

# Chapter 30

## What a Difference a Download Makes: Political Advertising in the Digital Age

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### ABSTRACT

*The Internet has captured the attention of the media, the government and much of the public. It has changed the way Americans receive information and communicate. With a number of political candidates creating MySpace profiles, YouTube videos and Second Life avatars it appears that the Internet and web 2.0 technologies have been leveraged for political advertising and campaigning. In the early literature the Internet and its role in politics had been purely speculative, with research only making vague guesses as to where the Internet would lead politicians in their political ambitions. The following chapter first outlines a historical perspective of political advertising, then examines contemporary forms and avenues of political advertising.*

### INTRODUCTION

“Thanks for the add!” This statement is not a polite acknowledgment from a constituent to a politician regarding a political advertisement. Rather, in the world of Web 2.0 campaigning, it’s a comment from a political candidate’s friend on MySpace, thanking the politician for adding that person as a friend. Today, the Internet has captured the attention of the media, the government and much of the public. It has changed the way

Americans receive information and communicate. Even the term “Internet” has long since become interchangeable with a variety of expressions, such as new information highway or information superhighway (Pavlik, 1998). A 2006 survey done by Pew/Internet reported that 70% of American adults were Internet users (Lin, 2008).

Beyond going online for information and serving as a way to stay in touch, people are using the Internet to increase their knowledge about politics. During the 2000 election, Web sites became interactive and integrated campaign elements, helping

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to raise money, communicate with supporters, provide positions on issues, organize grassroots supporters, and turn out the vote (Fose, 2002). Fose then went on to say:

*The Internet's importance in the political process will increase as more voters learn to use it as an avenue for activism and an opportunity to get information about the candidates. Because of this, candidates will continue to look to the Internet as a way to communicate their message, organize supporters, and raise money (pg. 1).*

Of a reported population of 128 million Internet users in 2004, 40% indicated using the Internet for political information during that year's presidential election (Rainie, Horrigan & Cornfield, 2005). Candidate websites flourished in the 2004 election, but as is the ever-changing nature of the Internet, 2008 offered something new—the addition of political candidates—both presidential and local politicians—logging on to social networking sites and developing MySpace and Facebook pages.

In the early literature the Internet and its role in politics had been purely speculative, with research only making vague guesses as to where the Internet would lead politicians in their political ambitions. The future of American politics had been called an “age of Internet democracy” and the residents of the new political system were hypothesized to be known as “netizens.” The new medium was predicted as the beginnings of true direct democracy - a vehicle for enabling common citizens, rather than distant elected representatives, to make ongoing policy decisions (Davis, 1999).

## **A Historical Perspective**

Political advertising and campaigning in the United States dates all the way back to the first presidential race. Though there was not a formal discipline of communication studies at that time, the art of rhetoric and persuasion had been in practice since the days of Socrates and Aristotle.

A political campaign is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific group (Shea & Burton, 2001). Communication is the epistemological base by which campaigns begin, proceed, and conclude (Trent & Friedenberg, 2000). Political campaigns are not solely linked to politics; campaigns may include strategies and tactics to move the heads of religious organizations or corporations into and from power, to sell different products, or to encourage people to start or quit a behavior.

At the presidential level George Washington never had this problem. Washington, on the strength of his Revolutionary War heroism, ran unopposed twice. For John Adams the 1796 race changed things forever. It didn't take long for the campaign to turn bitter. Adams' Federalist party intimated that the Democratic-Republicans were involved with revolution in France. Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans, in turn, tossed around words like monarchy and aristocracy in taking the Federalists to task for friendly dealings with Britain.

*“Other voices in the fall of 1800 were shrill by any period's standard. Murder, robbery, rape, adultery, and incest will all be openly taught and practiced ... The air will be rent with the cries of distress, the soil will be soaked with blood and the nation black with crimes,” should Jefferson be elected according to the Connecticut Courant's prediction (Dunn, 2004, p.1).*

With the Twelfth Amendment still eight years away, the electoral votes sent John Adams to the presidency and rival Thomas Jefferson into the role of vice president. That was merely the foreshadowing of the next bitter campaign, deemed the Revolution of 1800 by Jefferson who would have his revenge. Both Adams and Jefferson enjoyed long vacations from Washington, but the vice president worked on a campaign biography for a nearby newspaper and also helped influence state elections with correspondence and funding

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the distribution of campaign pamphlets (Ferling, 2004). The entire affair turned bitter and it would be years before the two Founding Fathers reconciled.

For many years thereafter campaign strategies would adapt to the players, but the techniques were largely the same. Each political hopeful held the approval of supporters who could be found voicing their opinions in speeches, papers, pamphlets and private correspondence. There were, of course, partisan critics with their newspapers and propaganda outlets that would attempt to set the narrative against the opponent.

For decades candidates would put on the appearance of being removed from the campaign. Champion advocates played leading roles as candidates attempt to stay above the vitriol. This move was merely for appearances; the candidates were frequently involved with their supporters and surrogates in crafting the strategy of the election season.

Abraham Lincoln ran under this model. Lincoln's plan was to stay out of view, but oversee the work of his lieutenants to help secure both the nomination and election of 1860. Opposite Lincoln was his famous foil, Stephen Douglas. The Illinois senator was the first presidential candidate to set out on a nationwide speaking campaign (Davis, 2006).

Here we see technological evolutions coming into play. Literature, cartoons images, newspapers, pamphlets, buttons and iconic imagery had long been a conspicuous part of the American campaign season. Now, the candidates could be offered transportation across a rugged frontier that contributed to the changing the face of national electoral politics.

Because of railways and other marginal transportation improvements Senator Douglas' attempt to realign the pre-Civil War South forced other candidates to go out on the road themselves. Needing to reach out to a rapidly growing populace, content needed to reach beyond the borders of their home state. With few exceptions, the front porch campaigns of Warren Harding, William McKinley

and James Garfield among the most notable, the game had changed, quickly and forever.

From the long view the evolving modern campaign dovetails nicely with a few concepts: the growth and prosperity of the nation, industrial advances and, often a need to be more innovative than the other candidate. Theodore Roosevelt opened the door to the 20th Century in presidential politics, but those that followed helped usher modernity into campaign politics. Woodrow Wilson was the first president to hold regular news briefings. Calvin Coolidge was the first president to broadcast over radio's airwaves.

It was Franklin Delano Roosevelt who had the benefit of timing to capitalize on emerging media. His famous Fireside Chats reached out to audiences with few other entertainment options at a time when they were willing to hear a calming voice from Washington. It was Roosevelt who boasted of the use of the first presidential plane. What has become known as "Air Force One" has matured into one of the most effective trappings of office for the campaign season; few things are as stirring as seeing that giant plane, with the presidential seal and the commander-in-chief strolling down the steps in your hometown.

Franklin Roosevelt was also the first president to appear on television, speaking to a tiny audience when he helped open the New York World's Fair in 1939. The technology would have to sit out rationing and a World War, but the future was coming into focus. It was one of the heroes of World War II that figured most prominently in the earliest television ads. General Dwight Eisenhower ran primary ads in 1952 and did so again in the general election against Governor Adlai Stephenson. For aspiring politicians, television arrived in full with the Nixon-Kennedy debates in 1960. More than 70 million tuned in to the first of four debates and they learned a lot about the men who would be their president. As Graber (1990) noted "People draw a multitude of inferences from human physical appearance and movements. Many people infer personality characteristics from human physical features" (p. 138).

Kennedy had been campaigning in California prior to the debates and appeared tanned and rested. Nixon, recovering from a bad knee injury, was underweight and refused stage makeup before the debates began. On television the handsome Kennedy ushered in a new image-based political environment opposite the gaunt and perspiring appearance of Nixon. From there campaigns began to understand the practical aspects of how television images affect voter evaluations.

The adaptability of candidates and campaigns to now swiftly-moving technological realities could mean the difference in fund raising or garnering votes. As television entered every home throughout the remainder of the 20th Century the art of appealing to the electorate through the small screen became all the more important. With his style and ease in front of the camera, the former actor turned politician Ronald Reagan became known as The Great Communicator.

Thereafter a small industry of political consultants and television pros were pressed into service to get the candidate into every living room. But soon, a curious thing happened: the audience started paying attention to a new small screen in their home.

### **The Evolution of Political Communication and Political Advertising Theory**

Politics, and political thought, may have first found their homes in ancient Greece in the creation of the city-state. Greek thinkers reflected with regard to which form of political organization would be best for the city-state (Sabine, 1961). Some of the most notable creators of political theories include Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, the Church of England, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Kenneth Burke, and Karl Marx. Each sought to define political concepts such as freedom, equality, democracy, and justice. The overarching goal of political theory, then, is to define the meaning of “political” and analyze political systems and

political behavior. When talking about political campaigns and advertisements, the focus shifts to political communication theory.

Political decisions and communication theory often work hand in hand, with one frequently influencing the other. Studies of political communication can be broken down into two areas; technique and effects. The technique of political communication focuses on how and why political messages are formed. Effects studies, in large part, are accomplished by examining the impact of the messages delivered.

The earliest records of human communication date back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.; rhetoric claims the first citation of formal communication theory (Bryant & Miron, 2006). Definitions of rhetoric are widely varied. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty wherein one discovers the available means of persuasion in any case whatsoever” (Kennedy, 1991, p.36). “The application of reason to the imagination for the better moving of the will” was how rhetoric was defined by Francis Bacon (Lucaites, Condit, & Caudill, 1999, p. 19). Various other scholars have likened rhetoric to stylistics, or the studies of varieties of language. Merriam-Webster defined rhetoric as “The art of speaking or writing effectively; the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion” (Merriam-Webster, 1993). Since rhetoric is a concept that encompasses many different definitions, contemporary rhetoric theory has suggested that the question of what rhetoric is should be discarded and replaced with the question of what rhetoric can be (Lucaites, Condit, & Caudill, 1999). Whatever the definition is the area of rhetoric focuses on the techniques employed in persuasive communication.

The art of speaking effectively centers on a person’s oratory skills. The earliest written mention of such skills is found in Homer’s *Iliad*, where the main characters were praised for their speaking skills. The success of the speaker was defined by the ability to have such authority over others that the speaker could compel those listen-

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ing to agree with their position (Bryant & Miron, 2006). Prior to 600 B.C., speaking skill fell largely to the Sophists in Ancient Greece. Theories about rhetoric began in Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., with Corax and his student Tisias developing an art of rhetoric that was later recognized as having a concept of message organization and the development of arguments from probabilities (Bryant & Miron, 2006; McCroskey & Richmond, 1996).

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are names that more readily come to mind when talking about the beginnings of rhetoric. Though Socrates is known for his contributions to philosophy and his development of the Socratic Method of Inquiry, he was ultimately put to death partly because he was suspected of being a sophist - a clever rhetorician who twists words and makes the weaker argument into the stronger (Griswold, 2007). Plato uses his writings *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* to discount the idea of rhetoric, claiming it can exist separately from the art of speaking. His condemnation in *Gorgias* explains that rhetoric is immoral, dangerous, and unworthy of serious study (Griswold, 2007).

Although Aristotle viewed rhetoric in the same manner as his successors Socrates and Plato, in that rhetoric played on the emotions and failed to use fact for persuasive purposes (Garver, 1994), he is cited as shaping the rhetorical system that would ultimately influence how rhetorical theory was developed through modern times (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000). Aristotle's reasoning about rhetoric differs from Plato's in that Aristotle viewed it as a key element of philosophy, along with logic and dialect. *The Republic* opens with the statement "Rhetoric is the counterpoint of Dialectic" (Roberts, 1924/1954). Since debates can take various forms (e.g., philosophical, practical), dialectic and rhetoric can find homes in various forms of debate, and rhetoric was determined to be a part of politics. Aristotle's claim is that dialectic and rhetoric can work in tandem in a system of persuasion that has a basis in knowledge, not in emotion (Corbett, 1984). The debates in ancient Greece took place in public forums, making the person engaged in

the debate the orator. The orator's purpose was to persuade, thus came an emphasis on focusing attention on the orator to ensure victory. Successful and influential orators were elevated to special status and power, and it was here that the natural association of oratory and political power began to form (Bryant & Miron, 2006).

Aristotle's greatest contributions fall within the realm of persuasion theory, and the concepts of *ethos* (speaker credibility), *logos* (reasoning that provides truth), and *pathos* (emotions) (Bryant & Miron, 2006). Some of these Greek influences spread beyond Greece as Alexander the Great expanded the empire. As the Roman Empire rose to power, the idea that rhetoric was a part of politics maintained prominence, and the Roman Empire receives credit for spreading this idea across the ancient world (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996). Cicero was one of the strong supporters of this notion, but also established five canons (invention, arrangement/organization, style, memory, and delivery), proposed three duties/goals (to prove, to delight, and to stir) and theorized on the different styles (plan, middle, and grand) of rhetoric (Bryant & Miron, 2006). It is looking at the concepts created and developed through this point that ties can be made to modern political campaigning and advertising because of the persuasive nature of political messages, and conclusions can be drawn with regards to how deeply the concept of rhetoric—whatever the definition—is tied into political campaigning and advertising.

Political communication finds its roots in the above examples with a heavy emphasis on rhetoric; however modern political communication has become an interdisciplinary field of study. In addition to rhetoric, political communication draws on the fields of communication, political science, journalism, and sociology, as well as several other disciplines (Kaid, 2004). Rhetoric and political communication share the same problem of not having a singular or universally accepted definition, but a simple definition proposed that political communication is the "role of communication in

the political process” (Chaffee, 1975, p. 15) may be the best. Modern political communication studies focus on the connections that exist between the politicians, the voters, and the media.

Enter the media. The first forms of mass entertainment began in the first century A.D. within the Roman Empire, as the Roman’s enjoyed prosperity with “leisure [becoming] an entitlement across all strata of Roman society” (Zillman, 2000, p. 9). The first mass medium emerged with the invention of the printing press in the 1400s (Bryant & Miron, 2006). At first, the printed book was not meant for mass distribution; rather it was viewed as a place for sacred writings and religious texts to be stored, with access limited to a select few, usually the elite within the society (McQuail, 2000). However, as libraries grew, access to the texts expanded beyond the elite, content began to include secular, practical, and popular texts, and the general public beyond the elites underwent an enlightenment that threatened the control of authorities and promised emancipation and empowerment to the public (Bryant & Miron, 2006). In addition to changes in content, the status of rhetoric underwent a change with the importance of the spoken word decreasing as the importance of the written word increased (Kennedy, 1980).

An example of this is the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. Though only local voters and citizens could attend the debates, newspapers became a powerful instrument in spreading the message. More people were able to receive those messages through the power of the written word than could attend the debates. This was not without problem though. Stenographers from Chicago recorded every word of the debates, which were then reprinted in papers across the United States. However, a bias existed; newspapers with Democratic leanings edited Douglas’s speeches, removing any errors and leaving Lincoln’s speeches alone. Conversely, newspapers with Republican meanings used the same tactic.

Subsequent communication technologies emerged continuously - the telegraph in the mid-

19<sup>th</sup> century, telephone and film at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and radio at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fortner, 1994). Print media and film emerged as mass medium, and in the 1920’s, electronic media enabled large audiences to become involved in technologically aided communication, giving way to the first true mass communication (Bryant & Miron, 2006). Restricted circulation was lost as commercial and prestige newspapers were established, allowing publications to be distributed to the majority, rather than the minority, of the population (McQuail, 2000). As societies continued to grow, so did the technology, which continuously allowed for more and more ‘average’ citizens to possess technology that enabled them to receive mass communication, until the norm became the ownership of newspaper subscriptions, then radios, then televisions, then VCR’s, and, now, access to computers and the Internet.

Adding media into the relationship between politicians and voters introduces media effect theories. The magic bullet theory/hypodermic needle theory, the two-step flow of communication theory, the limited effects theory, and the theory of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1984) were at one time the four main theories that focused on the media effects with regards to political communication. Agenda setting theory, priming theory, framing theory, diffusion of innovations theory and cultivation theory are also theories that can be studied with regards to political communication.

Arising from thoughts that politicians and governments used the mass media to manipulate messages in order to fuel World War I, the hypodermic needle theory talks about a direct influence on people by mass media (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996). The theory implied mass media had a direct, immediate and powerful effect on its audiences (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The core suggestion is that the mass media could influence a large group of people directly by ‘injecting’ them with appropriate messages designed to trigger a desired response (Davis & Baron, 1981). The

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“panic broadcast” in 1938 became the classic example of how the hypodermic needle theory worked. On October 30, 1938, radio programming was interrupted for the first time with a news bulletin. The news bulletin was actually H.G. Wells’ radio edition of “*War of the Worlds*”, and listeners heard Martians had begun an invasion in New Jersey. What resulted was a wave of mass hysteria as people tried to seek shelter, ration their food, raid stores, and flee their homes (Lowrey & DeFleur, 1983).

After World War I, research conducted with regard to consumer behavior found the war propaganda and advertising campaigns were an effective way to manipulate consumer behavior in favor (or support) of the product (Heath & Bryant, 2000). “Messages had only to be loaded, directed to the target, and fired; if they hit their target, then the expected response would be forthcoming” (p. 346). The theory takes on the viewpoints that audience members are simply “passive sheep” (Perloff, 2002, p. 494). In this view, the media becomes a “dangerous drug or a killing force that directly and immediately penetrate a person’s system” (Baran, 2001, p. 318). However, this takes the position that the message would affect all people in exactly the same way. This position assumes that, when considering propaganda during a time of war, there is a lack of competing media messages. Also, it assumes that audience will receive the message in exactly the same way (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996). As later shifts in theoretical thinking proved, these assumptions were inaccurate. From opposition from citizens about the United States becoming involved in World War I to war protests today, it is clear that there can be opposing messages, and that people do not receive messages in the exact same manner

The theory was deemed inaccurate after the presidential election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940. Election studies found that the majority of the people were influenced by interpersonal influencers (i.e., ‘word-of-mouth’ or ‘WOM’), and not by mass propaganda (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, &

Gaudet, 1968). Heath & Bryant (2000) theorized that the inaccuracy might be due to shortcomings in methodology. Upon the introduction of quantitative and empirically based research after the war, research findings of the hypodermic needle theory were examined and challenged (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996).

The two-step flow of communication theory was formed after the above mentioned election studies were conducted. *The People’s Choice* was the study that focused on the process of decision making during a presidential election campaign. As previously mentioned, the results of the study found interpersonal influences had more of an impact than the mass media. These findings gave way to the creation of the two-step flow communication theory, which states that information from the media moves in two distinct stages. Information from the media is first received by individuals who are called opinion leaders (because they normally have some sort of influence over other individuals). The opinion leaders interpret that information, and pass those interpretations down to people within society (Katz, 1987). Individuals are more likely to trust the people they see as opinion leaders than they are to trust the mass media. In other words, an individual is more likely to listen to and be influenced by a family member/friend/leader of a social group they might belong to when trying to make a decision of which politician to vote for because they trust the opinion of that leader.

Limited effects theory (Lang & Lang, 1953) reinforces the idea set forth in the two-step flow theory that media rarely directly influence individuals; rather, individuals are more likely to turn to family, friends, co-workers, or social groups for advice and interpretations. Media only becomes influential when those opinion leaders are influenced. When direct media effects do occur, they only occur in small and isolated incidents. Limited effects theory took the place of the hypodermic needle theory after Klapper (1960) shifted the attention to the role that audiences play in the mass communication process. Selective attention is a

pivotal concept within limited effects theory; it explains that people prefer information that fits with their previously held beliefs, and will avoid information that challenges or goes against those beliefs (Graf & Aday, 2008). Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet (1968) explained selective attention using political messages. People noticed more messages from the candidate they preferred, and often ignored messages from the opponent they disliked. It is then argued that this selectivity went against the notion that was set forth in the hypodermic needle theory that said the mass media directly influenced the audience; instead, thanks to selective attention, it was argued that the mass media only served to reinforce existing beliefs (Klapper, 1949, 1960).

The final media effects theory that looked at voting behavior was the spiral of silence theory. People often end up in a situation where they are afraid to express their views, whether it be a negative opinion about a popular political candidate, or a movie that was widely hated by their peers that they truly enjoyed. Those that do not have an opinion that agrees with the majority often stay silent for fear of ridicule and derision. If they do voice a dissenting opinion, they may end up forced into social isolation, considered to be a pariah that no one will talk to, as if the difference of opinion is a disease that might rub off on them. The above scenarios are the basis for the theory of the spiral of silence.

Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1991) formulated the spiral of silence theory after examining longitudinal survey data concerning the German Election of 1965, of which the two main competing parties were the Christian Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party. Month after month, the data showed the two parties to be in a dead heat, and predictions about who would win were impossible. In the final time period leading to the election, the survey findings showed a last minute swing in favor of the Christian Democrats. The Christian Democrats won, and Noelle-Neumann systematically examined the relationship between

voting intention and expectation of the winner, which gave rise to the theory of the spiral of silence. Several incidents that promoted the Christian Democrats in a positive manner occurred, and Noelle-Neumann hypothesized that the positive images gave supporters a boost that allowed them to speak their opinion, while the positive images made supporters of the Social Democrats feel that they could not share their opinion, and it was the fear of social isolation that caused them to fall silent.

Today the spiral of silence is applied most often to political situations or to people's viewpoints on controversial issues—which often are largely connected to politics. Journal articles that use the spiral of silence boast titles that deal with anti-abortion campaigns, moral reform, community standards for sex and violence, self disclosure on *Donahue*, pluralistic ignorance in prisons and Princess Diana's meanings for women. As mass media continues to have a presence in society, the question of how public opinion is formed will always be present. The other theories mentioned—framing, priming, cultivation theory, diffusion of innovations, and agenda setting—can all work together in multiple combinations to help explain why people think and behave the way that they do.

The difficulty in studying political communication is in the interdisciplinary nature of the field. No one field can lay solid claim to the discipline, and to do so would limit the potential to understand and explore the discipline. When talking about political campaigning and advertising, the areas of communication research that they could best be classified under would be the areas of advertising and propaganda/elections. However, because of the nature of the message in political advertising and campaigning, media effects theories cannot be disregarded. The study of political communication may be interdisciplinary, and similarly the study of political advertising and campaigning is not easily explained within a single discipline.

Advertising research began with print advertising in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. With the shift in technology

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at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century/beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that enabled print media to be mass distributed to the general public, advertising quickly became its own lucrative industry. Delia (1987) points out that national magazines produced after the Civil war were the first place that large-scale advertisements appeared. Advertising agencies began creating ads and campaigns that were run in newspapers and magazines in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bryant and Miron (2006) cite this as being the point where the realization for the need for advertising research took place. Though information was still being received by the consumer, exposure and competing messages of advertising meant that persuasion was now the main focus (Curti, 1967; Bryant & Miron, 2006). Similarly, political communication research began to evolve in the same direction, with the focus moving toward persuasion.

Political advertising is regarded as an arm of political communication. It first appeared in campaigns in the 1950s and is now the main avenue for communication between voters and candidates (Kaid, 2004). Kaid's research (1996, 1997, 1999) indicates political advertising research is one of the most significant components within the field of political communication. Political advertising has been defined as "the communication process by which a source (usually a political candidate or party) purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with the intended effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors" (Kaid, 1981, p. 250). Since the boom and growth of television, the advertisement has become the main form of political oratory, with the political ad being the main way that candidates for the presidency communicate their message to the voting public (Denton, 1988). The design of the political advertisement is twofold: it gives information about the candidate, the candidate's party, or the candidate's agenda that the news media cannot, and it is designed as a persuasive tool (McNair, 2003). The benefit of political advertising is that

the candidate has complete control of the message and how it is distributed.

The rules of political televised advertising for candidates are simple: there are no rules. However, broadcast media are regulated by the Federal Communications Commission, and among its many requirements include the provision that access to equal airtime must be given to all legally qualified candidates for federal elective office, and that a disclaimer must be placed on all ads that state the candidate approves the message (United States Government Printing Office, 2002).

As a contrast, there is no regulatory body that political advertisers have to answer to, thus there are no rules set forth that apply to the content and form of political advertising (Iyengar & Prior, 1999). Attempts by the news media or Congress to step in and monitor these ads often results in an increase in public cynicism about the two bodies (Iyengar & Prior, 1999; Kaid, 2004). Editorial control of the message is held by the politician, not the journalist; therefore the freedom exists to say what they want, put forth their own agenda, play up their own strengths and attack the weakness of their opponents (McNair, 2003).

Political advertising spending has steadily grown in the past twenty years. The 1988 election found President George H. W. Bush and opponent Michael Dukakis spending a combined \$80 million in television ads (Devlin, 1989, McNair, 2003). President George H. W. Bush alone spent over \$60 million in 1992 (McNair, 2003) with President Clinton and Ross Perot contributing another \$60 million to bring the total up over \$120 million (Devlin, 1993). Almost \$200 million was spent on advertising time in 1996 (Devlin, 1997), \$240 was reportedly spent by the three candidates in 2000 (Devlin, 2001), another \$200 million was spent by Bush and Kerry in 2004 (Memmott & Drinkard, 2004)

## **Current “New” Avenues of Political Advertising**

With a number of political candidates creating MySpace profiles, YouTube videos and Second Life avatars it appears the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies have been leveraged for political advertising and campaigning. Political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool boldly proclaimed electronic communication, of which the Internet is the primary force, the fourth stage in human communications development, following speech, writing, printing, and broadcasting (Davis, 1999).

Since the Internet became a fixture in the majority of U.S. households, it has played a role in political advertising and campaigning. As the Internet becomes less novel and more functional to the everyday user, online campaign tools have become more progressive and interactive. Gary Selnow (1998) noted that 1996 was the first year that political campaigns used the web for mass campaigning; since then its use has increased dramatically in local, state, and federal elections (Benoit & Benoit, 2000; Bimber, 1998; D’Alessio, 1997, 2000; Dulio, Goff, & Thurber 1999; Poupolo, 2001; Schneider & Foot, 2002; Whillock, 1997). For example, by early summer 2003 10 presidential campaigns had already established an active web presence for the 2004 presidential race (Endres & Warnick, 2004). In their 2004 journal article, Endres and Warnick found that campaign Web sites have developed from “a token tool to an absolutely must have tool” (p. 323). Their research discovered that web sites had such an impact on the campaign process that the Institute for Politics, Democracy, and the Internet (IPDI, 2002) published *Online Campaigning 2002: A Primer*. This was targeted at candidates and campaign managers, and offered instruction on how to strategically use the Internet in campaigns and outlined a set of “best practices” for Internet campaign web sites.

Foot, Xenos, and Schneider (2003) compiled a comprehensive analysis of the U.S. campaign

web sites of the 2002 campaign in an attempt to find out if the Internet was changing campaigns and the public sphere. Their study focused on how candidates discussed political issues on campaign web sites to see if universal campaign elements (message construction, issue selection) were adapted or (re)created online. Keeping in mind that the world of the Internet has undergone significant change since their 2003 study, their relevant findings were that candidates tended to provide basic issue stance information online, but avoid direct and indirect forms of issue dialogue. When a campaign was conducted online, the researchers found that intensity in which the campaign was conducted was similar to the intensity found in a traditionally run campaign. Foot et al. indicated that candidates tended to strategically frame their presentation of issue circumstance much in the same way that they would in traditional forms of campaigning. The findings also revealed patterns inconsistent with the ‘politics as usual’ perspective with regards to past research on politics and the Internet, and yielded two new implications for theorizing about the Internet with regards to online campaigning, pointing out the need for future research in order to obtain a more complete understanding (Endres & Warnick, 2004).

As the Internet continued to grow, users learned how to embrace the concepts of personalization and interactivity. Recognizing individuals’ desire for control, companies strived to allow consumers the ability to personalize experience. Internet users saw products and marketing campaigns with the prefix “my” - My AOL, My Yahoo, My Netscape—giving individuals’ personalization and adding empowerment to their lives. Personalization is a concept that encompasses many different types of personal control. People began to use the interactivity and flexibility of the Internet to customize their intake of information, their products, and even their social interactions (Shapiro, 1999).

The term *interactivity* refers to a complex and multidimensional concept (Heeter 1989; Newhagen, Cordes and Levy, 1996; Steuer 1992),

and there is little agreement on a set of specific conceptual and operational definitions (Kiouisis 2002; Lombard and Snyder-Duch 2001; McMillan and Hwang 2002). Interactivity has been defined using various underlying dimensions, but two dimensions appear most frequently in the extant literature: human-message interaction and human-human interaction. These two dimensions hold promise for the examination of interactivity on the Internet because they serve as umbrellas for different definitions and dimensions of previous interactivity studies.

Even though interactivity is not really new to communication fields, computer-mediated communication, especially via the Internet, has added new levels of interactivity beyond what is available in traditional mass communication (Morris and Ogan, 1996; Pavlik, 1998). For example, interactivity on the Internet allows consumers to actively participate in the persuasion process by controlling advertising messages, amount of information, and order of presentation at any time, according to their needs and preferences (Hoffman and Novak 1996). In addition, the commercial value of interactivity has been considerably increased since the advent of the Internet. Advertisers have new tools at their disposal that enable them to send messages to consumers in a more directed, cost efficient manner. With the proper database of information in hand a campaign can drill down to the most precise geographic or demographic cross sections possible.

### **Geo-Targeting**

You're fed up with those gateway surveys on websites. Someone always wants to know your name or your date of birth or hometown. What purpose will these answers ever serve anyway? That information is the foundational basis of an advertising technique known as geo-targeting.

To understand geo-targeting it is important to consider the true meaning of another word. When one broadcasts a signal--in the case of an

advertisement or a seed or a live television feed or fertilizer--it is being spread across a chosen dispersal area with hopes of varying degrees of saturation. To mindlessly cover an area with a message a broadcast can be an effective technique. When ad buyers delve further into their formulas, considering the number of eyes that have watched an ad, versus the amount of money spent producing and placing the spot, a general broadcast is often not cost effective.

Consider a mixed urban/rural state with a close race. The urban centers hypothetically vote for one candidate and the rural voters lean the other direction. Historically two southern counties of the state dictate which way the state will go in the next election cycle. A campaign would prefer the ability to advertise to voters in those specific areas directly rather than invest resources in the closest television DMA (designated market area) and hoping for the best. Geo-targeting can allow a message to be dispersed to people on database considerations. If the data has been collected by a local prominent website, or information the campaign or party has gathered, it can be used towards digitally canvassing neighborhoods.

A campaign might wish to shore up its image within the male 24-40 demographic north of downtown. A site that holds this information based on surveys and a web browser's cookies might then be able to share your ad only with men self-described of the certain age from the area of interest. This geo-targeting technique also has uses for smaller races. A potential city councilor needs only to reach the audience in her ward, and not the entire city. If she has the opportunity to do so--and at a smaller cost than a television or radio advertisement--it would be of a larger benefit to her campaign.

There is, of course, a basic televised technique similar to this. As viewers of the 2000 presidential election might recall Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George Bush concentrated their television buys on battleground states where the sway of voters was still undetermined. This same

theory could be extrapolated into a local dynamic where one media market may generally lean to one candidate, while nearby areas might vote for the opponent. Television has long been a proving ground for advertising based on age groups and a viewer's gender, but this can be a spotty technique owing to programming choices and an audience's drift pattern.

Geo-targeting, however, allows an advertiser to drill down to the core desired audience, to the zip code on a particular website if the hosts have generated the database with such depth. Not every site currently uses or offers this style of advertising, but that might expand as the usefulness of the technique becomes more greatly appreciated.

## Websites

The conventional wisdom is that you're campaign isn't much without a website. Like so many other campaign innovations this is a communication method that has trickled down the scale from national to local races. With three-quarters of U.S. adults (Pew, 2008) now accessing the Internet the presence of a website has emerged in a place of prominence that will give a campaign legitimacy, where the absence of such a tool can make a candidate appear out of step.

There are several fundamentally important aspects of campaign websites at this point in the Internet's growth. They can serve as a repository of information on the candidate, his stances and experiences. The website, by the use of blogs can help stir discussion and rally support among a constituency. It can also be an access point for grassroots activity, where proactive supporters can access, download and mass produce campaign literature. Most importantly it can be used as a vehicle to raise money.

Senator Bob Dole actually referred to his web site during his 1996 convention speech (Cornfield, 2005). Neither Governor George Bush nor Vice President Al Gore mentioned a website during their convention speeches in 2000, but that oversight

likely won't happen again. The advantages stemming from such a promotion are too important to ignore.

Coming up on the 2004 presidential election, the Internet's influence was beginning its rise to political power. Thorson and Rodgers' (2006) study examined candidate created blogs on campaign Web sites as a form of electronic word of mouth, while Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl and Sapp's (2006) study examined the evolution of online campaigns with specific attention focused on blogs and Web sites. A blog is a form of communication unique to the Internet, noted for their ease of publishing, widespread authorship and varied subject matter from all things popular to arcane. Blogs can be used as educational tools, corporate tools, and are most commonly used as online journals for a wide variety of people. Blogs have proliferated rapidly in recent years, attracting significant attention and generating important legal issues. Software developer Dave Winer one of the first bloggers and a former research fellow at Harvard, defines a blog as "[A] hierarchy of text, images, media objects and data, arranged chronologically, that can be viewed in an HTML browser" (2003, Technically, what is a weblog? ¶ 2). In 2004 Trammell (as cited in Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu & Landreville, 2006) noted that blogs offer greater interactivity, and at higher rates than traditional web pages, owing to the proliferation of links and comment features that allowed readers to leave feedback. Presidential candidates began putting blogs on their sites during the 2004 campaign. The blogs allowed candidates and staff to directly address and interact with website visitors (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). Blogs, as ostensibly interactive elements designed to enhance the persuasive impact of campaign web sites, provide an opportunity to explore whether (and how) allowing an opportunity for visitors to exchange ideas and opinions has an impact on important attitudinal and behavioral variables (Trammell et al., 2006). While blogs in these two studies were found to

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have different impacts on voting attitudes and perceptions, such studies have opened up the door for future research.

Max Fose was Sen. John McCain's Internet manager for the 2000 campaign. He pointed to several other advantages of web sites and the Internet in general, among them: unfiltered messages to the electorate, lowering campaign costs, increased message efficacy and the recruitment of campaign volunteers (Powell & Cowart, 2003). Fose's virtual staging ground for grassroots efforts netted the McCain campaign \$6.4 million (at the time an online record) and 142,000 volunteers.

How did Fose and the McCain campaign get such results? It worked, Fose said, because the online presence was integrated into the communication platform so completely that the online presence became the platform. Fose found that media drove traffic to the web site to the point that the candidate would mention fund raising success to reporters, who mentioned it in their stories until the coverage just multiplied (Powell & Cowart, 2003).

Money, of course, is the lifeblood of a campaign. Without it, even a natural candidate will struggle for attention. Funding has long captured an important part of the media's attention, often moving in time with the horse race coverage of the polls and the scathing sound bites. McCain, as time would prove, was no one-off in earning money through his online investment.

In the next cycle a little known governor from Vermont would exceed all expectations. Howard Dean raised \$15 million in the final months of 2003 and more than \$40 million for the year according to fund raising figures reported on by the New York Times. Dean's \$40 million lead all Democrats prior to the start of the primary season, including Sen. John Kerry's \$29 million (New York Times, 2004). The conventional wisdom was that Dean, a man admittedly behind this particular curve, hired staffers with experience in high level politics and high-technology enterprise to generate the bulk of that money. Thus began a revitalization of

interpersonal campaigning. Mass-media was no longer the sole outlet, campaigns could reach out to the public without the media and, even more promising, the electorate was reaching back.

While generating funds online was no secret and everyone was trying it the 2008 election featured two champions of online fund raising. Congressman Ron Paul earned a group of small, but vocal and generous group of supporters in the primary season, breaking several fund raising records including a staggering \$4.3 million raised online in a single day (RonPaulGraphs.com, 2008). Patrick Ruffini, a Republican online strategist not affiliated with Paul's campaign, noted "(It) wasn't a huge primary win or a big media hit. His supporters basically willed it into existence. This shows what a healthy, functioning relationship between a campaign and its grassroots actually looks like" (Ruffini, 2007).

It was bottom-up success on an unprecedented scale. Across the aisle candidates were enjoying success as well. The ever-evolving Internet was playing a big role in the success--in money and polling figures--of a young senator from Illinois.

Different from a blog is a social networking site, which focuses on the building and verifying of online social networks for communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services are primarily web based and provide a collection of various ways for users to interact, such as chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging, and discussion groups. The main types of social networking services are those which contain directories of some categories (such as former classmates), means to connect with friends (usually with self-description pages), and recommender systems linked to trust. Popular methods now combine many of these, with MySpace and Facebook being the most widely used in 2007 (Nielsen, 2007).

Web sites alone, no matter how dynamic they can become, are no longer enough to keep a can-

didate in the midst of an ongoing online dialogue. Prior to the 2008 election cycle the Internet blossomed with web 2.0 nomenclature and tools. Web 2.0 came to mean technology and web design to create user-driven content with the ultimate goals of information sharing, collaboration and enhanced creativity.

Suddenly it was even easier for everyday individuals without significant computer coding experience to maintain a presence online. Sites like MySpace and Facebook emerged as some of the most high volume locations on the web. Other technologies emerged to allow users to add their own photos and videos to the web. Phones, too, became an important tool and uploading to the web became push-button easy. More people were able to participate, or host, a part of larger conversations.

It was at this point that social media became valuable tools in a political campaign's arsenal. The electorate not only wanted to hear what the candidate had to say, but now they had the tools and ease to interact with the campaign and occasionally even the candidate as well. When campaigns reached out to the 2.0 audiences they were talking to, and hearing from, a hungry audience. People not content to sit back and wait for the news, sound bites, and answers to come to them were able to easily go online, engage in a conversation and seek out what they were looking for. Progressive strategists realized they now had an opportunity to campaign with greater ease, no filters and no interference to an audience passionate about their cause.

The passion of that audience became a conference campaigns could have with some of their most vocal supporters, using a technology that deals with early adopters. And, for politicians always interesting in courting the youth vote they now had the perfect vehicle. By concentrating online candidates could find motivated individuals, donor success and a younger audience that operated in a world without much consultation of daily newspapers or network news.

Social media, trendy personal hubs like Facebook, photo sharing sites, popular video sites and micro blogging were all part of a larger online construction. In the long 2008 campaign season all the presidential candidates from both major parties had websites. All experimented with many of these other services. And why not? They are free or inexpensive, and most importantly, people were already congregating at these locations for their own online social needs.

In the 2008 race many of the candidates used Facebook, MySpace and Twitter with varying degrees of success (see Reichart, 2008) Name recognition, campaign support, issue identification and fund raising were all important functions of the candidates' online presence. In the aggregate, no one did it better than Sen. Barack Obama.

In addition to dominating the mainstream media with his historic run to become the Democratic nominee, the party's own efforts and his general affability, Obama's campaign nurtured the groundswell of support online. Among the tools at Obama's disposal were: podcasting, Flickr, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and more.

A podcast, for the uninitiated, is something akin to an online radio interview. The strengths of a podcast, from the campaign's perspective are longevity and convenience. While a radio or television interview might be caught by an audience on a single broadcast a podcast can exist online for as long as the host wishes and can be accessed at any time. Even more importantly a podcast can be pulled in by an audience member with one of several automated tools online. Now, as an audience member, you don't even need to seek it out, it can be delivered to your computer for ease of consumption or downloaded to your personal mp3 player, such as an iPod, for you to enjoy on the go.

Flickr is a hosting site that has enjoyed an enormous audience for several years now. It is a simple process to upload your photographs or images to Flickr--free for casual users and at a small price for high-volume uploaders. The site

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flexes its muscle with a feature called tagging, which is another function of web 2.0. If the campaign uploads a photo and tags it “Obama” it is then grouped with every other Obama photo throughout the Flickr site. At that point anyone on Flickr could search Obama and see your photograph.

On August 29, 2008, the day after Sen. Obama accepted the nomination Flickr returned 163,926 hits for the word “Obama.” A search using “Biden” for his running mate Sen. Joe Biden returned 5,431 hits. Obama’s Republican opponent Sen. John McCain returned 17,840 hits on Flickr the same day. McCain’s running mate, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin returned 2,530 hits. It is worth noting that not all of these numbers represent a photograph; one must consider artistic productions, images from television, commonality of names and so forth, however the usefulness and popularity of Flickr is well illustrated by the statistics.

YouTube grew within the span of a few short years to become the world’s dominant video hosting site. Again functionality and ease of use--both to upload a video and to search and play them--are among the primary reasons behind that success. Any campaign with a web site could conceivably host a video on their own domain, but with a few clicks that same video can be uploaded to the third most popular site on the Internet (Alexa.com, 2009b).

Another aspect of YouTube’s success has been the simultaneous proliferation of inexpensive and simple video editing software that has become a widespread computing feature. Microsoft and Apple both deliver a basic video editor into their operating system essentially making everyone a potential director. Suddenly anyone with a creative idea is a demonstrable example of two-step flow, passing along their own thoughts and perceptions that could resonate with their audience. Home-based technology is assisting in the creation of new opinion leaders. Parodies, recuts, artistic “mashups” of candidates and music have all become a part of the YouTube dialogue.

Facebook and MySpace are two of the world’s primary social networking hubs. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project’s December 2008 tracking survey, 35% of adults have a profile on a social networking site--compared to only 8% in 2005 (Lenhart, 2009). MySpace has fallen to the number two social networking site behind Facebook, with recent statistics claiming over 58 million unique visitors and over 810 million visits per month (CnetNews.com, 2009). In the five years since Facebook originated, it has become the 3rd ranked most visited website behind Google and Yahoo (Alexa.com, 2009a). Facebook ranks 5<sup>th</sup> worldwide, and in February of 2009 had over 150 million users worldwide, and was still growing (Facebook, 2009). They are sites built with ease of the end user in mind--often to the detriment of the aesthetic, but that would be a different topic altogether. These sites level the playing field. No longer does one need computer coding ability to maintain an online presence, interact with friends, host photos, blog and share their thoughts. They’ve been so successful as a social gathering place that high end computer users and coders have found that they must also maintain a MySpace and/or Facebook account for networking purposes as a part of their online brand in much the same way as political candidates.

Senator Obama, for example took this one step further by hiring a man named Chris Hughes, who was one of the three co-founders of Facebook. Hughes was put to work running “my.barackobama.com”, a site which evolved into something of its own social network for like-minded Obama supporters. Not a software developer himself, Hughes brought an appreciation of how to nurture and manage online communities. Savvy use, and in that particular case a savvy hire, added a great deal to Obama’s online impact.

Twitter, one of the latest online success stories, is also a valuable tool for a campaign. Its power in disseminating information about a massive earthquake in China, the 2008 election and the

2009 post-election protests in Iran all helped give Twitter heft as an online tool. Twitter is considered “microblogging” which is to say that you can share anything you’d like that you can fit into 140 characters or less. Twitter users are pooling into nodes and communities as the functionality of the tool is such that you chose who to follow and others chose whether you are interesting enough to follow in their own Twitter feeds.

In some instances this might chip away at the spiral of silence. Twitter audiences are actively cultivated, meaning the user has the ability to seek out voices exclusive to their beliefs and can selectively ignore those that might oppose them or be critical of their voice. There is some degree of reciprocity involved in following Twitter users, so in following a new individual a user will often be given the same courtesy in kind. Over time this could allow a user to build a stream of conversation strictly about issues or stances relative to their own, establishing a network of similar thought while eschewing others.

Twitter is, in fact, new enough that users are still sorting out for themselves the etiquette of the “Twitterverse.” The anecdotal stories of the impact and success of Twitter thus far are largely concerned with breaking news, fund raising and other unique grass roots community campaigns, but candidates (national and even some local) are testing the waters. The mobility of Twitter, it can easily be used with any cell phone that supports Short Message Service text messaging, and the immediacy of the tool are tremendous attributes to the Twitter model.

Using these tools effectively benefited Barack Obama greatly on his way to the White House. Joe Rospars, Obama’s director of Obama’s new-media told *The Washington Post* just after the election that the campaign had more than \$500 million in online donations from 3 million donors (Vargas, 2008). Rospars went on to say that the average donation was \$80, and the average donor gave more than once. Clearly we’ve entered into a new age of digital fund raising.

The most challenging aspects for users, candidates and researchers concerning the web’s evolution are its innovative character. Rapid development of emerging technologies means things are changing constantly. Today’s smash online success, let’s say Twitter for one example, might be short-lived, but the next trendy development that bests an existing product as a tool or toy must improve upon the previous item’s functionality. Things will only grow faster, more efficient and more innovative. The open-source culture—allowing outside developers to see, use and modify your code to improve or augment an application—existing in much of the online ecosystem contributes to that evolution.

The inevitable question is what’s next within the context of a campaign’s technological growth? Obama pointed the way there as well: The next revolution will be mobile. He announced Sen. Biden as his running mate by text message. This was shrewd in both the technological and the political campaign sense. It built an instant (and significant) phone bank for the campaign. Nielsen reported that 2.9 million cell phone users signed up to receive such information from the campaign and the novel approach helped further the image of a fresh, young, innovative candidate (CBS News, 2008).

Within an election cycle or two even that experimental text message announcement might seem blasé or antiquated. As technologies evolve and smart phones become smarter and more widespread in the marketplace we’ll be getting (and sharing) our news and information in far more innovative, and mobile, ways.

## **Looking Forward to the Digital Advertising Age**

### **Problems with Digital Advertising and Campaigning**

In May of 2008, Lori Drew was indicted by a federal grand jury on one count of conspiracy

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and three counts of accessing protected computers without authorization to obtain information to inflict emotional distress (CNN, 2008). This woman was accused of creating a fake profile on MySpace and used it to torment Megan Meier, a former friend of Drew's daughter. Ultimately, Meier committed suicide, and her actions were attributed to being the victim of cyber-bullying. Drew was later acquitted (Zavis, 2009). In July of 2008, the Oklahoma Publishing Company and a sportswriter sued a Nebraska football fan who admitted creating a fake news article about two University of Oklahoma quarterbacks, using the publisher's template with which to showcase his satire and posting it on a message board (Ellis, 2008a). The suit was settled later that year (Ellis, 2008b). These are two cases out of numerous incidents that highlight the problem of credibility on the Internet.

Although the digital world gives users access to immediate information at any time, it does not come without its problems. The first, as mentioned, regards the idea of credibility. Credibility research focuses on one of two areas; source and medium. As media have become a primary source for public information, media credibility has received increased scrutiny (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Wanta & Hu, 1994; West, 1994). The Internet has been steadily growing in use each year, which tasks researchers to determine how people use it and the effects it has. In the digital age, anyone can be a contributor on the Internet, and the Internet has no government or ethical regulations that control the content that it put forth on it. Hovland & Weiss (1951) were among the first to assess media credibility, and their findings conclude that the messages were more likely to be accepted if the source was deemed trustworthy. As technology continuously advances, it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish a credible source from a less credible source (Andie, 1997).

In the past couple of years, the Internet has taken on a 'viral' aspect; a marketing technique that uses pre-existing social networks (like You-

Tube or MySpace) to broadcast a message. Viral marketing messages can be spread in several different ways—email forwards, word of mouth, and exposure on social networks. Viral marketing depends on people to pass the message to others on their own volition, and its effect is much like a snowball—the quicker the message is spread, the bigger it becomes.

Senator Hillary Clinton was the subject of a fake ad that was broadcast on YouTube that parodied a 1984 Apple Computer Super Bowl spot that implied Sen. Clinton was the epitome of mind-numbing conformity. Senator Barack Obama was victim to a false email that was spread around the Internet from inbox to inbox for over a year. The anonymous chain e-mail made a claim that Obama is concealing a radical Islamic background, stating that he used the Koran to be sworn in, as well as many other untruthful statements. No prominent political candidate seems immune to such negativity. As stated earlier, the Federal Communications Commission has strict regulations for what can and cannot be broadcast. The Internet does not currently have to adhere to any of these regulations. The viral nature of the Internet allows these fake ads and fake emails unlimited exposure. Essentially, the Internet gives power to anyone willing to make a political commercial. If it is interesting enough, it has the potential to gain wide circulation, influence and audience and perhaps an election. Credibility of these claims is considered by only a few. Credibility on the Internet is left solely to the determination of the individual user.

## **Easily Accessed Information**

Another problem that political campaigns face in the digital age is one of the aspects that the Internet is most appreciated for—the ease in which information can be obtained. Political analyst Dr. Larry Powell agrees that the Internet has definitely played a role in campaigning—a mostly negative role. He has called the Internet a “mistake-based

campaign medium” (Kennedy, 2007). Powell further points out that opponents can easily visit a web site to see if there is a mistake made that they can use to their own advantage; additionally, the opponents can take measures that try to inflict harm on the candidate, such as negative messages or inappropriate content.

Though the content can be rapidly changed on any sort of Internet site, if sharp eyes can catch it quickly enough, a mistake can be costly to a political candidate. Unlike the good old days of television advertising, if an ad is run that is more harmful to a candidate than their opponent, there is no more pulling an ad and trying to forget it exists. The nature of the Internet allows bad ads to be played ad nauseum. A bad photograph can be circulated quickly and repeatedly. Digital editing and photoshopping can take a candidate’s words and image and put them in a new—and often times negative—context.

Additionally, much like the more traditional media venues of newspaper, radio, and television, there is no way to determine who exactly is privy to your message. There is no membership initiation or proof required to become a part of a political candidate’s social networking site, or follow them on Twitter. Supporters and haters alike can be part of these communities. Spies from the opposing camps can monitor discussions and comments on these sites and use them to their own campaign’s advantage.

### **Need for New Theoretical Models**

Traditional models of mass communication have taken the form of a linear flow of information, and profess that the audience is a passive receiver of information. In the digital age, both of those statements can prove to be incorrect. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the domination of linear models that asserted the mass media was responsible for the distribution of messages from centers of information to an audience that was just waiting for the information to be provided

to them (Bryant & Miron, 2006). Studies of how the public reacted to such mass persuasion were the foundation for many of the early mass communication theories (Berger & Chaffee, 1987).

It is easy to realize, with the ease of access to the Internet and the popularity of portable media devices that at the very least, the media audience is no longer passive. In today’s political climate, voters do not wait for the news at 6 p.m. for campaign trail updates. Rather, they are accessing the latest news from web sites, “friending” candidates on social networking sites, receiving instant updates on their mobile devices, and actively participating in web-based chat and discussion groups. For many years, the point was argued that young people do not pay attention to politics. Today’s young adults are proving that they can be well versed in the issues of the day. What they do not do is follow politics in the ‘traditional’ manner.

McQuail (2000) points out several features that the new electronic mediums of communication present that differ from their predecessors; technology convergence, and unclear lines between content and functions and interpersonal and mass communication. New media allows for increasing levels of activity, user control, user personalization, customization of information, and innovative methods of distribution of messages. When looking at news on the Internet, the idea of convergence has allowed news delivery to grow considerably. Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift, altering the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences (Jenkins, 2004). Scholars define convergence as the process of technological integration (Danowski & Choi, 1998; Fidler, 1997; Pavlik, 1998). A mixture of audio, video, graphics, interactivity, and print became a reality with Internet news and has begun to have a lasting impact on news and how news stories are told (Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, 2004). Most news outlets consider their online sites as supplements to their primary products, but this model has begun to change with

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the creation of new facilities, and new concepts in new media, multimedia, and media convergence (Salwen, 2004). As media industries are forced to transition from analog to digital, and deregulation begins to occur within the industry, barriers that once existed between different media outlets are becoming weak (Fidler, 1997; Garcia-Murillo & MacInnes, 2001; Waterman, 2000). As more and more new technologies and new media present themselves to the public, the media users will begin the process of determining if the new media is better than the media it is replacing.

The preferred format for online news publishing is a multimedia one. A multimedia environment allows for the presentation of information in text, audio, and video. Written articles are accompanied by voice synthesis, music, color photographs, animated charts, and video footage. Multimedia isn't fixed by ready limits (Elderkin, 1996). The limits are set by the resources news producers commit to news production in this environment rather than by technological capability (Gunter, 2003).

Political advertisements and campaigns have adopted the idea of convergence and have begun to utilize the multimedia platform of delivery. A visitor to a candidate's web site can access as much information as they would like. It becomes the job of the visitor to create their own unique experience with the candidate's site. They can simply look at the front page of the site, and move on. They can choose to watch videos, look at pictures, find out more information on the candidate's background and policies, or to engage in discussion with other visitors to the web site through blog comments or discussion boards.

There has not been a 'new media' model developed to date. Given the variety offered online perhaps one single model will never surface. However, new media certainly challenges much of the theoretical models of media that currently exist. As previously mentioned, many of these models rely on linear communication and a passive audience. Various attempts to create such a model either try to combine structural characteristics

of media systems, message exchanges, and user perceptions into a multidimensional construct, or identify one of those facets as the main idea of interactivity (Sundar, 2004). However, the main problem may lie in the fact that there is not one definition that clearly defines exactly what interactivity is. Eveland (2003) criticized traditional media effects studies, suggesting they are too limiting, especially when considering new media technologies, and proposed a mix of attributes approach as a better alternative of study. Bucy & Tao (2007) proposed a mediated model of interactivity that incorporates interactive attitudes, the perceptions of the users of their own self efficacy with the medium, the differences of the individuals using the medium, and various media effects measures. Slater (2007) suggested a reinforcing spirals framework for understanding media selectivity and effects as a dynamic and mutually influencing process. His speculations include the development and maintenance of political subcultures in contemporary societies.

What is most clear amongst the areas of uncertainty is that the traditional models of communication may need a serious overhaul to be considered relevant in the world of digital media. In 'real' life, people often resist expressing their views because they fear some sort of negative consequence. This is the basis for Noelle-Neumann's (1974) theory of the spiral of silence.

However, in the virtual world, there may no longer be a solid grounding for this theory. The Internet potentially removes the concept of social isolation, and without social isolation, the spiral of silence has no grounding in which to exist. Traditionally, social isolation has been represented as a one-dimensional construct organized around the notion of a person's position outside the peer group and refers to isolation from the group as a result of being excluded from the group by peers (Bowker, Bukowski, Zargarpour & Hoza, 1998). From children to adults, literature shows that people understand the concept of isolation and fear the repercussions of being isolated from groups

they are a part of. The Internet has the power to free people from the fear of social isolation, and could potentially shut down the spiral of silence. The Internet allows people to intellectually locate within groups of people with like mindsets and similar points of view, but also provides multiple venues in which people can agree or disagree with a wide range of audiences, removing psychological barriers and making possible the large-scale, many-to-many conversations Coleman & Gøtze, (2001) suggested. Unlike traditional mediums that limit participation, the Internet brings the characteristics of empowerment, enormous scales of available information, specific audiences can be targeted effectively and people can be brought together through the medium (O'Hara, 2002).

This is just one example of how new media changes a traditional theory of media. Since the spiral of silence largely deals with political expression, it is easy to see how voters would become more aggressive in voicing their opinions, comfortable in the knowledge that they can find like-minded individuals with relative ease, not to mention silence the voices of opposing and potentially taunting voices with the click of a mouse.

Another example of how a traditional theory might need modification can be viewed with the two-step flow of communication theory. Recall that information in this model passes from the media, down to opinion leaders, then down to the general public. The flow of information moves in a downward pattern. However, politics on the Internet can be viewed in two different lights with this theory. One possible alternative is that information no longer flows in a downward pattern. Political consumers no longer wait for information to come to them; they seek out the information and pass it on. Since the average user now operates as the agent who accesses and distributes information, the information flows laterally. The viral nature of the Internet allows for such a message to be distributed quickly and rapidly. The second potential modification to this theory is that the Internet—specifically sites

like YouTube and other social networking sites—perform the opinion leadership function. Social networking sites take over what used to happen in local churches, coffee houses, and water coolers. The same goal—to share information—is able to be done more quickly. This function is no longer in the hands of the mass media. Instead, it goes into the hands of the public who can get online, interact, and email links. Essentially, the two-step downward flow becomes one laterally moving step.

## **CONCLUSION**

The world of political campaigns and advertising has entered a time of great change. As technology moves quickly, political campaign staffs are quick to re-adapt their strategies to fit in with the changing technology. Gone are the days of the passive audience; they have been replaced with a younger generation that often wants the latest technology now, and information and content delivered on their own terms. For all the advantages digital media seems to offer political candidates, it seems there are an equal number of disadvantages, including, perhaps, some that have yet to be discovered. To try to explain the current political playing field using traditional models of mass media and advertising will only serve to limit the overall understanding of the vast potential and capabilities the digital world offers. Taking into consideration how fast technology evolves, it may be more beneficial to better understand the new elements that the new medium brings and create central and lasting definitions that can be applied to various new models. For politicians, they must understand that the days of traditional advertising and campaigning are long gone. Garnering political information and delivering it at the appropriate time and place to the segment needing it for renewed commitment is more than just another step in the game. Rather it holds the potential to be the viral spread of

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content that becomes a dominant source of belief and support for the tech savvy candidate capable of deploying it.

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