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Brand Obama: How Barack Obama Revolutionized Political Campaign Marketing in the 2008 Presidential Election

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**Brand Obama: How President Barack Obama Revolutionized
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A Haiku for Poppa Lab:

Thank you, Poppa Lab
Double screens, moral support
#PoppaGrind all night.

To my father, Aaron Evan Michaelsen CMC'83
Your memory makes me stronger every day
Your simple words, "Do Your Best and Keep Your Promises,"
Have guided me throughout the entire process of writing this Thesis
And will continue to guide me for the rest of my life
Love you forever.

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I. Introduction

In 2008, President Barack Obama was named Advertising Age's marketer of the year, the first time a politician won such an award. Obama won the vote of hundreds of professional marketers, agency heads, and marketing-services vendors, edging out brands such as Apple, Nike, and Zappos.com.[1] The Obama campaign was praised for its innovative use of Web 2.0 technology and the way it created tools that engaged people with the campaign. Angus Macaulay, Vice-President of Rodale marketing solutions, praised the campaign: "I honestly look at Obama's campaign and I look at it as something that we can all learn from as marketers."[2]

From an outsider's view, it seems as though Obama's marketing strategy was a big factor in winning the election. However, many political scientists predicted that he would win the election without even taking his marketing strategy into account. George Bush's approval rating of 22% on Election Day, the lowest of any president since Gallup started asking the question in 1938, represented a country that was angry with the crippling economy, two continuous overseas wars in the Middle East, and a general failure by the Republican Party.[3] It seemed as though the country was definitely going to go blue no matter who ran on the Democratic ticket. For instance, Alan Abramowitz, a political scientist at Emory University, used the "time-for-change" model which looks at the incumbent president's net approval rating at the end of June, the change in real GDP

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[1] Matthew Creamer, "Obama Wins! ... Ad Age's Marketer of the Year," *Advertising Age*, October 17, 2008, accessed November 27, 2014, http://adage.com/article/moy-2008/obama-wins-ad-age-s-marketer-year/131810/.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Bush's Final Approval Rating: 22 Percent," *CBS News*, January 15, 2009, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/bushs-final-approval-rating-22-percent/.

in the second quarter of the election year, and a first term incumbency advantage to predict the outcome of the 2008 election: he predicted the Obama would receive 54.3% of the vote and that McCain would receive 45.7%.[4] Abromowitz's results were extremely accurate (the actual results were Obama 52.9% and McCain 45.6%).[5] The fact that Abramowitz could predict the result of the election based solely on external factors like the economy and Bush's approval rating, begs the question of how necessary Obama's marketing strategy was to his overall campaign.

However, whether or not Obama could have still won the election without his clever marketing strategy is not important question. Rather, his marketing tactics and strategies must be evaluated and analyzed in order to understand how they functioned and how they will affect the future of campaigns and politics. What made Obama's technique so unique? And, how did he utilize new media to revolutionize campaign marketing? This thesis answers these questions, first by looking at general political marketing theory and practice, the history of political marketing, and then at the strategies and tactics of the 2008 Obama campaign. Finally, it evaluates the future of new media in elections, the implications of a branded president, and the relationship between of marketing strategy and actual governance.

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[4] Alan I. Abramowitz, "Forecasting The 2008 Presidential Election With The Time-for-Change Model," *Political Science & Politics*, no. 4 (2008): 691-95, accessed November 30, 2014, doi:10.1017/S1049096508081249.
[5] "2008 Presidential General Election Results," *US Election Atlas*, accessed November 28, 2014, http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=2008.

II. Theory and Practice of Political Campaign Marketing

Introduction

In order to understand how Obama transformed political campaign marketing, we must understand the theories and practices of the field. Campaign marketing is far more complicated than picking a campaign slogan and the right opinion on hot issues. It is in intricate process that involves understanding the voters' needs, communicating to the voters effectively, and persuading them to support the candidate and to vote on Election Day. While every campaign is different, this chapter illustrates a general framework for presidential campaigns in the United States.

Theory of Political Marketing

Political candidates are essentially in a marketing game: which candidate can convince American voters that they are the better candidate to lead the nation for the next four years. Presidential candidates in particular must distinguish themselves from the competition by strategically branding themselves and their campaign platform. Candidates achieve this through effective political marketing.

Political marketing is similar to marketing in the business world. Marketing is an exchange process centered on a seller (a business) who exchanges a product or service for money from a buyer (the consumer).[6] It involves the process of creating, delivering, and communicating value and satisfaction for the purpose of making a profit by selling a

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[6] Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 8.

product or service. [7] This exchange is implemented by the seller through a marketing

strategy based off of market research and is implemented through advertising, brand

development, promotion, and public relations efforts.[8] Whether it is consumer products

like soap or shampoo or presidential candidates that are being marketed to the public,

emotional reactions can be just as influential as rational ones inside the mind of the

consumer. For example, a commercial for a beauty shampoo would showcase beautiful

women with luscious, glowing hair to appeal to every woman's emotional desire for

beautiful hair. In the same vein, a charismatic candidate for the presidency would

showcase his strengths and admirable qualities to give the voters a feeling that they will

personally benefit from his presidency.[9]

There are of course significant differences between marketing in business and in

politics. In business, the goal is to make a profit, whereas in politics the goal is to win an

election.[10] Second, while winning in politics sometimes means only winning by a few

percentage points, winning and losing in the business world is based upon large

variations and profit margins. For example, in the 2008 election, Barack Obama won by

only eight percentage points, whereas the profits margins between a company with a

successful marketing campaign and one without can be in the millions and billions of

dollars.[11] Lastly, businesses often follow through on marketing claims and strategies if

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[7] Darren Lilleker and Ralph Negrine, "Mapping a Market Orientation: Can We Detect Political Marketing Only Through the Lens of Hindsight?," in *Winning Elections with Political Marketing*, ed. Philip Davies and Bruce Newman (New York: Haworth Press, 2006), 36.

[8] Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*, 8.

[9] Ibid, 4.

[10]Ibid, 10.

[11] "Results: President," *CNN*, November 17, 2008, Accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/president/.

the business stands to make a profit, whereas politicians may choose not to advocate a certain policy that was part of their campaign strategy once they are elected.[12] Politicians are infamous for not following through on campaign promises as their strategies change once they are in office, whereas businesses must follow through on their marketing claims in order to maintain their customer base.

According to Darren Lilleker and Ralph Negrine, contributing authors of *Winning Elections with Political Marketing*, voters will support the candidate or party that most closely matches their personal ideas and values, not always the candidate that aligns with their political views.[13] In an increasingly non-partisan electorate, voters do not necessarily just look for the most effective "management team," but rather a candidate that reflects their own visions for society and the future.[14] For example, a voter that does not have solid political ties but has strong opinions supporting social activism and human rights would most likely lean towards a candidate that promotes issues like gay marriage and immigrant rights. Thus, political campaigns rely on marketing to communicate to voters what a candidate stands for by turning the candidate into a brand that appeals to the public. "When a president is a brand, turned into a commodity, and marketed like a product, consumer drive takes over for practical, rational ones," meaning that voters will

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[12] Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*, 10.
[13] Daren Lilleker and Ralph Negrine, "Mapping a Market Orientation: Can We Detect Political Marketing Only Through the Lens of Hindsight?," 36.
[14] Ibid.

often "buy into the ultimate simulation and powerful product" that is the candidate's brand.[15]

Political marketers also need to take into account the many factors that affect vote choice. Studies show that the average voter is disinterested in politics and campaigns, and thus it is the job of the campaign to foster interest in the voters in order to get them to vote for the candidate. One important factor that determines a voter's choices is his or her social identity, a combination of one's class, background, ethnicity, and religion. Parties tend to cater to certain social groups, and they remind aligned social groups of shared values through their ads and campaign messaging in order to maintain voter loyalty. For example, the Republican Party caters to the religious right by calling for family values and conservative social policy, while the Democratic Party appeals to groups like the youth, women, and immigrants by advocating for issues like lowering the cost of education, equal pay for women, and loosened immigration policy. Party identification, or a voter's psychological attachment to a party, is also a very important factor because close to ninety percent of voters vote for their respective parties in most presidential elections. Parties function as a filter through which trusted information passes to the party members, reinforcing party loyalty and motivating party affiliates to vote. Additionally, the state of the economy which is seen as a reflection of the incumbent candidate or party's performance is taken into consideration; and voters make their choice accordingly – rewarding incumbent presidents and their parties when the

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[15] Staci Zavatarro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President," *Administrative Theory and Practice* 32, no. 1 (2010): 123-28, accessed November 27, 2014, http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=12ea704b-06e1-424c-8ce6-74feb79331c3@sessionmgr4004&vid=5&hid=4212.

economy prospers and punishing the incumbent and their party when the country does not. This trend tends to be the case among independent voters more so than with those who identify with a party. Thus, candidates running against the incumbent will use marketing tools to convey the incumbent's faults while also portraying their own ability to improve the state of the nation. For example, in the 2008 election, Obama used the financial crisis to criticize George W. Bush and the Republican Party, pinning his opponent, John McCain, as part of the same regime that lead the country towards economic disaster. While policy issues are not generally as important as the aforementioned factors, some voters will make choices based on specific policy issues. Candidates try to adjust their positions on these specific issues to ones which they believe will gain them support. For instance, Obama changed his view on gay marriage in order to appeal to the liberal left and young voters. Prior to the 2008 election Obama considered marriage to be "a union between a man and a woman," yet he decided to take a more liberal stance on the issue in the 2008 election in order to appeal to liberal voters.[16]

Applying Marketing to Political Elections

When applying marketing to political elections, the exchange process revolves around a candidate who offers political leadership in exchange for a vote from the citizen. The campaign platform is the product, and research and polling help guide the strategy for marketing that product. The marketing strategy, however, spans beyond the campaign platform; it guides everything in the political campaign from the

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[16] John Sides, "Voter Choice," wwnorton.com, January 2011, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.wwnorton.com/college/polisci/campaignsandelections/ch/12/outline.aspx.

advertisements and slogans to where the candidate chooses to makes personal appearances and what he decides to focus on in his speeches and debates.[17]

One of the most important functions of political marketing is to persuade and inform voters, rather than relying on voters to come to a political decision on their own. In order to effectively accomplish this, parties and candidates must utilize market research to determine which factors will facilitate a connection between the voter and the candidate. Market research includes polling, demographic research, and trend analysis in order to determine what the voter wants, develop a product that directly links to voter concerns, and promote the product in a way that appeals to the voter. According to Darren and Negrine, political marketing is about "being aware of what competitors have to offer, creating a brand that is positioned strategically between that offered by competitors and one that can credibly offer a range of deliverable "services" at the right cost that will appeal to a majority of voters." The process of turning a political candidate into a brand through political marketing is very similar to a major manufacturer developing a product based on consumer insight and competitive analysis, and then advertising the product to raise public awareness and desire for the product.[18]

However, political candidates do not act on their own since they represent their political party. Historically, political parties ran elections by rallying its member around a set of distinguishing core ideals. [19] Politics was associated with ideas and ideologies and the real marketing battle was about getting out the vote, persuading and mobilizing voters

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[17] Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*, 10.

[18] Darren Lilleker and Ralph Negrine, "Mapping a Market Orientation: Can We Detect Political Marketing Only Through the Lens of Hindsight?," 37.

[19] Ibid.

to make it to the polls to support the party.[20]   Parties controlled nominations, framed the

issues, controlled campaign money and personnel, and delivered the votes on Election

Day.[21] However, modern trends have pushed campaigns away from parties and towards

the candidate. Beginning in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, it became evident that

the "golden age" of parties had ended.[22] The Democrats suffered from decades of

overseas war and factional fighting and the Republicans were "driven to near oblivion by

the Watergate Scandal." [23] In the absence of strong national parties, candidates became

the center of campaigns as voters began to base their decision on candidates on

personality and issue positions.[24]   Yet, parties still maintain some influence over

elections and the marketing process by acting as partners with political candidates,

according to David Menefee-Libey of *The Triumph of Campaign-Centered Politics*.[25]

While much of the discretion of the campaign is left to the candidate and his staff, once a

candidate gains his party's nomination, the party influences the campaign by helping

them form important relationships with national interest groups and providing candidates

with essential strategic information and money.[26] Political parties also recruit candidates,

contribute money and steer contributions to campaigns, offer an array of professional

services to candidates, assist campaign managers and consultants, and help develop

campaign themes and strategies.[27] While a candidate represents his own personal

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[20] Darren Lilleker and Ralph Negrine, "Mapping a Market Orientation: Can We Detect Political Marketing
Only Through the Lens of Hindsight?," 36.
[21] David Menefee-Libey, *The Triumph of Campaign-Centered Politics*, 2.
[22] Ibid, 124.
[23] Ibid, 125
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid, 212.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

political beliefs, he also inherently represents the party. Thus, candidates must find a balance between representing his brand and the brand of his party itself.[28]

Components of Political Marketing

According to Bruce Newman of *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as a Campaign Strategy*, there are three main components to a political marketing campaign**: *market (voter) segmentation, candidate positioning, and strategy formulation implementation*:[29]**

Newman explains that ***marketing segmentation*** is the process in which the general voter population is broken down into segments that the candidate targets with his message. While presidential campaigns are national ones, smart candidates are aware that they cannot appeal to all voters. Thus, successful candidates use segmentation to galvanize support from specific groups in which they can get support. For example, Bill Clinton in the 1992 election realized that the middle class was a large segment ripe for targeting. Since the country was experiencing an economic recession, the Clinton campaign chose to appeal to the struggling middle class by promising more jobs and better wages.[30]

After identifying the voter segments that the campaign will target, the candidate goes through a process called ***candidate positioning***. According to Newman, "positioning is a marketing tool that captures the essence of a candidate's vision and structures strategy." The candidate evaluates his own and his competitor's strengths and

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[28] David Menefee-Libey, *The Triumph of Campaign-Centered Politics*, (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 1999), 213.
[29] Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*, 11.
[30] Ibid.

weaknesses in order to position himself in a way that highlights his strengths and his opponent's weaknesses. For instance, Bill Clinton understood that as a Democrat and as a Washington outsider he was well-poised to criticize the Republican system Bush and Reagan had governed for over a decade.[31]

The processes of voter segmentation and candidate positioning help establish an *image* for the candidate. According to Newman, an image is how the voters perceives the candidate and is crafted through the use of visual impressions communicated by the candidate's physical presence, media appearances, experiences, and personal characteristics. For example, Bill Clinton created an image for himself as an outsider who would bring reforms to Washington through innovative economic policies. Since he was contending against Bush, an incumbent who was sitting on a struggling economy and failing government programs, Clinton was able to competitively capitalize on his strengths while also taking advantage of his competitor's weaknesses.[32]

A candidate's image is reinforced by both *verbal and visual rhetoric*. Every visual from a campaign's symbols and posters to how the candidate dresses in public appearances and how he poses in pictures contribute to the public's overall image of the candidate. According to Newman, symbols are very important when establishing and maintaining an image for a candidate because they allow voters to associate a complex candidate with a single word or picture.[33] Beyond visuals, the verbal rhetoric a candidate uses in his speeches, debates, advertisements, and media interviews is carefully crafted to

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid, 10.

[33] Bruce I. Newman, *The Mass Marketing of Politics: Democracy in an Age of Manufactured Images*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), 92.

form a positive image for the candidate. For instance, Ronald Reagan was particularly apt at building an image for himself, from photo opportunities that always had him standing in front of patriotic symbols to the gestures and words that he employed to "embrace the hearts and minds of the American people."[34]

Once a candidate's platform, target markets, and image are developed, the candidate must form a cohesive strategy that reinforces his positions and brand. This is achieved through *push and pull marketing*. Push marketing consists of the candidate communicating his political message to his campaign workers before it gets to the voter.[35] This is often done through grassroots efforts or through local and state party organizations who then campaign on behalf of the candidate in order to spread the message in a more personalized and local manner.[36] In addition, the candidate relies on these workers and volunteers to get the vote out on Election Day.[37] Pull marketing, on the other hand, is the candidate's large-scale, visible marketing campaign where he communicates his message on a national level.[38] Pull marketing uses the mass media to get the message out. Traditional outlets for pull marketing include television, radio, and newspapers, where candidates spend millions of dollars producing and broadcasting campaign commercials and advertisements.[39] In the most recent elections, the internet became increasingly useful in pull marketing tactics, widening the landscape of political

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[34] Ibid, 88.

[35] Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*, 40.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

marketing.[40] Recent candidates, most notably Barack Obama, utilized popular social

media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as well as their own campaign

websites to galvanize support and spread their message. Campaign buttons, posters

bumper stickers have been replaced by innovative media including TV and radio (and

now online) commercials, high-quality short films that highlight a candidate's strengths

and personal character, and infomercials that devote thirty minutes of paid advertising all

to get out the message to the voters.[41] Campaigns approach this media with the voter in

mind, using media appeals based on marketing research and choosing media outlets that

reach specific target markets.[42]

Role of Emotion in Political Marketing

Emotion is an integral part of the electoral decision making process.[43] According

to Diane Dean and Robin Croft, authors of *Reason and Choice: A Conceptual Study of*

Consumer Decision Making and Electoral Behavior from the Journal of Political

Marketing, political marketers can solicit support and encourage participation by

unleashing certain emotions in voters.[44] More specifically, emotions play a key role in

situations when voters are deciding their preference for change or for the status quo.[45]

Political marketers use emotional appeals to convince the electorate to either desire

change (if the candidate is running against an incumbent president or the incumbent

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[40] Staci Zavatarro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President."

[41] Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*, 40.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Dianne Dean and Robin Croft, "Reason and Choice: A Conceptual Study of Consumer Decision Making and Electoral Behavior," *Journal of Political Marketing* 8, no. 2 (2009): 130-46, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15377850902813386.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

party) or to maintain the status quo (if the candidate is running for a second term or he is from the incumbent's party). For instance, because Obama was running against an incumbent party that was very unpopular at the time, his emotional appeal for change garnered massive support for his campaign. According to Newman, "politics comes down to our gut reactions about politicians and their ideas."[46] Voters are attracted to candidates that make them feel good; thus, effective candidates "keep people's attention because of their ability to grab hold of people's emotions."[47] For example, Reagan's and Clinton's success as political candidates was closely tied to their ability to put people at ease with their presence, whether appearing on television in a debate or speech to the way they greeted people and shook hands.[48] Emotions also play an important role in a candidate's commercials. Advertisements function to invoke some sort of emotion in the viewer to inform their political opinion in a specific way. For example, in Ronald Reagan's famous "It's Morning Again" series, he used imagery of patriotism and a growing economy to invoke feelings of comfort and happiness to help him win his second term in office.

Political Marketing Consultants

In order to ensure effective marketing strategy and implementation, candidates now rely on marketing consultants to help run their campaign. As the technological tools available to candidates have expanded, so has the need for campaign consultants. Consultants are crucial to electoral success because they provide expertise, helping politicians craft winning images and strategies that resonate well with citizens over the

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[46] Bruce I. Newman, *The Mass Marketing of Politics: Democracy in an Age of Manufactured Images*, 89.
[47] Ibid, 90.
[48] Ibid.

television, internet, and social media.[49] According to Newman, these consultants have "not only taken over as the new party bosses in politics, resulting in a radical shift in power, but they are recruited and sought out like superstar actors for a high-budget film".[50] For example, Barack Obama chose political strategist David Plouffe of AKPD Message and Media, a Democratic campaign consulting firm, to run his 2008 campaign. Ploufee's expertise undoubtedly led to the most innovative presidential campaign in American history.

Conclusion

Political marketing plays a crucial role in the electoral process. It determines how a candidate portrays himself and how the public perceives him. Successful marketing campaigns can make or break a candidate, which means that candidates must focus much of their time crafting their image and strategically positioning their campaign towards the voters' interests. Of course, political marketing is not static; it has evolved overtime in reaction to changing tides among the electorate and advances in communication technology. However, the main framework of candidate positioning, voter segmentation, image formation, and strategy implementation can generally be applied as the major components of political campaign marketing.

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[49] Bruce I. Newman, *The Mass Marketing of Politics: Democracy in an Age of Manufactured Images*, 94.
[50] Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*, 15.

III. History of Political Campaign Marketing

Introduction

In order to evaluate how Barack Obama revolutionized political campaign marketing, it is important to understand how campaign marketing has changed over time, especially in relation to available technologies. This chapter outlines the history of campaign marketing from the beginning of the United States through the Internet Age, with special emphasis on how technology affected campaigning overtime.

Early History of Political Campaign Marketing

Since the founding of the United States, political marketing and strategic messaging has been used to persuade the people to vote in a certain way. While social conventions in early America deemed it inappropriate for a candidate to campaign on behalf of himself, candidates could rely on the campaigning efforts of their parties. For instance, during the third presidential election between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, Adams supporters slammed Jefferson as a "mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father," while Jefferson's supporters condemned Adams as "a monarchist who sought to be king." With limited technological capabilities, the parties were limited to small newspapers and face-to-face conversation with voters where advocates could speak out for or against a candidate. [51]

By the mid-1800s, symbols and slogans became commonplace in political campaigns.[52] For example, in the 1840 election between incumbent Martin Van Buren

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[51] Geri Zabela Eddins, "Persuading the People: Presidential Campaigns*," Our White House*, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.ourwhitehouse.org/persuading.html.

[52] Alexandra P. Toohey, "Presidential Politics: The Social Media Revolution" (2013), CMC Senior Theses, Paper 773, http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/773.

and Whig candidate William Henry Harrison, the Harrison campaign sought to brand the candidate as a war hero and advocate for the common man. Thus, they created one of the most well-known campaign songs and slogans: "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too." Harrison had lead American troops to victory against Native American warriors in the Battle of Tippecanoe, so the campaign chose the song (which later turned into his slogan) to remind the American public that Harrison was a patriotic and devoted leader.[53] To represent Andrew Tyler, Harrison's vice-presidential running mate, they added "and Tyler too" to capture the hearts of America through a catchy line.[54] Abraham Lincoln also used communication tools to reinforce his image to the public. His 1860 campaign was built largely around the theme of him as a rail splitter, using a split rail as a symbol to represent his hard work ethic.[55] Even though he worked as a lawyer and was long removed from manual labor, the Republican Party swept to victory by branding Lincoln in a way that appealed to the working man.[56]

As technologies advanced overtime, candidates found new ways to gain exposure. By 1800, over one hundred fifty newspapers were being printed in the US, which meant that candidates could spread their message to the masses through advertisements, articles, and editorials.[57] By the mid-1830s passenger railroads became available up and down the

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[53] Daniel Vermilya, "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too: Meaning, History & Significance," *Education-portal.com*, accessed November 27, 2014, http://education-portal.com/academy/lesson/tippecanoe-and-tyle r-too-meaning-history-significance.html#lesson.
[54]Ibid.
[55] Wayne Temple, "Lincoln's Fence Rails," *Journal of Illinois State Historical Society* 47 (1954): 20, accessed November 27, 2014, http://dig.lib.niu.edu/ISHS/ishs-1954spring/ishs-1954spring-020.pdf.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Geri Zabela Eddins, "Persuading the People: Presidential Campaigns."

east coast and eventually across the entire country by the end of the century.[58]

Presidential candidates took advantage of the railroad as an important marketing tool to

gain personal exposure to large groups of citizens that gathered at campaign events and

rallies across the states. For instance in the 1896 presidential election, candidate

Williams Jennings Bryan used the railroad to travel to twenty-seven states throughout the

campaign in what was coined the "whistle-stop strategy", travelling eighteen-thousand

miles and giving seven hundred speeches in less than four months.[59] Although he lost the

election to William McKinley, Bryan's nationwide campaign set a new standard for

subsequent elections.[60] In fact, this strategy was instrumental to Harry Truman's

campaign success almost fifty years later. Truman traveled over thirty thousand miles to

publicize his Fair Deal programs to voters across the nation.[61]

By 1920, the radio became commonplace in the United States, enabling

candidates to reach more American voters than ever before. As a result, Americans from

all walks of life became better informed and consequently began voting in record

numbers.[62] For example, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was particularly apt at radio

advertisements, using the medium to communicate with the voter as if they were in a

personal conversation together. These radio broadcasts functioned to ease the worries of

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Nathan Sanderson,"William Jennings Bryan and the Railroad," *University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, 2008, accessed November 27, 2014, http://segonku.unl.edu/~nsanderson/WJB_Frontpage.html.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Geri Zabela Eddins, "Persuading the People: Presidential Campaigns."

[62] Ibid.

the American people facing the Great Depression and to promote his New Deal programs during the first one hundred days of the election.[63]

While the radio proved to be effective, the onset of the television completely revolutionized political campaign marketing. Even still to this day, television remains a powerful force for reaching voters and spreading campaign messages.[64] While even early candidate for presidents utilized tools like images, slogans, and strategic positioning to help them win the election, marketing strategies became much more effective and important once every American citizen could view the candidates' advertisements, speeches, debates, and media coverage.

The Beginnings of Modern Political Campaign Marketing

With the advent of the television in the 1952 election, campaigns started to modernize by using mass communication tools at new levels to spread their message. This section highlights three presidential campaigns that were particularly effective at spreading their message with new technologies: Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952, Richard Nixon in 1968, and Ronald Reagan in 1984.

Eisenhower in the 1952 Election: President Harry S. Truman entered the 1952 election as a weak incumbent. The Korean War was dragging into its third year, the nation's anti-communist crusade was rousing public fear over the "Red Scare," and discourse over widespread federal corruption shook the public's confidence in the Truman administration. After losing the New Hampshire primary, Truman announced

[63] "Mar 12, 1933: FDR Broadcasts First Fireside Chat," *History.com*, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/fdr-broadcasts-first-fireside-chat.
[64] Geri Zabela Eddins, "Persuading the People: Presidential Campaigns."

that he would not seek re-election and threw his support behind Illinois Governor Adlai

Stevenson. Stevenson was no match for war hero Eisenhower who had played a decisive

role in the Allied victory in WWII. Eisenhower ran on a platform to clean up "the mess

in Washington" and to end the Korean War.[65]

The 1952 election was particularly important because it was the first time

campaigns created television advertisements. Eisenhower leveraged this new technology

to get his message out to the people in an entertaining and engaging manner. His

campaign advertisement "I Like Ike," featured everyday Americans marching to

Washington D.C. in support of the candidate. The song's lyrics, "you like Ike, I like Ike,

everybody likes Ike!," truly made it easy for people to like Ike and want to support him.

Additionally, the slogan "I like Ike" was simple and catchy and appealed to the common

American. Taking advantage of the visual aspects of television commercials, Eisenhower

created the "The Man from Abiline" commercial which portrayed Ike as a small town

boy "out of the heartland of America" who became a war hero "who brought us to the

triumphant peace of VE-Day." A short interview with the candidate was included at the

end of the commercial in which he explained how unprepared the United States was to go

to war if war was to come, sending a clear message to voters that it was "time for a

change." [66] Additionally, in a series of commercials titled "Eisenhower Answers

America," the candidate showcased average American citizens asking him important

policy questions, in which he propped up his own policy stances on taxes, domestic

issues, and foreign policy while criticizing his opponent's approach to these issues.

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[65]"1952 Eisenhower vs. Stevenson," *Museum of the Moving Image: The Living Room Candidate*, accessed
November 27, 2014. http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1952.
[66] Ibid.

Through these television advertisements, Eisenhower personalized himself showing that he could relate to the average American, while also portraying himself as a skilled leader by emphasizing his military prowess and preparedness to lead the country.

Nixon in the 1968 Election: The 1968 election between Richard Nixon and Vice President Hubert Humphrey illustrated how current political climate can play an important role in shaping campaign marketing strategy. Although Nixon had previously lost a presidential bid in 1960, he cleverly took advantage of the turbulent political factors of 1968 to bring him a win. The number of US troops in Vietnam had increased from 16,000 in 1963 to over 500,000 by 1968. American voters watched nightly TV coverage of the "living room war," inciting a nationwide anti-war movement. In a shocking move, President Johnson announced on March 31st that he would not be seeking re-election and just four days later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, igniting riots in more than one hundred cities across the nation. Vice President Humphrey entered the race late and was nominated by the Democratic Convention which was marred by disorder inside the convention and televised violence between police and anti-war protesters outside the convention.[67] Overall, the country was experiencing both domestic and foreign unrest, leaving the public ready for a candidate that could bring the nation back to the status quo.

Nixon took advantage of this political climate by speaking up for the "silent majority" of responsible, law-abiding citizens whose voices had been drowned amidst the social upheaval. Nixon positioned himself and the Republican Party as organized and

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[67] "1968 Nixon vs. Humphrey vs. Wallace," *Museum of the Moving Image: The Living Room Candidate*, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1968.

responsible, contrasting with the failures of Johnson's Great Society. Nixon increased

the stakes of the election by ending every ad with the phrase "vote like your whole world

depended on it," empowering the voter to truly make their voice heard. He used powerful

visual and verbal rhetoric in his television advertisements to invoke heightened emotion

in the viewer. For instance, his commercial titled "Failure" highlighted the escalating

threat of violence in the United States by showcasing graphic images of turmoil and

unrest with a voice-over of Nixon saying that the "first civil right of every American is to

be free of domestic violence." Here, he showed the voter the reality of violence and crime

while also explaining that he will be an advocate for the majority of responsible

Americans who deserve a life free of domestic violence. Additionally he appealed to

voters' frustration over the never-ending war in Vietnam through a commercial which

included bloody images of the war and a voiceover of Nixon saying, "if after all of this

time, all of this sacrifice, and all of this support, there is still no end in sight, then I say

the time has come for the American people to turn to new leadership." Nixon's success

came from the way that he created an image that related to the emotions of the average

American. By tying the domestic unrest Americans were experiencing with the violence

American soldiers and the innocent people of Vietnam were facing overseas in the war,

Nixon successfully positioning himself as the candidate to lead America towards a new

future of reduced public violence and an end to the war in Vietnam. [68]

Reagan in the 1984 Election: While Ronald Reagan lead a very successful

marketing campaign in 1980, his 1984 strategy was one of the most innovative and

successful political marketing strategies of the modern era. After a successful first term

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[68] Ibid.

in the White House in which he turned around the failing economy and raised public morale, the Reagan campaign was easily able to keep up the momentum through a clever marketing campaign. The campaign portrayed Reagan as a successful leader with a plan to continue the growth made in the past four years. Reagan's campaign called for lowering taxes, cutting spending, creating jobs, and growing the economy; policies that they contrasted with his opponent, Mondale Walter's, continued emphasis on raising taxes.[69]

The Reagan campaign formed a marketing team called the Tuesday Team, which was made up of a group of advertising executives from several top New York City advertising agencies. This was the first time so many large-scale professional advertisers were used for a political campaign, signifying the growing importance of marketing in presidential elections.   The goal of Tuesday Team was to create a series of campaign advertisements that would elicit a sense of optimism and patriotism in the viewer in order to paint Reagan as an effective leader that restored America over the past four years. The Tuesday Team garnered inspiration from successful consumer product commercials and created a direct takeoff of the "polished, joyous commercials for Pepsi-Cola." A sense of the "revived economy and renewed national spirit was conveyed in an initial batch of seven commercials flowing with scenes of happy, confident people going to work, moving into new houses, waxing their cars, hugging each other, reverently raising the American flag." After the turmoil of the late 1970s, it was finally "Morning in America" again and under Reagan's continued leadership, the United States could continue to

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[69] "1984 Reagan vs. Mondale," *Museum of the Moving Image: The Living Room Candidate*, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1984.

progress. According to Malcolm MacDougall, a New York advertising executive, the

Reagan 1984 commercials showcased "beautiful camera work, the kind [one] would see

in a great soft drink commercial or a great beer commercial," which raised the standards

for political campaign ads. By basing his strategy off of successful consumer product

marketing campaigns, Reagan portrayed himself as a modern and effective president,

communicating that he was prepared to continue leading the country in the right

direction.[70]

Political Marketing in the Internet Age

Until the rise of the Internet, political marketing was limited to television, radio,

and print advertisements; objects like posters and pins; and the general strategy and

rhetoric behind the campaign. However, the onset of the Internet transformed politics,

widening the landscape of political marketing by allowing candidates to use the mass

media in new and innovative ways to get their message out. According to John

Hendricks and Lynda Kaid of *Techno Politics in Presidential Campaigning*, "the twenty-

first century audience is no longer a passive audience, but active consumers who

deliberately seek out specific information and interact directly with it and with those who

sponsor and produce it." Presidential candidates therefore have reacted to this trend by

utilizing the Internet to convey their message and release information.[71]

The internet brought about very important marketing advantages for presidential

candidates. First, the Internet revolutionized campaign communication by allowing

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[70] Dudley Clendinen, "Ads Try To Tie Reagan With The Best Of Times," *Nytimes.com*, June 17, 1984, accessed November 27, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/1984/06/17/us/ads-try-to-tie-reagan-with-the-best-of-times.html?pagewanted=1.

[71] John Allen Hendricks and Lynda Lee Kaid, *Techno Politics in Presidential Campaigning: New Voices, New Technologies, and New Voters* (New York: Routledge, 2010), xi.

candidates to communicate with the masses for a fraction of the price of expensive

advertisements and mailed campaign materials. More significantly, the internet gave

candidates a greater ability to control their campaign message and image. Website layout

and content are completely under the discretion of the candidate, and candidates use this

to their advantage by controlling what information is transmitted to their campaign

websites.[72] According to the *Journal of Advertising,* the internet stimulates overall voter

involvement and learning by allowing voters to directly interact with the candidate and

the campaign. [73] In turn, candidates with high levels of interaction on their websites are

perceived as more sensitive and likeable.[74] Another important effect of the internet in

politics is the increased availability of information. Voters now have the ability to find

any information on the campaign or the candidates beyond advertisements and traditional

news sources. While access to information benefits a candidate when that information is

positive and factual, false or negative information can significantly affect a candidate's

standing.

While the first use of the internet in campaigns occurred in 1992 when Bill

Clinton and Al Gore produced a campaign website that featured full texts of speeches,

advertisements, position papers, and biographical information about the candidate, very

few Americans were active enough on the internet for the website to make an impact.[75]

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[72] Richard Davis, *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 96.

[73] Lynda Lee Kaid, "Political Advertising and Information Seeking: Comparing Exposure via Traditional and Internet Channels," *Journal of Advertising* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 27-35, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/4189205?uid=2129&uid=2134&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21104694502451.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Richard Davis, *The Web of Politics,* 86.

The first time the internet made a significant impact on a presidential election would be in Clinton's second election versus Bob Dole in 1996. Dole famously announced the address for his campaign website at the end of his first debate with Clinton and encouraged voters to visit the site.[76] From this moment on, campaign websites and other forms of internet campaigning would be an important component of presidential campaigns that voters would grow to expect from the candidates. According to a Pew Center Study in 1996, over two-thirds of Internet users said they would vote in the election, signaling to candidates the importance of communicating to the voters via the Internet.[77] Since the web provided endless opportunity for candidates to provide information on their policy stances, voters began to expect candidates to address campaign issues via the internet with statements longer than a sound bite.[78]

While the 1996 election symbolized the first major use of the Internet in campaigns, the Internet merely served as a supplemental tool for campaign communication.[79] However, the George W. Bush years saw a transformation in the use of Internet in presidential campaigning. The 2000 election marked the first time candidates utilized the Internet as a fundraising tool, a turning point in campaign financing. Both Bush and Gore created websites, sent out email newsletters, and

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[76] Ibid, 85.
[77] Ibid, 88
[78] Ibid, 89
[79] Ibid, 118.

accepted campaign donations. Yet, beyond online fundraising, both of their Internet

strategies remained pretty conventional for the time.[80]

However, by 2004, presidential campaigns were defined by the Internet. In this

election round; sixty-three percent of people used the Internet for political information;

and forty-three million discussed the election via email.[81] More significantly, fifty-two

percent of online users indicated that information obtained from the Internet influenced

their voting decision, which meant that the candidates needed an effective online

presence to both inform and persuade voters.[82] In order to do this, both John Kerry and

George Bush adopted new and innovative Internet strategies, improved online

fundraising mechanisms, blogging, and massive email lists.[83] Through grass work

campaigning and a strategy towards countless small donors over a few big donors, the

candidates were able to fundraise unprecedented amounts of money online.[84] While

Kerry ended up raising less money in total ($248 million compared to Bush's $260

million), he was able to raise nearly $82 million in online contributions (compared to

Bush's $14 million), illustrating the power of online fundraising to level the playing field

for candidates running against an incumbent president.[85] The advent of political blogging

was another major advancement of the election. The candidates created blogs to share

their views and policy stances, presenting an unfiltered message that brought supporters

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[80] Alexis Rice, "The Power of the Internet," Campaignsonline.org, November 1, 2004, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.campaignsonline.org/reports/1104.html.

[81] John Allen Hendricks and Robert Denton, Jr.,"Political Campaigns and Communicating with the Electorate in the Twenty-Fire Century," in *Communicator-In-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House*, ed. John Allen Hendricks and Robert Denton, Jr. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 4.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Alexis Rice, "The Power of the Internet."

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

together to form new online communities.[86] Lastly, the Bush and Kerry campaigns

expanded their use of email by creating massive lists of supporters to increase

communication with their voter base.[87] The emails blasts were effective in reaching out

to voters and increasing fundraising dollars.[88]

Even though he did not win the primary in 2004, Governor of Vermont and

Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean set the standard for using social media

as a campaign tool.[89] Dean utilized Meetup.com, a web tool for forming social groups, to

gather support. Users helped by recruiting their friends and family to join the website,

eventually leading to 140,000 members and a massive amount of media attention.[90]

Members contributed money and helped to spread his campaign message through email,

social media, and word of mouth.[91] Additionally, he used the internet to organize

thousands of volunteers who went door-to-door, wrote personal letters to likely voters,

hosted meetings, and distributed flyers.[92] Most significantly, through many small online

donations, Dean raised more money than any other Democratic candidate before him.[93]

While meetup.com would end up not becoming a significant social media website in

future elections, the viral success of the online campaign signified an important shift in

campaigns. In fact, it was Howard Dean's new and innovative approach to campaigning

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] John Allen Hendricks and Robert Denton, Jr., "Political Campaigns and Communicating with the Electorate in the Twenty-Fire Century," 4.

[90] Gary Wolf, How the Internet Invented Howard Dean, *Wired, January 2004,* http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/12.01/dean.html

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

that "would lay down the foundation for Obama's unprecedented online grassroots movement."[94]

Conclusion

A major theme in this chapter was how technology transformed campaign marketing throughout American history. As more and more technology became available to candidates, their strategies and tactics became far more complex and advanced. Once the railroad was invented, candidates were expected to make more personal appearances; once the radio became commonplace, candidates had to deliver engaging verbal rhetoric to every American's living room; and with the advent of the television, candidates had to create a consistent image that melded their overall message, policy stances, and personal qualities through carefully crafted visual advertisements. And more recently, with the many advances in Internet technology, candidates have had to expand the role of online tools in the campaigns. While all these technologies required candidates to innovate in order to compete, they also provided many benefits that allowed candidates to campaign like never before. Barack Obama was one such candidate that utilized new technologies to his advantage, creating a marketing campaign that far-surpassed anything the nation had seen before.

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[94] Rahaf Harfoush, "How Social Media Built the Obama Brand: Understanding the Past," *Peachpit.com*, June 4, 2009, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.peachpit.com/articles/article.aspx?p=1352540&seqNum=2.

IV. Crafting a Winning Image in 2008

Introduction

In his victory speech on November 4th, 2008, Barack Obama thanked his supporters from "young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled — Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of red states and blue states: we are, and always will be, the United States of America."[95] Candidate Barack Obama transformed himself from a mere political unknown in 2004 to a worldwide sensation by the time the general election started in 2008, galvanizing a massive amount of support by transforming his campaign into a movement. While many dismissed him for his lack of political experience, he turned that criticism into an asset by focusing on change and a new America. Obama's campaign marketing strategy drew in people of all types, convinced them to support Obama, and most importantly got them to the polls on Election Day. The Obama campaign carefully crafted a strategy to achieve brand recognition, and then never strayed from their core message.[96] This chapter will illustrate how the political climate of 2008 influenced Obama's overall strategy. Then, it will outline the various ways in which Obama formed his image and how he strategically positioned himself to win the campaign.

[95] "Transcript: 'This Is Your Victory,' Says Obama," *CNN*, accessed November 30, 2014, http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/11/04/obama.transcript/.

[96] Staci Zavatarro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President."

2008 Political Climate

The 2004 election marked a major win for the Republican Party as it was the first election since 1952 in which Republicans emerged holding a majority in all three branches of government.[97] However, by 2006, Republican support had dwindled in response to the continued war in Iraq and the failure of Bush's policies.[98] By 2008, under the tides of the recession, Republicans had fallen to the party's lowest point since the beginning of the Reagan Era.[99] According to a Wall Street Journal Poll, 76% of voters believed that the country was on the wrong track.[100]

As in 2004, the continued wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were important campaign issues; yet, foreign policy was overshadowed by the economy when the consequences of the credit and mortgage crisis hit full force in September 2008.[101] The economy including issues like health-care costs, energy policy, gas prices, and rising unemployment, became the focal point of the election.[102] According to a Pew Research Center poll, fifty-five percent of voters believed the economy was the most important problem facing the nation with the next most popular answer (the war in Iraq) lagging behind at only eleven percent.[103] Additionally, fifty-nine percent of voters believed the economy was in a poor

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[97] James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, *Epic Journey: The 2008 Elections and American Politics*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 5-6.
[98] Ibid, 6.
[99] Ibid.
[100] "Presidential Election 2008," *Roper Center,* accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/elections/presidential/presidential_election_2008.html.
[101] "2008 Obama vs. McCain," *Museum of the Moving Image: The Living Room Candidate*, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/2008.
[102] Ibid.
[103] "Presidential Election 2008."

state and forty percent said they were in a "not so good" personal financial situation.[104]

When voters feel financially uncomfortable, they tend to want change; Obama took advantage of this feeling by coming to represent the change that voters were looking for. Thus, the state of the economy put Obama in a prime position to criticize the Republican Party and to equate McCain to Bush, making a McCain presidency seem like just four more years of failed Bush policies.

As an inexperienced first-term senator, Obama had to stand out in order to win.[105] While he lacked years of political experience normally associated with presidential candidates, Obama won the country over with his personal qualities and his emphasis on hope and change. Obama came off as a personable, relatable, and youthful candidate, prepared to take on the heavy issues plaguing the country. Additionally, as a Washington outsider, community organizer, and a Democrat, it was easy for Obama to convince people that he represented change. According to the authors of *Epic Journey*, "Obama is one of a very few to have won almost entirely on the basis of what they showed of themselves in the campaign itself, as a candidate."[106]

One of Obama's most important personal qualities was his ability to inspire his audiences. He used his oratory skills "to mesmerize listeners, leaving them spellbound."[107] While he was often criticized for his lack of experience and his hyperbolic speeches (for example, Hillary Clinton derided Obama as a "messiah who preaches that the celestial choirs will be singing, and everyone will know that we should

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[104] Ibid.

[105] James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, *Epic Journey*, 19.

[106] Ibid, 19.

[107] Ibid.

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do the right thing, and the world will be perfect"), Obama was able to come off as a calm and sober candidate.[108] In good fortune as well, Obama recaptured the lead when the financial crisis hit in mid-September.[109] This spared him from needing to continually attack McCain; he could afford to remain calm, cool, and collected.[110] These qualities - the qualities of a mature and experienced statesman - enabled him to dismiss concerns about his inexperience. In the eyes of the public, "Obama was calm under fire, while McCain was volatile and erratic."[111]

Candidate Positioning

At the 2004 Democratic National Convention, then Senator Barack Obama gave his famous "Out of Many, One" speech which catapulted him onto the national political scene. While the speech was successful in meeting its purpose of promoting John Kerry's presidential candidacy and the Democratic Party at large, the address also functioned as a catalyst for Obama's future presidential campaign. The speech introduced him to the nation as a faithful and devoted American and a firm believer in the American Dream, stating: "I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that in no other country on earth, is my story even possible."[112] He expressed the importance of unity over partisanship, stating: "we are all one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the USA. In the end, that is what this election is about. Do we participate in

[108] Ibid, 20.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid, 20-21.
[112] "Transcript: Illinois Senate Candidate Barack Obama," *Washington Post*, July 27, 2004, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A19751-2004Jul27.html.

a politics of cynicism or do we participate in a politics of hope?"[113] Here, Obama tied together hope, change, and post-partisanship which would later become the backbone to his 2008 campaign rhetoric. The hope was that one day all Americans would prosper, the change came with the election of the Democratic Party, and post-partisanship came with a new approach to politics which serves the people over dirty political party games.[114]

When it came to begin campaigning for his own presidential bid in 2008, Obama had already primed the public with his campaign themes. He continued to embrace hope and change. In fact, the theme of change "became something greater than the sum of its parts," as Obama continued to give hope to the people that change and a "New America" was coming their way.[115] For instance, in his famous "Yes We Can" speech after the New Hampshire Primary, Obama asserted that "we know the battle ahead will be long, but always remember that no matter what obstacles stand in our way, nothing can stand in the way of the power of millions of voices for change."[116] Here, Obama positioned himself as the candidate of the people, empowering them to join his campaign and to become a part of his movement for change. Obama's rhetoric used patriotic symbols which got "Americans to care about this country, to want to believe in this country, to regain hope and faith in this country, and to believe we are more alike than we are different with a common destiny and a core set of values.[117]

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[113] Ibid.

[114] Deborah F Atwater, "Senator Barack Obama: The Rhetoric of Hope and the American Dream," *Journal of Black Studies* 20, no. 10 (2007): 5-6, accessed November 27, 2014, http://jbs.sagepub.com/content/early/2007/09/20/0021934707305431.

[115] James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, *Epic Journey*, 17.

[116] "Barack Obama's New Hampshire Primary Speech," *Nytimes.com*, January 8, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/us/politics/08text-obama.html?pagewanted=all.

[117] Deborah F Atwater, "Senator Barack Obama: The Rhetoric of Hope and the American Dream," 3.

Post-partisanship, Obama's other major theme, went hand-in-hand with hope and change. In order to bring about hope and change, Obama sought to change the status quo of partisanship and gridlock in Washington. This idea appealed to voters who felt that years of partisanship had tarnished the democratic process in Washington. In Obama's various speeches and appearances, he spoke of a "new kind of politics, one that can excavate and build upon those shared understandings that pull us together as Americans,"[118] This rhetoric evoked feelings of patriotism, unity, and devotion to the American ideal rather than to a party affiliation. The theme worked well alongside the theme of change because it positioned himself as a new type of candidate, one that was passionate about changing the status quo of partisanship and gridlock in Washington.

Hope and change and post-partisanship, however, were not enough. As a newcomer to national politics, "Obama had to overcome whatever reservations the electorate might have about an untested individual assuming the office in dangerous times."[119] Thus, Obama worked to position himself as a strong leader capable of leading a nation struggling with a weak economy and failing foreign policy. Obama accomplished this with two strategies. First, his campaign focused on reminding the public of its dissatisfaction with George Bush and to link John McCain to him.[120] This effort went to "exquisite lengths" through many campaign commercials which attacked McCain and public commentary like when "Obama likened John McCain's attempt to separate himself from Bush to 'Robin getting mad at Batman.'"[121] Additionally, commentary and

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[118] James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, *Epic Journey*, 16.
[119] Ibid, 32.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

attack ads portrayed McCain as old, out of touch, and a replicate of George Bush. This

strategy proved effective as it not only worked to delegitimize McCain, but to also

promote Obama as a young and fresh candidate that was in touch with the people and the

issues facing the country.[122] Second, he focused on making the public feel comfortable

with him as a candidate. [123] Since McCain was a successful and polished Washington

politician, Obama had to convince the public that he had what it took to get the job done.

This was accomplished through his various speeches, debates, and advertisements in

which he came off as professional, humble, and inspirational leader ready to get the job

done.

Appealing to the Youth

The Obama campaign focused on appealing to the youth because they knew his

message could capture the hearts of young voters who ready for change. According to a

Pew Research Center analysis of National Election Pool exit polls, "without a doubt, the

overwhelming backing of younger voters was a critical factor in Obama's victory."[124]

Obama drew in two-thirds (66%) of the vote among those younger than thirty.[125] While

this age group was Kerry's strongest four years prior, he drew a much narrower fifty-four

percent majority from the youth vote.[126] In fact, the youth so strongly supported Obama

that for every one vote cast for John McCain, two young people casted votes for

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124]"Inside Obama's Sweeping Victory," *Pew Research Center*, November 5, 2008, accessed November 28,
2014, http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/05/inside-obamas-sweeping-victory/#.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

Obama.[127] According to *US News*, both Indiana and North Carolina, traditionally

Republican strongholds, went blue because of the impact of the millennial vote.[128] Just in

the four years between the 2004 and 2008 elections, youth voting participation increased

at a significant rate: nineteen percent more Americans under age thirty voted in 2008 than

in 2004, compared with twelve percent more Americans voting in the overall election.[129]

Thus, two important factors were at play in 2008: more young voters voted in general and

the majority of young voters decided to support Obama.

The youth came out to support for Obama for many reasons. One of the top

reasons was the economy, as millennials were particularly familiar with financial

difficulties in 2008. The youth was dealing with more college debt than ever before and

more than a quarter of young voters lacked health care coverage, a rate twice as high as

the rest of the population. Additionally, when the financial crisis hit in 2008, many young

voters were worried about staying afloat during the first years of their financial

independence. Obama understood these struggles and marketed himself as the candidate

to represent the struggles of the youth. His platform, which included economic policies

that stressed higher taxes on the wealthiest brackets, universal healthcare, and programs

to help make college education more affordable, appealed to the youth in masses.[130]

Additionally, Obama's messages of hope and change particularly resonated with

young voters. Most millenials became politically conscious under the Bush

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[127] Amanda Ruggeri, "Young Voters Powered Obama's Victory While Shrugging Off Slacker Image," *U.S. News*, November 6, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014. http://www.usnews.com/news/campaign-2008/articles/2008/11/06/young-voters-powered-obamas-victory-while-shrugging-off-slacker-image.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

Administration, yet many of them were too young to vote in the 2000 and 2004 elections. In a post 9/11 America, the issues debated in Congress seemed more relevant to young Americans. Frustrations with the nation's continued involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan combined with the effects of a crippling economy prompted young voters to come out to the polls like never before. Young voters were looking for a fresh and new perspective, one that matched their modern and liberal outlook on life. By painting a McCain presidency as four more years of Bush policies, Obama was able to incite an imperative among the youth population. As Reverend Lennox Yearwood Jr., president of the youth voting caucus Hip Hop Caucus, explained: "This became our moment…We saw that…if we don't do it now, we aren't ever going to do it."[131]

While Obama's platform and message particularly resonated with younger voters, it was his online marketing strategy that brought the youth's support over the tipping edge. Obama knew that young voters had recently tended to gravitate towards the Democratic Party and that they are more likely to engage on the internet and social media websites.[132] Thus, Obama capitalized on these creating online tools that captured the youth's attention. These online tools will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Visual Rhetoric

The Obama's campaign masterfully created visuals that symbolized Obama and everything his campaign represented. His campaign themes of hope and change were reinforced by cleverly crafted symbols and logos that voters could easily associate with

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[131]Ibid.

[132] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, "The Internet and the 2008 Election," *Pew Research Internet Project*, June 15, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.pewinternet.org/2008/06/15/the-internet-and-the-2008-election/

him, creating a harmonious resonance between the ideas he was putting forth and the visual rhetoric surrounding him.[133] Obama's young and fresh perspective was reflected in the modern design of the campaign's famous 'O' symbol. According to Bobby Calder, professor of marketing at Northwestern Kellogg School of Business, "the red stripes flowing the way they did and the white circle in the middle of the logo represented a sun rising over the hillside or over the horizon, signifying a new day," visually representing a new hope for America.[134] Additionally, the Obama logo and other products with the logo on it could be altered to represent different groups, for example Farmers for Obama or Asian Americans for Obama.[135] By doing this, the campaign maintained a consistent visual message, while still catering to certain groups' interests to make these groups feel like an essential part of the campaign.

Another important visual was Obama's famous "Hope" poster. The Obama campaign hired Shephard Fairey, a famous American contemporary street artist and graphic designer, to design the poster. The poster consisted of a stenciled red, white, and blue picture of Barack Obama gazing into the distance atop the word "hope," along with the campaign's 'O' symbol.[136] Other versions of the poster also included the words "change" or "progress." Upon release, the poster immediately went viral, becoming an iconic symbol of the campaign and a pop culture phenomenon.[137] The modern look of the

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[133] Staci Zavatarro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President."

[134] Ben Arnon, "Politics Meets Brand Design: The Story of Obama's Campaign Logo," *The Huffington Post*, January 18, 2009, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-arnon/politics-meets-brand-desi_b_151317.html.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Michael J. Lewis, "The Art of Obama Worship," *Commentary Magazine*, September 1, 2009, http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-art-of-obama-worship/.

[137]Ben Aron, "How the Obama "Hope" Poster Reached a Tipping Point and Became a Cultural Phenomenon: An Interview With the Artist Shepard Fairey," *The Huffington Post*, November 13, 2008,

poster made it visually appealing and attested to Obama's cool-factor which was especially attractive to young voters. According to Fairey, before the poster came out, there were a lot of people who supported Obama but without a way to symbolically and publicly show their support.[138] However, "once there was an image that represented their support for Obama then that became their Facebook image or their email signature or something they used on their Myspace page" or hung up in their dorm room or office.[139] Thus, the poster far-surpassed the average campaign poster; it was modern and cool and people of all types wanted to get their hands on one. Hanging up a poster or posting a digital version on Facebook were just small acts of support, yet they were simple ways to get involved, spread Obama's message, and become part of the larger Obama movement.

Traditional Television Advertisements

While Obama's television advertisements were not central to his campaign as in previous presidential elections, they still played an important role in communicating a consistent message to the electorate. The Obama campaign created numerous positive ads that emphasized the ideas of strong values and hard work, portraying him as a candidate in which the average American could relate.[140] His ads portrayed him as a man from a working class background raised by a single mom that worked his way through college and picked a life of community organizing over Wall Street jobs. For example, in the advertisement "Country I Love," Obama illustrated how his humble beginnings taught

accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-arnon/how-the-obama-hope-poster_b_133874.html

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid.

[140] "2008 Obama vs. McCain," *Museum of the Moving Image: The Living Room Candidate*.

him the important values of "accountability, self-reliance, love of country and working hard without making excuses," ideals which guided him through college and eventually in his professional life when he decided to "pass up Wall Street and go to Chicago to help devastated neighborhoods." [141] Additionally, in "Something," the campaign used visuals of communities coming together in support of Obama to illustrate that he was a leader that could bring Americans together to "choose hope over fear, unity over division, and the promise of change over the power of the status quo."[142]

Obama's attack ads also contributed to his overall message by reinforcing the public's lack of faith in the Republican Party, while also portraying McCain as out of the touch politician who would bring four more years of Bush policy. For example, in "Better Off," included video footage of McCain saying that "Americans are overall better off because we have had a pretty good prosperous time with low unemployment, low inflation, a lot of good things have happened and a lot of jobs have been created," alongside statistics that debunked McCain's claims: "household income down $1000, unemployment up, highest inflation in 17 years, gas prices up 200%, 1.8 million jobs lost." The voiceover of the advertisement asked the viewer "do you feel better off?," reminding the viewer of their dissatisfaction with Bush the past eight years, making them feel that the country needed a change in order to return to better times. In another attack ad titled "Fundamentals," the Obama campaign took advantage of McCain's commentary on the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy. On September 15, 2008 the financial services firm declared bankruptcy, igniting the financial crisis that dominated public discourse during

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[141] "Presidential Election 2008," *Ropercenter.uconn.edu.*

[142] "2008 Obama vs. McCain," *Museum of the Moving Image: The Living Room Candidate*.

the election. That morning, McCain made a comment that "the fundamentals of the economy are strong." Within a day, the Obama campaign had produced a commercial which replayed McCain's quote alongside facts about the ailing economy that made McCain look out of touch with the reality of the struggling economy, endinh with the powerful question: "how can John McCain fix our economy when he doesn't even understand that it's broken?" This commercial was particularly important because it showed how breaking news stories could heavily affect the marketing practices of a campaign. Obama had the clear upper hand because he was able to effectively utilize current events, particularly ones revolving around the economy, to his own advantage.

Conclusion

The campaign carefully laid out its strategy and never strayed from its core messages, maintaining a clear and simple image.[143] Obama's themes of hope, change, and post-partisanship were reflected in his speeches, rhetoric, and campaign advertising, as well as his the visual rhetoric of his campaign symbols and posters. While his strategic positioning established him as a modern and fresh politician ready to tackle the issues facing the country, it would ultimately be his innovative internet and new media endeavors that catapulted his candidacy to a level never seen before in American politics.

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[143] Staci Zavatarro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President."

V. Leveraging the Internet and New Media to Win in 2008

Introduction

The Obama campaign started from scratch in early 2007 with few resources and little name recognition. However, with the help of the Internet, Obama connected to his supporters in new and cost-effective ways, eventually leading to the largest campaign fundraising effort in American history and a massive online communication machine. According to political strategist Mindy Finn, "in the Internet era, it's not enough to run a campaign; you need to lead a movement."[144] And, Obama did exactly that. As Time Magazine asserted:

Obama [found] new and creative ways to fuel, adapting to a world in which the concept of community [had] grown to include Myspace and Facebook. No campaign has been more aggressive in tapping into social networks and leveraging the financial power of hundreds of thousands of small donors. Nor has any other campaign found such innovative ways to extend its reach by using the Internet.[145]

While many factors contributed to his win including widespread anti-Bush sentiment, the financial crisis, and Obama's fresh and modern campaign platform, there is no denying that Obama's digital strategy made a very important impact on the outcome of the election. This chapter will outline Obama's Internet strategy and how he utilized new media in innovative ways, changing the face of political campaigns forever.

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[144]Jose Antonio Vargas, "Politics Is No Longer Local. It's Viral," *Washington Post*, December 28, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/26/AR2008122601131.html.

[145] Karen Tumulty, "Obama's Viral Marketing Campaign," *Time*, July 5, 2007, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1640402,00.html

The Power of the Internet and Social Media

While the Internet had been in use for over ten years in political campaigning, the 2008 campaign was unique because it was the first national election in which new media technologies and the Internet overshadowed traditional media such as television, radio, and newspaper. [146] Both Hillary Clinton and John McCain used the internet in the 2008 campaign; yet, what set Obama apart was the way he centralized web 2.0 technologies and social media in his campaign, leveraging these tools to "motivate, involve, and generate enthusiasm among the electorate more so than in any prior presidential campaign."[147] In fact, the internet was so crucial to his victory that Arianna Huffington, editor-in-chief of the *Huffington Post*, proclaimed that "were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president…were it not for the internet; Barack Obama would not have been the nominee."[148]

It is important to note that Obama was naturally well suited for a social network candidacy compared to his competitor McCain, which gave Obama an important advantage. As political scientist Max Paul Friedman put it, "Obama was the Mac: youthful, creative, nimble forward-thinking, and sleekly stylish."[149] His image and persona were modern and cool, which translated well into his Internet campaign endeavors. He came off as tech-savvy twenty-first century candidate, appealing to the

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[146] John Allen Hendricks and Robert Denton, Jr., preface to *Communicator-In-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House*, ed. John Allen Hendricks and Robert Denton, Jr. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), xi.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Betsey Schiffman, "NEW MEDIA--FLASHBACK Arianna: "'Were It Not For The Internet, Barack Obama Would Not Be President,'" *The Huffington Post*, February 9, 2009, accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/01/09/flashback-arianna-were-it_n_156730.html.

[149] Max Paul Friedman, "Simulacrobama: The Mediated Election of 2008," *Journal of American Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009): accessed November 28, 2014, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0021875809990090.

youth and many moderate and liberal voters.[150] On the other hand, McCain was the IBM:

boring, old, and outdated.[151] As John Hendricks and Robert Denton explained in

Communicator-In-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the

White House:

> Obama seemed to be "a natural Facebook politician…the 72-year-old John McCain, by contrast never managed to connect with the Facebook crowd on the same level. He gave one of his pastimes as fishing and listed *Letters from Iwo Jima* among his favorite movies – not the most popular things among frequent social networking website users."[152]

Adding to the fire, Americans learned during the election that the Senator had never sent

an email and his campaign website would go for long stretches of time with no

updates.[153] While his lack of technological skills were due to war injuries in his hands,

Americans - especially young and liberal voters - doubted if McCain was prepared to lead

the nation if he did not understand technology and the Internet. Instead of trying to come

off as technologically savvy, the McCain campaign decided to go for the "out-of-touch

vote."[154] As Rick Davis, McCain's campaign manager explained: "we figured not

everybody can do this BlackBerry stuff, and we want you...so if your fingers don't work,

screw it, come with us."[155] However, in a year when at least forty-six percent of the

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[150] Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris, "Who Wants to Be My Friend? Obama, Youth, and Social Networks in the 2008 Campaign," in *Communicator-In-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House*, ed John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton Jr., (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 57.

[151] Max Paul Friedman, "Simulacrobama: The Mediated Election of 2008."

[152] Ibid.

[153] Toby Harnden, "John McCain 'technology Illiterate' Doesn't Email or Use Internet," *The Telegraph*, July 13, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/uselecti on2008/johnmccain/2 403704/John- McCain-technology-illiterate-doesnt-email-or-use-internet.html.

[154] *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at 2008* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 2009, 101.

[155] Ibid.

electorate was using the Internet to get political news, post opinions about the campaigns, or interact with other voters, the McCain campaign's lack of focus on the internet was definitely a handicap.[156] McCain along with the rest of the Republican Party failed to see the potential of online campaign activities, seeing the Internet only as way to distribute information rather than to build relationships with voters.[157] As Congressman Adam Putnam, chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee, admitted, "[the Republican Party was] outflanked by new media and social networking sites." [158]

On the other hand, Obama understood that "more than any other medium, the Web is by the people, for the people."[159] The internet is not like TV, radio, or any other traditional medium where people sit back and watch or listen; people sit up and write back at the internet screen and they get involved in the conversation.[160]

Campaign and Strategy Organization: Prioritizing the Internet

Overall, it was quite clear that the Obama campaign took its online activities more seriously than John McCain.[161] Obama created a new organization model for online communication, "making it an equal part of the campaign team rather than subservient to the rest of the team."[162] According to Andrew Rasiej, a Democratic strategist and founder of the Personal Democracy Forum (an organization which explores how technology is changing politics), "every campaign will tell you that they get the Web, that they

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[156] Max Paul Friedman, "Simulacrobama: The Mediated Election of 2008."
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Jose Antonio Vargas, "Politics Is No Longer Local. It's Viral."
[160] Ibid.
[161] Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris, "Who Wants to Be My Friend? Obama, Youth, and Social Networks in the 2008 Campaign," 56.
[162] Ibid.

understand its power, but you have to look at where the power lies…how much influence

do their online people have?"[163] The Obama campaign understood the power and

importance of the Internet and put resources and staff towards digital strategy that his

competitors ultimately did not.[164] Obama's top paid employee was Joe Rospairs, the

campaign's e-campaign strategist and former chief digital strategist for Howard Dean's

2004 digital campaign. He was fully involved with fundraising, organizing, and

messaging strategy for the campaign, a new way of organizational structure that

facilitated a massive networked campaign.[165] Hillary Clinton and John McCain's top

employees were much more compartmentalized into distinct departments, the more

common organizational structure for mass media campaigning, which meant that their

online strategies were not integrated into the rest of their campaign.[166] By prioritizing

Internet strategy, the Obama campaign became more cohesive as online and offline

efforts became part of one large movement.

　　The Obama campaign understood that people were already on the internet and

social media sites; thus, the campaign prioritized its efforts to make sure that there was

plenty of content on the internet as well as every social media website. According to Pew

Research Center study, Obama supporters outpaced both Clinton's and McCain's

supporters in their usage of online video, social networking sites and other online

campaign activities.[167] The fact that Obama supporters were already more tech-savvy

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[163] Jennifer Stromer-Galley, *Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 109.
[164] Ibid, 110.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith. "The Internet and the 2008 Election."

certainly helped Obama. However, it was the way that his campaign capitalized on this trend which allowed him to control his effective and cohesive message. As Rasiej attests, "the Obama campaign was strategic and smart...they made sure the message machine was providing the message where people were already assembled…they turned themselves into a media organization."[168]

As a result of prioritizing the Internet within the entire organization of the campaign, the overall strategy focused on communicating directly with the people. This strategy "empowered an old style of politics," according to David Axelrod, chief strategist for Obama campaign.[169] "We returned politics to the people at the grassroots, and it was a tool that we were able to use to give people the ability to organize door to door."[170] The Obama message was about hope and change, and he empowered the people from the bottom up to embrace those themes by supporting the campaign. As Joe Trippi, a political strategist that worked on the Howard Dean campaign in 2004, explained: the Obama campaign's "ability to connect via the internet to groups, segments, and individuals changed everything…it flattened the process and created a bottom-up approach to participation."[171] Ultimately, the traditional top-down strategy, which had been enjoyed in previous elections and by John McCain, failed in 2008.[172]

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[168] Ellen McGirt, "The Brand Called Obama."
[169] *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at 2008*, 99-100.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Melissa M. Smith "Political Campaigns in the Twenty-First Century: Implications of New Media Technology," in *Communicator-In-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House*, ed John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 141.
[172] Ibid.

Social Media Strategy and Implementation

Obama's successful bottom-up approach to politics was facilitated through social media. With so many online media sources, "there was no longer one entry point for information," according to Dan Balz, a national political correspondent for the *Washington Post*.[173] Thus, in 2008, campaigns had to find ways to "leverage the smallest piece of information into the largest impact...to move information as quickly as they could."[174] The Obama campaign masterfully accomplished this by utilizing social media networks to move and control information, reaching its audience in ways never seen before in the history of political campaigns. These social media pages functioned to dispense the Obama message, unfiltered by the mainstream media in order to connect and inform his supporters.[175] More importantly, the campaign's social media strategy maintained Obama's image as a young, tech-savvy candidate, the candidate of the Web 2.0 generation.[176] By November 2008, Obama had approximately 2.5 million Facebook friends, outperforming McCain by almost four times; he had over 115,000 followers on Twitter, more than 23 times that of McCain; and 50 million viewers spent 14 million hours watching campaign-related videos on YouTube, four times that of McCain's

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[173] *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at 2008*, 104.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Frederic I. Solop, "'RT @BarackObama We just made history': Twitter and the 2008 Presidential Election," in *Communicator-In-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House*, ed John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 38.
[176] Ibid.

viewers.[177] Additionally, the campaign sent out 1 billion emails, including 10,000 unique messages targeted at specific voters in key states. [178]

From the beginning, the Obama campaign "stressed both rhetorically and practically the need to build a community to help launch a movement to elect Obama." Obama's emphasis on community and the "yes we can" ideal was supported by networking tools built into his campaign website which became critical components of his campaign. In order to create this community online, the campaign relied on storytelling: stories about the candidate, about the mission of the campaign, and especially about Obama's supporters. The strategy behind this was that when people told stories of what inspired them to support Obama and get involved in the campaign, the stories would become infectious and bring other people towards the campaign.[179]

My.barackobama.com: Obama turned to Chris Hughes, one of the founders of Facebook, to help make these stories come to life through social media. Obama's prior experience in community organizing inspired Hughes to harness the internet for organizing purposes.[180] Thus, he created "my.barackobama.com," a unique social networking site exclusively for the campaign.[181] Called "MyBO" for short, the platform allowed users to create personal profiles and blogs, share information with their

[177] Victoria Chang and Jennifer Akar, "Obama and the Power of Social Media and Technology," *The European Business Review*, January 1, 2008, accessed November 30, 2014. http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/?p=1627.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Jennifer Stromer-Galley, Presidential *Campaigning in the Internet Age*, 133-134
[180] Ibid, 133.
[181] Ibid.

neighbors, organize and advertise local events, and solicit donations.[182] By the end of the

election, more than two million profiles existed on the website.[183] Through MyBO,

volunteers planned 200,000 offline events, formed 35,000 groups, posted 400,000 blogs,

and raised $30 million on 70,000 personal fundraising pages.[184] Additionally, using a

virtual phone book system on the site, the campaign made three million phone calls

during the final four days of the campaign.[185] One important feature of the website was

the group function in which users could create their own groups with like-minded voters,

for example *Midcoast Maine for Obama* or *Educators for Obama*.[186] These groups not

only allowed users to interact with the campaign, but to also interact with each other

producing a sense of community and belonging to the Obama movement. MyBO also

included a blog which the campaign used to update information and communicate with

supporters. According to Sam Graham-Feisten, head of blogging for the Obama

campaign, "the blog was a central reason that people came back to the website…it

became an important messaging channel to facilitate community and also move people to

action."[187]

According to Jennifer Stromer-Galley of *Presidential Campaigning in the*

Internet Age, MyBO achieved the "magic formula of providing enough openness to foster

genuine engagement while directing that engagement in ways ultimately beneficial for

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[182] John Allen Hendricks and Robert Denton, Jr.,"Political Campaigns and Communicating with the Electorate in the Twenty-Fire Century," 7.

[183] Dennis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*, 19.

[184] Frederic I. Solop, "'RT @BarackObama We just made history': Twitter and the 2008 Presidential Election."

[185] Ibid.

[186] Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris, "Who Wants to Be My Friend? Obama, Youth, and Social Networks in the 2008 Campaign," 58.

[187] Jennifer Stromer-Galley, *Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age*, 133.

the campaign."[188] The platform was not just a campaign website with information about

the candidate and how to get involved or donate; rather, it was a social networking

platform which allowed supporters to network with one another, to advocate for Obama,

and to organize offline.[189] It also gave individuals the ability to organize in ways which

suited their interests and levels of commitment, making them feel like a part of a larger

movement whether or not they were willing to put in many hours. For example, in Texas,

precinct captains - highly motivated volunteers - were provided with unprecedented

access to lists of voters to target and the freedom to choose how and when to contact

them; and, on the other end of the spectrum, the average Obama supporter was provided

with engaging content they could simply send in an email or post on Facebook or

Twitter.[190] This high level of customization was truly revolutionary; "operating on a

scale that exceeded what was done before," allowing Obama supporters of any type or

interest level to get involved.[191]

People were not engaging on MyBO for no reason. They were engaging because

they liked Obama and they wanted to stay engaged throughout the election process. By

giving supporters the resources to achieve success and the freedom to use MyBO to

organize activities on their own, Obama was able to mobilize a huge amount of people,

transforming them from "passive onlookers to active participants in his campaign for the

White House."[192] This community gave his supporters a reason to keep going and keep

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[188] Ibid.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ibid, 133.

[191] Dennis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*, 19.

[192] Staci Zavatarro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President."

opening up their wallets. [193] By doing this, Obama cemented his commitment to ordinary

citizen involvement in politics, his confidence that one person can make a difference, and

his belief that all citizens are obligated to participate.[194] Thus, his messages of hope,

change, and community were well integrated into his digital media strategy, reinforcing

the image of Obama as the candidate for the people.

Facebook: While MyBO was the centerpiece of Obama's social media, the

campaign also understood that it needed focus on interacting with its supporters through

already established social networking sites. The Obama campaign particularly focused

on Facebook because of its ability to make information go viral. According to David All,

a communications expert, "the most impressive aspect of Facebook is that whenever

someone posts an item, joins a group, or tries out a new application, their entire network

is notified about it."[195] Thus, when Obama supporter shared a campaign link on Facebook

or liked a picture or post from the Obama page, all of the user's Facebook friends could

see that action in their individual newsfeed. Additionally, when videos about the

campaign went viral, for instance like Will.i.am's "Yes We Can" music video, Facebook

provided a perfect platform for the campaign and users alike to spread content quickly.

The campaign had a clear advantage when it came to Facebook because they were

working with one of its co-founders. In June 1007, Hughes created an Obama campaign

"platform", a new function of Facebook that had only been released a few weeks before

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[193] Dennis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*, 139.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris, "Who Wants to Be My Friend? Obama, Youth, and Social Networks in the 2008 Campaign," 56.

the campaign launched it.[196] The platform function allowed users to see what was

happening in the campaign, and more importantly, to spread word to others living in early

primary states.[197] This tactic was effective because it allowed users to stay updated on

the campaign through a medium they already used; just as they used Facebook to stay in

touch with their friends, they used Facebook to stay in touch with the Obama campaign.

In total, Obama had approximately 2.4 million "friends" on Facebook by the end of

election season.

Another important aspect of Facebook was its Groups function. Ordinary people

could create public Facebook groups where Facebook users engaged in conversation

about the election. Many of these groups, for example "One Million Strong for Barack

Obama" and "Students for Obama," attracted millions of users who shared useful

information and engaging content that supported the Obama campaign. By the end of the

campaign, there were approximately five hundred unofficial Facebook groups dedicated

to supporting the candidate.[198]

Twitter: Although Twitter was not a major focus of the Obama campaign, the

platform provided an easy way for the campaign to release information. By the day of the

election, Twitter only had about 3.5 million users, and Barack Obama had about 118,000

of these users following him. Twitter served two major functions for the Obama

campaign. The first function was to use tweets to announce where the candidate was at

any one moment. The major second major function was to direct followers to the Obama

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[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid, 58.

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campaign website. Almost two-thirds of Obama's tweets included a reference to the

campaign website, encouraging followers to go to the site to read recent speeches, watch

videos of campaign appearances, watch live-streaming of events, and learn the location of

polling sites. By using Twitter, followers maintained a consistent relationship with the

candidate by reading his tweets and finding out where the candidate was at any one time,

which group he was speaking to, and where he would be going next. He also

strengthened his image via twitter by referencing famous people and celebrities that

supported his candidacy, including Bill and Hillary Clinton, Bill Richardson, Oprah

Winfrey, Macy Gray, and Usher. Additionally, Twitter was a major force in moving

people to his campaign website to donate to the campaign.[199]

YouTube: The 2008 election was the first presidential election that saw use of

YouTube. In 2008, YouTube created YouChoose, a space on YouTube where

presidential candidates could post videos.[200] Barack Obama took advantage of this

service for free advertising, posting 1,839 videos which reached an incredible 26.3

million views.[201][202] In total, the campaign's official videos were watched for 14.5 million

hours.[203] Buying the equivalent in broadcast TV hours would have cost the campaign $47

million.[204] Thus, YouTube saved Obama money while also allowing him to bypass

[199] Frederic I. Solop, "'RT @BarackObama We just made history': Twitter and the 2008 Presidential Election." 40-47

[200] Dennis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century: A Whole New Ballgame?* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 15.

[201] Claire Cain Miller, "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics," *New York Times*, November 7, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/how-obamas-internet-campaign-changed-politics/?_r=0.

[202] Dennis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*, 15.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Ibid.

established media and go directly to viewers where they already were spending a lot of time: online on YouTube.[205]

Beyond being cost efficient, YouTube videos were more effective than traditional TV advertisements because viewers chose to watch them on their own time instead of having their television programming interrupted.[206] Additionally, digital videos could be shared through the internet via social media which meant that Obama supporters could simply post a link of their favorite Obama YouTube video on their Facebook or Twitter, and instantly many more people would see the link. Thus, the social aspect of online videos resulted in free and effective advertising and exposure for the Obama campaign.

YouTube was also useful for Obama supporters to create and post their own video content. For example, hip-hop artist Will.i.am produced a music video set by Obama's "Yes We Can" speech which featured various famous musical artists and actors singing and speaking the words of the speech alongside the footage of Obama's address.[207] Will.i.am produced the video within only a few days after the primary, releasing it in order to stir up support for Obama for the upcoming primary battles. The music video went viral reaching over ten million views.[208] Additionally, the celebrity appearances in the video contributed to Obama's cool-factor, creating the buzz that the campaign needed during the primary season. Another viral YouTube video, "I Have a Crush on Obama," was produced by BarelyPolitical.com and featured a young woman (model Amber Lee Ettinger) seductively singing about her love for Obama. Even though the campaign had

[205] Dennis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*, 15.
[206] Claire Cain Miller, "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics."
[207] Dennis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*, 15.
[208] Ibid.

nothing to do with the piece, the video promoted Obama's likability especially among younger voters who were entertained by the video.

While YouTube undeniably benefitted Obama's campaign, the video platform was also a double-edged sword. In August 2008, the McCain campaign released an online ad called "The One." According to McCain's advisors, the spot was a "creative and humorous" way of poking fun at Obama's massive popularity by illustrating him as a self-appointed messiah.[209] The video immediately went viral and gained a lot of media attention, increasing McCain's positive view among the public. Thus, while Obama's online strategy was helping him spread his message and come off as tech-savvy candidate, it also lent him to easy attacks from the other side.

Text Messaging: The Obama campaign understood that it was not enough to just engage with voters through the Internet. Thus, following the trend towards mobile, Obama used text messaging to communicate with his following, getting over one million people to sign up to receive text messages from his campaign.[210] The campaign offered promotions and campaign exclusives through text messages in order to entice people to subscribe to the text messaging service. For example, on June 19, 2007, Obama announced that people could receive a free bumper sticker by texting the word "GO" to the phone number OBAMA.[211] The campaign also offered free campaign ringtones and wallpapers. In his most famous text messaging marketing ploy, Obama announced a

[209] Amy Sullivan, "An Antichrist Obama in McCain Ad?," *Time*, August 8, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014. http://content.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1830590,00.html.

[210] Melissa M. Smith "Political Campaigns in the Twenty-First Century: Implications of New Media Technology," 142.

[211] Jennifer Stromer-Galley, *Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age*, 136.

week before the Democratic National Convention that he would announce the vice-presidential choice to his supporters via text message.[212] The goal was to collect even more phone numbers, which could then be used to mobilize voters later in the election.[213] Texting his followers before releasing the information to the mass media also sent an important message: Obama cared about his community of supporters and prioritized informing them over the press. The campaign also allowed users to text message questions to the campaign. For example, if someone texted a question about Iraq, the sender would get back a response that provided Obama's position on Iraq (Barack has been strongly against the war since 2002)"along with the URL for his campaign website where more specific information was available.[214] Not only did this text messaging service engage voters and make them feel appreciated, but it also drew users to the website where they could receive more information and more importantly, where they could donate to the campaign.[215] Additionally, he used twitter to encourage followers to text comments about presidential debates to the phone, sending the message that he wanted to hear what people had to say about happenings of the campaign.[216]

Leveraging the Internet for Online Fundraising

Beyond engaging and communicating with supporters, the Internet and social media served an important role in gathering campaign dollars. Instead of focusing on getting a few very large donations, Obama focused on getting millions of small donations, almost entirely through the Internet. Additionally, they provided a platform

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[212] Ibid.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid.

on MyBO that allowed thousands of supporters to create their own personal fundraising

pages for the campaign. According to David Plouffe, the Obama campaign manager, this

was an effective tool because it allowed supporters to get more involved in the campaign

in a personalized way.[217] When people donate to a campaign, they become customers;

and when people become customers, they have a vested interest in the success of the

campaign.[218] Thus, the more people that donated to Obama, the more people there were

with a vested interest in supporting the candidate and staying involved in his campaign.

This strategy reflected his values of community and change by sending a message to his

supporters that anyone can contribute to the campaign process no matter how small their

donation. And, the strategy worked: more people gave to the Obama campaign than any

other campaign in history.[219] Beyond sending a positive message, this strategy was also

extremely lucrative, bringing in unprecedented campaign funding. Even though ninety-

two percent of his donations (6 million donations) were under $100, Obama still managed

to raise $600 million online contributing to an overall $770 million raised.[220] The bulk of

these donations came through the Internet, attesting to the success of his online strategy

that tied the idea of community and change to donating to the campaign.[221] More

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[217] *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at 2008*, 97.

[218] David Meerman Scott, "Ten Marketing Lessons from the Barack Obama Presidential Campaign," *Webinknow.com*, November 6, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.webinknow.com/2008/11/ten-marketing-lessons-from-the-barack-obama-presidential-campaign.html.

[219] Tahman Bradley, "Final Fundraising Figure: Obama's $750M," *ABC News*, December 5, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=6397572.

[220] Max Paul Friedman, "Simulacrobama: The Mediated Election of 2008," 345.

[221] Jose Antonio Vargas, "Obama Raised Half a Billion Online," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/11/20/obama_raised_half_a_billion_on.html.

significantly, the average Obama donor gave more than once, showing that Obama

supporters continued to feel connected to the larger Obama community and movement.[222]

Going Viral: "Obamanation"

"More than any other 'national product' to date – and far more than any other

presidential candidate – Obama tapped into the power [of the internet]."[223] The Obama

campaign did not necessarily invent any new technology; rather, they innovated with pre-

existing internet tools, "bolting together social networking applications, under the banner

of a movement, creating an unforeseen force to raise money, organize locally, fight smear

campaigns and get out the vote that helped them topple the Clinton machine and then

John McCain."[224] Obama did not just use the Internet to release information; rather, he

used it to "empower his advocates by organizing online and by extension in their social

networks offline."[225] His winning message was that ordinary people had both the ability

and responsibility to self-govern.[226] There was no one type of Obama supporter; in fact,

anyone could support Obama and easily become part of the community.   As business

magazine *Fast Company* put it: the Obama campaign "deputized soccer grandmoms and

hipsters alike to generate new heights of viral support." [227]

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[222] Ibid.

[223] Ellen McGirt, "The Brand Called Obama: Win or Lose, Barack Obama's Rise Changes Business As Usual For Everyone And Here's Why," *Fast Company*, April 1, 2008, http://www.fastcompany.com/754505/brand-called-obama.

[224] David Carr, "How Obama Tapped Into Social Networks' Power," *New York Times*, November 9, 2008, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/10/business/media/10carr.html?_r=0.

[225] Dennis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*, 125.

[226] Ibid.

[227] Ellen McGirt, "The Brand Called Obama."

This viral amount of support lead to what many called **"Obamanation."** No matter if one supported Obama or not, the campaign was impossible to ignore.[228] Hope posters hung everywhere from public spaces, to people's cars, to dorm rooms across the country; Obama's YouTube videos went viral with millions of views overnight; and people all around the nation rallied around the candidate, showing up to rallies and speeches in spades and spreading the message through both online and offline mechanisms. The Obama brand "took on its own momentum…it was a self-reinforcing dynamic of cool," powered by innovative online and social media tools that formed Obama's winning message.[229]

Conclusion

All of the components of Obama's marketing strategy worked together, creating a cohesive and coherent message. His online and social media strategies reflected his campaign themes "reinforcing the notion that everyone was included and that the movement was actually a conversation to which everyone was invited."[230] Obama became the candidate of the people by using grassroots efforts grounded in social media, which in turn gave his supporters a sense of community which energized his campaign. My.barackobama.com as well his other social media pages portrayed him as a modern and fresh politician ready to tackle the issues facing the country in new and innovative ways. He expressed that the country needed change, and then actually gave the people a way for people to come together through social media to bring about that change.

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[228] L Bagui and MB Parker, "Mobilising an Obama nation using Web 2.0: 'Yes we can,'" September 1, 2009, *Informatics & Design Papers and Reports*, Paper 27 (2009), accessed November 28, 2014, http://dk.cput.ac.za/inf_papers/27

[229] Max Paul Friedman, "Simulacrobama: The Mediated Election of 2008."

[230] Staci Zavataro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President."

Furthermore, the "Internet provided the opportunity to draw individuals into the political process who might never have participated before, or who might have previously felt left out of the process."[231] Social media provided a platform for anyone to speak out on the issues and to get involved, particularly appealing to young voters and minority groups who often felt disengaged and unimportant in campaigns.[232] Lastly, Obama's use of social media allowed his campaign to publicize a predetermined and strategic image out to the masses for little money or effort.[233] Obama could control what information was released onto his social networking accounts and frame in a way that was beneficial to his campaign, a feature unavailable to previous candidates that only had access to traditional forms of mass media.[234] Thus, Obama took full advantage of the internet and new media technologies, revolutionizing campaign marketing and opening up new ways for the average American to get involved with electoral politics.

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[231] Melissa M. Smith "Political Campaigns in the Twenty-First Century: Implications of New Media Technology," 142.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid.

VI. Conclusion

Introduction

The 2008 election was the first election in which over half of all Americans used the internet to find out more about the candidates, share their opinions about the campaigns and the issues, and work to mobilize other voters.[235] Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Obama's own my.barackobama.com provided new ways for Americans to get involved and engage in political campaigns. According to the *New York Times*, "Obama's campaign changed the way politicians organize supporters, advertise to voters, defend against attacks and communicate with constituents."[236] Given that Barack Obama changed the way political campaigns organize and strategize, what sort of implications does this have on the future of elections and American politics? This concluding chapter answers this question by discussing the future of new media in political campaigns, the implications of a branded president, and the merits of Obama's presidency in relation to his campaign marketing strategy.

The Future of New Media in Political Campaigns

Very few will argue with Obama's marketing success; yet, a very important question still remains: will his use of new media signify the beginning of a different way of running political elections? According to *Communicator-in-Chief*, most political consultants agree that the framework for political campaigns have changed, but that it will be impossible for a future candidate to replicate Obama's success: "he is seen as a

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[235] Melissa M. Smith "Political Campaigns in the Twenty-First Century: Implications of New Media Technology," 139.
[236] Claire Cain Miller, "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics."

one-in-a-million candidate – the one perceived as leading a movement, not running for

president." [237] His unique charisma and personality, ability to organize people, and

unparalleled fundraising puts him above the average presidential candidate; however,

there is still much future candidates can take away from his strategy.[238]

While the Obama campaign cannot be entirely replicated, future candidates can

follow a similar framework to achieve success. First, candidates must devote a

substantial amount of financial and human resources to online strategy.   According to

Jonathan Kardush, an international expert in political technology, "future candidates can

benefit from a solid online strategy, but it requires devoting the necessary resources to

build a good, strong website." Kardush suggests that future candidates model Obama's

localized and personalized online features, which made information and resources

available to voters who wanted to organize offline and spread information locally. Since

most politicians are not experts in online media, it is imperative that they hire people who

understand how political marketing and online strategy can meld together to form a

cohesive campaign. As for social media, future candidates must engage with their

following as much as possible. These platforms provide a way to organize and motivate

supporters in a way that no traditional method can even come close to providing. As

Obama proved with MyBO, social networking is paramount when seeking to engage and

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[237] Melissa M. Smith "Political Campaigns in the Twenty-First Century: Implications of New Media Technology," 139.

[238] Claire Cain Miller, "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics."

inspire one's supporters. Thus, future candidates, especially those running for

presidential office, should invest in their own social networking site.[239]

Implications of a Branded President

The innovations that Obama brought to the field of political campaign marketing

are here to stay; thus, it is imperative to understand the implications of these changes.

According to Staci M. Zavattaro, author of *Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded*

President, there are several important implications of the method in which Obama

campaigned in 2008: a shift from platform-centered approach to a candidate-centered

one, presidential commodification, and a president as simulation.

As mentioned in chapter one, according to Bruce Newman, there is an important

difference between campaigning and governing, and conflating the two is a mistake. In

his view, a political candidate is marketed as a service-provider, not like a product.

However, with the Obama campaign, there was an evident shift towards a candidate-

centered marketing model which sold the Obama package as a whole. As a result, the

distinction between campaigning and actual governing eroded as "people bought into the

product and confused the campaign with governance practices." Voters bought into

Obama's "hope" and "change" and believed these ideals would guide Obama's

governance once in office. This, however, was exactly what Obama's team of marketers

wanted. Whereas traditional campaigns consisted of a political party image, a leader

image, and policy commitments, Obama effectively shifted much of the campaign's

focus to his charismatic personality. Of course Obama's views on issues like the

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[239] Ibid.

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economy, foreign affairs, and domestic policy were important; however, most of his

campaign rhetoric and imagery centered on him and his prospects for hope and change

without actually explaining how he would bring hope and change. Since "it is the

immediate impression that counts most, savvy marketers focus their energy there first

while possibly, sacrificing substance." For instance, his campaign website and social

networking pages used phrases like "get involved," "build the momentum," and "make a

difference," all generic phrase with no real substance to them. Rather, these functioned

to capture his supporters attentions and make them feel a part of the larger Obama

movement. While this approach bodes well for consumer products, it is a dangerous road

to go down when dealing with presidential candidates. As the leader of the free world,

the president of the United States must be more than a good first impression. If future

candidates are to follow this model, elections could very well become far too focused on

the candidates themselves rather than the larger issues facing the country.[240]

Since the Obama campaign focused much of their attention on the candidate

rather than the issues, Barack Obama became somewhat of a commodity as he turned into

a national and worldwide sensation. While Obama was not the first candidate to

recognize the power of commodification, he was the candidate that "perhaps perfected

the movement," according to Zavatarro.[241] Political candidates are "inexorably engaged

in a marketing game, so turning presidential candidates into commodities via branding

was the next logical step."[242] Marketing is a consumer-driven experience, and the Obama

campaign masterfully used imagery, rhetoric, and social media to "identify and create the

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[240] Staci Zavatarro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President."
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.

goods and services the consumers (the voters) really wanted."[243] While Obama was not

turned literally into a commodity that was bought and sold, the Obama brand became a

product that used marketing ploys and strategies to attract customers (the voters). Since

this strategy worked so well for Obama, there is a risk that future presidential elections

could become more of consumer-driven marketing battle rather than a battle between two

candidates that spread their positive message through communication and messaging.

Lastly, if future candidates continue to participate in candidate-centered

campaigns and presidential commodification, presidents could slip into what *Zavattaro*

calls "hyperreal simulation." According to Zavaratto, through branding and marketing,

candidates "become not an actual leader, but an image of a leader; become not an actual

statesman, but the embodied image of a national brand; become not a political campaign

model, but an image-centric candidate model."[244] While this view is quite extreme, it hits

on some very important points. President Obama is certainly not a simulation of a leader;

however, he has faced real challenges during his office and has failed to meet many of his

campaign promises. While the ideal is what is put out to vote in the political market,

presidents must actually deal with real situations in often very unideal circumstances.

Thus, candidates that portray a "hyperreal" image to the public might bode well in the

election, but could end up failing to meet expectations once in office.[245]

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[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.

Evaluating Barack Obama's Presidency

Considering the implications of the ways in which Obama marketed himself, it is imperative to evaluate his presidency in the context of his campaign marketing claims to answer some important questions: did people buy into the Brand Obama and not candidate Obama and what is the relationship between campaign marketing and actual governance?

While President Obama achieved much during his first term in the White House, many still do not believe that he brought hope and change to America. According to *The Atlantic*, the word "change" during the 2008 campaign did not just mean passing Democratic legislation into law, getting poor people health insurance, or allowing gays to serve in the military.[246] These are significant policies that will affect the lives of millions of people, whether or not one supports these policies. Yet beyond these policy strides, it is evident that Obama failed to bring the "change" he so masterfully convinced the American people to believe in. As Obama proclaimed during the campaign, "let me be clear, this isn't about ending the failed policies of the Bush years; it's about ending the failed system in Washington that produces those policies."[247] "Hope and Change" captured the hearts of the American people; they believed in Obama and they bought into the idea that he could change Washington for the better.[248] Or as Zavattaro would claim, they bought into Obama's "commodity" of change not his actual ability to bring change.

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[246] Conor Friedersdorf, "The Decline and Fall of 'Hope and Change,'" *The Atlantic*, January 30, 2014, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/01/the-decline-and-fall-of-hope-and-change/283454/.

[247] Ibid.

[248] LZ Granderson, "Why 'Hope and Change' Is Dead, 'Forward' Lives," *CNN*, May 2, 2012, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/01/opinion/granderson-hope-and-change/.

However, when he actually entered the White House, hope and change did not come easily. It was especially tough when the worst economy in eighty years greeted him at the door.[249] Furthermore, hope and change were "virtually impossible" when working with a dysfunctional and partisan Congress with approval ratings below 25%.[250] Bringing about sweeping reforms to the morality and efficiency of Washington was far more complicated than Obama made it seem to be when he wowed crowds with masterful rhetoric that captured the hearts of Americans desperate for change. Unfortunately, "Americans will continue to live under a government with significant transparency problems, a culture of lobbying that is often tantamount to sanctioned corruption, and an executive branch that undermines the separation of powers" and it will require much more than one president that desires to change the system to actually make an impact.[251]

While the merits of Obama's presidency and his policy decisions can be endlessly debated, the relationship between his marketing campaign and his actual presidency is much clearer. As explained in chapter one: "the charismatic candidate is someone who gives a great number of voters the *feeling* that they will personally benefit through the candidate's election."[252] Obama did just that: he gave voters a positive feeling; he made them feel part of large and important movement; he made them feel as though they themselves were part of the hope and change. As David Axelrod explained soon after the election: "we've once again reinvigorated people at the grassroots to believe that they

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[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Conor Friedersdorf, "The Decline and Fall of 'Hope and Change.'"
[252] Staci Zavatarro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President."

could make a difference."[253] In short, Obama made people feel good and made them excited about politics. This strategy mirrors consumer marketing where marketers try to make people feel good about their products through visually pleasing advertisements and appealing product claims. While this process is beneficial for campaigning, a dangerous transformation can occur when politics start to mirror business. According to Stephan Henneberg, a professor of marketing and strategy at the Manchester Business School, political marketing has the ability to transform politics from "a quest for a common vision of just, noble, and good into the private and often irrational whimsy of consumerism."[254] Henneberg's view is similar to that of Zavattaro's idea of "presidential commodification." While their views are quite extreme as not every voter is driven by the whims of consumerism, it is fair to claim that Obama's strategy was successful because of the way it attracted voters and maintained support through a campaigning scheme that emulated consumer marketing strategy. While the field of political campaigning has much to learn from consumer marketing, there is a definite danger when the line between the two start to blur.

Conclusion

In 2008, Barack Obama changed the face of political campaign marketing forever. His innovative use of online and social media tools ignited a movement never seen before in American elections. America was transformed into Obamanation as Obama's posters, symbols, and famous words became iconic parts of popular culture. His movement captured the hearts of young and new voters, receiving unprecedented supports from

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[253] *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at 2008*, 100.

[254] Nikolay Vankov, "The Strategic Dimensions of Political Marketing," *Economic Alternatives*, no. 3 (2013), accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.unwe.bg/uploads/Alternatives/A07-03.2013.pdf.

these groups. From now on, candidates will be expected to use the Internet and social media to engage with voters in order to win. While this new style of campaigning certainly improves electoral politics by providing new ways for the average American to get involved and an increased amount of information and content available to voters, there are many implications of online candidacies like that of Barack Obama. With the potential for flowery speech and substance-free messaging to go viral, it is important that the American people learn to discern between clever marketing strategy and the actual merits of a candidate. If not, presidential elections have the potential to turn into a consumer-driven marketing experience rather than a policy and merit-driven political battle.

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