

CHATTING WITH DIGITAL NATIVES: AN ANALYSIS OF HOW POLITICAL
COMMUNICATORS AND YOUNG CITIZENS INTERACT WITH EMERGENT
COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

By

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(Under the Direction of Ruthann Weaver Lariscy)

ABSTRACT

The culture of communication has changed with the introduction of emergent communication technology. Tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and various blogs have changed the way we communicate. This study examines how politicians perceive and utilize these tools in their relationships with young citizens through the lens of dialogic theory. Through interviews, this dissertation reveals support for previous research indicating the lack of interactivity used by political communicators in their online communication. Results from the experimental phase indicated an overall lack of support for hypotheses raised. Future research calls for more in-depth study of dialogic theory and further examination of how emergent communication can provide insight into how to manage relationships between political campaigns and their young citizen constituents.

INDEX WORDS: Dialogic theory, Interactivity, Political public relations, Political engagement, Political information efficacy, Emergent communication technology, Social networking, Social media

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the 33 Hokies who were taken from this world tragically on April 16, 2007.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The culture of communication constantly evolves with advent of new media formats, from newspapers to radio to television to the Internet. We currently have 24/7 access to information about every topic and person from celebrities like Ashton Kutcher to brands like Coke to institutions like the White House if we choose to follow them on Twitter or “like” them on Facebook. People communicate in short forms including text messages, status updates, and tweets of no more than 140 characters. We also have access to information as it happens, sometimes without a journalistic or editorial filter. With increased information access comes the opportunity to comment, provide feedback, and receive responses directly from sources. These communication tools provide new experiences by which people gather and process information.

Questions abound surrounding the nature and influence of these changes and how we as people, and citizens, react to their effects on our daily lives. One of the major changes is in level of engagement people have with information. For example, when people want to go out to eat, they may post a tweet asking their followers for suggestions, or they may check in on Foursquare, which offers suggestions, or they can use their iPhone dining guide application to find what is nearby. These ways of sharing information have changed the way we do many activities, not just our dining habits. According to a 2010 Pew Internet study, 92 percent of Americans now get their news from multiple platforms. The report further states “the Internet is at the center of the story of how people’s relationship to news is changing” (Purcell, Rainie,

Mitchell, Rosentiel, & Olmstead, 2010, p. 2). Terms used to describe this process include social networking, community engagement, and participatory newsgathering.

One constant thread throughout these new tools and various means of communicating is engagement. People not only watch and read news, but also comment on articles, post stories for their followers, and blog about their own perspectives. We as consumers of all forms of media have higher expectations for accuracy and engagement than in recent history from journalists, brands, celebrities, and even our government officials. This culture shift produces a plethora of new voices in an increasingly crowded information landscape. Communicating, information-gathering, and interacting have fundamentally shifted the ways we learn about and process information about all topics.

This transformation in how we communicate is not the first time people have shifted the way they send and receive messages. One of the most significant alterations occurred with the diffusion of television to the mass audience (Sanders & Kaid, 1978; Nimmo, 1977). The diffusion of emergent communication technology formats features some of the same parallel shifts. According to the 2008 United Nations report by the Global Teaching and Learning Project, it took the Internet just four years to reach 50 million users, compared to 14 years for television and 38 for radio. Even more telling than those trends, it took Facebook, a single tool on the Internet, less than nine months to acquire more than 100 million users and less than six years to reach 500 million (NPR story).

Web-based communication and information gathering have fundamentally shifted how individuals perceive situations, receive messages, and communicate viewpoints. As this development continues, these shifts in communication present new avenues for scholarship, especially campaign communication and political public relations. This dissertation seeks to

examine how these changes affect the political system by examining motives, perspectives, and uses of emergent communication technology in campaign communication among political communicators and young citizens. By addressing these aspects of emergent communication technology, the hope is to provide an avenue for citizens, specifically young citizens, to communicate in and engage with the political system. By participating in this manner, the overarching goal of this research is to provide knowledge and a potential framework to lessen cynicism, enhance engagement, and encourage more involvement within the political system.

Often the last to adopt various technologies, politicians have incorporated tools and techniques into their overall campaign communication plans (e.g. Foot & Schneider, 2004; Stromer-Galley, 2000). Politics plays a role in the daily lives of American citizens, however there is much general distrust and cynicism (e.g. Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001; Lee, 2005). Scandals and misinformation further exacerbate the situation, leaving some to disengage completely (Andolina, Jenkins, Keeter & Zukin, 2002; Cowan, 1997; Halstead, 1999; Howe & Strauss, 1991; Strama, 1998). With the advent of emergent communication technologies, such as social networking sites, microblogging sites, and blogs, a renewed sense of engagement is emerging (e.g. Davis, 1999, 2005; Smith, 2009). One of the more recent prominent examples of this was the digital grassroots campaign to elect President Barack Obama (e.g. Erwin, 2008; Fraser & Dutta, 2008; Stirland, 2008). Obama was credited with inspiring more young citizens to go to the polls in 2008.

A CIRCLE study found that the percentage of young people ages 18-29 who voted during presidential election years since 1972 ranges from 37 percent to 52 percent. However, citizens over 30 years of age show percentages consistently over 60 percent, with some age groups peaking at more than 70 percent. Additionally, a 2008 study of millennials (defined as those born

between 1985 and 2004); found a high level of confusion associated with getting involved in and becoming engaged with the political system (CIRCLE, 2008).

Citizens of all ages, but especially those under the age of 30, are turning to emergent communication technology formats more often than other age groups for their political information (National Annenberg Election Survey, 2008). Trends toward use of emergent communication formats and low political participation by young citizens (e.g. CIRCLE, 2006, 2008), provide a framework for investigating how these formats could lead to an answer for lack of engagement and improve relationships between political communicators and young citizens.

According to a 2008 Pew Internet and American Life survey, 42 percent of young citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 used some form of online political information during the 2008 presidential election. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning (CIRCLE) revealed in a 2008 study on millennials that young citizens shy away from polarized debates and biased opinions, instead seeking authentic dialogic about politics and political issues. Emergent communication technology provides users with alternative forms of news and information, creating various opportunities for political information consumption.

These studies and others (e.g. Wells & Dudash, 2007; Chang & Pinkleton, 2009) like them reveal alarming trends in how young citizens 1) view government and 2) lack knowledge and understanding to participate in the political system. Inconsistent trends in participation and voting among young citizens, paired with their frequent use of emergent communication technology formats, establish a unique framework to examine the potential of these tools for improving engagement within the political system. Moreover, this study will provide insight on how tools can be used most effectively in the relationships between political communicators and young citizens.

Public relations scholars researching emergent communication technologies have spent much of their time focusing on individual tools (e.g. Kent & Taylor, 2003; Kent, 2008; Lawson-Borders, 2005), situations (e.g. Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006), and comparisons with traditional media formats (e.g. McKinney & Rill, 2009). Though previous research provides valuable knowledge into how individual tools function within the media landscape, this examination takes the next step, providing for a more in-depth investigation of how they compare to each other when used for a single campaign message. This dissertation focuses on how political communicators currently use these tools as well as how young citizens (18-29) perceive that use in their search for political information. A political communicator is generally one of three key figures within a campaign: politician (e.g. partisans, ideologists), professional communicator (e.g. strategists, advisors), and activist (e.g. volunteers, surrogates) (Nimmo, 1977). Carey (1969) stated that revolutions in communication technology stimulated the emergence of the professional communicator as a distinctive social role. These communicators provide both strategy and policy that encompass effective political communication campaigns.

The design of this study incorporates dialogic theory (e.g. Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002), interactivity (e.g. Rafaeli, 1988; McMillian, 2002), political information efficacy (e.g. Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007), and political engagement (e.g. Christy, 1987) constructs to analyze emergent communication technology tools and how they are used in relationships between political communicators and citizens. Dialogic theory provides an ideal construct in the examination of two-way communication and relationships through a simple conceptual definition, well-defined tenets, and actionable tactics to implement directly into communication

formats. These five principles include usefulness of information, generation of return visits, ease of interface, conservation of visitors, and dialogic feedback loop (Kent & Taylor; 1998, 2002).

Dialogic theorists have struggled to fully explicate the feedback loop principle. By combining this young theoretical model with the concept of interactivity as conceived by McMillian (2002) and Endres and Warnick (2004), who specifically focused on politicians, this study seeks to provide a higher level of specificity to the features of dialogic feedback loop. Interactivity is based in the idea of exchanges between and among communication parties. Initially, interactivity research focused on the study of face-to-face communication, but has found resurgence in emergent communication technology literature. When paired with interactivity, dialogic presents a foundation on which to build ethical, balanced, and two-way communication. In an ideal relational situation, parties attempt to reach this level of communication to ensure a beneficial relationship.

Theoretical Constructs

Dialogic Theory

Dialogic theory is a communication model to “guide relationship building between organizations and publics” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 321). The concept of dialogue has its roots in philosophy, rhetoric, psychology, and relational communication. Pearson (1989) was one of the first to discuss the idea of dialogue in reference to ethical public relations. Similarly, Grunig (1990) discussed a similar model for public relations which he identified as two-way symmetrical communication. Throughout the body of dialogic literature, there is debate among public relations scholars about how to define dialogue and how to use it to create ideal and ethical communication (e.g. Ehling, 1992; Ackerman, 1980; Pearson, 1989). However, it was Kent and Taylor’s (1998) study that presented a concise model with specific tenets of dialogic

theory and principles to incorporate in practice. In their 1998 theory position essay, they extended Pearson's dialogic approach to enhance relationship-building research, which had taken center stage in public relations.

The various levels and aspects of dialogue are more important than ever with fragmentation of the media, and the desire for people to feel more connected to their information sources (Stromer-Galley, 2004). Applications of dialogic theory contributed to building a strong construct, yet the theory still lacks predictive power. This dissertation is one of first to extend the theory by applying dialogic principles in an experimental research design. By doing so, dialogic theory may become a stronger theoretical model with a higher level of legitimacy.

Interactivity

Dialogic scholars struggle to pinpoint the dialogic feedback loop component in their studies. Rafaeli (1988) defined interactivity as "an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions" (p. 111). He further explained an ideal interactive situation requires that communication roles need to be interchangeable and the process exchange is not automatic. With the addition of the interactivity construct, this dissertation further clarifies the principle. Rather than a vague idea of feedback, interactivity provides features that are more specific and types of what feedback might look like in various communication situations.

Political Information Efficacy

According to Graber (2001), "It is axiomatic in a democracy that citizens must be interested in politics and must be well informed. When it seems like interest in politics is declining and knowledge levels are plunging, red warning flags go up. They have been up for

quite a while in the final decades of the twentieth century” (p. 433). In relation to how young citizens consume and use the acquired political information, this study applies the body of literature associated with political information efficacy (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2004, 2007). Political information efficacy is a concept posited by Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2004, 2007) in response to young citizens reporting their low levels of political knowledge leads to their lack of participating in voting. This study seeks to extend the model to various emergent communication technology tools and platforms.

Political Engagement

By integrating dialogue with interactivity and analyzing their combined influence on efficacy and engagement, this study addresses how political communicators manage their relationships with young citizens. Because political engagement is an important aspect of a healthy democracy, it provides for an important point of measurement. Political engagement encompasses activities citizens participate in to express their political and civic interests such as voting, discussion, and volunteering for a cause or campaign. Most recently, studies by Rojas and Puig-i-Abril (2009), Xenos and Moy (2007), and Xenos and Bennett (2007) examined political engagement in their analysis of emergent communication technology. This study will expand on that line of research in conjunction with how political communicators use these tools.

The purpose of this study is to examine relationships between citizens and politicians or political representatives through a lens of emergent communication technology formats. Framing this examination is political public relations and dialogic theory. Broad questions include: how do citizens and political communicators view social media, what tools do citizens and political communicators utilize in their search for and dissemination of political information, and how emergent communication technology can benefit the overall communication between young

citizens and political communicators. With these questions in mind, this study aims to provide empirical research and practical advice for political communicators and young citizens to apply in their relationship management. Another important goal of the study is to advance public relations theory.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bodies of literature from across several disciplines, including public relations, communication, and political science, provide the foundation for this current investigation. Central to this study is the exploration how traditional theories apply or can be adapted to the examination of emerging communication technology formats (Rice & Associates, 1984; Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988). A major area of communication research regarding the political system is campaign communication (e.g. Trent & Friedenber, 2000; Shea & Burton, 2006), emergent communication technologies are central to this paradigm (e.g. Tedesco, 2004; Sweetser, 2011). Political public relations scholars apply various theories to examine the communication and relationships build through campaign communication. Two of those theories, dialogic theory and interactivity, serve as the two main theoretical constructs underpinning this dissertation. To begin this review of literature, dialogic theory will be traced from its origins through to its present extensions.

Dialogic theory provides a primary framework for the study, focusing on analysis of organization-public relationships in the emergent communication technology environment (e.g. Kent & Taylor, 1998; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2004). Dialogic theory is the central focus of this study. The first section traces the roots of the theory, the major components, general applications, and most recent political public relations applications.

To further distinguish and add dimension to the dialogic analysis, interactivity provides an additional conceptual component to further explicate the feedback loop principle of the

dialogic model. Though not generally considered a stand-alone theory (e.g. Bucy, 2004; Stromer-Galley, 2000), the interactivity construct has potential to extend dialogic theory, through establishes specific features and types of feedback. And thus, provide a template representing how citizens engage with emergent communication technologies.

After reviewing foundational literature, a discussion of defining features and relevant research associated with political engagement and political information efficacy provides a basis for this current study. These aspects establish two of the important measures in discussing how young citizens use emergent communication technologies in their pursuit and use of political information.

To close the literature review, the context elements of the dissertation, emergent communication technologies in politics and young citizens will provide the final components of the study's construction. These elements set a framework for existing issues with two-way communication and relationships within political communication. The section presents a timeline discussing scholarship surrounding uses of emergent communication technology in politics, specifically campaign communication. Issues discussed regarding young citizens include low political participation and engagement, distrust of politicians, and a high level of political cynicism.

Dialogic Theory

The concept of dialogue has its roots in a variety of disciplines: philosophy, rhetoric, psychology, and relational communications. Dialogue has been called by various names including discourse and conversation. Buber's (1922) notion of a relationship between humans and creative works provides a philosophical foundation for exchange that occurs between various groups and publics. Buber also discussed the notion of ethical communication and that it

“involves an effort to recognize the value of the other – to see him/her as an end & not merely as a means to achieve a desired goal” (p. 94).

One interpretation of Buber’s work by Arnett, Grayson, and McDowell (2008) establishes five important elements of describing and measuring an authentic dialogic situation. First, dialogue is a process whereby meanings emerge from discourse, not solely from “either communicative partner” (p. 3). Instead, they posit “it is a product of the relationship” (p. 3), emphasizing the idea that both parties are required in the overall process. Dialogue also presupposes the “I of the human being” is derived from otherness humans desire to engage (p. 3). This concept provides distinction between one’s own position and respect for other positions. Thirdly, Arnett et al. (2008) posit that an important aspect in positioning for discourse is defined as “the between” (p. 3). This “between” establishes the circumstances and parameters where dialogue occurs. The fourth and fifth principles assert the often forgotten characteristics that dialogue cannot be demanded and are in fact companion to other forms of speech and discourse.

Holba (2008) clarified and explicated Buber’s three types of communication to include genuine dialogue, technical dialogue, and monologue. The current study further explicates this concept of dialogue through the frame of phenomenology and the requirement of authenticity. Buber (1971) defined dialogue as occurring in “I-Thou moments where we find deeply genuine and connective communication encounters” (p. 25). These moments, if authentic, provide the interaction humans desire from their communication among and relationships with others. The dialogic process is how “we see, interpret, and understand concepts, events, and decisions, through these lenses” (Holba, 2008, p. 499).

Dialogue also has connections in Habermas’ (1984) theory of communicative action through his identification of the public sphere and communication symmetry. He advanced the

notion of ideal communication occurring with balance and through the creation of an interactive sphere encompassing participants. Other scholars such as Ehling (1984, 1985) called a similar phenomenon “message-exchange” or “communication-as-conversation.” Ackerman (1980) labeled the process as neutral dialogue and emphasized that both parties should be treated as equals.

In public relations, Pearson (1989) initiated a paradigm shift in the discipline by suggesting ethical public relations should encompass a dialogic system. According to Pearson, “public relations is best conceptualized as the management of interpersonal dialectic” (p. 177). Botan (1997) added, “dialogue manifests itself more as a stance, orientation, or bearing in communication rather than as a specific method, technique, or format” (p. 4). With that said, even if dialogic partners create dialogic communication structures, it does not mean that they are behaving dialogically. Pearson (1989) also established the importance of identifying the structural characteristics of a communication system that promote communication, negotiation, and compromise.

Principles of Dialogic Theory

Kent and Taylor (1998) were the first scholars to solidify the principles of dialogic theory in public relations as evidenced on the Internet. As technology evolves, scholars must utilize and apply current theoretical models to evolve with each new iteration (Rice & Associates, 1984; Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988). Tedesco, Miller, and Spiker (1999) were some of the first to point out that “by embracing this medium in its infancy, scholars may identify important characteristics in the messages produced by political candidates in their candidate-mediated communication (CMC), thus contributing to the theoretical and pragmatic evolution of this phenomenon” (p. 51).

According to Kent and Taylor (2002), dialogue possesses five characteristics: genuine, accurate empathetic understanding, unconditional positive regard, presentness, spirit of mutual equality, and a supportive psychological climate. In the public relations field, these factors focus on building two-way communication and relationships between organizations and publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The various elements of dialogue are more important than ever today with fragmentation of the media, as well as the desire for people to feel more engaged with their information (Stromer-Galley, 2004). Park and Reber (2008) described the “dynamic nature of online relationship building” in the study of Fortune 500 corporations’ use of their websites. Unlike the adoption of the Internet in politics, dialogue or dialogic relationship building is “product rather than process” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 323). This concept leads to the need for a more complex analysis and identification of dialogic principles within communication situations.

The central focus of the dialogic theory is on dialogue and its orientation includes five features:

... *mutuality*, or the recognition of organization-public relationships; *propinquity*, or the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics; *empathy*, or the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests; *risk*, or the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their terms; and finally *commitment*, or the extent to which an organization gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 24-25, emphasis from original).

Each of these features plays an important role in overall structure and considerations taken for incorporating dialogic principles for application in an organization-public relationship (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002).

Mutuality. Kent and Taylor (2002) described mutuality as the basis for recognition of the organization-public relationship by both the organization and the various publics. To differentiate further, there are two main sub-concepts associated with mutuality, collaboration

and the spirit of mutual equality. First, collaboration involves the exchange and understanding of the positions of the involved parties. This process involves effort by both organizations and publics to appreciate each other's perspective. The second component is the spirit of mutual equality. This element stems back to the philosophical foundations of dialogue in the treatment of participants in the dialogue as persons and not as objects.

Propinquity. Next is the notion of propinquity, or the natural occurrence of interactions with publics. This aspect involves the recognition of four main concepts, type of exchange, presence, temporal flow, and engagement. Both sides of the exchange must understand and maintain their individual orientation to the relationship for a beneficial exchange. In addition, "parties involved are communicating in the present about issues, rather than after decisions are communicating in a shared space" (Kent, Taylor, & McAllister-Spooner, 2009, p. 5). The final two aspects of propinquity are ensuring communication flow is relational and that participants are willing to engage completely in the dialogic encounters.

Empathy. Empathy provides that a dialogic setting provide for support of the public's goals and interests. To adhere to this feature, there are four main pieces to include, supportive atmosphere, supportiveness, communal orientation, and confirmation. Two important aspects of a supportive and trustworthy dialogic atmosphere and providing for an environment to encourage and facilitate participation. Communal orientation provides that whether the participants are individuals, organization or publics, all will share equally in the dialogue. Finally, confirmation refers to the acknowledgement of all voices, even with the ability to ignore.

Risk. One of the most important and contentious aspects (Kent et al., 2008) of dialogic theory is risk, which refers to a willingness of both parties to concede to the terms of the other in the interaction. Both organizations and publics must have levels of vulnerability, expect

unanticipated consequences, and recognize the uniqueness and value of the other. In dialogue, information is power and participants “have to be willing to emerge from exchanges as new, changed, and reborn. To provide an ideal, ethical dialogue, communication should be unguarded, unrehearsed, and spontaneous. Finally, all parties involved in the dialogue should be recognized as unique and valuable in the process.

Commitment. The final feature of dialogic theory is commitment. Related to risk, this aspect ensures an investment of an organization to “dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics” (Kent et al., 2008, p. 3). Organizations must be willing to establish genuine and authentic communication and commit to being transparent about one’s position. Two other commitments made to dialogic communication, the functions of conversation and interpretation. The goal of conversation should not be to win, but rather to produce mutual benefit and understanding. Additionally, dialogic participants must put forth effort to understand positions and equally evaluate them.

Website-Specific Features

In addition to establishing the five main elements of dialogue, Kent and Taylor (2002) generated five guiding characteristics when it comes to enhancing the communication and organizational response in the examination of a website. These principles are dialogic feedback loop, ease of interface, conservation of visitors, generation of return visits, and providing information relevant to a variety of publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Each aspect plays an important role in the “product of ongoing communication and relationships” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 24). This dissertation seeks to build on this notion of using dialogic theory to maintain relationships between organizations and publics using emergent technologies.

Applications

Dialogic theory, in its most recent form, has inspired research in the past decade in various arenas, especially in the examination of online communication (e.g. Kent, 2008; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2003). However, analyses have concentrated on content analysis (e.g. Kim, Nam, & Kang, 2009; Park & Reber, 2008; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007) and surveys (McAllister-Spooner, 2009; Hickerson & Thompson, 2007) in the development of definitions and documentation of its existence.

A content analysis of environmental websites provided an initial assessment of dialogic principles (Taylor, Kent, and White, 2001). The study involved the analysis of five dialogic principles in the use of websites. The prescribed principles of dialogic feedback, usefulness of information, ease of interface, conservation of visitors, and generation of return visits apply in the analysis. These specific principles embody the spirit of the aforementioned tenets for practical and scholarly application. The study found dialogic principles did exist on the environmental sites, however with low alphas (Taylor et al., 2001). Additionally, the study provided an initial look at how websites used for a specific issue public. This dissertation seeks to address these results through user perceptions of campaign use of dialogic principles.

In a theoretical analysis, Kent and Taylor (2002) discuss the fragmentation of the mass media, allowing a transition in using dialogic in the analysis of emergent technologies. This study sought to apply interpersonal communication principles within the theory's constructs to establish that communication resulting from the dialogue should be relatable to publics. The scholars also further explicated the defining features and distinguished between terms such as "discourse," "process," and "discussion." The model of "product over process" was also explored. In the analysis of dialogic, research often focuses on the process of dialogic

communication, but the more important aspect of the model is in the communication products, such as trust, empathy, and satisfaction.

Extending the analysis of Taylor et al. (2001), another study used a similar data set and methodology to examine general environmental activist and watchdog group websites (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). Their design examined relationship management and applied stakeholder theory to how organizations respond to stakeholder information needs. Results indicated that organizations needed to respond with an adequate level of commitment to the stakeholders to be successful. The study concluded that websites facilitated the interactive features required to maintain a high level of responsiveness to stakeholder needs. This process extends further with the capabilities in newer forms of emergent technologies, including Twitter and Facebook.

Dialogic examination expanded to politicians' online campaign communication through Taylor and Kent's (2004) content analysis of congressional sites. The study analyzed whether politicians were using their sites to communicate more directly with constituents. Taylor and Kent (2004) posited that there was a high level of potential for dialogic principles to enhance the relationship between elected officials and their constituents. However, the study's results revealed that they continued to use the sites as a one-way communication channels and there was an overall absence of dialogue.

A study by Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) examined environmental blogs for dialogic principles. Results revealed blogs were indeed better for dialogue than websites in the amount and level of dialogic principles. They added it was important for the organizational blogger to have an independent voice to engage with publics. This result extended previous research on dialogic theory and relationship-building with a specific investigation of blogs and identified the

use of dialogic features within blogs. The study also pointed to the motives of the communicator as important in the overall process and use of blogs. This dissertation notes this element as an important aspect of the political use of dialogic theory and the need to examine political communicators' uses and perceptions of emergent communication technology.

Another recent examination of dialogic theory was its employment to measure influence on a sponsoring organization, users of the site, and the community in health wikis (Hickerson & Thompson, 2007). The study surveyed users of Wikipedia and WikiHealth. Both wikis had the same overall structure of being "open, incremental, organic, and observable" (p. 15). However, there were major differences in the numbers of users, age of site, and information. Results pointed to a significant commitment on the part of users to use the website in the future versus non-wikis. The study also found a significant dialogic score for wiki websites that the authors posit could create valuable information and long-term relationships with users.

Stephens and Malone (2009) used dialogic theory in a content analysis of various media formats, including emergent communication technologies during the 2007 pet food recall. The analysis included blogs, websites, news articles, and press releases. Results revealed that the emergent communication technology formats allowed more freedom for users to "virtually meet, share information, and potentially ban together to organization and seek damages from the organization in a crisis" (p. 237). This finding, along with previous research, points to the concept that people who seek out online forms of information often share interests and concerns. However, the authors did highlight their inability to generalize these findings across all publics. Finally, Stephens and Malone (2009) conclude there is a need for organizations to establish their online presence and dialogue prior to any crisis to access their publics quickly with the correct information.

Political Public Relations Applications

The applications of dialogic theory most relevant to this study are those in political public relations. According to Taylor and Kent (2004), “the Internet and the WWW can theoretically improve relationships between elected officials and their constituents” (p. 60). However, in their examination of 100 congressional websites, Taylor and Kent (2004) found those politicians’ sites to be one-way communication channels and void of dialogue. Stromer-Galley and Baker (2006) described technology as causing both “joy and sorrow” for politicians in their communication with citizens.

In a more recent study, Sweetser and Lariscy (2008) applied dialogic theory framework to their analysis of Facebook wall posts on candidate pages. The study’s results revealed very few candidates engaged in true dialogic communication. Additionally, the researchers suggested transparency was a crucial aspect in the emergent communication technology landscape, political communicators “should act ethically and properly identify themselves when engaging in conversations online on a candidate’s behalf” (p. 194). This aspect is a central tenet of the current study.

Political public relations scholars (e.g. Trammell, 2006; Froehlich & Rüdiger, 2006; Kiousis & Stromback, 2010) often apply public relations’ theories to campaigns because there are many shared interests and principles. Taylor et al. (2001) were astute to point out that “dialogue is emerging as an important framework as public relations moves toward a relation approach” (p. 264). Dialogue has become a more important aspect of all political campaigns, especially in regards to establishing interpersonal communication exchanges. These exchanges encompass the following components

relationships are based on trust yet involve some risk; (2) relationships are based on interaction; (3) relationships are based on trust yet involve some risk; (4) relationships require periodic maintenance; and (5) relationships involve cycles of rewarding and unsatisfactory interaction (Taylor, et al., 2001, p. 268)

It is not surprising Kent and Taylor (1998) suggested dialogic principles for using the Web to build relationship, especially interpersonally.

The 2008 presidential election received much attention for the level of emergent communication technology utilized. One study applied dialogic theory to official candidate Web pages in the 2008 presidential election (Rhoten, 2009). Results from the study revealed that candidates, as with previous research (e.g. Williams et al., 2005; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006), politicians used the Internet for more one-way communication rather than utilizing dialogic approaches. Though the content analysis revealed usefulness of information was heavily used, the dialogic feedback loop featured the lowest scores. Rhoten (2009) stated this result indicated “that actual two-way communication appeared to be the lowest priority within each candidate’s online usage” (p. 69).

Much of the dialogic theory research is comprised of content analyses, surveys and theory pieces. However, one of the main weaknesses lies in the lack of predictive power. Thus, this dissertation seeks to add to the dialogic body of literature through the addition of experimental method to assess the predictive power of dialogic principles.

Interactivity

A concept related to dialogic theory in this dissertation is interactivity. The term interactivity has spurred much debate since it was conceptualized by Rafaeli (1988) as "an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even

earlier transmissions" (p. 111). Conceptually, interactivity is unclear and several scholars have sought to define its parameters and create a structure to a fluid idea. McMillan (2002) provided structure with her typology, creating three categories of interactivity: user-to-user, user-to-system, and user-to-document. Each type maintained the process of interactivity as Rafaeli (1988) had set out as expression within a series of communication exchanges.

As with dialogic theory, interactivity has been applied to communication and relationships among citizens and politicians. Stromer-Galley (2000) examined political websites in the 1996 and 1998 congressional elections to assess the level of interaction used by candidates. The study distinguished between human and media interaction. However, the analysis exhibited that politicians avoid interaction on a whole. When Stromer-Galley (2000) interviewed campaign staff about issues on the sites, they acknowledged it was the desire not to lose control over the message(s), which prevented them from incorporating interactivity into their sites. Stromer-Galley (2000) concluded politicians were still held captive by their overall objective to win the election, causing them to carefully craft and refine campaign messages instead of engage with citizens.

Even though interactivity's structure does not stand strong as a lone theory, it does offer additional components to supplement a dialogic analysis, specifically for the feedback loop component. The early 1990s, the term and examination of interactivity began to increase drastically (McMillan, 1999). In the past two decades, scholars debated various definitions and conceptualizations of interactivity. McMillan (2002) was the first to specify different types of interactivity. The study established the user-to-user, user-to-system, and user-to-document typology from the traditions of the concept.

User-to-user interactivity is one of the most common forms and refers to how specific individuals interact. There are several communication traditions that build this dimension of the interactivity construct. Goffman's (1967) notion of "interaction ritual" posited the importance of interpersonal interaction within human connection and communication. Blumer (1969) built on Goffman's research with his concept of symbolic interaction, creating meaning through social interaction. The other two focuses are social interaction (e.g. Bales, 1950; Schudson, 1978) and feedback which provide important aspects of the user-to-user structure. McMillian (2002) also notes two additional essential components to the process as control and direction of communication, which correspond with Rafaeli's construction of interactivity.

User-to-system posits the manner whereby individuals interact with a particular entity through a mechanism, such as a computer. Three aspects of this process are the human-technology interface, media richness, and the human-computer equation. The interface between humans and technology has been viewed as "conversational" and "interactive" (Vasarhelyi, 1977) for various types of media including the most recent forms. McMillian (2002) established that "the richness of the medium can sometimes reduce the sense of distance between communicators" (p. 173). This aspect is even more important with emergent communication technology and the ability to provide real-time communication. Finally, various scholars including Burgoon, Bonito, Bengtsson, Ramirez, and Dunbar, N., 2000 and Shaw, Aranson, and Belardo, 1993, have examined the human-computer equation with media formats, providing a foundation for designing systems more efficiently to interact with humans. The two important elements in the overall structure of user-to-systems are again control and in this case, interface to establish the typology of interaction.

User-to-document is the least used in analysis and deals with how users change particular documents, such as websites. This component involves parasocial interaction and the creation of content (e.g. Bierig & Dimmick, 1979). Though parasocial interaction is a form of user-to-user interaction, it is associated with user-to-document because there is no direct contact with the communicator, i.e. the media. Creation of content in this process primarily deals with the influence of active users on the process of communication. The final two important elements in determining user-to-document interactivity are control and the nature of the audience. These aspects allow for the possibility of four models: content on-demand, packaged content, co-created content, and content exchange. All four of these models are in play when considering various forms of emergent communication technology.

Through the examination of various definitions from communication and non-communication scholars to establish how they might relate to one another, Kiouisis (2002) provided a conceptual explication. The analysis revealed three main central components to interactivity, structure of technology, communication and the perceiver. Kiouisis also posited a summary definition that interactivity was the degree of technology to create a mediated environment for individuals to interact. This provides a beneficial construct to apply with dialogic theory to tease out more details regarding the composition and mediating variables present in dialogic situations.

Following up with a critical essay, Bucy (2004) scolded scholars for their preoccupation with defining and document occurrences. Instead, Bucy stated there is a need to examine the experience of interactivity. Yet another reason this concept would benefit from a pairing with dialogic theory. The current study moves toward a self-report scale incorporated within dialogic

components. Bucy (2004) also posited that interactivity should be view as perceptual variable and there is a need to incorporate educational and cognitive variables into future analyses.

Finally, Brunig, Dials, and Shirka (2007) brought up a distinction that deserves future research, distinguishing between two-way communication, reaction, and interaction. Stromer-Galley (2004) further distinguished interactivity between interactivity-as-process and interactivity-as-product. A major difference established interactivity-as-process dealt specifically with human interaction, mediated or in person. This advance provided some much-needed distinction for the hypermediated world developing in the late 20th century on into the early 21st century, expanding interactivity more clearly to the online space. Political campaign communication scholars have explored interactivity in examining various features of campaign websites (Williams et al., 2005) and campaign blogs (Trammell et al., 2006).

Text-based Interactivity

Endres and Warnick (2004) extended another type of text-based interactivity in their case study of campaign websites. Text-based interactivity establishes that organizations may use rhetorical strategies to engage their publics instead, or in combination with, typically interactive features such as hyperlinks. This type of interactivity is “more conversational and promote[s] immediacy, personal presence, and multivocality” (Endres & Warnick, 2004, p. 333).

This dissertation seeks to expand theoretical foundations by extending interactivity, specifically in the area of human interaction, which can occur within four types of user-to-user, user-to-system, user-to-documents, and text-based interactivity, by using it as a way to define more clearly the feedback loop component of dialogic theory. Stromer-Galley (2000) identified the defining feature of interaction as feedback providing one of the logical connections to dialogic theory. Feedback and interaction are crucial components for various forms of emergent

communication technologies, including social networking sites and Twitter. These formats provide “the individual enjoys unprecedented access to information and a newfound advantage in the sphere of public influence” (Badaracco, 1998, p. 265). By combining the two perspectives, the examination casts a wider net on forums created by sites, such as YouTube and Twitter, in an attempt to measure and describe the dialogue and relationships established and maintained utilizing the newest forms of Internet technology. Political campaigns provide an excellent text to explore these occurrences because “the Internet may be a place for previously unrelated publics to come together for a social or activist cause” (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 267).

Dialogic theory and interactivity concepts provide a theoretical foundation for the analysis and design of the process. Two of the main aspects this study seeks to measure an influence are political engagement and participation as well as political information efficacy, outlined in the following section.

Political Engagement and Participation

Political engagement and participation are closely related concepts scholars rely on to discuss the process by which citizens activate their political knowledge into action. A general definition of the concepts encompass political activities citizens engage in, including voting, discussion, and volunteering. These activities have been measured and correlated with various variables including age, gender, education, level of knowledge, and efficacy. Recent trends reveal an increase in the number of studies regarding young citizens because of record low participation rates and overall knowledge. This dissertation will examine if there is an identifiable influence from emergent communication technologies on levels of political engagement and participation in young citizens.

As the early scholars to investigate political engagement and participation, Christy (1987) examined various activities including voting, working in campaigns and in political parties local community, and event protesting. Scholars, such as Putnam (2000), who divided engagement into political participation, civic participation, religious participation, connections in the workplace, and informal social connections, volunteering and philanthropy, have added additional elements to the overall construct. Moon (2006) described engagement as a macro-political category analyzed by presidential campaign participation. In the early days of the Internet, some scholars (e.g. Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993) stated that the medium required a “sophisticated level of technological competence,” however, that same fact is not true with today’s user-friendly formats. On the contrary, Weber, Loumakiz, and Bergman (2003) cite the Internet’s ability to “make it easier for citizens to obtain political information through mediating political organizations, direct government websites, and information sharing, via-a-vis email, Listservs, and chat rooms” (p. 27). In addition, De Zuniga, Puig-i-Abril, and Rojas (2009) found in their analysis of Pew data that using traditional media sources online was positively related to various types of political engagement.

Literature associated with political engagement and participation presents numerous constructs and aspects. Fraser (1999) stated, “Participation means being able to speak in one’s own voice...to construct and express one’s cultural identity through idiom and style” (p. 529). Xenos and Moy (2007) pointed to the study of emergent technology as crucial to future theoretical development, especially concerning young citizens. Results of their study of more than 1200 National Election Surveys (NES) revealed Internet use was and will play a significant role in political engagement. They found more than 40 percent of respondents reported finding

political information online. Additionally, their “findings related to participation and talk point to a robust pattern of differential effects” (p. 714).

Emergent communication technologies feature an increasingly larger role in the engagement and participation of citizens. Though early reports (Davis, 1999; Noveck, 2000) discussed reduced level of participation attributed to the weakening of social cohesion, the trend has not stayed consistent as technologies developed. Dutta-Bergman and Chung (2005) found a positive relationship between “the use of the Internet for political purposes and the more traditional forms of political participation” (p. 1). Kenski, Jamieson, Pasek, and Romer (2006) completed a survey of 1500 young citizens, finding that greater use of media would increase their amount of engagement. Frères and Price (2007) built on previous research, stating that young citizens engage more with their communities (Lopez, 2004), those with more knowledge were more engage (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997), and that Internet use was positively associated with engagement (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002). The study concluded that Internet use does play a role in increasing engagement, moderate efficacy has little influence, and that age has a strong influence.

Some scholars distinguish between online and in-person participation (e.g. Anduiza, Cantijoch, & Gallego, 2009) among young citizens. However, because the traditional media landscape cannot be distinguished from online landscape, why should we differentiate between online and traditional participation. Both have potential to influence overall goals and objectives of a campaign, therefore, providing them a stronger voice in the political process.

One of the most interesting areas of study regarding political engagement and participation is in how emergent communication technology has changed the communication and relationship between citizens and politicians. Erikson (2008) suggested that citizens could

“subvert the hierarchical relationship between the politician...and the constituent” (p. 11). His study stated, “Traditional political relationships, the individual is empowered as a rational democratic subject, articulated in their right to vote” (p. 11). However, in this new emergent communication technology environment, the individual is empowered as a desired object. Verger and Hermans (2008) concluded that online political discussion has lead to more engagement and empowerment of “various peripheral groups in society and thereby contributing to deliberative citizenship” (p. 37). These studies point to the need to parse out the specific characteristics of these emergent communication technology tools to specify how they increase political engagement and participation, all of which could lead to the construction of a better democracy.

Political Information Efficacy

An important element within the development of political engagement and participation is information gathering and processing. Where do citizens gather their information? How do they evaluate political information? Moreover, once they have it, how do they use it in their decision(s) to engage in political activities? As part of the analysis of media use and political engagement and participation, this study employs the recent theory of political information efficacy.

Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007) established this theory of political information efficacy with the notion that information processing occurs at different levels depending on the sources of political information. This concept is an “attitudinal construct is grounded in important theoretical links between general political efficacy and one’s feelings of confidence in the political knowledge they possess” (p. 1096). Kaid and Postelnicu (2005) posited there were two main features in explaining political information efficacy – technical participation knowledge (e.g. how to vote) and knowledge on what ways to participate (e.g. for whom to

vote). Initial studies found certain types of campaign messages had different effects on young citizens. In addition, they concluded political information played an important role in voting decisions of young citizens. The concept developed as an important aspect from a decade of research investigating young citizens' and their attitudes toward engagement and participation (e.g. Kaid et al., 2000, 2004, 2007).

An examination of the influence of celebrity blogs on citizens' political cynicism and political information efficacy revealed those exposed to political information in "more diverse ways come to believe that there is more information to be gained about politics than what they know" (Sweetser & Kaid, 2008, p. 84). There is potential this trend will lead to individuals to seek further information. In addition, researchers found were differences in age and gender came only in specific cases. Specifically, young people reported a lower political efficacy than other age groups. In regards to gender, men are more likely to be satisfied with the amount of information than women. However, the study advocated support for further research into political information efficacy in young citizens.

An online survey of citizens, completed by Strait (2008), collected from those who posted to politically oriented websites, listservs, Facebook groups, online discussion groups, and blogs. These self-selected respondents had mean age of 28.72, more males than females (76%), and an even distribution of political partisanship with approximately 28% each, Democratic and Republican. Results revealed support for previous models of political information efficacy (e.g. Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005; Kaid, et al., 2007). The study advanced the model by Tedesco (2007) finding that interactivity increases political information efficacy.

The 2007-2008 U.S. presidential primaries were the first to feature debates where CNN collaborated with online video mogul YouTube, where candidates answered submitted video

questions from citizens. McKinney and Rill (2009) investigated the influence of these debates on young citizens' political attitudes and political information efficacy. Results indicated a positive effect on political attitudes overall. Political information efficacy scores revealed significant increases for both traditional and CNN/YouTube debates. However, there was a higher level of significance in political information efficacy found in both Republican and Democratic CNN/YouTube debates.

Emergent Communication Technology in Politics

For nearly two decades, election campaigns have integrated emergent forms of communication technology, specifically on the Internet. The Clinton/Gore 1992 presidential campaign was the first time a politician posted campaign-related material online (Davis, 1999). Since then, each election has extended online tools in their campaign communication plans. One description of the Internet was “the first ‘pull’ communication medium with both interactivity and graphical impact” (McKeown & Plowman, 1999, p. 322). Political communication merges communication theories and often public relations principles and theories to communicate with citizens. Another study by Trammell (2006) discussed political public relations as an emerging area of research forging political communication and public relations theories. Bimber and Davis (2003) pointed out that “campaigning is a process of communication” (p. 45). This process involves the use of various techniques and formats targeted at specific publics to achieve the goal of getting a politician elected to office.

Emergent communication technologies, such as blogs, online video, and social networking, provide new communication tools for politicians to use in their message strategies. These technologies have challenged how politicians present their campaign messages, control communication, and ultimately manage relationships with their publics. One of the major

advancements in political communication formats is more interactive formats available, such as blogs, chat forums, and online video with comment features. The process differs from what scholars have experienced in the past with other mass media formats.

Political public relations (e.g. Cutlip, 1991; Esser, 2000; McNair, 2004; Kiouisis & Arlana, 2006) has historically consisted of examining traditional communication formats such as radio, television, and print through various areas of political communication, especially during election campaigns. However, the Internet provides even more possibilities for direct communication with voters (e.g. Trammell, 2006). Beginning with the 1996 election, candidate websites became a place for politicians to post specific information about issue stances, raise money, and mobilize supporters. Political campaigns and emergent technologies have a parallel tendency to develop in stages, with candidates learning how to adapt them most effectively (Howard, 2006). With each passing year, the Internet has produced various other tools for politicians to use in their campaigns. Cornfield and Rainie (2006) examined how the Internet has affected campaigns, “including the use of candidate websites in 1996, e-mail in 1998 (the Jesse Ventura campaign), online fund-raising in 2000 (the John McCain campaign), blogs in 2003 and 2004 (the Howard Dean campaign), and social networking sites such as YouTube and MySpace in 2006” (p. 2). These emergent technologies bring new possibilities and challenges to politicians and their campaigns. Howard (2006) designates these campaigns as “hypermedia,” meaning that they “are the conjoined superstructure of fast, high-capacity hardware and software communication tools that let people transmit, interact with and filter data” (p. 2).

Building off the foundation of the 1992 election, the 1996 contest featured both presidential candidates providing more information online for voters with access to what was then a “new communication medium” (McKeown & Plowman, 1999, p. 341). Howard (2006)

highlighted the integration of political information systems and the development of measurement tools as two important reasons why the 1996 election advanced use of technology in campaigns. Davis (1999) discussed the 1996 election as an example of attempted interactivity through live formats such as chats. However, other formats such as e-mail used interactivity at the candidate's discretion. The development of the Internet had given rise to a new database of sorts for people to gather their information. Connecting through a phone line, voters could access a basic Web page that Tedesco (2004) described as an online brochure. Another major development during the 1996 election was the decline in resistance to using the Internet to disseminate messages. It was a crucial year for breaking down the barriers and increasing interactivity between candidates and voters.

The Internet created opportunities for citizens to communicate in innovative ways as well as find information at their fingertips. One of the most promising features of emergent technologies was the potential for more conversation and dialogue with previously inaccessible groups, including politicians. However, Tedesco et al. (1999) warned, "mere availability and presence of computer-mediated political communication does not automatically mean that citizen participation will increase" (p. 53). However, leaders were using the Internet to communicate with constituents online and provide more comprehensive policy information; two-way communication remained absent (Stromer-Galley, 2000).

The millennium election featured advances in how both politicians used emergent technologies and the number of citizens utilizing Internet sources to gather political information. According to the *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, about one fifth (18%) of the voting population, and more than one third (33%) of online users, used the Internet in 2000 to find information about the campaigns. Johnson and Kaye (2003) posited, "while 1996 was

characterized as the test drive year for the Internet, it emerged as an important vehicle on the 2000 campaign trail” (p. 10). Tomlinson (2003) suggested that McCain2000.com presented a model for “how a national campaign integrated the use of the Internet into the very fabric of the campaign’s organization and established a model to which other campaigns aspire” (p. 179). One of the main reasons McCain’s site was important was its ability to harness online fundraising. For the first time, nominating conventions were streamed online (Trammell, 2006). One of the most telling advancements was that campaigns made changes in their budgets to ensure money was directed from traditional outlets to managing online ventures, specifically campaign websites.

Moving past the millennium election, two of the most important tools for political campaigns in the 2004 election were blogs and community organization tools such as Meetup.com. Here was an opportunity to bridge the gap in interactivity scholars had been asking for (Stromer-Galley, 2000). Howard Dean spearheaded this effort with his *Blog for America*, created in March 2003 and received 30,000 visitors per day by September of that same year (Gill, 2004). Dean’s blog was successful at mobilizing his supporters, raising campaign funds, and helping propel him into an early lead in the 2004 Democratic presidential primary. Other candidates quickly followed Dean’s Web campaigning strategies. Despite Dean’s failure to capture the Democratic presidential nomination, his *Blog for America* continued to attract attention and serve well both Dean and the Democratic National Committee. As tools like blogs and social networking sites became standard campaign tactics, strategies like open discussion and dialogue about politics became real.

Assessment of candidate blogs during the 2004 presidential election indicated that candidates were using blogs to “enhance viability” for their campaign (Williams et al., 2005). In

addition, Williams et al. (2005) concluded that politicians used blogs to present more diverse topics than they provide on their websites. Democratic challenger Sen. John Kerry appeared to embrace the blog format more enthusiastically as evidenced by his frequent posts, high daily average posts throughout the general election (11.96 per day for Kerry to Bush's 8.06), and inclusion of a comment feature (Trammell, 2005). President Bush did not offer a comment feature on his official re-election campaign blog.

Blogs were not the only tools used in 2004. Williams and Trammell (2005) discussed how candidates utilized e-mail messages to directly contact voters. Through content analysis, they examined all of the e-mails from both the Bush and Kerry campaigns during the hot phase of the 2004 presidential campaign. Results indicated not only an advancement in the use of messages from previous campaigns, but also an increase in the "mechanisms to enhance interactivity and fostering an environment of interactivity through text" (Williams & Trammell, 2005, p. 570). Another important result from the study was a documentation of encouragement used within messages to forward the e-mails to other nonsubscribers. This finding is associated with viral marketing where a citizen receives a message from someone they know, who is more likely to open it and attend to the content. Viral marketing is a concept associated with the sharing of information (e.g. videos, articles, websites) with others, by which the process accelerates exponentially, thus making the material more popular. The authors highlighted this finding as one way to overcome selective exposure.

Despite research findings that conclude blogs are useful to political candidates, many politicians and practitioners remain undecided about their value and skeptical of their influence. The blogosphere, or the "ever-expanding universe of bloggers who link to news sites and each other," is an outlet for people to express their thoughts and feelings in a format and on a level not

previously available (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005, p. 548). Trammell (2005) discussed how candidates utilized open thread posts to promote interaction from users and that “advancement in online campaigning as staff begin to embrace interactive tools and incorporate such tools into their overall strategy” (p. 11).

Technology has grown exponentially since 2004, showing its true power during the 2006 midterm elections with YouTube. The 2006 election was a battle between Democrats and Republicans for control of both houses of Congress. One YouTube video completely changed the landscape of the Virginia Senate race between Republican George Allen and Democrat Tim Kaine. According to Gueorguieva (2007), “Allen was caught on tape calling a college student of Indian descent a ‘macaca’ and the video was ‘tubed,’ causing an immediate media scandal and quickly becoming one of YouTube’s most viewed” (p. 1). In addition, the Montana race became controversial when a video of Republican Conrad Burns appearing to sleep during a hearing appeared on YouTube (Jalonick, 2006). However, even as these videos influence elections, there is still an overall lack of dialogic opportunities offered by politicians (English & Tedesco, 2007).

Even with the evolution of technology and its adaptation by politicians, Howard (2006) pointed out that citizens “may not realize that they are being fed highly personalized information” (p. 1). “YouTube has become yet another Internet tool to rouse party activists, political junkies and office procrastinators. Strategists say it's an entertaining new way to directly connect with voters” (Jalonick, 2006). According to Gross and Acquisti (2005), social networking sites have “moved from niche phenomenon to mass adoption” (p. 71). This progress has forced various groups and organizations to adapt the technology to maintain their audience and reputation. One of those groups is politicians. To ensure they are reaching voters,

politicians have set up Facebook and MySpace pages, turned on YouTube channels and even begun tweeting using Twitter.

Arguably, one of the most influential tools, or at least the one with the most potential to be influential, is social networking (e.g. MySpace and Facebook). Congressional candidates had their own pages in 2006 and they played an important role in the 2008 primary and general presidential elections. Ancu and Cozma (2009) surveyed users of MySpace profiles of 2008 presidential primary candidates regarding their motives to accessing those profiles. Results revealed that respondents sought to connect with other like-minded supporters, information seeking, and entertainment. Of those three motives, seeking to connect with other supporters ranked highest in the respondents' priorities, with information seeking and entertainment taking a backseat.

Erikson (2008) discussed political fandom associated with MySpace fans of Hillary Clinton during the 2008 Presidential election. This study posited that social networking has the potential to create a more ideal communication situation in the traditional Habermasian public sphere. Building on Davis' (2005) research regarding political discussions in blogs, chat rooms, and over e-mail, Erikson (2008) concluded that social networking sites offered critique and a break from the public sphere. Instead, sites like MySpace and Facebook portray multiple, competing public spheres to citizens. This perspective may provide a view of this dialogue between politicians and citizens related to the various publics the political system serves in a diverse democracy. However, Erikson (2008) also posits that this offers a "way of doing politics that may in fact be more democratic" (p. 15).

MySpace is not the only popular social networking site; Facebook is also prevalent among politicians in their campaign communication plans. The social networking site offered all

of the 2006 Congressional candidates their own official pages to feature information, events, and respond to comments left on their wall. Sweetser and Lariscy (2008) used a content analysis to examine wall posts about candidates. Though they found a progression toward integration of emergent communication technology formats, the comments were mostly shallow notes of support with little response from the candidates or their campaigns.

YouTube also had a significant influence in both the 2006 and 2008 elections. McQuaid (2008) stated, “some websites, such as YouTube, aren’t political per se but have become powerful vehicles for disseminating political information” (p. 43). Seitz (2008) pointed to the YouTube/CNN debates as an example of the “multidimensional web of connection [that] doesn’t exist in the traditional media, though some mainstream news organizations try had to emulate it” (p. 11). These changes in the information landscape are said to “rival those brought by television, starting in the 1960s” (May, 2008, p. 25). However, May (2008) was quick to point out that the “plus side of this new media environment is more transparency in newsgathering; the downside is akin to watching sausage being made” (p. 25).

The 2008 presidential election featured much more integration of emergent communication technology than seen in the past 15 years. Candidates posted messages across various emerging technology formats including traditional websites, campaign blogs, social networking sites, and online video sites. Many referred to the 2008 election as the “Facebook Election” or the “YouTube Election,” but the reach extended beyond individual platforms and encompassed the entire emergent communication technology sphere. Candidates utilized extensive websites with many tools, Facebook pages, YouTube videos, and even Twitter. Learmonth (2009) summarized Barack Obama’s use of and benefits from emergent communication technology forms, “\$500 million raised online from 3 million donors, most in

increments of less than \$100; 35,000 groups organized through the website My Barack Obama; 1,800 videos posted to YouTube, garnering 50 million views; and Facebook's most popular page, with gagillions of friends” (para. 4). Though Obama did not have “gagillions” of friends, he did top two million before the end of the election (Learmonth, 2009).

Another major development in the emergent communication technology environment in the 2008 election is Twitter. This online tool provides users with ability to post 140 character messages that are seen by their followers, sometimes referred to as microblogging. Not only is Twitter used by the campaigns, but also by those following the campaigns. The microblogging site allows a unique view into the campaign, on a “moment-by-moment” basis, where citizens can gain an insider’s perspective (Dickerson, 2008, p. 6). Dickerson also stated that “if written the right way, Twitter entries build a community of readers who find their way to longer articles because they are lured by these moment-by-moment observations” (p. 6). Twitter comes with both positive and negative attributes, a characteristic associated with most of the emergent communication technology formats.

All of these emergent communication technology tools have some aspects in common, providing another goal of this dissertation; to parse out important aspects to young citizens in their search for political information. According to McQuaid (2008), “The Web has revolutionized campaign community building and fundraising and campaigns routinely reach out to bloggers and websites that command big, partisan audiences” (p. 44). In an article featured in the *St. Louis Journalism Review*, Stoff (2009) declared, “the mainstream media has to report on stuff on it because it is out there and people are asking about it. The mainstream media can no longer pick and choose what they cover” (p. 16).

Jo Mannies, author of the blog *Beacon Backroom* is quoted in Stoff's (2009) article saying, "in 2004, there were candidates who had websites, but it was not sophisticated. In 2006, the difference from what they were doing in 2004 was really something. In 2008, it was light years ahead" (p. 16). Politicians have sought to balance maintaining control over their messages while allowing for dialogue between the campaign and users as well as among users. Additionally, accordingly to a 2008 Pew Internet and American Life Project study, 25 percent of Americans regularly turned to the Internet for information about the presidential election. A subset of the population that more consistently turns to the Internet for campaign information is young citizens (18-29), where 42 percent indicated the Web as a regular source of political information.

May (2008) discussed that the media landscape as transitioning from a bubble to a fishbowl. The author pointed out that the positive side was more transparency, but that negative side was seeing the political system akin to "watching the sausage being made" and the changes rival those brought by television (p. 25). These changes provide unique challenges and opportunities for communication scholars. Xenos and Moy (2007) posited "the notion of the Web as a mainstream information source is not only intrinsically significant but also important for theoretical advancements in the discipline" (p. 704). One theoretical framework that establishes a foundation for examining how users interact with the Internet is dialogic theory. Research provides guidance in this ever-changing information landscape to track the development of the emergent formats as well as how campaigns employ them strategically.

Young Citizens

A central population to the examination of emergent communication technology formats is young citizens, especially those between the ages of 18 to 29. Known for being less engaged in

the political system and less likely to vote in elections, young citizens are a group thought to be lost in the shuffle and provide challenges in communication. Traditionally, according to a 2008 CIRCLE study, voter participation levels are consistently at least 10 percent lower than those over 30, with voting percentages as low as 22 percent in Congressional midterm election years.

However, some scholars (e.g. Bennett, 2000; Norris, 2002) see emergent communication technology as an answer to many communication issues politicians have with their constituents. The Internet has set a new public landscape that allows for various opportunities related to social and political behavior (Kann et al., 2007; Shah et al., 2001; Stanley & Weare, 2004; Wellman et al., 2001). It is true that 42 percent of 18-29 year olds get their campaign information from the Internet, especially social networking sites, research is still developing into what influence that has on the subsequent political behaviors of young citizens.

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) stated that young citizens have limited political knowledge, leading to “thin citizenship” and a lack of engagement. However, Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007) posited that the gap was in the low confidence young citizens had in their knowledge that led them not to participate. Their study analyzed political information efficacy as a construct to aide in measuring why young citizens do not engage in the political system as often as older cohorts. In addition, Kaid et al. (2007) found a significant positive relationship between political efficacy and communication between voters. This finding supports the need to further research into emergent communication technology formats, especially those that provide interactivity. The question remains, can “a phoenix rise from the ashes” (Norris, 2002) with new innovative forms of communication and participation or will young citizens stay in their pattern of little engagement?

Emergent communication technology has seemingly given this group, often called “digital natives” (e.g. Palfrey & Gasser, 2008), a newfound interest and engagement in the political system. Forty-two percent of 18-29 year olds identified the Internet as a primary source for campaign information (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2008). There has also been a steady increase in the percentage of 18-29 year olds voting in elections with more than half (52%) casting a ballot. The 2008 election was the first time half of the under 30 population voted in 16 years.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Previous literature sets the stage for analyzing the influence of individual emergent technology formats in political campaign communication. The next step is to look past the tools, to find out how political communicators perceive and utilize these tools as well as how they are perceived and utilized by citizens, and in this case, young citizens in particular. Focusing less on individual formats, but more about specific aspects shared by most of these formats, this dissertation examines whether dialogic and interactivity principles provide the underlying structure necessary to create effective two-way communication and build relations between political communicators and young citizens.

Scholars have examined the formats and user perceptions, but this study goes back to those creating and communicating with the formats, the campaigns themselves. Many make assumptions about how political communicators utilize these tools, but this study is one of the few (i.e. Stromer-Galley, 2000) who actually speak with political players about their strategy. The first two research questions seek to explore overall perceptions of emergent communication technology and how that fits within their campaign communication with young citizens.

Interview responses also provide structural elements to incorporate in the experimental conditions to add authenticity to treatments.

Research Question 1: How do professional political communicators perceive emergent communication technologies (i.e. social media) in the political system?

Research Question 2: How do professional political communicators utilize emergent communication technologies in their campaign relationships with young citizens?

The second phase of the study addresses five specific hypotheses regarding dialogic theory, political information efficacy, and political engagement. These hypotheses extend previous studies to include emergent communication technology formats and find predictive power in their influence. Hypothesis seven is a reversal of one included in Kenski et al. (2006) in regards to intense television use lowering political engagement. This study is one of the first to attempt to establish predictive power for dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002).

Research Question 3: What features of a web site do young citizens find to be most important in their search for online political information?

Hypothesis 1: Political engagement will be positively correlated with political information efficacy.

Hypothesis 2: For those who are heavy users of emergent communication technology, the positive relationship between political engagement and political information efficacy will be greater than low users of emergent communication technology.

Hypothesis 3: Users exposed to high dialogic features and text-based interactivity features will have higher levels of political information efficacy than those exposed to low dialogic features and text-based interactivity features.

Hypothesis 4: Users exposed to high dialogic features and text-based interactivity features will have higher levels of political engagement than those exposed to low dialogic features and text-based interactivity features.

Hypothesis 5: Greater use of emergent communication technology formats to gather political information will be positively correlated with higher levels of political information efficacy.

Hypothesis 6: High levels of media use, specifically intense Internet use, will be positively associated with higher levels of political engagement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“Scholars studying it [new media] probably need to consider use of multiple methods, including qualitative and triangulation methods of data-gathering and analysis and the interpretive approaches to research” (Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988, p. 50).

Emergent communication technology, also referred to as new media and social media, consistently poses challenges for researchers in their pursuit of knowledge and understanding. By following Williams et al.’s (1988) advice and incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods, this study’s objectives provide a more holistic view of the relationships between political communicators and young citizens than using one or the other. To meet these objectives, a two-phase methodological structure was designed including in-depth interviews and an experiment to analyze the complex set of issues surrounding how emergent communication technology influences relationships between political communicators and young citizens.

Underpinning these methodologies are two theoretical models, dialogic theory and interactivity. Both theories have been used to shed light on how emergent communication technology formats function as well as how they can most effectively be used to initiate and maintain relationships (e.g. Kent & Taylor, 2003; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2004; Taylor & Kent, 2004). This study builds on previous dialogic theory research in content analysis (e.g. Kent & Taylor, 2003; Kent et al., 2003) and survey methodologies (McAllister-Spooner, 2008; Hickerson & Thompson, 2007) to push toward predictive power in the model. In addition to testing the dialogic model using an experimental design, the researcher applied the principles of

interactivity to further explicate the feedback loop component of the dialogic model, one of the most difficult aspects to define and measure. To move dialogic theory to a more predictive model, this study seeks to measure the connection, engagement, and authenticity of political candidates to their constituents. These outcome variables provide insight to how citizens will respond in the overall political system. This chapter outlines both methodologies, including the participants, procedures, and measures.

Phase I: Interviews with Political Communicators

Few scholars (e.g. Stromer-Galley, 2000; Taylor & Kent, 2004) have turned to interviewing political communicators in their research, for many reasons including the time-intensive nature of the process. However, this dissertation presents a unique opportunity to take time early in a midterm election year after the monumental and influential 2008 presidential election to speak with political communicators. Addressing the first two research questions, the first phase involved collecting information about the viewpoints of political communicators regarding emergent communication technology and young citizens. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe interviews as “particularly well-suited to *understand the social actor’s experience and perspective*” (emphasis original, p. 173). Through in-depth interviews, political communicators from all levels of government (local, state, and national) provided insight regarding their use of and perspectives on emergent communication technology in campaign communication.

Participants included communication directors, campaign managers, political strategists, and others involved in decisions about campaign communication. A snowball sampling technique (e.g. Rubin, 1986; Weiss, 1994) was used with the researcher’s personal and professional networks of political consultants and other political operatives in Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, and Washington, D.C. The central goal of the interviews was to gather as much

information about campaign communication with young citizens from an insider's perspective and their use of social media in their overall communication strategies. The sample included 30 political communicators, of which 47 percent are Democrat and 53 percent are Republican.

Purposes of the interviews were to identify: 1) how political communicators define their constituencies, 2) how they maintain their relationships with young citizens, and 3) how they perceive the role of emergent communication technology in the political system.

Questions from previous studies (Stromer-Galley, 2000; Taylor & Kent, 2004) were used in the creation of the interview guide. These two studies represent the main theoretical constructs underpinning this study; Stromer-Galley (2000) used interviews in an analysis of interactivity on political campaign websites and Taylor & Kent (2004) used them to examine dialogic theory, also in an analysis of political campaign websites. Sample questions include “what is your definition of emergent communication technology,” “how do you perceive the function of these tools in the political system,” and “how does your campaign/office communicate with young citizens (18-29).”¹ Because social media formats are evolving entities and each political communicator used them in his or her own unique way, it was important the interview process be flexible and organic. Therefore, the guide provided a structure for each interview but allowed for other areas of discussion to emerge. Each interview resulted in a unique conversation, allowing specific follow-up questions to provide details for that individual.

Procedures for Phase I

To establish consistency and enhance analysis, the researcher conducted all interviews. Each interview lasted one to two hours and was completed in the most convenient manner for the participants: telephone, video conference, or in person. Audio recordings of interviews and

¹ Please see appendix for full interview guide.

subsequent written transcriptions ensured a full and accurate record of the conversation. All notes, recordings, and transcripts were kept confidential to provide privacy to respondents; resulting comments will only be identified through job title and level (e.g. Press Secretary for National Republican Senator, State Democratic Political Strategist).²

Each interview followed a consistent list of questions and was addressed in a semistructured format. In addition, the interviewer probed for specific information regarding the participant's individual experiences with social media and specific examples of use. Additionally, the researcher requested any documentation associated with social media policy, the political representative's reading lists (e.g. blog lists, media consumption), the structure of social media use for an office or campaign, and any other related material. This process allowed a supplementary analyses pertaining to the answers given in the interview session. Prior to data collection, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved all procedures for interviews.

Analysis

Each interview was analyzed using a system adhering to established qualitative research standards. The process to analyze interviews first involved transcribing audio interviews into text-based transcripts. Once the researcher had transcriptions, each went through multiple readings to identify main themes. Stages of analysis as discussed in Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002). First, described by Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002) as “unacknowledged by most scholars” was how each participant discussed the various topics within each interview. Each interview presented its own perspective through what themes they decided to focus on and what not to discuss. The next stage involved reading and analyzing the transcript once it was completed. This stage also included identifying important concepts and themes emerging from

² Please see appendix for interview transcripts.

the set of interviews. During the third stage, specific quotes or excerpts of interviews were identified to provide appropriate evidence of the themes. The final stage related the themes to the theoretical foundations and individual research questions posed by the study.

Phase II: Experimental Design

To analyze the perspectives, goals, strategies, and structures of emergent communication technology discussed in the interviews, the second phase employed an experimental design to measure how young citizens (18-29), consumed and applied them to their political perspectives. Keeping with one of the overarching aspects of the study, strength of multiple methods, the experiment provides quantitative analysis to pair with the qualitative and thus leads to more holistic view than using either one individually. Experiments allow for a high level of control, manipulation, and measurement of specific variables and relationships (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). This level of detail is required to establish the predictive power of the dialogic model, one of the underlying objectives of this dissertation.

The experimental design applied specific information from interviews regarding message construction and interactive features offered by political communicators. Examples from the interviews provided authentic message content, strategy, and organization political communicators utilize in their official emergent communication technology formats. Previous research about young citizens (e.g. CIRCLE, 2004, 2006, 2008; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2008) and consumption of online political information (e.g. Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2008; 2010) provided the framework for establishing which tools young citizens use most often to gather political information.

Dialogic theory, in public relations, provides a framework for organizations to use in their relationships with publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). This dissertation applied that

model to relationships between political communicators and young citizens (18-29). Using interactivity, additional principles further define the dialogic feedback loop aspect of the model. In the experimental phase, participants were exposed to three emergent communication technology tools (Facebook, Twitter, and blog) with the manipulation of dialogic communication, paired with the interactivity concept. These conditions were presented in high and low conditions.

Kaid, et al. (2007) advanced the understanding of political information efficacy, positing that an individual's level of political knowledge was central to their perception of influencing the political process. More specifically, researchers applied this concept to young voters to assess and potentially counteract the trend of increasing levels of political cynicism. Media consumption will measure what sources young citizens consult in their search for political information. Young citizens' perceptions of emergent communication technology were assessed through how they use the various types and how they perceive the use of these forms in political contexts. Additionally, participants were asked about their voting behavior in recent elections and political engagement. These questions included their reasons for participating in the political system as well as how they perceive the act of voting and its importance.

Participants

Research participants were recruited from undergraduate and graduate students at a large public university. Students were contacted through research pools, individual classes, and other college and department-level groups to participate in research session. Prior to data collection, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed all procedures for the experiment. Both undergraduate and graduate students were included in the sample to ensure a full range of coverage for the ages 18 to 29. Each participant received extra credit for a class and an entry into

a drawing for a \$10 gift card for their participation. IRB approval was obtained prior to data collection, which occurred during January and February 2011.

The recruitment process began with making contact with each class or campus group through a representative. The researcher went to classes and met with other student groups to describe the study and collect names and email addresses of volunteer participants. Participants were then sent an email including more information regarding the process and provided a link to the sign-up sheet. Student signed up using a web form and were instructed to bring their personal laptops to the session. Additionally, participants were asked to bring one friend along from another major. This component was to expand the variety of disciplines represented in the sample.

This demographic group is also referred to as digital natives or millennials because of various characteristics they share, primarily their use and dependence on digital technology (e.g. CIRACLE, 2008; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Since the experiment focused on the perspectives of young citizens, this age range is appropriate. A total of 410 participants completed the experimental sessions. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 25, with the mean age 20.49 ($SkD = 1.29$). The gender of the participants was 79.8 percent female and 20 percent male with one participant not identifying. A majority of the participants were Caucasian (84.1%), followed by African American (8.8%), Latino/Hispanic (2.4%), Asian (2.4%), and mixed race (2%). Political affiliation broke down as follows: Republican (49.5%), Democrat (23.9%), Independent (10.2%), Libertarian (9.8%), and others (6%).

Experimental Design & Manipulations

The experimental design involved exposing participants to three different emergent communication technology tools (Facebook, Twitter, and blog) with manipulation of two

specific features: high dialogic or low dialogic communication and high or low interactivity.

Groups were divided based on a within-subjects design, which allowed for the same participant to be exposed to three treatments. A within-subjects design provides a higher level of power and allowed for more precise individual treatment comparisons than a between-subjects design (Frey et al., 2000). Each participant viewed and evaluated all three treatments, taking a post-test after each one, with the final post-test asking them compare the formats to one another.

The design followed a 2 (high vs. low dialogic/interactivity) x 6 (orders of emergent communication technology format) design. The order of presentation was also manipulated to ensure comparison in post-test results. During each session, lasting approximately one hour, each participant viewed all three formats separately and immediately following each view, completed a post-test. In the following section, broad definitions regarding high and low manipulations of dialogic communication and interactivity as well as a description of how each individual format was manipulated for the factors. Table 1 summarizes the design of the current study.

Table 3.1: Experimental Design

Treatment	Post-test	Format 1	Post-test	Format 2	Post-test	Format 3	Post-test
↑D↑I	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test	Blog	Post-test
↑D↑I	Post-test	Blog	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test
↑D↑I	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test	Blog	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test
↑D↑I	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test	Blog	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test
↑D↑I	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test	Blog	Post-test
↑D↑I	Post-test	Blog	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test
↓D↓I	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test	Blog	Post-test
↓D↓I	Post-test	Blog	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test
↓D↓I	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test	Blog	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test
↓D↓I	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test	Blog	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test
↓D↓I	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test	Blog	Post-test
↓D↓I	Post-test	Blog	Post-test	Twitter	Post-test	Facebook	Post-test
Control Group	Post-test						

Treatments

Each of the three treatments featured a hypothetical independent male candidate for U.S. Senate named Pat Smith. A fictitious candidate was created to avoid any pre-existing thoughts or attitudes toward an existing politician, political party, or policy. However, information included in all treatments was adapted from actual candidate pages and content, as well as information collected from interviews with political communicators. Stimulus materials were primarily designed to analyze communication formats and political communicators' uses of them rather than perceptions or attitudes toward an individual policy or political issue. Therefore, manipulations focused on the communication exchange and less on specific political messages. Only vague policy points were utilized from current independent candidates in the 2010 election.

Twitter, Facebook, and blogs were selected because they provide comparable structures and text-based formats to manipulate similar textual components. This process was done to prevent the uneven comparison on multimedia (e.g. YouTube) to text based messages. Additionally, text messages were utilized across platforms to ensure messaging remained consistent and the focus remained on comparing the formats. For example, one post was a link to an article with a comment asking “What do you think about this new legislation?” were posted on all three formats, with length variation.

The high dialogic manipulation included all five main characteristics of Kent and Taylor’s (1998, 2002) Web-specific dialogic model identified as ease of interface, conservation of visitors, generation of return visits, usefulness of information, and dialogic feedback loop. Examples of dialogic features from previous studies (e.g. Kent et al., 2002) include for ease of interface: site map, major links to rest of site, and low reliance on graphics; for usefulness of information: press releases, downloadable graphics, links to other politicians, and position statements; for conservation of visitors: important information on first page, short loading time, and posting of last updated date and time; and finally, for return visits: links to other sites, downloadable information, and an explicit invitation to return. Within the low dialogic manipulation, ease of interface and usefulness of information were included to maintain some level of consistency in the overall structure and content, but not the other features.

The final component, dialogic feedback loop, was the focus of the interactivity manipulation. This feature has been defined in previous studies (e.g. Kent et al., 2003) include providing opportunities for user response, surveys, and offering campaign information. To more accurately utilize this feature and provide defining characteristics, concepts from Endres and Warnick (2004) and Trammell et al. (2005) provided interactivity manipulations. The

interactivity variable was operationalized in the manner established by Endres and Warnick (2004) as text-based interactivity. This type of interactivity was utilized because all three formats manipulated are primarily text-based. Endres and Warnick (2004) defined text-based interactivity as “engage[ing] the user through qualities of text construction” (p. 326). These constructions are designed to “simulate face-to-face communication between the candidate or members of the campaign and their site’s users” (p. 326-327). Implementation of text-based interactivity includes specific use of color, photographs, and various multimedia applications. Research associated with text-based interactivity is primarily focused on political communication, making it appropriate for this design. Additionally, the design incorporated interview results to construct the current and most common forms of text-based interactivity.

Specific Format Manipulations

Facebook. Facebook is a social networking website that offers various users their own profile page with including various tools used to communicate, share pictures, and play games. All profiles maintain a standard format including features like an information page, profile picture, friend list, “wall” to displayed comments and content, For politicians, Facebook offers a place to connect with potential voters on “their own turf,” where they must adhere to the constraints of the same Facebook profile as other users. Facebook allows users to customize their profiles, but the overall structure remains intact.

The Facebook manipulation featured two different treatments. One involved high dialogic communication with high interactivity. There are various features available to Facebook page creators. This study focused on most often utilized tools by politicians, from the interviews with political communicators. The Facebook features manipulated were the “wall,” the information tab, the profile picture, the statement box below the profile picture, and the addition

of the “contribute,” “join the team,” and “events” tabs. Volunteers were asked to “like” the page to populate it for research purposes only. They were also given instructions on what to write in comments left including templates, again on a volunteer basis. All textual information, including wall comments, candidate statements, and notes followed text-based interactivity definitions. Additionally, comments were based on organic comment types from previous studies (e.g. Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008).

For wall comments, there were several different templates used including one for event announcements, links to other content, notes, polling questions, and general engagement. Each of these templates utilized the text-based interactivity features. The “join the team” tab featured a way to sign up for various activities, including volunteering, phone banks, and receiving updates. Other information included in the high dialogic manipulation were more details about the candidate’s personal life, links to all website associated with the candidate, and a higher number of updates.

Figure 1: High Dialogic/Interactivity Facebook Manipulation



The low dialogic manipulation features much less information about the candidate, no “join the team” or “contribute” tabs. Wall comments featured less interactive components and more messages being pushed out to users. There were no responses from the campaign. Events were posted, but not advertised. The profile picture featured a graphic similar to campaign posters.

Figure 2: Low Dialogic/Interactivity Facebook Manipulation



Twitter. The Twitter interface, as with Facebook, provided a standard template for all accounts to use in their design. Two of the main customizable features were the background and profile picture. For the high dialogic and interactivity treatments, the background featured a photo from the campaign trail of the candidate interacting with people at an event. The profile picture was of the candidate smiling and facing the camera directly, the same used on the Facebook page and the campaign website. With the content of high dialogic and interactive

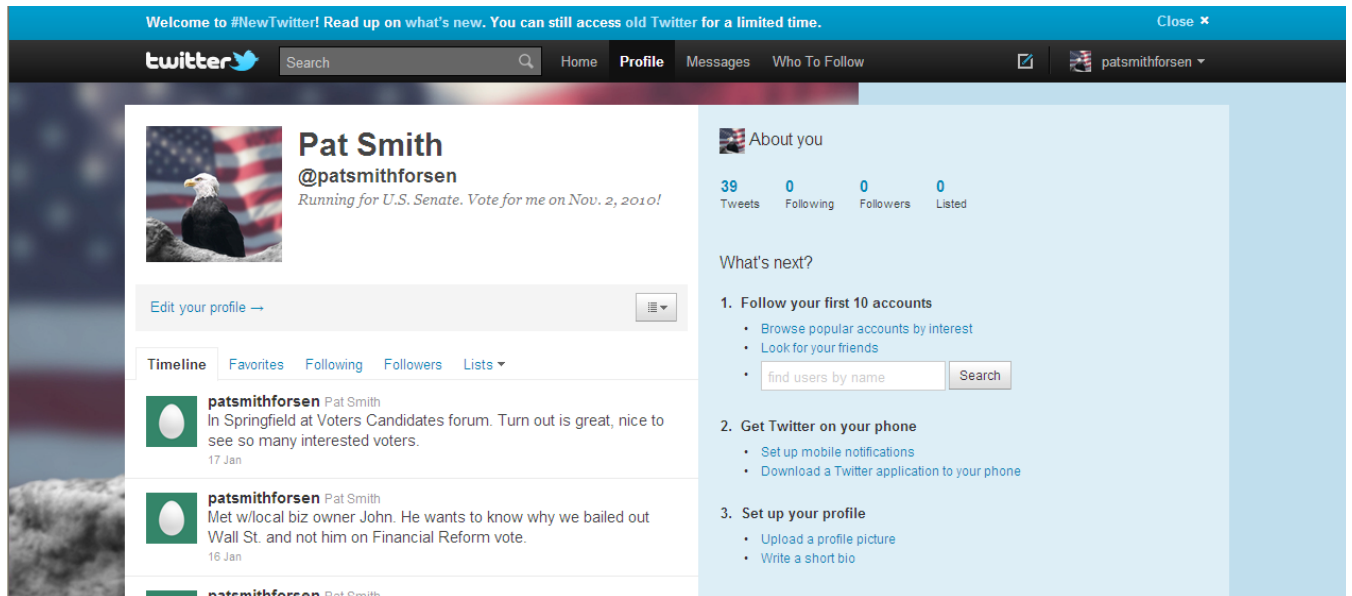
stimulus were a combination of useful information for voters, replies to individuals or groups from the campaign, re-postings of other users' tweets, and personalized information about the candidate. Posts were frequent, at least daily and the account followed a large number of users.

Figure 3: High Dialogic/Interactivity Twitter Manipulation



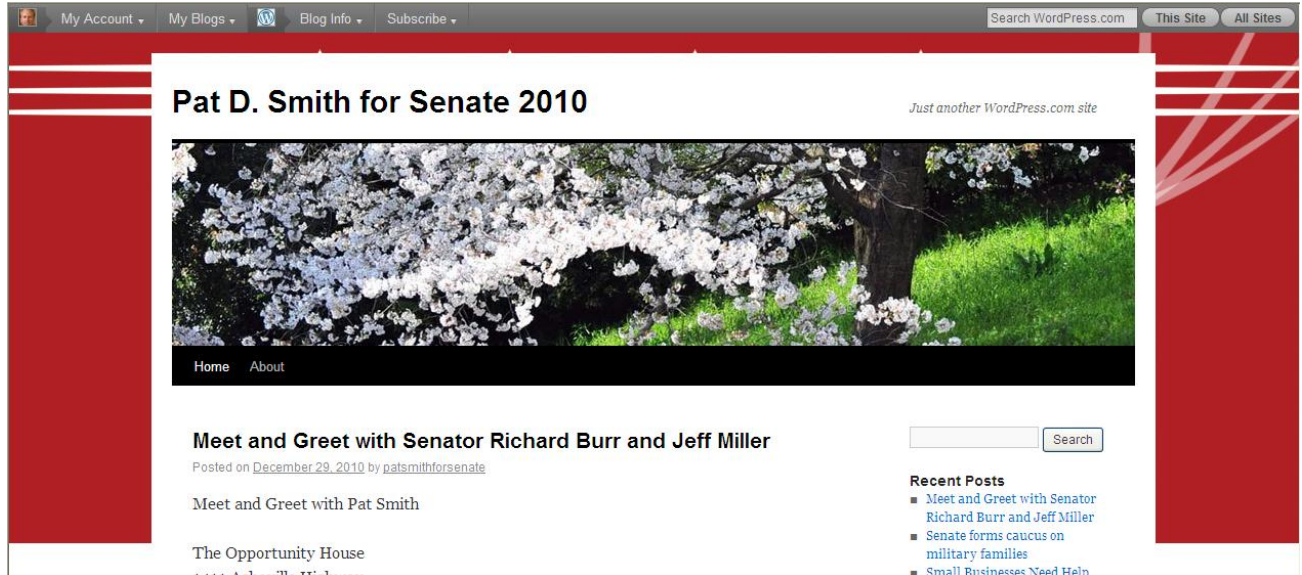
The low dialogic and low interactive treatments featured a basic color background with the same colors as the campaign posters. A version of the graphic for the campaign posters was also used for the profile picture. Updates read more like an RSS feed, featuring brief updates and hyperlinks, but lacking a discernable human voice. Postings include only messages going out with no interaction or re-posting of other users' tweets. The posts were also less frequent and the account followed very few users.

Figure 4: Low Dialogic/Interactivity Twitter Manipulation



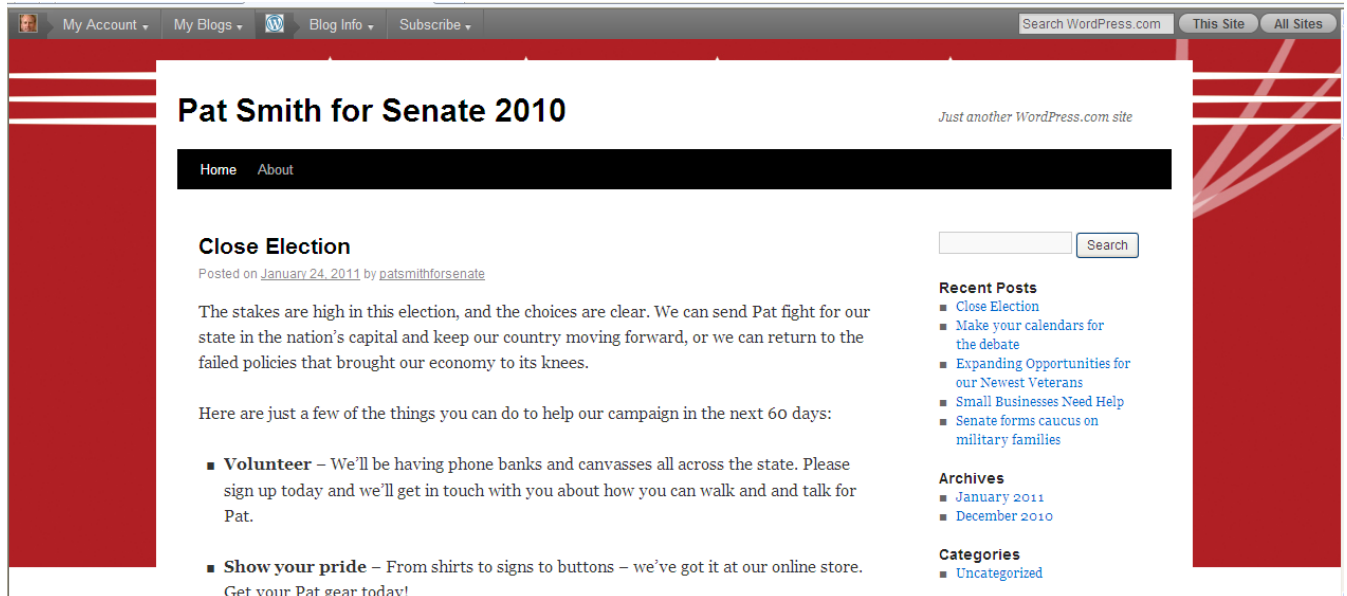
Campaign blog. Blogs offer many more opportunities for customization, however most political candidates tend to keep it simple. Therefore, the manipulations followed the results of interviews with political communicators and viewing of various current Senate candidates. Both high and low manipulations were created using WordPress, one of the more commonly used blogging sites. As with Facebook and Twitter treatments, the high dialogic manipulation featured a photo of the candidate and the low manipulation featured a version of the campaign poster.

Figure 5: High Dialogic/Interactivity Blog Manipulation



The high dialogic and high interactivity blog manipulation featured multiple comments and interactions from the campaign. Posts also featured language adhering to text-based interactivity definitions. The text-based interactivity aspects manipulated are inviting users to comment and providing ways to get more information. On the other hand, the low blog manipulation featured posts only with no opportunity to post. The reason treatments are deemed “low” and not, “non” is due to the inclusion of hyperlinks to other content, which are considered interactive. Hyperlinks are considered an essential aspect of defining a blog (e.g. English & Tedesco, 2007).

Figure 6: Low Dialogic/Interactivity Blog Manipulation



Procedures

Participants were randomly assigned to one of 13 groups including 12 treatment groups and a control group. Participants attended a session lead by the researcher. Each participant completed the experiment entirely online, in an adapted laboratory environment. The “lab” was set up in college centers and available classrooms around campus. All sessions were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere and participants used their personal laptops. This set-up has been used in previous studies (e.g. Iyengar, 2010) to simulate an organic online experience.

The experimental procedure has multiple stages. First, participants were exposed to one of 12 stimulus groups. Each participant explored each treatment at his or her own pace for 10 minutes before being told to move on and immediately complete a posttest questionnaire. This process was repeated two additional times. The final posttest assessed demographic information, media use, Internet use, voting behavior, political information efficacy, political engagement, dialogic principles, and interactivity. Once they completed the posttest, a page appeared with

debriefing material regarding the study's objectives and contact information for researcher. Control group participants were not exposed to a stimulus, but instead were instructed to complete a different version of the post-test questionnaire with questions appropriately written.

Measures

Dialogic principles

Dialogic principles were identified from previous studies (e.g. Taylor, Kent & White, 2001; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Yang & Lim, 2009). Additionally, any emergent categories, found in the interview results, associated with any of the five major principles were included in the design and questionnaires for the experiment. Examples include correcting fact errors, event announcements, and news appearances.

Each participant assessed the dialogic principles through a series of five-point Likert-type scale questions, indicating their level of agreement with the statement. The questions included the following: "the information on site was useful," "the site downloaded quickly," "the information was easy to find," "I would return to the site for more information," "I would post a comment," and "I would share this site to friend or family member."

Interactivity scale

Adapted from Yang and Lim (2009) and Burgoon et al.'s (2002) five item, 7-point scale. This second scale was used to gain perspective on the transition between two-way communication and relationship building, this time by gauging the level of engagement. Here are the items: "I was interested in viewing the previous site," "I am likely to leave a comment if I were a regular visitor to this site," "I feel comfortable with interacting with the candidate through this site," "I feel connected to the candidate's ideas and thoughts through this site," and I would

post a link to this site from my Web site or blog if I have/had one.” Responses fall on a seven-point scale ranging from “strong disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Perspectives of Dialogue

Respondents were also asked to identify what they believe are the most important features of a Web site with regard to political information. A factor analysis was run to confirm existing categories and any emerging categories. The five main features identified by Kent and Taylor (2001) were provided in specifically operationalized formats. Those five features are usefulness of information, ease of interface, conservation of visitors, generation of return visits, and dialogic feedback. Each of the features were defined using adapted sub-categories from Taylor et al. (2001).

Usefulness of information was defined using “news section,” “multimedia information,” “position statements,” “donation section,” and “biography/about section.” Ease of interface will be identified as “site map,” “major links to rest of site,” “search engine box,” and “low reliance of graphics.” Conservation of visitors was identified as “short download time” and “logical organization of information.” Generation of return visits were defined using “statement inviting user to return,” “recent news section,” “FAQ section,” “bookmark button,” “calendar of events,” “items that can be requested by mail/e-mail.” The final component of dialogic loop was classified using “opportunity to comment” and “opportunity to e-mail sign up.” These aspects were analyzed using an exploratory factor analysis.

Political Information Efficacy & Political Engagement

As stated in the literature review, Kaid, McKinney and Tedesco (2007) advanced the theory of political information efficacy in an effort to assess how young citizens could be better educated in how to participate in the political system. The scale was comprised of four items

with levels ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. These four items are the following: “I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics,” “I think I am better informed about political and government than most people,” “I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues facing our country,” and “If a friend asked me about the election, I feel I could have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.” Variations of this scale have been used in previous studies (e.g. Kaid et al, 2007; McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007; McKinney & Rill, 2009). Three questions were added to the posttest to gauge specific reactions to the stimuli, including “likely are you to participate in response to the communication you just viewed,” “how likely are you to engage online if all political communication was presented the way you just viewed,” and “Emergent technology formats (i.e. Twitter, blogs, Facebook) influence my views of political issues, parties, and candidates.” This political engagement measure provided a perspective on the types of political activities (real life and online) young citizens participate in as part of their engagement in the political system. Political activity choices included the following, volunteer, post political or campaign material online, campaign for candidate, contact elected officials, attend political rally, donate money to a campaign, post comments or visual material about politics on the Web, and political use of social networking sites. These choices were adapted from previous studies (e.g. Christy, 1987; Putnam, 2000; Xenos & Moy, 2004). An "other" category provided a way to capture any emergent types of political activity.

Political cynicism. Political cynicism is a concept that has received much attention in recent years, especially in regards to young citizens. To measure political cynicism, an eight-item scale was used, with responses ranging from disagree strongly to strongly agree. The scale was previously adapted from the National Election Survey conducted by the University of

Michigan Survey Research Center. Variations of this scale and used repeatedly in previous studies (e.g. Kaid, 2003; Kaid, Johnston, & Hale, 1989; Kaid et al, 2000; McKinney & Rill, 2009; McKinney, Spiker, & Kaid, 1998; Spiker, 2005; Spiker & McKinney, 1999).

The eight statements used to measure political cynicism are “Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do,” “ People like me don’t have any say about what the government does,” “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on,” “One cannot always trust what politicians say,” “One can be confident that politicians will do the right thing,” “Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over,” “Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think,” and “One never knows what politicians really think.”

Media & Internet Use. Media use has gone through various manifestations with each shift in the media landscape. This study assessed media use using an exhaustive list of traditional formats (e.g. newspaper, television, radio) as well as Internet and emergent technology formats (e.g. social networking sites, blogs, Twitter). Respondents were also asked to rank their top five sources for which sources they use most often in their consumption of political information. Finally, there were questions to assess the number of hours respondents spend gathering news, surfing the Internet, and seeking political information.

Voting behavior. To measure voting behavior, three questions were asked. Each question will assess a different level of voting. First, they were asked their intention to vote in the upcoming election, which will be in 2010. The survey was implemented in the two to three months prior to the election. If they do not intend to vote, they were prompted to indicate their reasons. The final question inquired about the number of previous elections the respondent has voted.

Demographic information. The final section of the survey prompts respondents to identify relevant demographic information. Categories included are basic information including age, gender, major, level of education, and ethnicity. Also, two questions relating to political identification were present to allow the researcher to compare ideology and partisanship in the analysis. The two categories were political ideology, where respondents will select where they fall on a scale (liberal to conservative – liberal, moderate liberal, centrist/independent, moderate conservative, conservative). Also, party identification, where participants selected from a list of common parties in the United States (e.g. Democrat, Republican, green, communist, libertarian), with an “other” category for emergent responses.³

³ Please see appendix for the full questionnaire.

CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

During the first phase of this dissertation, in-depth interviews with political communicators were completed to gauge their perspectives and use of emergent communication technology. These interviews revealed some consistencies with previous research and some interesting trends for the future of political campaign use of emergent communication technology. The previous chapter details the process utilized to collect, record, and subsequently analyze interviews. Because the definition of political communicator was left broad, the composition of the sample varied. Party affiliation was even (53% Republican, 47% Democrat), but the breakdown of communicators' affiliation skewed toward the Senate staff (50%), with the other categories as follows: Strategists (27%), House staff (17%), and local candidates (6%). Variations in responses came in the amount of experience each person had, their position within the campaign (e.g. New Media Director, Press Secretary, Strategist), and level of government (e.g. local, state, national).

Each of the interviews provided individual-level findings and more general trends and themes revealing results broadly applying to the sample-at-large. This chapter will outline the responses addressing how political communicators defined social media, the two original research questions posed, as well as how their responses provided insight into the application of dialogic theory to online political campaign communication.

One of the most interesting questions all political communicators answered toward the beginning of each interview was describing their definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media. Social media is constantly evolving; both the tools and concept surrounding the tools, it was important to address how each political communicator defined it early in the interview. Because of variable tendency of definitions related to this emerging concept, it was important to establish each individual participant's perspective. The definition of social media establishes the foundation for how these political communicators view and apply the various uses of it in the political system. The three main themes emerging from this question about defining social media were social media is a tool, a broadcast channel, or a new horizon. Each of these perspectives revealed insights regarding the campaign and each individual political communicator's perspective.

In the discussions, many political communicators portrayed social media as a tool. Often in the same sentence as "in their toolbox" or "arsenal," describing how they communicate messages to their constituents. Therefore, it was not surprising to find this theme in the interviews with political communicators. In some cases, political communicators described social media as "just another tool" or a "unique tool." Others referred to it as part of their "set of tools." The following quote summarizes this grouping of responses, and was said by Director of Communications for Republican Senator 1, "Social media provides campaigns with a new set of tools for us to disseminate campaign information. The main difference is we have more to work with than we ever had before." This theme's responses did not differ based on political party, level of government, or job title.

Differences did occur in the overall structure and description of these tools and how campaigns utilized them. There were some political communicators who described the tools as

part of the media plan or another way of broadcasting. However, others described them as a new or emerging format for interaction and offering an innovative tool for communicating with the campaign's supporters. Summarizing the latter group was an Online Communications Director for Republican House Representative stating "Social media is a set of tools we have at our disposal to provide a more interactive experience with the campaign."

While many political communicators described social media as a tool, there were still variations in how those tools were utilized within the communication plan. Several within the sample referred to social media relating to traditional media or broadcasting terms. These responses came from those political communicators who were also generally pessimistic or cynical when discussing the overall usefulness of social media. Definition discussion with these political communicators tended to focus on how campaigns and politicians used social media as another channel to broadcast their message. These political communicators did not often acknowledge the two-way communication features of social media. Responses included phrases like "another site to post," "one more place to publish," and "social media is just a larger audience for us to get our message out." One respondent, Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office 1, summed up how this grouping's perspective about social media in this statement, "Social media is a new set of speakers for us to amplify our messages."

These political communicators were some of the most frustrating to interview because of their overall lack of knowledge and in some cases, cooperation during an interview. At several points, these respondents asked me to turn off recording so they could go off the record. During these breaks, their true feelings were often revealed, but cannot be shared here because of their request not to be documented.

On the other side of the spectrum from those who describe social media as a broadcast channel are those who view it as a new horizon, one with much promise and potential. This theme emerged from the answers of New Media Directors, Online Communication Directors, and political strategists. Not surprisingly, the political strategists were all strong advocates for the use of social media. The definitions from the strategists echoed some idealism and evangelism for the technology. Terms including “new horizon” and “game changer” were used to describe the various technologies.

These definitions became the basis for dividing participants into groups based on how they use social media, in understanding, frequency, as well as holistically. Most participants who began discussing social media as just another tool fell into either the mid-range or the laggards group, whereas those who really saw the potential for social media as a larger concept were also those participants more likely to be social media evangelists. One Director of New Media described emergent communication technology as “a whole new world of possibility for campaigns to tap into segments of their constituency they were never able to reach before. It’s always good to really tap into the pulse of what’s going on outside of the beltway...in the heartland of America.” A National Democratic Strategist poetically noted social media “as the flowering of communications into the hands of anyone with an Internet connection.” These descriptions of social media as a “pulse” or as “flowering” are quite different from those using it as “another set of speakers.” A Republican Strategist noted though that “More candidates are emerging who ‘get it,’ understanding the value of supporter-centric campaigns.”

The definition of emergent communication technology or social media is just the start of the examination of how political communicators perceive and utilize emergent communication technology. One of the respondents, Director of New Media for Republican House

Representative, made an important point saying, “I don’t think there is any one set definition for social media, it is constantly changing and evolving. Our job is to keep up with it.” This dissertation provided some insight into the varying degrees and perspectives political communicators hold regarding the definition social media. The next section will explore the original research questions.

Research Question 1: How do professional political communicators perceive emergent communication technologies (i.e. social media) in the political system?

Previous research has indicated a slower integration by political candidates of various mediums (e.g. Stromer-Galley, 2004). A classic example is how Nixon refused to acknowledge the power of television while Kennedy, a newcomer, embraced it. Political candidates tend to adapt to changes much more cautiously due to the tendency to desire full control of messages. These changes in the trends were evident in various comments made by political communicators. One from an Online Communications Director, House (R) stated, “There is a process beginning to reject more traditional forms of media in exchange for social forms. It has been a slow process, but recent results have proven too dynamic to ignore.” These sentiments tended to be less heard from press secretaries and communication directors.

In addressing the first research question regarding how political communicators perceive emergent communication technologies, there were three main groups emerging from the overall sample. These groups were those high in social media evangelists, majority users or cautious optimists, and hesitators or laggards. The social media evangelists included all of the political strategists and a couple of the campaign staff. That campaign staffs in this grouping were those with titles such as New Media Director and Online Communications Director. In the group of the majority users or cautious optimists, there were many House staff and a couple of the Senate

staff members. The final group, hesitators or laggards, were those with the most campaign experience and often unfamiliar or unwilling to incorporate emergent communication technology formats.

As themes began to emerge from the interviewing process, the political communicators began to identify themselves in a way similar to how Everett Rogers discussed consumers in his diffusion of innovations theory. Based on the theory by Rogers (1962), combined with new terms such as social media evangelist, political communicators emerged as fitting at least with three of Rogers' categorizations.

Rogers' (1962) diffusion of innovations model categorizes consumers as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. These categories were originally used to discuss how technology spread or diffused through society. As the political communicators began to describe their perspective and use of emergent communication technology, these categories, combined with popular terms such as "social media evangelist," provided some structure to organizing the respondents into groupings. Due to the small size of the sample, the original categories were combined to create three main groupings; innovators and early adopters were termed social media evangelists, early and late majorities were mid-range or cautious optimists, and laggards were also referred to as hesitators.

Innovators and early adopters, in this study referred to as social media evangelists to describe their specific position relating to emergent communication technology. This group were those completely bought into, utilized, and mastered the use of various forms of emergent communication technology in campaigns. Director of New Media for House Republican made this statement exhibiting this group's perspective: "Social media is being able to assert itself as a dominant form of political communication, remaking our nation's politics in the process." These

political communicators were also some of those who referred to social media in terms such as “new horizon” and engaged regularly in dialogue with their constituents. The sheer fact that these communicators carried titles such as “director of new media” or “director online communications” provided insight into the advancement these communicators represented in political campaign communication.

Majority respondents were those that fall in the middle of the bell curve and are referred to as cautious optimists in this study. These political communicators recognized the value and potential of the forms of emergent communication technology, but still had strongly held beliefs regarding the control of messaging within campaigns. They often used ECT formats, but not to their fullest potential. These communicators described their use in terms of adjustment. In some cases, they would acknowledge their use of one tool, but their lack of understanding regarding another. Additionally, majority users discussed changes in policy or pointed to current restrictions in the House or Senate that restricted their use. Whether this was an easy excuse or a legitimate cause of holding them back from fully engaging in dialogue with citizens, social media lacked the investment necessary to be effective.

Finally, the laggards in this group are referred to as hesitators. This group has knowledge and may also follow various forms of ECT, but their use within campaign communication is low. These political communicators find it difficult to relinquish any control of campaign messages to engage with their constituents. There were only a few of these within the overall sample, but these communicators held strongly to their belief that social media was a “fad” or was not having any real influence on political communication. They also often pointed to the lack of policy change in the House or Senate as why social media would not become a standard part of political communication plans.

With the exception of the few laggards present in the sample, most would probably agree with the following two statements: first from Online Communications Director, House (R) “Social media is beginning to take up some of the space previously occupied by traditional media” and two from Director of New Media House (R) “Television created a new set of candidates and social media is likely to do the same.” These sentiments point to a shift that began during the 2004 election and continues to exhibit the expansion of emergent communication technology use in political campaign communication. This sample of political communicators reinforces previous research with the slow integration, but also points to a positive trend toward changing how politicians and citizens communicate.

Research Question 2: How do professional political communicators utilize emergent communication technologies in their campaign relationships with young citizens?

This second research question focused specifically on how political communicators utilize emergent communication technologies in their communication and relationships with young citizens. In many cases, young citizens were described as “just another constituent group” or “not a separate focus” or “not a crucial differentiated group.” A few expressed their disinterest in focusing on a historically disengaged group, from which this quote came from a Director of Communications, House (R) “I’m gonna be straight with you. We know y’all don’t vote, so why should we bother focusing on you? What’s our return?” Though statements like this one were not a common thread among political communicators, the underlying cynicism showed through in how young citizens were dismissed as an insignificant group.

However, there were several conflicting comments made by political communicators. For one, campaigns did indicate meeting or dealing with young citizen groups/constituents on about

a weekly basis – in some cases, more in campaign season. When asked about using social media to communicate with young citizens, National Strategist (D) stated “The age break is not really the determiner of how you communicate with people; it’s more of a lifestyle and a psychographic than a demographic. And there is no longer a divide between those who use social media and other people don’t.” This statement provides for a wider perspective regarding the use of social media.

One group of political communicators within the sample that heavily favored using social media in engagement with young citizens and those were the strategists. Much of their reasoning for the use of emergent communication technology, in particular with young citizens, is in a unique way in which these and future generations communicate and will communicate in the future. Political strategists pointed to the need to grow with each new generation. The only way we will change the trends of the past (e.g. high cynicism, low participation) is to engage current and future generations in the same ways they consume and engage with the political system. This sentiment was captured in a statement by a National Strategist that “There’s a search for efficacy going on among young people...making a message that can spread is a positive motivator.”

Though political strategists were consistently in favor of more engagement with young citizens, they were not the only political communicators to share these feelings. There were at least two comments from current campaign staff highlighting positive trends for the future. One was from a Communications Director for Democratic Representative who stated “Trends toward supporter-centric campaign allow young citizens to become involved. Many volunteers fall into this category and campaigns are beginning to listen more intently.” Additionally, an Online Communications Director, House (R), said “Society has begun the integration of these tools into

their every day communication especially the younger generations, allowing politicians to more readily accept them as relevant.”

This sample reinforced much of what we believe regarding how young citizens are viewed by political campaigns. However, there were a few positive trends both with political strategists as well as some of the more junior campaign staffers. The question remains whether these sentiments can disseminate to the larger political system and only time will tell. A Democratic Strategist made the following statement which sums up the importance of developing strategies for engaging young citizens and establishing “Good responsible, civic leadership. And two it reflects the way that young people communicate today. It’s not about a one-way broadcast communication and a lag time before a response. It’s an ongoing, steady stream of interactive engagements.” In the next section, findings related to how the interviews reflected the five main features of dialogic theory are explored. These features may assist to guide political communicators on the areas they should focus if they want to improve their use of emergent communication technology.

Dialogic findings

The main theoretical foundation of this dissertation is dialogic theory. With this in mind, it was important to consider how the five main tenets of the theory were exemplified in the political communicators’ responses. Each feature had supportive and conflicting responses regarding how campaigns integrate emergent communication technology into their overall communication strategy. To examine these responses, this section outlines each feature; mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment.

Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002) highlight one of the founding tenets of dialogic theory as *mutuality*, or the recognition of organization-public relationships. In this dissertation, these

relationships took form between political campaigns and their constituents. Each of the political communicators provided answers highlighting their acknowledgement of emergent communication technology as an important way to communicate with their constituents. Though the uneven use provided insight into how the level of commitment and risk varied among the sample interviewed. It seems the existence and maintenance of the emergent communication technologies provides a certain level of recognition of the relationship between political communicators and citizens. However, the inconsistency in tactical use of emergent communication technology such as in the frequency of updates, amount of content available, and interactive components leaves evaluation to a candidate-by-candidate comparison.

This “listening” component often applies to various sources. A Communications Associate for a Republican Senator stated “Even if we’re not participating on different sites, we are always keeping up with what’s being said.” Belief in social media is an important advancement in communication and exhibits a crucial aspect of the growing process for any political campaign. In some cases, it takes a group of politicians to make a change. Several political communicators mentioned a site called YouCut as a shining example of politicians are listening to their constituents. The site allows submissions of ideas for how to cut spending by the government. Those suggestions are then voted on and subsequently brought to the floor of the House. Though none of the measures have succeeded, the site has garner millions of hits and thousands of ideas from average Americans.

Having accounts on sites such as Twitter and Facebook shows a willingness to meet citizens “on their turf.” However, the benefit to candidates is still small in comparison, at least in any measurable way. Where mass media outlets, such as radio and television, provide wide audiences to reach, social media has more niche sites with a pull method to communicating.

These networks provide for a labor-intensive management with a smaller group of people. Thus, the reasoning provided by political communicators for merely listening and not fully participating in these communities.

Building off of mutuality is the second feature *propinquity*, or the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics. According to political communicators in this sample, there is an overall lack of interactions when it comes to current Senate or House of Representative offices. Most of their responses are merely to clear the record regarding false information or the remind citizens to refrain from using abusive language. Responses were described as more orchestrated than most seen on social media. Most responses seek to set the record straight and messages of gratitude such as “Thank you for voting today” or “Thank you for your support.” Few interactions provided any authentic spontaneity with the campaign.

The next component is *empathy*, or the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests. This feature causes political communicators trouble because they want to fulfill these expectations, but only to the point that the goals and interests are in line with the campaigns’. Because of the nature of social media as a purposive form of communication, in most cases, this works well because supporters are often those users posting and attempting to communicate with the campaign. However, there is still little effort to engage those who identify as independents or are in opposition with the campaign.

One of the major struggles for any political campaign rests in establishing and maintaining control of the campaign message. Without a clear handle on what is being said and by whom, a campaign can quickly find itself responding to an attack rather than initiating one. When considering the aspect of campaign communication, it seems intuitive the risk it takes to engage citizens in any meaningful way would prove to be close to impossible. However, those

political strategists interviewed laid out a strong case for why it is important for politicians to begin to adapt, even in small ways to ensure they are not left in the dust by more technology-savvy opponents.

The dialogic feature seems to cause the largest roadblock for campaigns because it requires campaigns to give up some control of the messages associated with their campaign. They can understand and relate to the public, meet them on their own turf, but campaigns are highly controlled creatures that require candidates to be careful about what they say and do as well as messages with the official campaign to be written and rewritten. This sentiment is exhibited in the following comment by a Republican Senate Director of Communications “We still have to maintain some level of control over the messages that are disseminated regarding our campaign.”

The risk of losing control of the campaign message is at the heart of why most campaigns choose not to engage in dialogic with even supporters. One Press Secretary for a Republican Representative summarized this feeling by stating “The give-and-take aspect of social media is a little difficult to swallow. We have a too much riding on the campaign messages to allow just ‘anyone’ with a computer to have some control.” Another perspective echoed this message came from a Democratic House Director of Communications “There are moments we see our supporters taking control of the page in a good way by fending off a troll, but there are other times they get so far off topic, it’s difficult to see how the campaign is benefitting.” The struggle to risk the campaign message for richer, authentic communication with their constituents still seems out of reach for these political communicators.

In the final dialogic component, we consider commitment. While the interviews revealed a commitment to listening to citizens and being aware of what’s being said, that is where

commitment seemed to end for many campaigns. The commitment to listening to their constituency is important, but there seems to be a disconnect regarding the engagement and interactive components of emergent communication technology. A Democratic Strategist stated “There should be a constant stream of communication between candidates and their constituents.” However, many political communicators pointed to lack of man power as a central problem to their commitment to creating a more fully dialogic communication exchange with constituents. One Director of Communications, House (R) simply stated “Our biggest obstacle is time and personnel...we believe in the technology, but it’s difficult to manage.” Resources are crucial in the holistic use of emergent communication technology and the subsequent creation of authentic dialogue. Without committing those resources, financially and with regards to human capital, political campaigns will continue to fall short in their use of emergent communication technology.

As more and more results are produced showing evidence emergent communication technology is a productive use of campaign time and resources, there will be an overall shift in focus. With high profile political operatives like Sarah Palin use these tools to engage with their publics, there will be more examples for political communicators to exhibit how emergent communication technology can benefit a campaign’s communication plan.

One of the last questions asked during the interviews with political communicators was where they saw the future of social media in the political system. A cynical response from a Press Secretary for a Democratic Senator was “The future of social in politics is an ever-expanding pool of tools we have to weed through to get to those that will help us get elected.” Not all were as cynical, a Director of New Media, House (R) stated “Television created a new set of candidates and social media is likely to do the same.” Finally, a Republican Strategist set out

the most demanding plan with this statement: “I believe that for every campaign, every candidate going forward will include, must include, every aggressive exploitation of social media that is possible. And that is just that campaigns in the past would not have advertising, exclusion of press. There’s not a single campaign going forward that will not have social media as part of its arsenal of tools.” It remains to be seen what the future holds for emergent communication technology in political campaigns and from the interviews conducted here, no clear answer was revealed. We’ll have to wait and see.

The integration of emergent communication technology has long been a process for political candidates. With each new election cycle, they seem to inch closer and closer to integrating various forms of technology more fully, but they fall short in their engagement. Questions remain for political strategists and the campaign team to strike a balance between losing a little control for the overall benefit gained from engaging with citizens. This dissertation started a process of examining how emergent communication technology is utilized and what the future may hold for its use in political campaign communication.

CHAPTER 5

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

The experimental phase followed the interview stage and utilized the responses from political communicators to create stimuli to create manipulations to test young citizens' responses their emergent communication technology formats. Data was collected during January and February 2011 at a large southeastern university with undergraduate and graduate students as participants. Data was then analyzed in accordance with the research question and hypotheses proposed earlier in the document.

Participants in the experiment were primarily female (79.8%), Caucasian (84.1%) and Republican (49.5%). The average age of the respondent was 20.49 (SD=1.289). Other races represented were African-American (8.8%), Latino/Hispanic (2.4%), Asian (2.4%), and mixed race (2.0%). Political identification was somewhat surprising for a college campus with less than a quarter of the sample (23.9%) identifying as Democrat. In addition, other respondents identified as independents (10.2%), Libertarian (9.8%), Green (1.2%), and other (4.8%).

To test the hypotheses and research questions proposed, SPSS v. 17 was used for data analysis. Before the main tests of variables were completed, reliability tests were run on scales to ensure consistency with previous studies. The two main dependent variables tested in the hypotheses were political engagement and political information efficacy (PIE). For the eight-item political engagement scale, a Cronbach's alpha of .778 was found, meeting reliability standards. For political information efficacy, a four-item scale was used with an alpha of .835, again meeting threshold standards.

During the construction of the experimental design, a pilot study was run using a small group of participants (n=18) to check the manipulations. Approximately 70 percent of participants indicated the appropriate high or low manipulation when presented with the individual emergent communication technology tool (Facebook, Twitter, & blog). Adjustments were made after the pilot based on results of the pilot. These changes included additional information to further distinguish between high and low manipulations.

To examine the experimental conditions, the 12 groups were collapsed into two dialogic and interactivity components. Though there were 3 different media (Facebook, Twitter, and blog) used in each manipulation, it was determined based on a manipulation check question and cross-tab that there were no significance differences between the media themselves, only the manipulations.

Before proceeding to the first research question, the effect of the manipulations was verified by comparing the high and low dialogic/interactivity groups. First, the eight-item scale was tested for reliability with an alpha of 1.00. Both the mean scores and the individual items were tested. Then, an ANOVA was performed, indicating a significant difference between the high and low manipulations ($p = .001$) for all eight questions. Though there were three different social media tools and the order of presentation varied for each cell, it was determined the high/low manipulation was the overriding factor, not the individual tool.

Table 5.1:
Summary of ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	2.135E8	2	1.068E8	1190169.193**
Within Groups	1304.85	403	22.89	
Total	2.136E8	405		

**p < 0.01

Note: Dialogic and interactivity was rated on a Likert scale where 1 = strongly agree and 7 = strongly disagree. The 8-item scale was answered a total of three times by each participant in an exposure cell.

Research Question 3: What features of a website do young citizens find to be most important in their search for online political information?

To answer research question three, participants were asked to not only identify the important features of a website, but also to rank what they believed were the top five most important. Each of the means for the features was calculated to find the lowest scores because the scale was ranked with one being most important. There was a list of nineteen features total. The five top-ranked features are position statements (M=1.72), biography/about section (M=2.31), site map (M=2.61), news section (M=2.99), and multimedia information (M=3.07). As for the least important features, the following were deemed least important: major links to rest of the site (M=3.76), donation section (M=3.88), bookmark button (M=4.00), opportunity to sign up for email updates (M=4.15), and items that can be requested by email/mail (M=4.88).

Table 5.2: Mean Ranks for Website Features

Feature	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Position Statements	1.72	1.05
Biography/About Section	2.31	1.18
Site Map	2.61	1.54
News Section	2.99	1.18
Multimedia Information	3.07	1.33
Search Engine Box	3.24	1.47
Logical Organization of Information	3.26	1.35
Recent News Section	3.35	1.20
Short Download Time	3.37	1.54
FAQ Section	3.49	1.22
Inviting Statements to Return	3.50	1.43
Calendar of Events	3.55	1.14
Little Reliance on Graphics	3.60	1.52
Opportunity to Comment	3.72	1.16
Major Links to Rest of Site	3.76	1.18
Donation Section	3.88	1.08
Bookmark Button	4.00	0.00
Opportunity to Sign up Email Updates	4.15	1.20
Items the can be Requested by Email/Mail	4.88	0.34

Hypothesis 1: Political engagement will be positively correlated with political information efficacy.

The first hypothesis involved examining the relationship between the dissertation’s two main dependent variables. The reliability of the scales was established above; however a more thorough discussion of the political information efficacy scale is important at this point. Previous scholars (e.g. Kaid & Tedesco, 2004) used a three-question scale, which in this study yielded an alpha of .781. Tedesco (2007) added a fourth item and in this case, the item increased the overall alpha to .835. The item included was the statement “If a friend asked me about the election, I feel I could have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.” To attempt to

increase the reliability and overall measurement of the scale, additional questions were added, for a total of seven. However, the alpha decreased to .667. To fully process the scale, questions were added one at a time to see if any of the three increased the overall alpha. This four-item scale (Tedesco, 2007) was then used in the rest of the analyses including PIE to ensure the highest level of reliability.

To test the hypothesis, a summative index was computed for both the political engagement and PIE scales. Before the computation, PIE was reversed coded to ensure both scale measures were parallel. The relationship between the two variables was then tested using a bivariate, Pearson correlation. Results indicated that there was a positive correlation (.555) and the result was statistically significant ($p=.01$). To ensure the result was upheld for each manipulation, correlations were run on both the high and low cells. Results indicated the high manipulation had a similar result (.589, $p=.01$). Additionally, the low manipulation (.538) indicated a similar correlation and was also found to be significant. All of these correlations indicate a positive, moderate relationship between PIE and political engagement. Therefore, the hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis 2: For those who are heavy users of emergent communication technology, the positive relationship between political engagement and political information efficacy will be higher than light users of emergent communication technology.

Heavy uses of Internet and specifically emergent communication technology were assessed in hypothesis two. Use of media was divided into traditional formats (e.g. radio, television) and Internet (e.g. websites, social networking). Once these categories were divided, they were subsequently divided into three usage groups (heavy, medium, light). The heavy and

light groups were then used for comparisons. There were two different media use questions, one for general political information gathering and one specifically for the 2010 election.

As found in the first hypothesis, the relationship between political engagement and political information efficacy was indeed found to be positive. The relationship between political engagement and political information efficacy is still significantly positive, for heavy users of Internet medium (.602, $p=.01$) and light users (.521, $p=.01$). Additionally, the same is true for heavy users (.596, $p=.01$) and light users (.465, $p=.01$) of social media specifically. These items were broken out of the overall Internet category and included Facebook and Twitter. The trend of a positive significant relationship also remains true for information-gathering during the 2010 election. Heavy users of Internet sources during the election posted a score of .494 ($p=.01$) and light users a .554 ($p=.01$). And again, for heavy users (.596, $p=.01$) and light users (.536, $p=.001$) of social media specifically.

Additional tests were run to determine if there was a significant difference in the mean scores of the heavy and light users for political engagement and political information efficacy. T-tests revealed only significant results for political engagement for all mean scores of those categories; Internet use ($p=.002$), social media use ($p=.01$), 2010 election Internet use ($p=.001$), and 2010 election social media use ($p=.001$). None of the political information efficacy means scores were significantly different. Therefore, the hypothesis was partially supported.

Hypothesis 3: Users exposed to high dialogic features and text-based interactivity features will have higher levels of political information efficacy (PIE) than those exposed to low dialogic features and text-based interactivity features.

To test the third hypothesis, the mean scores for PIE as well as low and high dialogic and interactivity features were calculated. For the high dialogic and interactivity manipulation, the mean score was 11.88 and the low manipulation mean score was 12.53. When looking at the face

value, it can be seen that the results do not support the hypothesis. To further measure the difference in the means, an independent samples T-test was run. Results indicated there is no significant difference between the means ($p=.698$). Thus, the hypothesis is not supported.

Table 5.3:
Summary Statistics for T-test Measuring Difference for PIE between High & Low Manipulations

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p-value</i>
High	184	12.53	3.27	0.698
Low	179	11.88	3.32	

Hypothesis 4: Users exposed to high dialogic features and text-based interactivity features will have higher levels of political engagement than those exposed to low dialogic features and text-based interactivity features.

For hypothesis four, mean scores were calculated for political engagement within the high and low dialogic and interactivity manipulations. Results indicated a mean of 11.33 for the high cells and 11.10 for the low cells. Though there is a slightly higher mean for the high manipulations, an independent samples T-test revealed the difference is not statistically significant ($p=.139$). Therefore, the hypothesis is not supported.

Table 5.4:
Summary Statistics for T-test Measuring Differences in Political Engagement between High & Low Manipulations

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>
High	180	11.10	3.96	0.139
Low	178	11.33	3.36	

Hypothesis 5: Heavy use of emergent communication technology formats to gather political information will be positively correlated with higher levels of political information efficacy than those with light use of emergent communication technology.

The process to divide media usage was discussed above. To test this hypothesis, the heavy and light groups were compared using an ANOVA. All four categories revealed significant positive relationship between the levels of political information efficacy: Internet use ($p=.001$), social media use ($p=.001$), 2010 election Internet use ($p=.001$), and 2010 social media use ($p=.001$). Results supported this hypothesis.

Table 5.5:
Summary Statistics for ANOVA Measuring Media Use and PIE

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>
Television	373	44.76	21.86	0.001
Internet	355	71.00	77.98	0.001
Social Networking	384	45.82	58.25	0.001
2010 Election Television	358	33.60	42.54	0.001
2010 Election Internet	356	41.04	20.08	0.001
2010 Election Social Networking	372	65.11	37.03	0.001

Hypothesis 6: High levels of media use, specifically intense Internet use, will be positively associated with higher levels of political engagement.

To test the final hypothesis, the heavy and light media use groups, for television, Internet, and social media use, were compared using an ANOVA. Results indicated a significant positive relationship for higher levels of political engagement. The categories were television use ($p=.03$), 2010 election television use ($p=.001$), Internet use ($p=.001$), 2010 election Internet use ($p=.001$), social media use ($p=.001$), and 2010 election social media use ($p=.001$). The hypothesis was also supported.

Table 5.6:
Summary Statistics for ANOVA Measuring Media Use & Political Engagement

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>P</i>
Television	373	44.76	21.86	0.03
Internet	355	71	77.98	0.001
Social Networking	384	45.82	58.25	0.001
2010 Election Television	358	33.6	42.54	0.001
2010 Election Internet	356	41.04	20.08	0.001
2010 Election Social Networking	372	65.11	37.03	0.001

The results from the experimental phase were mixed at best. Though the scales were all reliable, including the newest one to measure dialogic theory, there were several unsupported hypotheses. As this dissertation was the first to attempt to find predictive value in dialogic theory, it seems the results indicate more work is needed, especially when seeking results related to political information efficacy.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Dialogic theory provides a strategic framework from which organizations, and in this case political campaigns, can structure their communication plans. Previous researchers looked for presence of dialogic tenets and some of the perceptions of them, but this study examined how the theory might be used in predicting how these tenets might affect how certain constituent groups respond to their integration into political campaign communication. Specifically, the dissertation examines how young citizens perceive political candidates use of these tenets in emergent communication technology (ECT). Three of the most common formats (Facebook, Twitter, and blog) were selected based on interviews with political communicators and previous research on political campaign use of ECT. Though as discussed later in this chapter, the format was not an important variable, it did provide an accurate lens to view how political communicators ECT and how young citizens perceive that use. Instead, the tenets applied to those formats allowed for an advancement of the dialogic theory toward the predictive stage of theory development.

This dissertation was designed to provide a dual perspective on the use of emergent communication technology (ECT) in political campaign communication. Both campaign representatives (political communicators) and one of their constituent groups, young citizens, were studied for perspective on how each views the use of ECT. Political communicators from various local, state, and national-level campaigns provided insight on their strategy and how their individual campaigns had or planned to use ECT. Young citizens were then exposed to

manipulations based on those responses to see how they perceived candidate use of ECT. The theoretical approaches analyzed were dialogic theory, interactivity, political information efficacy, and political engagement. Focusing on young citizens provided a sample with heavy use of emergent communication technology (CIRCLE, 2006, 2008; Lenhart, et al., 2010; Pew, 2008, 2010) and thus an important population to advance research streams for all areas.

The first phase of the dissertation, interviews with political communicators, provided the foundation for the study's manipulations. Campaign communicators revealed the use of ECT is still an emerging issue within political communication, but provided some insight to how the future may look if development continues on its current path. None of the communicators denied the overall influence ECT had on campaign communication, both past and present, and many pointed to a future with a higher dependence on them for engaging with citizens. Unfortunately, political communicators also revealed their lack of emphasis on the young citizens group as a whole. This thought pattern explain why, historically, young citizens have a low level of political engagement and high level of cynicism. However, it may merely be a product of a cycle that has existed for decades.

Building on previous studies in dialogic and interactivity theories (e.g. Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent et al., 2009; Park & Reber, 2008; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007) this study was the first to combine interactivity as a concept to further explain the dialogic feedback loop. This addition to the framework aids researchers in the further distinction in the important aspects of the feedback loop and what is required to establish and maintain organization-public relationships. Studying political communication is arguably one of the most difficult areas to use dialogic theory because of how politicians lag behind in their overall use of dialogue in their communication plans (e.g.

Taylor & Kent, 2004). Finally, this study starts the long road to testing the theory's predictive nature, building a strong theoretical framework for the future research.

Dialogic Theory Contributions

As stated, this study is the first attempt to advance the dialogic theory to the predictive stage of development. By utilizing an experimental design, the study explored how high and low dialogic political candidate manipulations could predict perceptions by young citizens. Results indicated there was a significant difference between the high and low manipulations. Those participants exposed to low dialogic-interactivity cells were less likely to agree with statements regarding the connection and interaction with candidates. Additionally, this is the first known study to combine dialogic and interactivity constructs to further strengthen the structure of the dialogic framework. Text-based interactivity provided a strong foundation to build political campaign communication components. The three tools (Facebook, Twitter, blog) utilized in the manipulations did not have any significant effect on the overall perspective of respondents. Instead, they seemed to provide an ideal cross-section for comparison. As research (Pew, 2010) indicates, young citizens utilize each of these tools for various tasks including information gathering and communication.

Important to note, the creation of a scale to measure dialogic features is significant to the further development of theoretical measures for dialogic theory. By repurposing content analysis items (e.g. Kim et al., 2009; Park & Reber, 2008; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007) as statement items and combining with an existing interactivity scale (Yang & Lim, 2009; Burgoon et al., 2002) items, the researcher contributed to how dialogic theory is measured. The scale established strong reliability in tests both on individual manipulations and holistically. However, the scale should also be edited to incorporate questions that can be recoded to ensure respondents are

reading and answering each individual question. A between-subjects design might also prevent participants from suffering from fatigue. It is crucial to continue to test this scale to ensure its effectiveness when applied to other areas of research outside of political public relations.

Since the theory's development, the main research focus of dialogic research has been websites (e.g. Kent, 2008; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2003) and how organizations have created dialogue through those sites (e.g. Kent et al., 2003; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Taylor et al., 2001; Taylor & Kent, 2004). This dissertation also explored that issue by asking participants to rank the most important website features for political campaign sites. Results revealed the features as the following: position statements, biography, site map, news section, and multimedia information. Surprisingly missing are features such opportunity to comment or opportunity to sign up for email updates because of their interactive qualities. However, when considering political information-gathering and the pull method of most web sources, these features are intuitive in nature. All of these features are related to ease of interface and relevant information aspects of dialogic theory, which are the basis for any effective website.

On the other side of the scale, the lowest ranked features were major links to rest of site, donation section, bookmark button, opportunity to sign up for email updates, and items that can be requested by email/mail. When you consider most of the respondents also indicated they never donated to political campaigns under political engagement activities and email addresses are often used for donation databases, it seems logical that young citizens would resist these features on political sites. Two of the lowest ranked features were a surprise, the bookmark button and major links to the rest of the site seemed like helpful features for any Internet user. When considering them further, it may be a shift in how young citizens consume information or merely a byproduct of this individual study.

One of the features lowest ranked by young citizens was the donation section, indicating one of the major separations in the priorities between political candidates and young citizens. As most of the respondents indicated they never donated to a political campaign, this aspect of the website was not important to their overall experience and in some cases, may even be a turnoff to those who are trying to interact with candidates about the issues. Pointing to the information-heavy aspects of the website taking prominence in the ranking lists of young citizens, it is safe to conclude that they are more interested in finding information on the sites rather than donating. According to a 2011 Pew Internet and American Life report, only five percent of Republicans and six percent of Democratic likely voters donated money to a campaign. Though that figure is up from three percent in 2006, it still indicates the low number of people who actually donate money to a political campaign. The percentage is only slightly higher in presidential election, with 11 percent donating money during the 2008 campaign.

During the 2010 midterm election, campaigns continued the trend to incorporate various forms of emergent communication technology tools. Results from this study are in agreement with a previous study (Rhoten, 2009) that applied dialogic theory to official candidate webpages in the 2008 presidential election, revealing there was more one-way communication than the use of dialogic of approaches. These findings are also congruent with previous interactivity research (e.g. Williams et al., 2005; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006), where politicians resisted two-way interactive communication. Additionally, responses from political communicators were in line with Rhoten's (2009) findings and statement "that actual two-way communication appeared to be the lowest priority within each candidate's online usage" (p. 69).

Pearson (1989) discussed the idea of incorporating dialogue to provide ethical communication in public relations. Brunig, Dials, and Shirka (2007) brought up a distinction

between two-way communication, reaction, and interaction. Political communicators provided responses in their interviews akin to reactions rather than interactions that dialogic theory seeks and in place of ethical communication, authentic dialogue demands. They described their main goals in responding to most of their ECT tools was with the goal to correct factual errors, remind users of decorum, or provide thank you message for support. Respondents in the experiment indicated they felt a connection and comfort level with the ECT manipulations, which provides a foundation to build on. Dialogic communication began as a theory for public relations theorists to bring more legitimacy and ethical principles to a maligned industry. However, as the theory has developed, the features and core components lend themselves to the concept of authenticity as the focus.

Holba (2008) clarified and explicated Buber's three types of communication to include genuine dialogue, technical dialogue, and monologue. Political campaign communication seems to dominate in just two of these types. Most of the interviews exhibited the concept of monologue well in the process of posting information regarding the campaign's activities. However, there were frequent instances of technical dialogue in their use of factual corrections and acknowledgements of support. Unfortunately, few examples of genuine dialogue lead to the use of all dialogic features including risk and commitment to the cause. These require two dialogic features most campaigns have yet to meet, risk and commitment.

Previous political public relations use of the dialogic framework can be seen in Taylor and Kent's (2004) content analysis of congressional sites. This current study posited, just as Taylor and Kent (2004), that there was a high level of potential for dialogic principles to enhance the relationship between elected officials and their constituents. However, congruent with what that study found, interviews with political communicators revealed trends remained much the

same with one-way communication dominating the emergent communication technology landscape. Political communicators did not seem to believe the investment was worth risk, but results from the experiment indicated a significant difference between high and low dialogic when it came to the dialogic features, including the question asking whether the user felt connected to the candidate through that site. However, risk remains an important factor in providing genuine dialogue,

An important note for political communicators is experimental results revealed significant differences between high and low dialogic manipulations in how young citizens perceived the candidate. Those participants exposed to the high dialogic manipulation had a significantly more positive response to the dialogic and interactivity question scale. Two of the most interesting results were in the questions relating to the interaction comfort level and connection with candidate ideas through the sites. Both of those results indicated a level close to agreement in the high condition. This finding is important because it points to a positive trend toward more interaction, rather than less.

Political information efficacy

Political information efficacy (PIE) establishes the connection between an individual's general political efficacy and their confidence in their political knowledge (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007; Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005). Previous research explored political information efficacy in various contexts, results revealed support for the model, but a generally low level of PIE in young citizens. This study employed the measure to gauge how high and low dialogic-interactivity manipulations would have on the overall levels of PIE and explored the relationship between PIE and political engagement and various media usage, especially emergent communication technology. The researcher predicted the high dialogic-interactivity

manipulations would result in higher PIE scores due to the notion that more engagement with the candidate through these tools would provide a higher level of information and therefore, confidence in that connection with the candidate.

This study confirmed a four-item scale used in previous studies (e.g. Strait, 2008; Tedesco, 2007) was a more reliable measure than the original three-item scale. However, additional items regarding emergent communication technology components did not add to the overall reliability of the scale. The alpha for all seven items was approaching an adequate rating according to Garson (2006) and even a lower level of acceptability by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998), warranting their use in future studies to continue testing. A continued development of this scale is helpful to the process of examining how citizens gather and apply political knowledge.

Results revealed no significant differences between high and low dialogic-interactivity features in the levels of political information efficacy. In fact, levels were almost neutral and nearly equivalent for all participants in the study, including the control group. With that in mind, reasoning for this finding is most likely the fact that PIE levels are pre-determined and were already present in the individual participants. Therefore, the study would not change them due to exposure. Another possible cause for this result is ECT formats have altered the way we understand and use language (e.g. Buckingham, 2003). A shift to more social information consumption has occurred, where we are finding more information from our friends than we generally seek out individually. News feeds on Facebook and Twitter streams are two examples of how people within your social groups are sharing information. With that said, participants in this study were exposed to these pages without this component. Thus, leading to a less organic

flow of information and perhaps providing for lack of significant difference between high and low manipulations.

Furthermore, participants were dealing with a hypothetical candidate and timed exposure, so there was most likely not an investment in the candidate or the information presented.

Schudson (1998) posited that citizens using digital media in their citizenship decision-making process were only likely to act “when directly threatened” (p.). Therefore, young citizens who do not have a connection with a particular candidate would be less likely to engage with that candidate.

The only hypothesis supported at significant levels in regards to PIE was that greater use of emergent communication technology were related to higher levels of PIE. This finding is congruent with previous studies (e.g. Kahne, et al., 2010) stating that using various forms of ECT helps to strengthen young citizens’ understanding and participation in political life. With that said, this result provides valuable information regarding how young citizens gather their political information and how ECT may provide some of the idyllic changes to the political system many have ascribed to since the millennium election. However, it is important to remain within context to ensure no overstatement. More study is needed in how to differentiate the reasons and features of ECT that produces such a result.

Political engagement

Trends in political engagement research (e.g. Weber et al., 2003; De Zuniga, et al. 2009) indicate an overall positive trend relationship engagement and the use of emergent communication technology. Xenos and Moy (2007) pointed to the study of emergent technology as crucial to future theoretical development, especially concerning young citizens. Results of their study of more than 1200 National Election Surveys (NES) revealed Internet use was and

will play a significant role in political engagement. They found more than 40 percent of respondents reported finding political information online. Additionally, their “findings related to participation and talk point to a robust pattern of differential effects” (p. 714).

This dissertation went a step further by optimizing the ECT formats to include important dialogic and interactivity components. With these additional steps, the researcher predicted those high dialogic-interactivity manipulations would result in higher levels of political engagement. These predictions were made with the notion of advancing the concepts of political participation and engagement in the communication and relationships between politicians and young citizens.

In addition to PIE, political engagement proved to be a difficult area to garner significant results and supported hypotheses. High and low dialogic manipulations had no significant effects on political engagement results. Reasoning for this finding might be that political engagement activities are pre-determined prior to entering the study and the hypothetical situation did not provide any real influence over previously-held beliefs. These findings are in conflict with Delli-Carpini and Keeter’s (1997) study which found that those with more information were more engaged. With that said, this research provides some insight to Frères and Price’s (2007) results that moderate efficacy has little influence on engagement.

This study’s results are congruent with those the Keeter, et al. (2002) study finding that Internet use was positively associated with engagement. Also, Dutta-Bergman and Chung (2005) found a positive relationship between “the use of the Internet for political purposes and the more traditional forms of political participation” (p. 1). The current study supports this finding and one of the hypotheses, show that high levels of media use, specifically Internet use is positively associated with political engagement. This relationship also extends to social networking

specifically and the variables measured for Internet and social networking use in the 2010 election.

Another of this study's hypotheses sought to confirm a positive relationship between political information efficacy and political engagement. The logic is that those who have a higher level of confidence in their political knowledge (PIE) will have a higher level of engagement in the political system, participating in various activities including voting and campaigning for candidate. Kenski, Jamieson, Pasek, and Romer (2006) completed a survey of 1500 young citizens, finding that greater use of media would increase their amount of engagement. This study confirmed a positive relationship between political engagement and political information efficacy. The positive, moderate relationship extends to all treatments with a slightly higher correlation in the high dialogic/interactivity condition.

An important extension of this study is in seeking to increase the strength of the relationship through the examination of media literacy research. A study by Kahne, Feezell, and Lee (2010) questioned whether more information or different formats were really the answer if young people did not fully comprehend or analyze the information they had at their disposal. With that said, they made the argument through other studies (e.g. Mihailidis, 2009; Hagittai & Walejko, 2008), for digital media literacy education in schools. In fact, Mihailidis (2009) found in a quasi-experiment that those enrolled in a media literacy course had increased level of overall comprehension, evaluation, and processing of media messages.

Another area of interest related to these findings is in how young citizens gather their information. According to a 2011 Pew study found that emergent communication technology use is "deeply embedded in group life," with citizens getting their information through various online

sources. One of the most relevant findings from that study was that 53 percent of people surveyed believed the Internet played a major role in getting a candidate elected to office.

When you combine this trend with information overload present today in the saturated media landscape, there is an argument for providing young citizens with more tools to weed through all of it. Furthermore, Hagittai and Walejko (2008) argued the gap between digital media use and participation could be closed using digital media literacy education. The results from this study do not necessarily point to this particular solution, but it may be an avenue to explore in future research.

One of the most interesting findings is the fact that none of the three tools (Facebook, Twitter, blog) used in the manipulations were significantly preferred over the others. The even spread of the preference provides some insight into how politicians should value all different tools. Political communicators frequently mentioned Facebook as a crucial social media tool to use. However, it would seem, at least with young citizens, it is not significantly more important or relevant than the other tools. This division also included those in the control group who were asked the question in reference to more general political information-gathering.

Limitations and Future Research

Though it was appropriate and advantageous to sample from a college campus population, the restrictive sample from one university campus restricts a more holistic perspective of young citizen nationwide. Future research should include multiple campus and attempt to recruit those individuals from the higher end of the age group to produce a more accurate picture of the demographic group (18-29). Additionally, it is important to recruit from non-college student populations to incorporate various socio-economic perspectives.

Producing an authentic social media experience is difficult to do when you are producing a hypothetical candidate with hypothetical supporters. Thus, this situation caused for some level of difference in what we would find in an organic social media environment. Authenticity and transparency are hallmarks to a successful experience for both the organization and public. The necessary deception involved in this experiment allowed for a certain level of cynicism in the participant responses. In future studies, researchers should attempt to monitor an actual candidate's online presence or potentially partner with a political communication (past or present) to establish a more authentic experience for participants.

Future research should further test the scale produced to test dialogic components, especially surrounding the feedback loop aspects. Dialogic theory can only advance if those features continue to be honed and measured accurately. Research should move past text-based interactivity to more human interaction aspects in their manipulations to ensure a variety in how interactivity is presented. Different tools should also be tested as they emerge to determine their effectiveness. One of the advantages to studying emergent communication technology is the constant flow of new tools and formats to examine.

Additional future research should attempt to find why there is currently a negative relationship between political information efficacy and political engagement. Using a long term approach to the study, where an individual can become more engaged with a candidate over time. The addition of media literacy variables may lead to a clearer picture of how young citizens gather, analyze, and subsequently apply their political knowledge.

Conclusions

Overall, the study revealed mixed results on all theories. Findings revealed some inconsistencies. However, this dissertation also added some knowledge and strength to both main

theories, dialogic and interactivity. This dissertation also provided valuable first-hand knowledge of how political communicators perceive campaign communication strategy, a research avenue lacking depth and breadth. By combining the theories to strength the overarching framework, the study moves understanding of how dialogic theory might provide important perspective for those seeking to use ECT formats effectively. The current study also posits new questions for how researchers might explore the development of political campaign communication and more generally political public relations strategies.

Additionally, this study has paved the way for a new research stream in dialogic, reaching past content analyses and surveys to build the theory into a predictive measure for relationships between organizations and publics. The dynamic nature of emergent communication technology often leaves researchers with more questions than answers and this dissertation followed with that trend. Research into these areas should continue in the hopes that we will find answers for the concerns we hold as Americans in how we relate to our political system.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

My name is Kristin English and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. I have arranged this interview as part of my dissertation research into the relationships between politicians and political organizations with young citizens. This interview is set up to explore how your office sees the role of young citizens as well as any current or potential role social media plays within your communication. It should last about one to two hours. Do I have your permission to record? Please note that if at any time you wish to stop recording, I can do so. Do you have any questions before we get started?

- 1) Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?
- 2) How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?
- 3) What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?
- 4) What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?
- 5) Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often?
- 6) Why do you like these tools for political use?
- 7) Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?
- 8) How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?
- 9) How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?
- 10) How did the campaign utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

- 11) Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?
- 12) Since young citizens are often those who use these outlets most often to gather political information, do you have any specific policies regarding the use of social media with this public?
- 13) What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?
- 14) Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

Appendix 2: Job Titles for Interviewees

Republican

Communications Associate for a Republican Senate Campaign

Deputy Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office – 1

Deputy Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office – 2

Deputy Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office – 3

Republican Political Consultant – VA 1

Republican Political Consultant – VA 2

Republican Political Consultant – NC

Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office – 1

Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office – 2

Republican Secretary of State Candidate

Director of Communications for Republican Senator – 1

Director of Communications for Republican Senator – 2

Director of Online Communications for Republican House Representative – 1

Director of Online Communications for Republican House Representative – 1

Director of New Media for Republican House Representative

Online Communications Director for Republican House Representative

Democrat

Youth Campaign Director for a National Democratic Campaign

Deputy Press Secretary for Democratic Senate Office – 1

Deputy Press Secretary for Democratic Senate Office – 2

Democratic Political Consultant – VA 1

Democratic Political Consultant – VA 2

National Democratic Political Consultant

Democratic Candidate for Commissioner

Communications Director for Democratic Representative – 1

Communications Director for Democratic Representative – 2

Director of Communications for Democratic Senator – 1

Director of Communications for Democratic Senator – 2

Press Secretary for Democratic Senate Office – 1

Press Secretary for Democratic Senate Office – 2

Communications Associate for a Democratic Senate Campaign

Note: All names were kept confidential to protect those who were involved in the research. All protocol adhered to IRB regulations.

Appendix 3: Posttest Survey Protocol

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Strongly agree Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral/No Opinion Somewhat Disagree Disagree
Strongly disagree

The site downloaded quickly.

The information was easy to find.

I was interested in viewing the previous site.

I am likely to leave a comment if I were a regular visitor to this site.

I feel comfortable with interacting with the candidate through this site.

I feel connected to the candidate's ideas and thoughts through this site.

I would post a link to this site from my website or blog if I have/had one.

Please indicate which of the following website features you feel are important on a political site.

news section
multimedia information
position statements
donation section
biography/about section
site map
major links to rest of site
search engine box
little reliance on graphics
short download time
logical organization of information
inviting statements to return
recent news section
FAQ section
bookmark button
calendar of events
items that can be requested by email/mail
opportunity to comment
opportunity to sign up for e-mail updates
Other (Please specify):

Please rank your top 5 important website features (1-most important).

news section
multimedia information
position statements
donation section
biography/about section
site map
major links to rest of site
search engine box
little reliance on graphics
short download time
logical organization of information
inviting statements to return
recent news section
FAQ section
bookmark button
calendar of events
items that can be requested by email/mail
opportunity to comment
opportunity to sign up for e-mail updates
Other (Please specify):

Which 5 of the following website features did the previous site use most effectively?

news section
multimedia information
position statements
donation section
biography/about section
site map
major links to rest of site
search engine box
little reliance on graphics
short download time
logical organization of information
inviting statements to return
recent news section
FAQ section
bookmark button
calendar of events
items that can be requested by email/mail
opportunity to comment
opportunity to sign up for e-mail updates
Other (Please specify):

How many minutes a day do you access the following sources to get news or information about the politics and government?

Newspaper
Standard Radio
Satellite Radio
Internet Radio (strictly online)
Cable Television (i.e. FOXNews, CNN)
Network Television (i.e. ABC, NBC, CBS)
Local news
Issue-oriented websites
State or local government websites
Political candidate websites
Alternative news organizations (i.e. NewsMax.com, AlterNet.org)
International news organization (i.e. BBC)
Radio news organization (NPR, RadioAmerica, Air America)
News satire websites (i.e. The Onion, The Daily Show)
Commentary, experience, or issues (online news group, website or blog)
Social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, MySpace)
Twitter
Other (Please specify):

How many minutes a day do you access the following sources to get news or information about the 2010 election?

Newspaper
Standard Radio
Satellite Radio
Internet Radio (strictly online)
Cable Television (i.e. FOXNews, CNN)
Network Television (i.e. ABC, NBC, CBS)
Local news
Issue-oriented websites
State or local government websites
Political candidate websites
Alternative news organizations (i.e. NewsMax.com, AlterNet.org)
International news organization (i.e. BBC)
Radio news organization (NPR, RadioAmerica, Air America)
News satire websites (i.e. The Onion, The Daily Show)
Commentary, experience, or issues (online news group, website or blog)
Social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, MySpace)
Twitter
Other (Please specify):

Did you ever go online to get news or information about the 2010 election?

Yes

No

Don't Know

If you answered yes, how often did you go online to get news about the election?

1 Never, 2 Not very often, 3 Sometimes, 4 Most of the time, 5 All the time

Did you communicate with others online about politics, the campaign or the 2010 elections using the Internet, whether by email, text messaging, social networking site, online forum or blog?

1 Never, 2 Not very often, 3 Sometimes, 4 Most of the time, 5 All the time

If yes, how often did you go communicate with others online about politics, the campaigns or the 2010 elections?

1 Never, 2 Not very often, 3 Sometimes, 4 Most of the time, 5 All the time

How many hours do you spend online in an average week?

How many hours do you spend online seeking political information in an average week?

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral/No Opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

I am likely to participate in response to the communication I just viewed.

I am likely to engage online if all political communication was presented the way I viewed.

Emergent technology formats (i.e. Twitter, blogs, Facebook) influence my views of political issues, parties, and candidates.

I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics.

I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues facing our country.

If a friend asked me about the election, I feel I could have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.

Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

One cannot always trust what politicians say.

One can be confident that politicians will do the right thing.

Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.

One never knows what politicians really think.

Do you intend to vote in the 2010 election?

Yes

No

Don't Know

If you do not intend for vote, why?

Not eligible

Not registered

Don't know how to

Not interested

Don't like candidates or issues

Away from home

Other (Please Specify):

How many previous elections have you voted in?

How often did you participate in the following political activities within the past year?

1 Never, 2 Not very often, 3 Sometimes, 4 Most of the time, 5 All the time

Volunteer

Campaign for candidate

Contact elected officials
Attend political rally
Donate money to a campaign
Post political or campaign material online
Post comments or visual material about politics on the Web
Political use of social networking
None
Other (Please Specify):

Please answer the next five questions to the best of your abilities.

How many justices serve on the Supreme Court?

5
7
9
10

Which party holds the most seats in the House of Representatives?

Republican
Green
Moderate
Democrat

Which of the following individuals is the Vice President?

Dick Cheney
Donald Rumsfeld
Joe Biden
Rahm Emanuel

What position does Hillary Clinton hold?

Secretary of State
Senate Majority Leader
Secretary of the Navy
House Minority Leader
The first 10 Amendments of the U.S. Constitution are identified as:

Bill of Rights
Declaration of Independence
Federalist Papers

Magna Carta

Gender: Male Female

Age:

Major:

Level of education:

Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Graduate student
Other (Please specify):

Race:

Caucasian
African American
Latino/Hispanic
Asian
Pacific Islander
Native American
Mixed Race
Other (Please specify):

Political identification:

Republican
Democrat
Independent
Green
Reform
Libertarian
Socialist
Communist
Constitution
Other (Please specify):

How would you describe your political views?

Very liberal, liberal, moderate liberal, centrist/independent, moderate conservative, conservative,
very conservative

Appendix 4: Interview Transcripts

Press Secretary for a Republican Senate Office 1

Let's start with who do you see as your major constituent groups?

Anyone within our district.

Ok, how often do you meet with groups who would fit within the young citizen (under 30) group?

Not often, some college campuses and groups during the election season.

Does the campaign focus any of their communication toward young citizens?

Not really. We don't typically invest a large portion of our time and effort on a group that we may get thirty percent participation from...especially when you look at those over the age of 50 who are out there in numbers above seventy percent in some cases.

What is your definition of emergent technology and/or social media?

We think of social media as another outlet. It is useful in providing us with access to other niches of the population that we can directly communicate with. Social media is a new set of speakers for us to amplify our messages.

What tools are you currently aware of?

Facebook, Twitter, You Cut, YouTube...blogs.

Which tools do you personally know how to use?

My team does, but I do not. I follow some blogs.

Does your office answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent receive a response?

My team would have those numbers. [off the record – 10 min]

How do you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

Just as we do any other constituent. They are communicating how they feel comfortable and we welcome that.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

To provide another outlet. We have many people within our districts who use these formats and it's important we include them.

Does your office or organization utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

Yes, but I would have to get back to you on which ones.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office or organization? If so, what are they?

Again, I will have to get back to you.

Can we turn off the recording?

Yes, sure. [recording stopped]

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Not being able to understand how to best use it. We have accounts and feeds and stuff, but we're not sure how to get it making us money. We get some information...but we...can't seem to get it to give us any more than that. The campaign needs to examine how to best to advantage of the outlet.

Can you indicate one or more examples of how social media has been successful?

None come to mind.

Thank you for your time today.

Deputy Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office 1

Me: Let's start off with who you see as your major constituent groups?

B: Related to social media?

Me: Well, more broadly & yes, those for social media.

B: Most of our constituent groups are 45 and older, but we focus social media efforts on those who are 18-45.

Me: How often do you meet with groups who would fit within the young citizen (under 30) group?

I would say once a week or once every two weeks. It depends on what's going on. With budget cuts affecting education, we have been meeting with a lot of young citizens.

Me: Great, now moving onto to social media...what is your definition of emergent technology and/or social media?

Interesting question...my personal view or the office's?

Me: I would say both.

Well, personally, I see social media as a place for people to meet and discuss various issues and to interact on level, which is close to in-person. In the office, we strive for that, but I think it is more of another place to put out information. We also like to use it to dispel rumors and correct misperceptions.

...I guess you would call it a widget. And it's a platform where people can share their ideas, vote on them and make comments on them. So it's like share your ideas. Other companies use it their support pages or they also use it just to get new ideas. Barack Obama used it when he first was elected to get people to say what they want him to work on. There was a bit of controversy there because the legalization of marijuana became the number one. That's what happens. The things

that get the most attention and votes, they rise to number one. So that actually became the number one priority based on what people were saying.

Wow, that could become an issue.

The good thing is that there are moderation tools you can use.

That was actually my next question, whether or not there was actually any way to moderating that conversation.

In general in social media?

How do you handle that process? And if it's different for different tools, you can expand on that.

It is for different tools. For twitter, it's not as much of a problem because if someone posts something and it's only broadcast to people following them. But on Facebook, you do find people who are trolls and they pretty much just try to destroy everything you say or they're against everything you say...especially the thing you run into in politics, people will post I don't agree with you for voting this way or you did this and this. A lot of times, people don't have their facts straight and it's not the truth. So then you're having something people think is factually that's actually not being broadcast. And when it's on your own Facebook fan page, that could be a problem. So a lot of these people...we do have to block people because there's just no way to deal with them. Something interesting though that happens, you've seen examples of someone will say something negative, but then other people will come to our defense.

Right, right. So you'll actually...you won't even really have to respond as sort of an official channel, but your supporters will come in.

Yea, and if something's really wrong or someone has a question that someone really needs to have answered, we'll have a staff member go on and say I work for [taken out for anonymity]

and this is how he voted...or someone else will say, well you really need to support whatever tax, or the fair tax or whatever. You need to vote against this. We'll actually say, this is so-and-so from Senator [taken out for anonymity] office, he's actually a co-sponsor of this bill. So things like that. And we'll link them to some information.

Now, in sort of that vein, how often...well, I guess, does the answer communication through this different channels. And what percent of those communications do you think would receive a response?

Well, Twitter right now we're not at the phase to really start responding and interacting as much as we'd like to. So, on that one you're probably not going to see a response, we'll re-tweet people, but I mean that's very...that's like 1 percent. On Facebook, we really just broadcast information and we interact when we feel like we have to, but we try not to make it a platform for people to just ask questions and then have to receive an answer because when you put an answer out there publicly, it has to be absolutely perfect and it's just impossible to have the staff to make every single response absolutely perfect.

So that's Facebook, Twitter...Do you...What, I guess compared to the letters and e-mails that the office gets, is it a significantly lower percent of response?

Yes, I would say that.

How do you view your constituents who use various social media tools as a means to reach you? How do you view those citizens?

That's a good question.

And again, this may be different compared to using the different tools.

I mean it just depends. I mean you have people that are just nuts. I shouldn't say that.

No, I mean, there's wacky people out there.

Some people it's annoying when people are like just...you like to hear great comments and even if it's critical and it's respectful, then that's great. You still just want to hear what people have to say. As long as people are polite and people are respectful then I think it's great. The people who just, they don't like you but they're on your page trying to just wreak havoc, I mean it's really annoying.

So it really comes down to the approach that a particular constituent takes and this could be very similar to you know rants people send in letter form. So it sounds like it really does depend on the approach that someone takes, rather than the actual communication medium.

Um, yes, I would say so. And if they're ranting and they're being negative in a letter. They only people who see that really are the staffer, [taken out for anonymity], and whoever else reads them. But when it comes to like social media, everyone sees that person's rant and their crazy whatever. Whatever you want to call it.

Right, ok. The extremists of the group one way or the other. How do you...and this is sort of a larger, almost, can be thought of as a long-term question but how do you perceive the function of social media within the political system?

I think it has a lot of really great points because it allows you to reach out to your constituents and kind of meet them at their level. Not meet them at their own level, but meet them at medium that's convenient for them. And they can get information. If they're already on Facebook. The fact that you can reach them on Facebook and give them updates in a medium that they're already using for other things in their lives. It reaches people who might not usually care what you're doing day-to-day. They might care about politics in general, but they don't...it gets them a little more involved. More so than they ever even imagined. That's really cool. It does on the

other hand, it does create more problems...well not problems, but more work for a staff and problems come up that you would not have had to deal with without it, using more traditional forms of communication. And also like I said, there's the issue of people, there's a lot of misinformation out there. So that's a problem. I think it's great. It lets you see what people are thinking. You can see kind of the stream of consciousness of your supporters and people who care about what you're doing. It's like spying...oh my, I shouldn't say that.

Well, I mean it is a unique way that people put themselves out there in a certain way and it can also be a way that you can mine a little bit of data that you wouldn't be able to get in another way.

B: Yup, exactly.

The first part of this question is that yes, you do work with social media formats....how does that work with traditional formats that you utilize? How do you pair social media in your overall communication plan?

Well, I mean it is in our overall communication plan. We look at our overall strategy to see how we can use our social media strategy. The overall comes first, but...I mean we'll post interviews when he's going to be on the radio or TV. Post his different news articles. It kind of integrates both of them. Especially for Facebook.

So all of the messages, across all of the channels are typically coordinated whether it's social media or traditional media?

[recording turned off]

Any examples you can note?

Nothing comes to mind.

Thank you for your time today.

Deputy Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office 2

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

More over the age of 30-40, not a whole lot around college age or what you have referenced as young citizens.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

We don't typically, but we do take meetings at colleges and universities.

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

It's another broadcast outlet for use. We use it to get the same stories we want out in the traditional media to those who are reading their news through social media.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

We have a Facebook page and a Twitter page.

Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often?

I don't use social media.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

[redacted by request]

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

They are the same as other people just using a different format of communication.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

It's just part of the natural progression. We had advertising, radio, television, not we have Internet and social media. We'll have all sorts of ways of communicating.

How did the campaign utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

[redacted by request]

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

We don't have the time or the money to really devote the true attention social media deserves.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

None really come to mind. We can talk to the rest of the team.

Deputy Press Secretary for Republican Senate Office 3

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

Hmm...that depends. We have lots of people within our constituency.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

Maybe once a week...I would have to check the schedule and records. We do a lot of colleges and universities during campaign season.

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

It's mainly another tool for us to use. We have various uses including research, engagement, but also more outlets.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

We have accounts with several different tools...I think Facebook, Twitter and blogs are the best examples of what we use.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

[redacted by request]

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

Not much different.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

It's a part of the system. It's helpful to our overall campaign plan to have, but we have yet to harness it for sure.

How did the campaign utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

[recorder malfunction]

Republican Political Consultant – VA 1

Who do you see as your major constituent groups?

Primarily, we deal with state-level, small town and city elections. The constituents are constrained to that particular geographic area.

How often do you advise candidates to meet with groups who would fit within the young citizen (under 30) group?

It depends on the individual community/election. If there is a college or university in the area, we definitely plan to meet with young citizens about once a week, maybe more during the hot phase of the campaign or when we're recruiting.

What is your definition of emergent technology and/or social media?

That's a tough one. When I think about social media, I consider it to be an interactive set of tools used to do more than one-way communication. We look at them as a set of tools we have at our disposal.

What tools are you currently aware of, for use in political campaigns?

We've used blogs, Facebook, MySpace to a certain extent, some message boards, Google Analytics...there's also YouCut and YouTube, Meetup groups. We are also constantly exploring the use of things like tumblr, mobile apps and other mobile functions.

Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often?

It depends on individual clients, but we typically have them tell us what they are thinking and then we go from there. For example, we will often introduce the most popular examples such as Facebook and Twitter, and in some cases we need to bring in some of the less popular tools. We also base their involvement on how much they are willing to invest in human capital. Oh, but

you asked me personally...right sorry about that. Personally, I use all of the tools at some point to try them, but on every day basis, I use Facebook, Twitter, a personal and company blog, RSS feeds, Google Analytics, and several other tools.

Do the campaigns you work with answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent receive a response?

It depends on the candidate. Each one has a different set of expectations when it comes to using social media. None of them consider it as a primary tool, but they do find it useful in communicating smaller details. They don't really see the big picture.

How do they view their constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

This also depends on the individual candidate or campaign. We have a lot of clients that come in excited about using social media and then they get into it and get overwhelmed. There are also those people that come in completely...well, let's say skeptical and then they get on board with what social media has to offer. I think it's important to explain to them that these are the forms of communication their constituents are already using and that usually helps the conversation move along. Though, we have had client we have had to dissolve a relationship with because they continued to go against our advice in relation to social media.

How do perceive the function of social media in the political system?

My personal opinion is that social media has the potential to really influence how politicians communicate...if used effectively. You could call me a social media evangelist. I push it to the campaigns whenever I consult, saying that it should at least be part of the communication strategy. There have been moments in the last 10 years that have really shaped this process and I can't wait to keep seeing its integration. It provides some intangible advantages to those candidates who use it and some real disadvantages to those who ignore it or choose not to

understand it. Those are the moments that shape what we see in the political system...the moments like Allen's idiocy where you completely transform a campaign with one off-handed statement. However, it's important to make the appropriate connections and interpret those situations for clients. It is not just about that statement, but how that statement relates to his wearing a lapel pin to his policies, etc. This is what social media is crucial at...revealing the true, or the real person behind the candidacy...good or bad.

Does your firm utilize emergent technology and/or social media in your clients' overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

This is up to the individual client. We tend to direct each candidate in a specific way depending on their preferences, goals and objectives.

Are there any specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your clients? If so, what are they?

Whenever we set up the tools, before we do any work on the site or profile, we sit down and think about the goals and objectives related to how we want to use the tools. The client typically provides direction and we follow it with our own suggestions. We always advise a structured process of moderation and an understanding of who should be the point people in charge of responses if they are required.

What would say is the biggest obstacle for the use of social media?

The biggest obstacle would have to be willingness to invest some of the human capital into the process. They say they want a blog or Facebook page, but they don't have the people to handle the updates and comment moderation.

Thank you for your time today.

Republican Political Consultant – VA 2

How often do you think candidates should meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

They should meet with all of their constituents on a regular basis. It's tough to say exactly what that means for each individual campaign.

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

It is a unique entity that has yet seen its full potential. There are moments of greatness we've seen from social media and also great failure. Politicians see social media in many cases as an enemy...one they have to fight with to remain in control of...they don't truly understand how to use it, but we consultants are working on that.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

There are too many to count, but the most common are email, Twitter, Facebook, various other social networks, blogs, forums, YouTube...and on and on. Facebook is probably most popular.

Do you advise campaigns answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent of a response?

Well I advise they do what they can. Many respond to all email which is a good start, but that system needs to be applied to social media for a more holistic approach to how people view it. It is tough to put a percentage on it because much of it will fall into categories and a response can be spread over those people that fall into the same category.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

Social media is truly a game changer...we have times, places, people and tools that shape how political campaigns function and social media has come in and completely changed all of that for candidates. They can no longer do what they want, how they want and not answer for it. There

are more people showing the true sides of politicians for the better through social media. The key now is to truly harness the power of the people through its use.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

That would depend on an individual campaign. [off the record – 18 min]

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Probably the commitment of people. If campaigns want to see the benefits of social media, they have to be willing to give up the people on the campaign to help them get there. They have to also give up some of their control...most are not willing to walk the line even a little.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

I can give you some off the record.

Thank you.

Republican Political Consultant – NC

[recorder malfunction – 15 min]

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

I think the most important ones are the popular ones...Facebook, Twitter, blogs, social networking sites, YouTube, Flickr.

Do campaigns generally answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

Most do not because of manpower issues, but many read and listen to the information that's provided them through these various tools. I can't put a percentage on it, but there are some campaigns that are around 10 percent or so. [redacted because of identification]

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

I see it as a true asset to politicians and campaigns. It provides a closeness and engagement not seen in any other types of media or previous communication available.

How do you advise campaigns utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

Typically we start out with their goals and objectives for what they hope to accomplish with those particular tools, then we move on to logistics and financial aspects to ensure there is a solid commitment. It's important that they don't just come to us and say..."we want a Facebook page." They have to have some level of knowledge and understanding about what that means and how they will manage it once we have helped them put it together.

Do you suggest specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for the office/campaign? If so, what are they?

These are difficult to define without thinking about a particular campaign, can we turn off the recording to discuss them.

Can I use the general aspect of what you speak about without attributing to any one particular campaign?

Yes, sure that's fine.

[recording stopped for 17 min]

What is the biggest obstacle for the use of these tools?

One of the main aspects we see issues with are focused on how a campaign understands the entirety of the commitment to using social media...in the number of people & level of engagement necessary to do it right. Ideally, we ask for some sort of commitment from a campaign to ensure we are not wasting time with them as a client, but that doesn't always work out...it depends on the person in charge and the candidate quite honestly. They need to have senior management on board to really implement some worthwhile.

I didn't get this at the beginning because of a recorder mishap, but can you tell me about your definition of social media again.

I think it's a mindset. It comes down to how people are communicating, gathering information, and sharing that information. There is a sense of belonging to a particular social group and within that group, you feel the need to share and discuss various topics. Many people belong to these groups and provide the real foundation of how social media functions.

Thank you for your time.

Republican Secretary of State Candidate

Who do you see as your major constituent groups?

Those within the state of [redacted]. We include everyone whether or voting age or not.

How often do you meet with groups who would fit within the young citizen (under 30) group?

We don't really. I have received a couple of requests to speak, but we were unable to attend those events.

What is your definition of emergent technology and/or social media?

I guess it would be another site for us to publish. We have many different ways of communicating and that is it.

What tools are you currently aware of?

Not many...Facebook, Twitter...blogs. I guess I shouldn't say that, but it's true. A lot of people make a big deal about social media tools, but they don't bring in the money or committed supporters I have over the years through go old-fashioned campaigning and networking.

Which tools do you personally know how to use?

I don't really use any of them.

Does your office answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent receive a response?

I'm not aware of those numbers. I know we have a Facebook page. I know we respond to all of our emails [off the record – 12 min].

How do perceive the function of social media in the political system?

Not sure the importance will last long enough to have a real strong function within the political system. We have seen some isolated instance where social media has found a niche for a candidate or a cause, but there is no overall system change because of one simple media type. There are a lot of people who want to make a bigger deal of social media than it actually is.

Does your office or organization utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

We follow a few sites with the idea that it might be helpful in our research plans, but we do not have any active social media accounts.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office or organization? If so, what are they?

Can we turn off the recording?

Yes, sure. [Recording stopped]

End of transcript

Director of Communications for Republican Senator 1

Let's start with who are the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

Well that is far-reaching...typically we stay within the start of [redacted] to ensure we are getting to the people who will vote for [redacted].

What about within those particular groups?

Oh you mean specific groupings?

Yes.

Ok, well we divide into different demographic groups like seniors, middle age, sometimes young people...we also use divisions based on organizations, unions, etc.s

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

It is mainly another tools we can use to help us communicate with our constituents and other citizens.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Mostly Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube...

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

About 10% of the time. Email messages are always responded to. We're trying to find a way to adapt that process for the social media process.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

We view them as active participants in the campaign. They are often part of how we find out information we might not have otherwise. I enjoy looking through comments, wall posts and various other communications to see what people are saying and doing. They can be our greatest advocates and cheerleaders, it gives us strength and purpose in a lot of cases.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

As a tool, helpful to overall messaging. We talk about how it might influence to future more and use examples of how not to do it to learn lessons.

How did the campaign utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

[redacted by request]

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

[redacted by request]

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

A lot of it has to do with not having enough people to help with the process of monitoring and responding. So that's why we really don't have the engagement aspect down at all.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

[redacted because of identification]

Director of Communications for Republican Senator 2

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

Most of our constituents are within our state obviously, but we also have a responsibility to various demographic groups. Most of our voting public is between 30 and 65.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

About twice a month...maybe more during campaign season.

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

Interesting question. Personally, I think social media is a transformation of how we communicate with one another as well as gather information. There is a source that is no longer specifically linked to an author or media or other type of source, much of our information we choose to consume is through what our friends and followers post on the various sites.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, Foursquare, You Cut...I think those are the major ones. I know Obama tapped into several other types, but Congressional campaigns are not likely to do something like that unless there is a really good reason to do so.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

We really only respond, and this is going to sound terrible...when we feel like we need to intervene due to a problem or negativity in the conversation or to correct a factual error. Most engagement is not about that, it's about letting them know we're listening. Sometimes we'll also post thank you messages for our supporters...especially during a heavy donation time frame or even when we are seeking support for an important issue.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

No real difference there. It is more difficult to separate between those who are actually you constituents and those who are from out of state or even out of the country in a few cases, but it is great to have such a diverse audience.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

I would say it has provided some serious challenges and triumphs depending on who you talk to. Social media has given us great tools, interesting perspectives, and ways to get in touch with folks we wouldn't be able to otherwise.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

Can we talk about these off the record?

Sure, let's move on...Since young citizens are often those who use these outlets most often to gather political information, do you have any specific policies regarding the use of social media with this public?

Not really...we treat social media as a more holistic strategy, rather than dividing it into various demographic groups.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

I guess time is our biggest enemy. We didn't eliminate anything when we added social media, so the workload on us media folks is already at a crazy high level, especially during the campaign season that it can be difficult to keep up with. I will tell you that if nothing else, we are listening and will continue to do that no matter what happens with our social media plan.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

I think of Obama...probably like most people though. There are some great republicans and tea party folks who are doing great things as well. Can we talk about those specific individuals off the record?

Yes, that would be great.

Thank you.

Director of Online Communications for Republican House Representative 1

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

Mostly those between the ages of 30 and 60. We also talk to various organizations, unions, etc.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

About once a month.

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

I think social media is definitely a tool for campaigns to utilize, but I would also describe it as a different way of thinking about information exchange.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

The top tools being used are Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, You Cut, maybe tumblr and Foursquare.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

I would say about 10-20% of the time. We always respond to our email messages and contact form messages.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

Not differently.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

Like I said earlier, it is a tool. I think we can inflate it to be more, but most don't see it that way. I'm an optimist and I think it is amazing and wonderful and all positive adjectives, but I am just lucky my boss thinks that as well. [redacted] lets me do what I think is best and doesn't try to interfere too much with my plans.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

We do, but let's talk about those at the end because I can better show some material than tell you about it. Also, it is very specific to our campaign, so I do not want that part recorded.

Ok, that's fine. Moving on, what is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Mostly it's small-minded thinking or people who don't really understand what is important about social media. Also, we have a resources problem, with people more so than financial, but it is still a problem with fight often. I am trying to figure out some sort of sharing system, but it's going to take some time.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

I can give some of those as well of the recorder.

Thank you.

Director of Online Communications for Republican House Representative 2

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

Obviously those within my own district, but more so those between the ages of 30-60.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

Maybe once or twice a month.

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

Social media is a format by which people not only consume and gather information, but they also share that information with their social groups, whomever they are. The strongest aspect of social media comes in who is recommending or sharing that information...whether it be an article or picture or video, etc.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

We use Facebook, Twitter, and a blog primarily, but we also have several other accounts including Foursquare, tumblr, flickr, and YouTube.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

That's a great questions. We typically answer all of our emails and contact form messages. I would say we respond to about 10, maybe 20 percent of the other types of social media. We've started a one day of the week feature where we will ask a question and have some time to engage with people on Twitter and Facebook, but that's about all we can spare at this point.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

We view them as active participants in the campaign. We definitely try to get them to be assets to the campaign in various ways by getting the word out over social media.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

It has definitely been a game changer. I came into this career at a very opportune time where I can take full advantage of what's going on. From here on out, no political candidate that wants to win will be able to deny the power of social media and those who use it will be much better for it.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

We have a comment policy and a specific response process for when someone posts something positive and especially negative. There are several key players that interchange as being the point person for a response. Typically we run a response with 6-12 hours, but sometimes we do it earlier or later depending on when and who is in charge.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

For most campaigns it has to do with manpower and time...for us it is being as strategic as possible in selecting which of the social media outlets we're going after. We have a good strategy for approaching the process and we're in line with the more advanced campaigns when it comes to the types of tools we're using.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

Let's talk about them without the recorder, too many identifying aspects.

Thank you.

Democratic Political Consultant – VA 1

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during a campaign?

That depends on a campaign...for social media is it usually 18-40 or something like that.

How often do you think a campaign should meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

Well...that's tough...I guess they would say what does that get me. I would say if you foster that relationship now, you are likely to keep it moving forward. Since social media, that has been somewhat easier.

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

It could save the political system from itself. If we create new candidates, we will find that they are willing and able to communicate the way in which most people do. Cynicism might drop based on the level of honesty candidates have to be their campaigns because they cannot hide anything for risk of being caught. Also, listening to what your constituents are thinking, feeling, believing are crucial to the success of any campaign...no matter who is running.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Mostly Facebook...some Twitter...blogs a big...mobile is becoming more and more important...also we haven't seen the last of location-based sites...foursquare and such.

How often should campaigns answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels?

There should be steady stream...but it will also depend on the campaign.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

The function is far-reaching and all-encompassing. We haven't yet hit where and when people have truly discovered how they might use it most effectively and once they really do that...we

will a full shift. It is quite a change for the industry as a whole. Corporations, organizations are pushing transparency at a rate I don't think anyone could have predicted years ago.

How did your client campaigns utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

[redacted by request]

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

[redacted by request] Common sense and strong forethought is crucial to any policy.

What is the biggest obstacle for political use of these tools?

I think manpower and willingness to lose a fraction of control to your citizens is really the biggest obstacles to use of social media.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

For my clients?

Yes, but not on the record.

Democratic Political Consultant – VA 2

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

Social media is a new horizon for use to explore in the world of politics. It is truly a place where people can express their opinions and views in a way they never could before. I can not say enough good things about social media and its promise in the structure of how people communicate about politics.

What tools do you use in your consulting?

We do a lot of Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. There are other tools like YouTube, You Cut, Tumblr, Foursquare and mobile apps we suggest for those campaigns who can handle them, but the first 3 are the main ones we have one tap.

How do candidate/politicians view their constituents using this method as a means to reach them?

It's tough...it depends on the candidate. A lot of them respect the idea and the tools, but some of them focus on the nut jobs in the mix...which have always been there, but now they can get more direct contact with them without a high level filter between them. So I would say that for the most part, they take them seriously, but there are moments we have to re-focus them on those people they should be listening to and less on those who are just there to cause trouble.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

It has changed the landscape of how we view campaigns. We think about communicating in such different ways these days, it is difficult to really follow any of the same rules we did in the past. The political system has truly been altered for the better. The more politicians and candidates that come to realize that, the better off the whole system will be.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for an office/campaign? If so, what are they?

[redacted by request]

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Usually it is manpower, commitment or control issues that rule how campaigns approach social media. Other obstacles are like when you are dealing with an “I have _____ candidate” site or Facebook page. These however provide the campaign an excellent chance to acknowledge differences and create more of a conversation surrounding the campaign.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

Obama is a big one, but Dean was a big year for us...2010 had subtle changes and a lot of things were done to ramp up for 2012 which will prove to be an interesting test for social media at-large.

Director of New Media for Republican House Representative

Who do you see as your major constituent groups?

I deal with anyone who communicates with use via electronic communication. Sometimes it is via email, other times it is Facebook or Twitter. I think it's difficult to pinpoint those groups. I often have to distinguish between those who are within our district and those on the outside. In a lot of ways, we've lost what we traditionally know as constituent groups.

How often do you meet with groups who would fit within the young citizen (under 30) group?

Personally, I would say a couple times a month, maybe more. We have a team that functions as our organization liaison group who deals with them more often. I do tend to see a good percentage of them participating online.

What would you say your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

That's a great question. Many people are asking that same one these days. I don't think there is any one set definition for social media, it is constantly changing and evolving. Our job is to keep up with it.

Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often?

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogs, You Cut...I use them often. Each of them use and/or check several times a day. I have personal accounts and we also have accounts for the campaign.

Does your office answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent receive a response?

Our office receives thousands of emails, comments, wall posts, and other forms of electronic communication each week. We typically respond to all emails with an automated response to

start and then categorize those based on topic. Then, we'll send a follow-up with more specific information. As for comments and wall posts, we typically do not unless we're clarifying or providing specific information regarding a position being discussed or reminding them of our comment policy...vulgar, poor language, etc.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

Another great question...I guess I started to touch on that earlier when I was discussing definitions. Social media has provided us with a unique opportunity to find a way to transform the political system. Without these tools, we would still be stuck in a place where we did not have the chance to interact with people all over the country and world for that matter. For politics, it has provided us with more of a Television created a new set of candidates and social media is likely to do the same.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented within a campaign?

That depends on the campaign. We have suggestions and some starting points we talk about, but each of the campaigns comes in with their own idea of where they are going and what they are doing. We definitely use a comment policy, process through which a campaign does their messaging andthere are other standard policies we look to in the event that they want something more specific. There are definitely recommendations of how to handle things, crisis plan, who is a contact person, what they do or how they function. [off the record – 7 min]

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

The people and the time to do it right. We don't have the time or the manpower to handle the amount of information that comes in every day or even every hour. So it's important to acknowledge that aspect if we are going to use it. There are several problems within specific tools

such as how some campaigns use facebook. We have to manage how the campaigns see and utilize these tools to ensure they are not abusing the information of their users. Unfortunately, we have had some campaigns in the past who abused information they received from facebook, twitter, and other site followers. We had to establish rules and regulations for campaigns and other organizations to follow in many cases...it's hard when your client does something like this because it challenges all of the ethical codes you have as a consultant. [off the record – 11 min]

Thank you for your time today.

Online Communications Director for Republican House Representative

Who do you see as your major constituent groups?

I deal primarily with the online groups and they are mostly between the ages of 30-50. We do a fair bit of Facebook interaction with mostly those over the age of 30. We have also seen a strong increase in the number of seniors online. They are often less active in engaging and commenting, but they are beginning to increase in their representation in our likes/fans.

How often do you interact with groups who would fit within the young citizen (under 30) group?

There are a couple of strong campus groups who we meet with and communicate with on regular basis, but that's really it. The campaign added me in an effort to increase the number of younger people we had involved with the campaign, but it has not panned out thus far. There are plans in the works to attempt to work on this problem for the 2012 election. The main reason for this particular growth is because we are seeing an increase of young people, couples and young families move into our district and we would like to tap into those demographics.

What is your definition of emergent technology and/or social media?

Interesting...not sure if I can really narrow that down to something too specific. One of the things I hate about our campaign is that there are still a fair number of people who still refer to social media as another option for broadcasting. It's tough to get my head around the fact that people are not dying to be involved with social media...but anyway, back to a definition. I would say that social media offers us a new set of tools for use to communicate and provide services to our constituents. It's important for us to recognize the interactive components and the loss of control...one of the hardest aspects for my bosses to understand. They think we should still be in

complete control of our campaign message and while I agree practically, it is not a real possibility in social media.

What tools are you currently aware of?

Facebook, Twitter, blogs, You Cut, Digg, Google Analytics, etc. I could name some more, but those are the main ones we like to use. There are also forums and blog comments we follow closely.

Does your office answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent receive a response?

Well...that's a tough question. The campaign provides a structure for how to respond to comments, wall posts, etc, but we don't use it in as high a frequency as we would like to. There's such a process involved, many times it is not worth it to go through it all just to say something. We do correct inaccurate information, post warnings about trolls as well as post comments thanking users for their support and comments. This is especially important when we hear from someone we recognize as a friend of the campaign through donations or other reasons. Facebook and Twitter posts are much lower percentages, we do some retweets, have some engaging relationships with several followers, but on a whole, we only use it to correct factual errors or thank our followers for support.

How do you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

We view them just like any other constituent. One of the more difficult aspects is finding out who those people are based on little information. It's tough to distinguish whether they are people without our district or not.

How do perceive the function of social media in the political system?

That is a tough one...I'm not sure we really know the answer yet. We are still trying to weed through how it can be applied. Policies are constantly changing regarding how we can use it and when or why. So it's tough to narrow it's primary function. Personally, I think it has revolutionized how we look at our public. We can narrow or broaden those views however we want, but the fact remains, people have a voice. We want to be able to harness that voice to help the campaign in every way possible. What have you heard from other interviews?

Some people has similar opinions to yours, others have had more specific thoughts about how it fits into different parts of the system. I've only done a few thus far.

Right...well we have heard a lot about the fundraising aspects of the social media, but they are often overblown and not completely accurate. Especially when it comes to the Obama numbers...2008 was a watershed year, but not to the proportion that many would have you believe.

What do you think the biggest obstacle for use of social media?

The people needed to do the job right. I only have one other person and maybe an intern helping me at any given time. That is far from enough people to get the job done right in the way we want it. Unfortunately, budgets are being cut rather than increasing, so unless there is a fundamental shift in how we go about spending the money, it will not change. I have seen incremental changes which helps, but there needs to be more done.

Can you indicate one or more examples of how social media has been successful?

A couple of weeks ago, we tried a new feature on our Facebook page where we asked our users for questions for the Rep. and then we were able to get him to pick and answer of those questions. We also created a video response of him the same week to post that got a lot of positive response. Right now we're exploring how to best use the Facebook page in advance of

the 2012 election. We actually met with the Facebook folks not too long ago. [off the record – 12 min]

Thank you for your time today.

Communications Associate for a Republican Senate Campaign

[recording malfunction for first 10-15 min of interview]

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

It is for different tools. On Facebook there are trolls and those are difficult to control. People will post online that they are pissed at a candidate for voting for something that is either not true, not completely true or just out of context...this is where a problem can come into play. We do have to block people at some points. Some people will say things that are negative and then our supporters will come to our defense to tell them to stop ranting or correct them, etc. Sometimes we do correct completely incorrect information. We are open about who we are and that we represent the campaign.

What about the comment policy?

We have a statement on the Facebook page. These help us to establish the rules of the site and we use a similar policy on the blog. There is less of a policy on Twitter because it is less of a concern.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

With Twitter it is unlikely we will respond...about 1%...some retweets. Facebook is more broadcast...not engagement. It is impossible to have the staff to answer all of the questions that might be asked.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

That's a good question...well it just depends. You have people who are just nuts. Sometimes it's annoying to hear if people are not respectful.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

I think it has a lot of really great points. Meet them at their own medium. They are already there. People may get more involved. It does create a lot more problems and work for a staff and there are things that come up that we didn't and wouldn't have without it. [redacted by request]

What is your definition of emergent communication technology and/or social media?

It's a tool we use in addition to our more traditional forms of communication. I think the engagement portion is the most important aspect of social media. It creates

What tools does the campaign use currently and how?

Facebook, Twitter and blog...oh and the website. We maintain the same messages on all of these sites.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Really hard to be creative...[redacted by request]...we know what we're supposed to do, but the control issue is important. The extreme caution restricts what we can do. If it's a contested race, you have a little more leeway to say more controversial things. We want to communicate and engage people, but we have to avoid...you have to align your communication with your political situation.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

Oh definitely...it's definitely gained votes. A lot of times people don't vote for you because they don't know you. Let's you get to people you might not get to otherwise. There is also the component of allowing your constituents to know what you're doing on a more regular basis than you would otherwise.

What about getting young citizens engaged?

That has been a tough area for the campaign. We have several colleges and universities within the state that we visit, meet with their political organizations and various student groups, but overall, our primary voting groups are at least 40 if not older.

Anything else you want to add?

No, thanks. I'd like to find out what you come up with in your research.

Thank you for your time and I will get back to you when it's all done.

Youth Campaign Director for a National Democratic Campaign

How often did you think meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

There should be a constant stream between elected officials. It's good, responsible civic activities. It reflects how young citizens communicate. It should be a steady stream.

What is your definition of and/or social media?

Let's start with definition of digital...something created using pixels. Social is a subset of digital. Social is either content or technology that allows sharing peer to peer. From broadcaster, from user to user...share this from a website, etc. Format by which that is shared.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Starts with [redacted] and moved toward other tools and connected it with other tools...included profiles, interests...all fostered community. [redacted] was preset on all different type of social networks you can imagine. Included YouTube, ethnic networks, even email was an important viral tool. SMS was one of the most important. The [redacted] announcement was important to the campaign. That single moment ballooned our contact information to help us connect with more and more names. Our email list for those people who signed up for our messages was up to 11 million. [redacted because of identification]

Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often?

Why do you like these tools for political use?

What percentage of political communicators are communicating with young citizens through social media?

That's a tough question because it's less about the demographic or age breakdown. It's about a lifestyle and a psychographic. There is no longer a divide between use of social media among

young and older people. I believe that for every candidate going forward will include, must include every aggressive exploitation of social media that is possible. Not a single campaign

2008 the tipping point for that?

I think 2004...Howard Dean, though he failed as a candidate, succeed in showing the possibilities. In 2006, when candidates were lining up their boxes, we need to do what Dean did right. Often the fast follower is the most successful. So, Dean paved the way for Obama being that fast follower. If you can't activate people with action,

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

[redacted by request]

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

[redacted by request]

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

You hit where the art and science meets for social media. Message control is key. However with our messages, we had to throttle down the messages with peer to peer. Knowing where to gently interject the campaign's message...different to balance this aspect of control. People don't want to communicate with the campaign, they want to communicate with the people of the campaign.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media use during the 2008 election?

Moments in a campaign when a candidate has to step forward and make his case in an unambiguous way. These are the moments that help the campaign tremendously. There are moments where it helps to be clear and if there are opposition figures, be firm but also allow people to disagree, but give them a platform to do so. [redacted because of identification]

Conversations in social media do take on contexts that alter the way we think about communicate.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system, today and moving forward?

I think it's the most important vehicle for participation and transparency and engagement that we've ever had in political campaign history. There are various organizations that have sprung up in its stead, like the Personal Democracy Forum and Tech President and the Sunlight Foundation that are pushing the agenda of open government and more participation. I do think it is that important. It is the most important movement.

Thank you for your time.

Deputy Press Secretary for Democratic Senate Office 1

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

All within geographical area.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

Maybe once a week or once every couple of weeks.

What is your definition of social media?

Social media is another tool in our arsenal to communicate with the public. It may be more than that, but right now that's what I think it is.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

I'm not 100% sure what we are using on a regular basis. We have accounts with Facebook, Twitter, and a blog on our main website. However, we are also experimenting with other sites

Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often?

Why do you like these tools for political use?

Personally, I do not use social media. I have a Facebook page

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

Can we turn off the recording?

Yes.

[Recording turned off]

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

It plays a role that has yet to be fully determined. TV, radio, and newspapers were a lot easier to integrate into the fold. Social media provides us with challenges those forms of media never did.

How did the campaign utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

I don't know that information offhand.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

Since young citizens are often those who use these outlets most often to gather political information, do you have any specific policies regarding the use of social media with this public?

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Manpower and control of the message. A lot of what we don't do is because of the risk it might cause the campaign.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

I can direct you to someone who would know that information.

Thank you for your time today.

Deputy Press Secretary for Democratic Senate Office 2

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

Those within our district. We have several people who work the different groups...seniors, young professionals, over 50, unions, workers, etc.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

About once every couple of weeks.

Well, I guess I mean that you can include events, individual meetings, group meetings, etc.

We have several meetings

What is your definition of and/or social media?

It's really just another tool we use. A lot of people will talk about how social media is going to save the world, but the big corporations that own the traditional media outlets own some of these same outlets that we claim are without bias or all of sudden open up the world to people.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

We have accounts with Facebook, Twitter, and a blog on our main website. However, we are also experimenting with other sites. The party has been introducing new ideas about social media.

What kind of ideas?

Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often?

Why do you like these tools for political use?

Personally, I do not use social media. I have a Facebook page. For the campaign, we maintain several different sites.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

Can we get off the record...maybe, yea let's turn off the recorder.

Yes, ok.

[Recording turned off]

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

Social media is important to how people communicate today, but the political system adapts slowly to changes and I think some people have accelerated that process unnecessarily.

How did the campaign utilize social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

I don't know that information, but my team probably does.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Manpower and control of the message. A lot of what we don't do is because of the risk it might cause the campaign.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

I can direct you to someone with that information.

Thank you for your time today.

Director of Communications for Democratic Senator 1

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

We have a wide range of groups from young voters to older voters. I deal with more strategic aspects of each than tactical meetings.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

That's hard to tell...we get requests all the time, but I would say about once a week. That picks up during campaign season. We have also been known to have at least one of the debates at a college or university. There are also active chapters of the Young Democrats who volunteer for us during various times of the year.

Shifting gears a little...What is your definition of social media?

Social media is a participatory process through which each party involved has a chance to interact and/or engage with other users or institutions during their information gather process. It works quite well for people looking for political information to find people they agree with or possibly disagree and further discuss the issues.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Mostly the top tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, YouTube...there are others, but these are the most mainstream and seemingly effective. The campaign has account with all of these, but we really only use the Facebook and Twitter ones. We tried to start a town hall Q&A type thing using YouTube, but it never got off the ground.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

Well...this is going to sound, well...I think we try to get back to every single email or contact form message, but other than that, there's not a whole lot of engagement...maybe 5-10 percent on social media.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

No different than our other constituents, but typically these are people from our base. So, we usually don't have to work as hard to keep them interested in what's going on with the campaign because they are already.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

Social media is a tool with a whole lot of potential. There are times where we love it and also times that we hate it, but it's not going away anytime soon. Moving forward it will most likely become more and more important just like radio and television did.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

We have a comment policy on our blog and Facebook, but we need to work more on process by which we respond and analyze how social media is helping/hurting the campaign. We have a serious need for measurement.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Obstacles typically include time and money, but also investment on the part of our old timers...we need everyone on board for the use of social media because it helps to have all hands on deck during implementation.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

I can provide you with a couple we've done, but Obama and Dean were instrumental and our colleague [redacted because of identification] is doing some interesting things. Facebook allows use some really fun tools to play with.

Thank you for your time.

Director of Communications for Democratic Senator 2

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

I am in charge of organizations more so than individual citizen groups. I will say that demographics have become less important than other variables such as psychographics.

Ok, then how often did you meet or communicate with organizations who would fit within the young citizens public?

Usually between 1-3 times a month. It typically heats up during the campaign season, more so after college students start back in the fall during an election year. We have some interns that are often our connection to the group. We also occasionally respond to speaking requests within the state. [Redacted because of possible identification].

What is your definition of and/or social media?

Interesting question. I view social media as a tool we have to communicate with our constituents. We have a lot of ways to communicate, but social media offers a good alternative to some of the more traditional forms of media. We also have the chance to follow along with conversations already happening online.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Mostly Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, RSS feeds, Google Analytics.

Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often?

I use them for personal use, but not for the campaign. However, we do follow several blogs as part of our media consumption for the campaign. We also frequently encounter online formats that will provide us information we need to manage the campaign messages.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

Can we turn off the recording?

Yes. [recording stopped]

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

It is used primarily to provide another form of communication. I don't know if we really know it's ultimate purpose.

How did the campaign utilize emergent technology and/or social media in their overall communication plan? If so, which tools?

I can direct you to someone who can answer that question.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

That is something we're still developing. We use common sense and a few simple principles now, but we need to get a better sense of the policies to use. I think that would help our use.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Time and manpower and control. These are often the most difficult aspects of a campaign to manage. We need to ensure they are all tightly managed to ensure the campaign is running smoothly.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

Again, I can direct you to someone who knows those answers.

Thank you for your time today.

National Democratic Political Consultant

What is your definition of social media?

Social media is media being created by everybody as opposed to media being created by professionals with large platforms. It's as mundane as tweeting about what they had for breakfast to snapping a picture of the London bombings to the plane landing the Hudson.

What tools are most effective for political uses?

This is really a moving target. Most of the ones I'll mention weren't around 5 years ago. Patterns of behavior continue to shift. Technology creators are continuing to innovate. Before we know it, there will be more and more advanced. In general, what we see is simplicity beats complexity. You Tube made it easy, so they have the largest market share. Then there is Twitter...no one thought it was going to be useful. It gets into the cracks of people's attention in a helpful way, in most cases. There's a hierarchy of uses...email is still central, social networking, etc.

How have campaigns evolved their use of social media?

The sophistication has changed dramatically...personalized emails, different designs...little tricks to get people to click through. People are more resistant to messages coming at us. There is also highly localized advertising. Personalization through targeting very specifically or genuine supporters reaching out to their friends. More money being spent on advertising online.

My dissertation focuses on young citizens. How do you think campaigns have done or could to better with those citizens?

Generally they don't. Campaigns prefer to work with the electorate they know rather than the ones they don't know. Older voters are more reliable...more messaging goes toward them rather than young voters. Some improvements with engagement. The online arena is more engaging to young people and some improvement in turnout. Most voters do not approach young voters not

turning out...it's about getting more votes than their opponent. The Obama campaign did make an asserted push in young people and it did pay off, but can anyone sustain that. Now the challenge is that the news is passed along socially, does the amount of time they spend in social networks produce a similar feeling to reading the newspaper. An important aspect is efficacy.

You hit the nail on the head. How do we get people to engage in the system in an age when we're eliminating civics education and people don't know who the secretary of state is?

I don't know the answer to that question. It's quite hard at this point to make stuff happen with the political system we currently have. It is set up to hold stability, not adaptability.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

Room for more do-it-yourself action than ever before. Often times the difference between people who don't get something done or a group that does get something done. It has to do with organization and sustained action and social media is providing a vehicle for that.

“as the flowering of communications into the hands of anyone with an Internet connection.”

Thinking about a political system that is an ecosystem that is now a dispersed network trying to figure out where in that network there is important aspects.

What can we do to get people to act?

It's tough because there are so many different things going on that we move from one thing to another. So it's the earthquake, the oil spill, Michael Jackson's death...it just keeps going. Our political process still gives us a few moments of focused attention, elections, we do have to maintain some focus on one.

Communications Associate for a Democratic Senate Campaign

Who are your campaign's major constituent groups?

We have an array of constituents related to the areas covered within our Senate district. There are several small towns and a couple of larger cities. Beyond geography, we have a diverse group of demographics from young and old to educated and uneducated, high and low income, etc. we have a lot of requests to come to senior centers and town hall meetings.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

Depends on the point in the campaign. We typically meet with young citizens when we are near a college campus. But we do not have a regular meeting time with a young citizen group.

What would you say is your definition of and/or social media?

Well, that's a tough one. There is no one real comprehensive definition that I've come across. It's definitely a tool we use, but beyond that it is tough to nail down.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Digg, You Cut for Republicans, blogs, other websites.

Which tools do you personally know how to use? Do you use them? If so, how often? I

personally use a lot of sites, but for the campaign, I am not in charge of any of them.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

They answer most, if not all emails, but comments and wall posts often go unanswered. I've asked people about this, but they just point to time and manpower issues.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

That's probably more of a question for someone who is higher up in the chain of command. I think it's natural to include these types of communication, but I'm not sure everyone shares my viewpoint.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

It's a game changer. We have seen how it has taken down candidates, such as Allen, and we need to recognize its power and harness it for our own individual candidates. However, a lot of people are scared of how it will be perceived and used by others. We are cautious optimists or hard core cynics, depending on who you talk to.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

I referred to this earlier when I talked about having people to manage it and really the time. The other big factor is really losing some level of control over the messages. This was hammered into me when I started this job that if we don't have control of the messages about the campaign we don't have anything. Without control, we are just floating along and that type of campaign does not win elections.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

None really come to mind for our campaign. I mean Obama is a big example we have to consider.

Thank you for your time today.

Democratic Candidate for Commissioner [no transcript produced by request]

Communications Director for Democratic Representative 1 [no transcript produced by request]

Communications Director for Democratic Representative 2

So let's start with who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

We had several different groups, but mostly education and agriculture people. Most of them were also older...at least 40 and over.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

Sad to say, but almost never. We had a college or two within our district, but most of them never really voted in state, so it was tough to justify spending any time there without a real, tangible payoff.

What is your definition of social media?

Interesting question. I definitely see it as a tool, but it's also sort of a mindset that allows for us to think about information and sharing that information with other people in a way I don't think any of us really thought about years ago.

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, forums, You Cut...some campaigns use other types of tools, but those are the most popular.

Did the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

Well, we did use social media to clarify factual errors, respond to people who were being trolls or nut bars and also to thank our supporters. However, I think the overall level of engagement is still only at the surface and shallow. We know that is not the ideal situation, but is what we have been able to accomplish in recent campaigns.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

They are treated just the same as other constituents.

How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

The function of social media...interesting. I guess social media is there to provide us with a unique opportunity for us to engage with information and other people related to the information. We can share items within our social groups and discuss aspects of life we normally would not.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

There are several policies in place or in process related to how we approach and utilize social media. One is our comment policy which allows us to delete and/or address comments that are overtly negatives, aggressive, profane, etc. However, we are still working on other policies that are more specific in their nature and scope.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

I would point to time and manpower for sure. However, the breadth and depth of social media makes it a difficult nut to crack at times. We also find it to be confusing and constantly changing. So, I guess the moral of the story is that you just can't take anything for granted. We continue to explore how social media can and will be used in campaigns.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

I can give those to you after we speak. Obama is a good one...there are several republicans doing good work this year as well.

Thank you for your time.

Press Secretary for Democratic Senate Office 1

Who were the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

There are various groups that fall within the office's purview. We don't usually distinguish them to prevent from focusing too much on how they differ, but rather think about them as all of our constituents. Obviously, we do have various groups we meet with such as student groups, senior citizens centers, unions, etc.

How often did you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public?

Can we go off the record for a moment?

Sure.

[off the record – 10 min]

Getting back on track, what is your definition of social media?

I think of it as another outlet for us to communicate the campaign's message. We use Facebook, Twitter, and a blog to get our messages to a wider audience and we also know that most of those people who are choosing to listen to our campaign. It is a primary way of communicating with our base.

Any other tools other than those you just mentioned that you use?

Well yea, but not really to disseminate messages. Mostly we use social media for research and gauging public opinion. We listen a lot to what's going on with our publics. If we know what they're talking about and how...we are that much more prepared to address the issues they are most interested in. Also, there are lots of useful resources out there for opposition research. I can think of at least one major example...Allen in 2006 where that really paid off for a campaign.

Does the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

Ouch...that hurts...no, honestly. We very rarely interact or engage people on the various sites. It is too time-consuming and we really don't have the manpower to handle that kind of endeavor. I know that sounds bad, but it's the reality of a small campaign staff in today's landscape. We do have several interns who come through during the summer who help us with assessing how we might provide some of those finer points of communication. I will say that we do get back to in some format every email, contact form, or formal letter communication we receive. I would love to put that system into play for social media at some point.

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

Just as we would any other person contacting the campaign. I'm not sure why there would be any difference. Well, I guess we do try to make sure they are from our state.

Moving toward the big picture, how do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

Wow, that's a big question. I guess it definitely plays a part of how we run our campaigns today, but I'm not sure what part that is. There are so many different aspects we look at when it comes to social media.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

Can we go off the record again?

Sure.

Our policies are important to the process, but are confidential and so I would prefer they are not included in the official transcript and if referred to, please do not attribute to this campaign.

So, besides the manpower issues, what is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

Well that's a big one, but I guess it comes down to the magnitude of the incorporation. We have some many balls up in the air, that social media throws off the rhythm of how campaigns are comfortable communicating with publics and constituents. In that way, I'm not sure we've really accepted it as an integral part of a political campaign...not like political consultants have.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

Not that I can think of for our campaign. Obama is an obvious example and Dean in 2004, but the Allen thing in 2006 really ruffled some feathers and the tea party has done some interesting things in the past couple of years.

Thank you for your time.

Press Secretary for Democratic Senate Office 2

Who are the major constituent groups under your purview during the campaign?

We have various groups within our constituents...most of them are demographic markers. I would say we deal mostly with organizations.

What types of organizations?

Everything from unions to senior groups to college and university groups. We also pay close attention to education and agricultural causes because of the nature of our committee work.

How often do you meet or communicate with groups who would fit within the young citizens public, 18-29?

That's a tough questions...it would depend on the time period. We meet with a lot of college and university groups during campaign years, especially when we are working on get out the vote drives, recruiting volunteers, and generally seeking to inspire the next generation of political activists.

Shifting focus...What is your definition of social media?

Well it's definitely a great tool to use in our communication. We consider it part of our overall toolbox. I can't tell you how often we consider all of the various options we have in the social media realm and I know we are not using any of them to their fullest potential. Personally, I see social media as more of a game changer than the rest of the staff, but I'm considerably younger than most of the decision makers [redacted by request]

What tools are you currently aware of being used by political campaigns?

Facebook, Twitter, blogs, social networks, YouTube, Tumblr...the republicans are also using something called YouCut which is an interesting way of finding out about public opinion, but they don't really have any results from it as far as I know.

Ok, so does the campaign answer communication (i.e. comments, wall posts) received through these channels? What percent received a response?

That...I'm...well, I don't really know. I think we have some of those numbers somewhere, but I don't know them off the top of my head. My staff would probably be able to get those [break to find them...off the record]

How did you view your constituents using this method as a means to reach you?

We treat them as we would any other person getting in touch with us. There's not a distinction. I think one of the aspects we do look for are their affiliation and whether they are in or out of state. We try to make our strongest efforts for those people who have elected us to office.

Ok, big picture question...How do you perceive the function of social media in the political system?

I see it as a tool, but also a new horizon we have yet to really explore to its full extent. Social media has changed many aspects about how we communicate and how we gather information, so all people who are communicating need to take note and make adjustments accordingly....some faster than others.

Do you have specific policies that dictate the various aspects of how social media is implemented for your office/campaign? If so, what are they?

We can also get you those...of course off the record.

Since young citizens are often those who use these outlets most often to gather political information, do you have any specific policies regarding the use of social media with this public?

We do not really make the distinction in our social media strategy...or in our general strategy either.

What is the biggest obstacle for your use of these tools?

A lot of it is wrapping our heads around the possibilities of what can be done. We also have a pretty small staff which makes it difficult to get to it all on a regular schedule.

Can you indicate the most successful examples of social media?

Wow, I don't know...I guess Obama is one for the party and a general historical example, also Dean. As far as our campaign, we have a weekly town hall type question video feature we do where people send their questions through social media outlets and we choose the five best questions and get the senator to answer them on video. It seems to be popular and helpful in providing us with positive comments.

Thank you for your time.

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