This was a result of the fact that some tools had extremely high numbers of members or supporters such as Facebook. Obama had 2,304,514 friends and McCain 616,215 friends. However, in keeping with previous methods, other tools such as Delicious or Under the Radar were coded as having zero members/supporters as no information was available in relation to this variable. Because of the large difference between tools, the standard deviations were extremely high for the ratio-level variables.

Conclusion

Overall, this study was important to public relations because it took a relatively new theory, the dialogic theory of public relations, and examined a relatively new set of tools on the Internet, social media. With the extreme growth of the Internet, it was important to examine the communication taking place online, especially concerning historical events such as the 2008 presidential election. This study examined online communication through the dialogic theory of public relations. While the dialogic theory of public relations is a young theory in relation to mass communication research, it has extreme potential as it coincides well with the Internet and its unique capabilities for dialogic, two-way communication. Because of this, it is essential to develop new studies concerning this theory to analyze the Internet and its constantly evolving online tools. Each study conducted using this theory adds to the existing body of knowledge and can assist future researchers, either positively or negatively, on how to design and conduct future studies. If the Internet continues to grow and online communication continues to flourish, this theory will only become more essential in understanding communication in relation to public relations.

In addition, several study-specific conclusions were also deduced from this research. First, this study suggested that while candidates were using dialogic features to communicate

online with voters, candidates were not fully utilizing all of the dialogic features available. Previous research in the 1996 and 1998 campaigns by Stromer-Galley (2000) suggested that candidates were using the Internet but not fully utilizing its interactive features. This study was in line with previous findings that suggested candidates were using the Internet but not fully realizing the interactivity available online.

Specifically, candidates were using their online tools more as a traditional public relations function than a direct means of communication with target audiences. While candidates were using online tools, and they were using some dialogic features, they were not focusing their communication on potential voters. Through correlations and mean scores, this study was able to see which indices were related to which ratio-level variables and which indices were the most frequently occurring. These findings suggested candidates were spending more time communicating with the media, using the online tools as almost a press kit or large press release instead of a means for direct communication with potential voters. Therefore, when potential voters visited a candidate's site, they received one-way communication meant for the media. This suggested that candidates were more often participating in monologic communication rather than two-way symmetrical dialogue. This was similar to results from previous research that suggested candidates were using Web sites similar to traditional brochures or advertisements. The Web sites simply provided information instead of using the two-way communication capabilities of the Internet (Tedesco, 2004). As a result, there was little if any growth in this area.

In addition, both candidates appeared to be using their online tools to self promote. Obama had links to three other candidates and McCain did not have any links to other candidates. This suggested that while candidates were creating online images of themselves,

they were not attempting to better their party or other political candidates. Instead, their online presences were simply for their own publicity and gain, not for the betterment of the party or to help others. This was also similar to previous research that suggested candidates were using online tools mainly for self-promotion (Tedesco, 2004).

Another interesting finding from this study was that while at first glance there appeared to be a large disparity in Internet usage, both political parties tended to use the same frequency of dialogic features. It was unmistakable that Obama and his Democratic party did use more tools than McCain and his Republican party within this study. However, their usage of dialogic features averaged out to be quite similar. For the scope of this study, both political parties were using the Internet for dialogue in similar ways. However, both parties failed to fully utilize two-way symmetrical communication to build meaningful relationships with potential voters through dialogue.

In terms of a public relations campaign, this study was important because it examined online communication, which is relatively cheap and easy to create. Because of the low cost, public relations practitioners could potentially incorporate several of the online tools examined in this study into a public relations campaign with relative ease and low financial burden. In addition, these tools have the ability to reach millions of people. Obama had more than 2 million friends on Facebook. The Internet's capability to reach millions of people for a low cost makes it a great means of communication. Public relations practitioners can examine this study and see the dialogic indicators as well as the dialogic indices, and prepare their online communication plans with these factors taken into consideration. In addition, the findings from this study that were negative, such as Obama and his copy-and-paste method of communicating to minorities

instead of tailoring his messages to his different audiences could help future communicators avoid the same blunders.

In conclusion, the results from this study specifically suggested that while candidates in both political parties have incorporated new tools into their communication campaigns, once again, they both were not utilizing all dialogic capabilities and possible interactive features. While additional research is needed for a more definitive conclusion, this study found that both candidates have unactualized potential to communicate directly with voters.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Code Book

Eligibility for Coding

The online tools eligible for coding will be listed on each 2008 presidential and vice presidential candidates' Web sites, excluding any possible tools that the candidate does not publicize on his or her Web site. The candidates include Democratic nominee Senator Barack Obama and his vice presidential running mate, Senator Joe Biden as well as Republican nominee Senator John McCain and his vice presidential running mate, Governor Sarah Palin. The units to be coded include any online tools the candidate publicizes on his or her official Web site. An example of an online tool would be Facebook, blogs, or text messaging. Candidate specific tools such as McCain Space will be included in the analysis, as this is an online tool being utilized by the candidate. Tools do not have to be separately hosted and operated.

General Instructions

Open an Internet browser, and log on to:

<http://128.192.29.48:8080/survey/entry.jsp?id=1227908378330> to open the coding instrument.

Each coder must have a working Internet connection to code. Each Web site will be analyzed separately, with some requiring more time than others to examine. Before coding, review the entire site and become familiar with the links and set up. Then, start at the home page and begin coding. Click on each separate tool to examine the candidate's usage of the specific tool. Only tools listed on the Web site can be coded. Tools listed on another tool, but not on the Web site, will not be included. For example, a candidate's Facebook page lists a MySpace profile link, but the candidate's official Web site does not list the MySpace profile. The MySpace profile will not be coded. Each tool will require steps one-52 be completed from the code sheet.

Code Sheet Information

Coder Name	Check box with appropriate name
Candidate	Check box with candidate(s) name
Online Tool	Check the box with correct tool name
Online Tool ID	Type in ID number as given before coding

Visit the site map, which is a list of all items on the Web site, normally located on the home page. Go through all items listed and search for the usage of online tools. If a variable is

present, check the box next to the appropriate variable. If a variable is absent, do not check the box by that variable.

1. **Location of the tool on the Web site:** Determine whether the tool is listed on the home page or if one must search different pages on the Web site to find it. If the tool is on the home page, check the box to mark as present. If the tool is not located on the home page and requires one or more clicks, do not check the box. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
2. **Location of tool on the site map:** Go to the candidate's home page and click on the site map link. Look for a direct link to the online tool being coded. The intercoder reliability for this variable was .50.
3. **Account requirements:** Use the candidate's link to visit each specific online tool. Determine if an account is needed to view the page, or if any Internet user can see the available information. If the information requires an account, check the box to choose present. If the online tool is available without an account, do not check any boxes. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
4. **Search engine located on tool:** After visiting the tool, look for a search engine box to use within the site. If a search engine tool exists, check the box to mark as present, and if not, do not check any boxes. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
5. **Reliance on graphics:** Does the site use graphics to help its visitors navigate? Are graphics used instead of text to guide visitors throughout the Web site? Do visitors have to click on graphics or videos to reach different areas of the Web site? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
6. **Press release features:** Does the tool have links to press releases either new or archived? Can visitors read the press releases? For example, Facebook notes contain information similar to a press release and can be coded as a press release. The intercoder reliability for this variable was .50.
7. Record the **number of press releases** if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
8. **Video of candidate:** Does the tool contain video clips of the candidate giving speeches and presentations? This does not just include commercials, the candidate must be giving an actual presentation or speech. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
9. Record the **number of videos the candidate** provides on this tool if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
10. **Audio of candidate:** Does the tool provide audio clips of the candidate giving a speech or presentation? It must be the actual candidate, not a speech concerning the candidate. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.

11. Record the **number of audio clips** the candidate provides on this tool if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
12. **Pictures from the campaign:** Does the campaign post pictures to the online tools. They can be arranged in album format or just posted separately. An example would be the Photos application on Facebook. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
13. Record the **number of photographs** and albums the candidate provides if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
14. **Textual content from candidate:** Does the tool contain a text version of speeches or presentations given from the candidate. Look for key words such as “I” or “me” or “we.” The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
15. **Downloadable graphics:** Does the tool provide a link to graphics that can be downloaded and used externally? Look to see if any copyright information is available or if the tools are open to anyone to use as they please. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
16. **Statement of policy:** Examine the tool and specifically look for policy statements. An example would be the candidate’s policy on Iraq. Does the tool contain a textual and clear statement of a candidate’s policy? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
17. **Stance on issues:** Examine the information on the tool and look for information concerning the candidate’s stance on a variety of issues. An example of common issues includes abortion, education and Iraq. Does the candidate provide clear positions on issues? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
18. **Member/supporter information:** Does the tool contain information concerning members or supporters of the candidate? Does it say how many supporters have volunteered, joined a group, or donated money? This would be information on the candidate’s supporters. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
19. Record **the number of members or supporters** the candidate displays if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
20. **Mission statement or philosophy:** Examine the online tool and look for an overarching mission statement or general philosophy. This does not include a candidate’s stance on an issue or specific policies. A mission statement is similar to an all-encompassing goal for the candidate. The intercoder reliability for this variable was .50.
21. **Fund-raising opportunities:** Does the online tool provide visitors with the opportunity to donate money or information on how to donate? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
22. **Volunteering opportunities:** Does the tool allow visitors to sign up to volunteer or provide information on how to volunteer or provide a local contact? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.

23. **Links to other candidates:** Examine the tool and look for links to other political candidates. It does not have to be a direct opponent, just any other political candidate running for office. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
24. Record the **number of links to other candidates** the candidate displays if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
25. **Links to affiliated groups:** Does the online tool provide links to groups or organizations the candidate is involved with? An example would be a link to a union or special interest group. The intercoder reliability for this variable was .1.
26. Record the **number of links to affiliated groups** the candidate displays if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
27. **Logo:** Examine the tool and look to see if the candidate's logo is prominently displayed and identifiable to visitors. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
28. **Site updates:** Examine the online tool and look to see if it displays a date and time of update. For example, the mini-feed on Facebook displays the dates and even times items were updated or added. This would be coded as updates. However, only check as present if the update has taken place in the past 48 hours. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
29. **Visitor communication via tool:** Examine the tool and look to see if it provides features that allow visitors to communicate with each other. For example, a Facebook page allows users to post on a wall. Visitors can write an original comment or comment on other visitors' previous comments. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
30. Record the **number of visitor posts or comments** on the candidate' online tool if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
31. **Links to external sites:** Does the tool provide links to sites outside of the actual tool? Can visitors click on a link and be taken to another Web site outside of the online tool? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
32. Record the **number of links to external sites** the candidate provides if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
33. **Bookmarking:** Does the tool allow users to bookmark its content through a provided link? An example would be a bookmarking tool such as del.icio.us link located on the candidate's blog. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
34. Record the **number of bookmarking sites** the candidate provides if applicable. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.

35. **Request information via e-mail or direct mail:** Does the tool provide contact information including an e-mail address or a direct mail address to request information? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
36. **Response to e-mail or mailing contact:** Does the candidate or someone from the campaign team respond to an e-mail or direct mail inquiry? This does not include requesting e-mail updates. An example would be a personalized e-mail to the candidate concerning a policy. If a personalized response is given, code present and if a form letter is sent not in response to the question, code absent. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
37. **Request updates:** Does the tool provide a method of receiving e-mail updates from the candidate or campaign team? This includes signing up for regular updates through e-mails, text messages, or direct mail. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
38. **Response to request for updates:** After requesting information, does the information actually come via the selected vehicle? If information is requested via e-mail, do the updates actually arrive within 48 hours? Coders must sign up, and then wait to code this question. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
39. **Telephone contact information:** Does the online tool provide a telephone number to contact the candidate or the campaign team? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
40. **Response to telephone call:** Does the candidate or a member of the campaign team personally answer and address the phone call within 48 hours? If a person answers when initial call is made, code “yes,” and if someone responds to a message within 48 hours, also code as present. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
41. **Online opinion surveys:** Does the online tool have opinion surveys available for visitors to provide feedback and their individual opinions on issues? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
42. **Opinion polls:** Does the online tool have polls through which visitors can vote on different subjects? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
43. **Downloadable information:** Does the online tool provide downloadable information such as a brochure, fact sheet, newsletter, etc. An example would be a PDF version of a biography. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
44. **Calendar of events:** Does the online tool provide a calendar of upcoming events? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
45. **Online tool ability to communicate:** Does the online tool provide a way to communicate with the candidate directly through the online tool? An example would be a Facebook wall and the ability for a visitor to communicate through the tool itself. The intercoder reliability for this variable was .50.

46. **Response to communication through online tool:** Does the candidate or a member of the campaign team respond within 48 hours? Is it a form letter or a personal reply to the question raised? Code “yes” if the response is in direct relation to the question posed. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
47. **Online tool point of view:** If the online tool in general is presented from the candidate’s point of view, check the box to mark present, and if the tool is presented from a third person point of view, do not check the box to show it is absent. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
48. **Advertising:** Does the online tool contain advertising for something unrelated to the candidate? The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
49. **Updates in past 48 hours:** Does the online tool contain a date for the last update? If it does, is that date in the past 48 hours? Only code this item as present if the date is listed. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
50. **News stories in the past 48 hours:** Does this tool have news stories posted that are dated in the past 48 hours? If no date is available or the stories are more than 48 hours old, do not code as present. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
51. **Explicit invitation to return:** Does this online tool contain an explicit invitation to return included text, video or audio? This could be a text box that says ‘please visit our site again,’ or ‘check back with our site for up-to-date updates on the candidate.’ The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.
52. **E-mail opportunities:** If this site contains e-mail addresses for a user to contact either the candidate or the campaign, code this as present. However, if no e-mail addresses are available at all, not even an e-mail address for help with navigating the site, it would not be coded as present. The intercoder reliability for this variable was 1.

Appendix B: Code Sheet

Coder name

Cindy

Sara

Jeremy

other:

Item ID number

Candidate

Obama/Biden

Obama only

Biden only

McCain/Palin

McCain only

Palin only

Tool

Flickr

MySpace

Blog

Facebook

del.icio.us

Stumble

feedburner

newsvine

BarackTV

Eons

Democratic National Party Builder

Fight Smears

Under Radar

BlackPlanet
Faithbase
Glee
MiGente
My Batanga
AsiaAve
LinkedIn
Eventful
Twitter
MySpace
YouTube
Mybarack.com
Web site downloads
Fund-raising Web site tool
Action Center
Texting Option
McCain Nation
Team McCain
McCain Space
National Leadership Team
Poll Watcher
other:

Ease of interface - Check all that apply

tool listed on home page
tool located on site map
account needed to view info
search engine
low reliance on graphics

Media usefulness - Check all that apply

press releases

- video
- audio of speeches
- pictures of candidate
- text version of speeches
- downloadable graphics
- statement of policy
- statement of position on issues
- information on member/supporter base

Usefulness of information to voters - Check all that apply

- mission/philosophy statement
- information on donating
- information on volunteering
- links to other political leaders
- logo prominently displayed

Conversation of visitors - Check all that apply

- last update time or date posted
- visitors can comment to each other

Return visits - Check all that apply

- links to external sites
- advertisements other than for candidate
- links to affiliated group
- bookmarking tools
- e-mail opportunities
- update in past 48 hours
- news stories posted in past 48 hours
- calendar
- explicit invitation to return

Dialogic loop: Potential for two-way communication - Check all that apply

- e-mail contact information
- phone number contact information

ability to post to the online tool
online opinion surveys
online opinion polls
ability to request news updates

Dialogic loop: Actual two-way communication - Check all that apply

response to e-mail
response to phone call
response to online post
news updates sent

Extras:

updated downloads and information on candidate
online tool is presented in first person

Number of press releases.

Number of videos.

Number of audio clips.

Number of members or supporters.

Number of links to other candidates.

Number of links to affiliated groups.

Number of visitor posts or comments.

Number of links to external sites.

Record the number of pictures present. If the pictures are arranged in albums, also record the number of albums. Label each accordingly.

Number of bookmarking tools.

Memorable note (if applicable)

TABLES

Table 1: Indices Overview

Index and Variables	Frequency	Percent
Ease of interface ($\underline{M} = 2.2439$, $\underline{SD} = 1.09042$, alpha .138)		
Listed on home page	24	58.5%
Located on site map	5	12.2
Account needed to view information	20	48.8
Search engine available on tool	14	34.1
Low reliance on graphics	29	70.7
Media usefulness ($\underline{M} = 2.8049$, $\underline{SD} = 2.24966$, alpha .765)		
Press releases present	7	17.1
Videos present	23	56.1
Audio present	6	14.6
Pictures present	27	65.9
Text of speeches	4	9.8
Downloadable graphics	5	12.2
Statement of policy	9	22.0
Statement of position on issues	14	34.1
Information on member/supporter base	20	48.8
Usefulness of Information to voters ($\underline{M} = 1.4146$ $\underline{SD} = 1.3224$, alpha .584)		
Mission philosophy statement	6	14.6
Information on donating	18	43.9
Information on volunteering	16	39.0
Links to other political candidates	3	7.3
Prominently displays logo	15	36.6
Conservation of visitors ($\underline{M} = .9024$ $\underline{SD} = .94353$, alpha .866)		
Last time updated available	20	48.8
Visitors can comment to each other	17	41.5
Return Visits $\underline{M} = (2.0488$ $\underline{SD} = 1.87018$, alpha .708)		
Links to external sites	28	68.3
Advertisements other than for candidate	6	14.6
Links to affiliated groups	9	22.0
Bookmarking tools available	8	19.5
E-mail opportunities present	9	22.0
Updated in past 48 hours	15	36.6

News stories posted in past 48 hours	6	14.6
Calendar of upcoming events	3	7.3
Explicit invitation to return	0	0
Dialogic Loop: Potential for Two-Way Communication (\underline{M} = 1.0732, \underline{SD} = 1.21223, alpha .657)		
E-mail address present	4	9.8
Phone number present	7	17.1
Ability to post to online tool	25	61
Online opinion surveys	2	4.9
Online opinion polls	2	4.9
Dialogic Loop: Actual Two-Way Communication (\underline{M} = .2195, \underline{SD} = .52499, alpha .348)		
Response to e-mail	1	2.4
Response to phone call	5	12.2
Response to online post	0	0
News updates sent	3	7.3

Table 2: Volume of Tool Content

Content on Tool	Mean	Standard Deviation
Press releases	1.98	11.7
Videos	21.32	76.027
Audio clips	0.54	1.65
Members/supporters	113,948.88	396,200.59
Links to other candidates	0.07	0.264
Links to affiliated groups	1.12	3.108
Visitor posts or comments	3,770.51	10,974.45
Links to external sites	19.71	72.12
Pictures	171.1	840.42
Bookmarking tools	0.37	0.99

Table 3: Indices by Political Party

Index	Mean	Standard Deviation
Ease of Interface		
Democrats	2.33	1.06
Republicans	2.00	1.18
Media Usefulness		
Democrats	2.93	2.13
Republicans	2.45	2.62
Usefulness of Information to Voters		
Democrats	1.47	1.22
Republicans	1.27	1.62
Conservation of Visitors		
Democrats	0.9	0.92
Republicans	0.91	1.04
Return Visits		
Democrats	2.07	1.78
Republicans	2.00	2.19
Dialogic Loop: Potential for Two-Way Communication		
Democrats	1.00	1.14
Republicans	1.27	1.42
Dialogic Loop: Actual Two-Way Communication		
Democrats	0.23	0.57
Republicans	0.18	0.40

Table 4: Online Tools

Online Tool	Type of Tool	Created by	Candidate used by	Number of dialogic variables present
Delicious	Bookmarking	Third party	Obama	1
Stumble	Bookmarking	Third party	Obama	1
MyBarack.com	Candidate specific	Campaign	Obama	1
McCain Nation	Candidate specific	Campaign	McCain	1
Fundraiser Tool	Political	Campaign	Obama	1
Newsvine	Bookmarking	Third party	Obama	1
McCain Space	Candidate specific	Campaign	McCain	1
National Leadership Tool	Political	Campaign	McCain	1
Team McCain	Candidate Specific	Campaign	McCain	1
Twitter	Direct Communication	Third party	Obama	7
Web Site Downloads Tool	Political	Campaign	Obama	9
Democratic National Party Builder	Political	Third party	Obama	9
Eventful	Online calendar	Third party	Obama	10
MyBatanga	Social networking	Third party	Obama	10
Under the Radar	Political	Campaign	Obama	10
BarackTV	Video sharing	Campaign	Obama	10
Digg	Bookmarking	Third party	Obama	10
LinkedIn	Social networking	Third party	Both	11
Faithbase	Social networking	Third party	Obama	12
Glee	Social networking	Third party	Obama	12
Blackplanet	Social networking	Third party	Obama	13
Fight the Smears	Political	Campaign	Obama	13
Feedburner	Bookmarking	Third party	Obama	13
Texting Tool	Cell phone texting tool	Campaign	Obama	13
Flickr	Photograph sharing	Third party	Obama	14

MiGente	Social networking	Third party	Obama	14
AsiaAve	Social networking	Third party	Obama	14
Eons	Social networking	Third party	Obama	15
YouTube	Video sharing	Third party	Both	17
Facebook	Social networking	Third party	Both	20
MySpace	Social networking	Third party	Both	20
Blog	Direct Communication	Campaign	Both	29
Official Web site	Web site	Campaign	Both	30

FIGURES

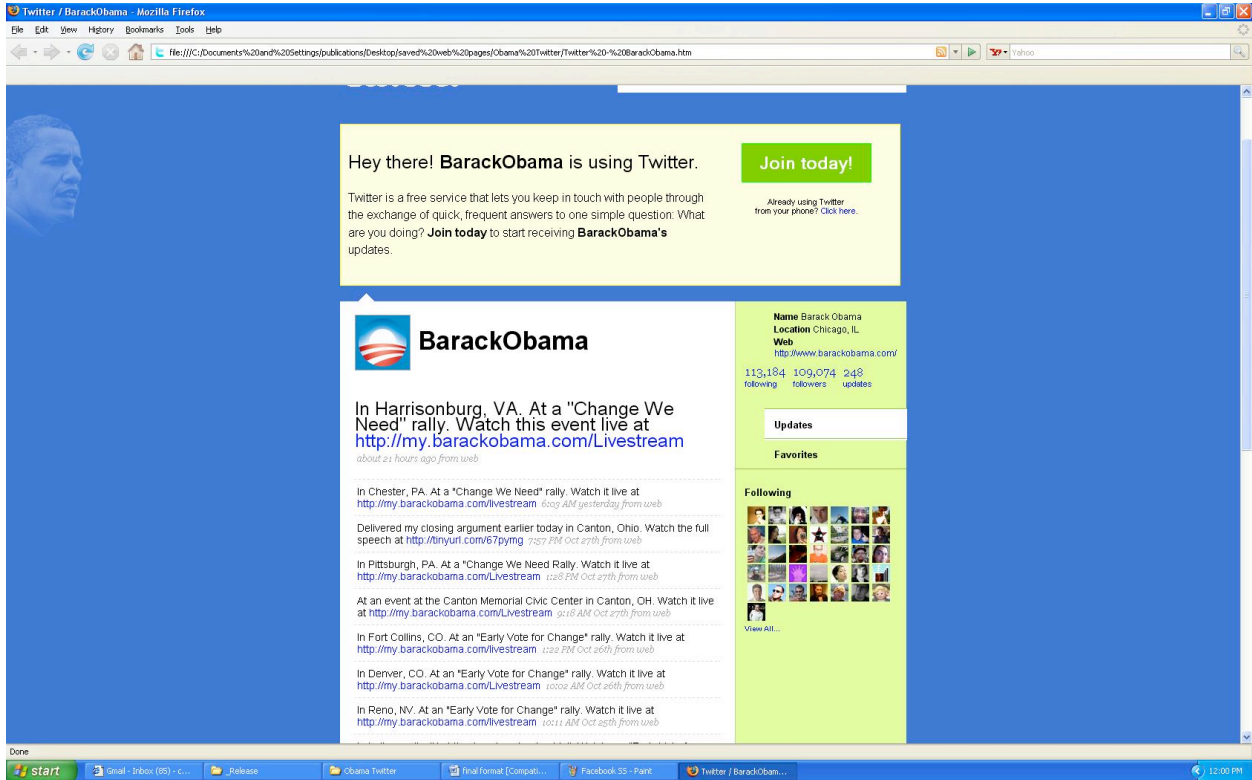


Figure 1: Obama Twitter Screenshot

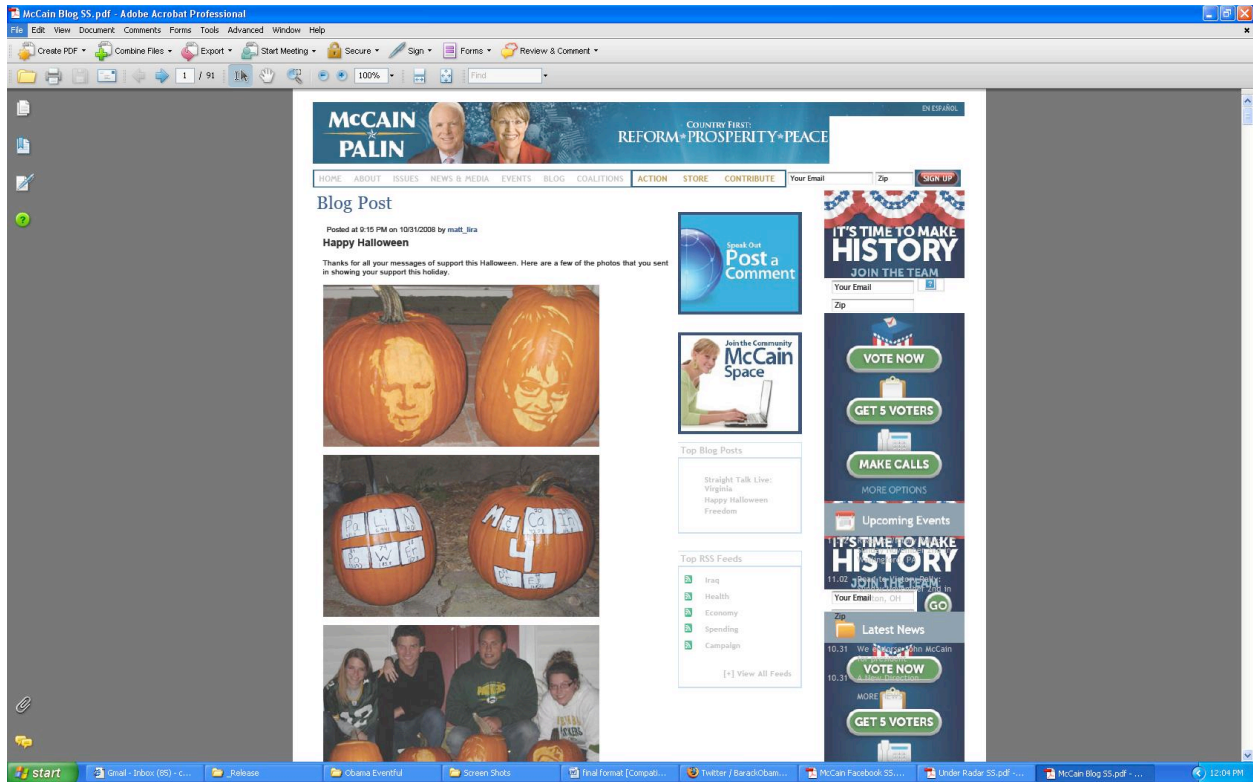


Figure 2: McCain Blog Screenshot

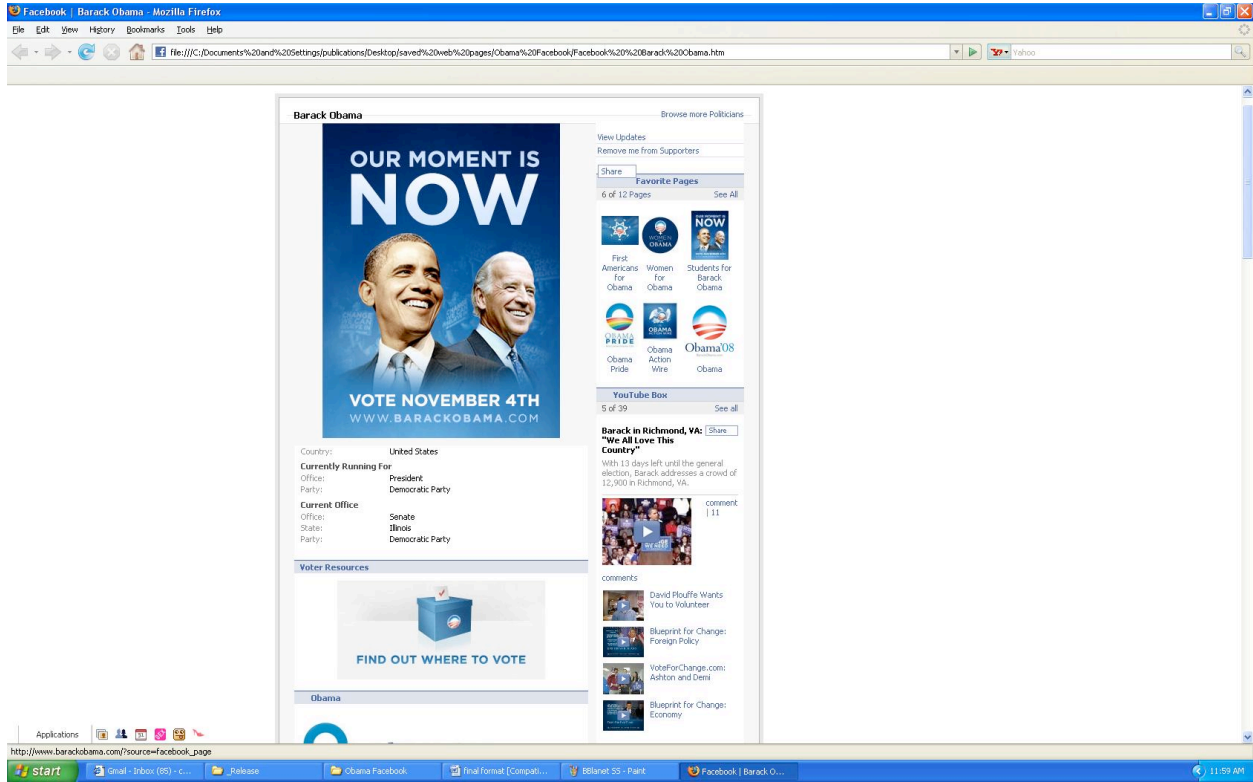


Figure 3: Obama Facebook Screenshot

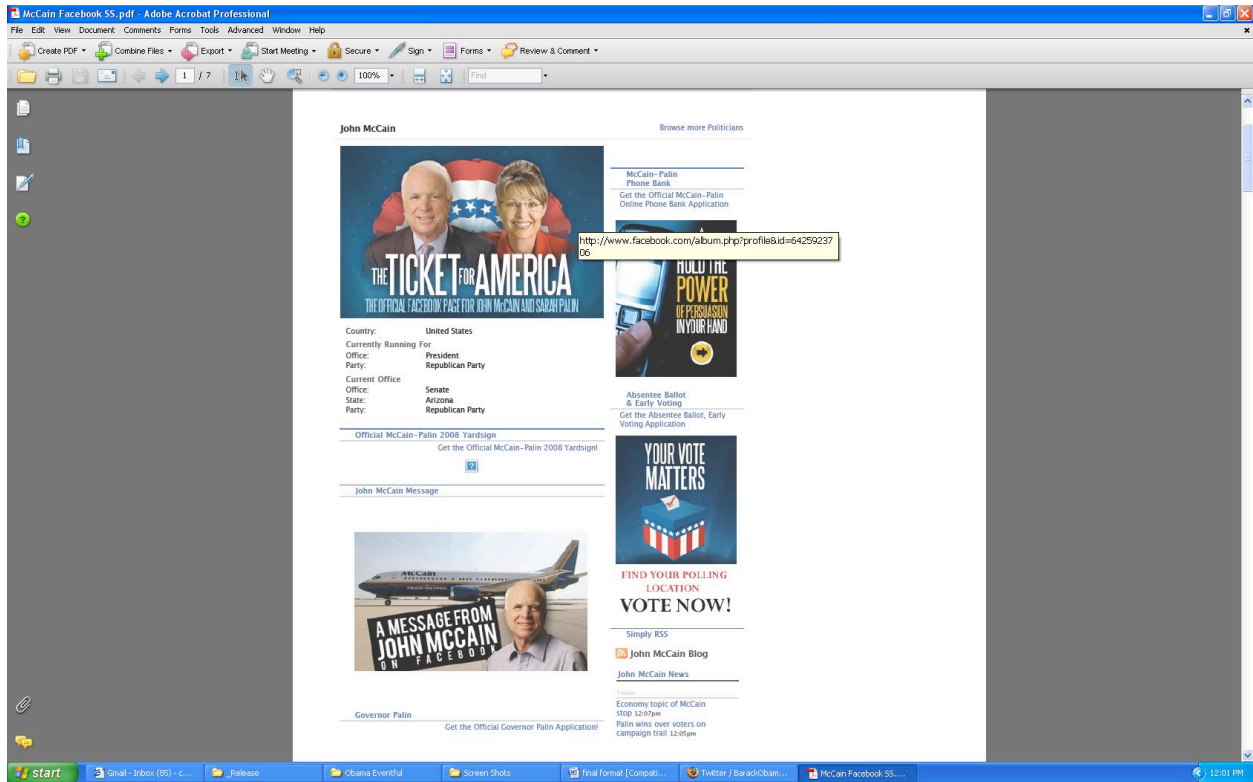


Figure 4: McCain Facebook Screenshot

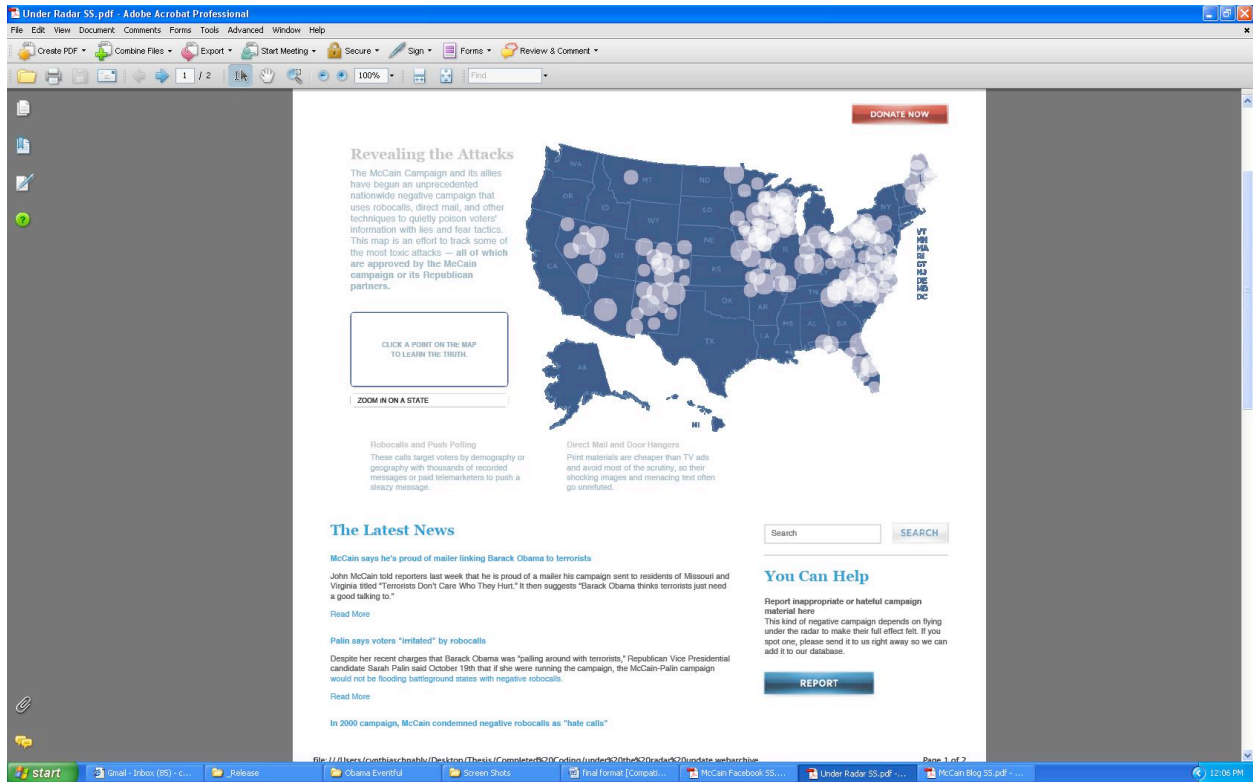


Figure 5: Under the Radar Screenshot

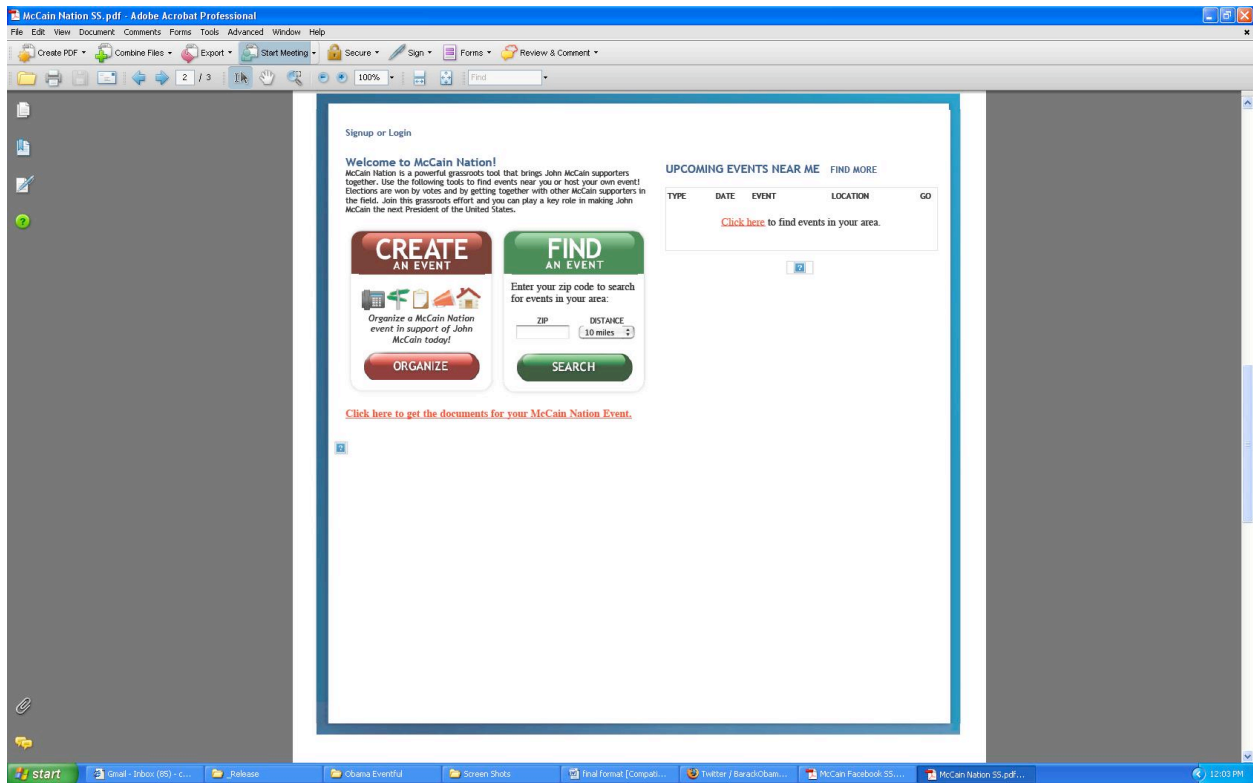


Figure 6: McCain Nation Screenshot