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The Impact of the World Wide Web on 21st Century Elections in the U.S.

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, Presidential candidates would go door to door and town to town, sharing their political ideas in the hope of gaining supporters. This paper aims to analyze the evolution, contribution, and the future of internet use in terms of gaining support and its crucial ability to help persuade American citizens to vote. Focusing primarily on the elections from the year 2000 to 2012, data and research will be used to analyze how web usage has evolved from president to president. The future of campaigning will continue to revolutionize through the internet because of its ability to alter the traditional methods of expression, communication, and organization in electoral politics. Each president within this time frame has delved into the World Wide Web and made impacts on the United States through this new medium. Email, campaign websites, and other platforms of communication via the internet have and will continue to revolutionize politics in the foreseeable future. Contemporary methods of conversing with a wider audience through social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are noticeably effective tools to use in campaigns. Presidential candidates have witnessed the internet's advancement in politics and used its tools to promote their campaigns. Scholars have yet to realize the power within the World Wide Web and its ability to change politics. Digital information can visibly bring a positive or negative service to voter persuasion. This paper shows the manifestation of change in the process of how citizens and presidential candidates interact through the internet.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Nations world wide are asking or requiring all people to stay inside their homes until further notice! Citizens of the world are relying on the internet to communicate more than ever before. Nearly everything is shut down except for essential places such as grocery stores and hospitals. People are being told to stay home and be socially distant for any in person interactions. The COVID-19 pandemic has made America a victim of its destruction, and it could last beyond election day, November 3, 2020. People are not allowed to be in the same vicinity in large crowds, which means voting might be held online for the 2020 election, which would make it the first year that voting for the president is done almost completely through mail or a potential online service. In addition, the aftermath of the pandemic could make politics and elections go in new directions if COVID-19 continues to spread throughout America.[1]

This paper explores the ways candidates use different dimensions of the internet to assist their campaign. It examines how and why internet campaigning in the United States developed to its current state. Lastly, it posits that this change will affect future approaches toward campaigning in America. It is important to gain some clarity on the differences between the internet and the World Wide Web because many people tend to confuse the meaning of these two words. The internet is basically an infrastructure that connects different computers around the world. Meanwhile, the World Wide Web is where all the digital information is stored and shared. The future of campaigning will be revolutionized through the internet because of its

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[1] Schumacher, Shannon, and Nicholas Kent. "8 Charts on Internet Use around the World as Countries Grapple with COVID-19." Pew Research Center. April 2, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/02/8-charts-on-internet-use-around-the-world-as-countries-grapple-with-covid-19/.; Denkmann, Libby. "The Presidential Election In November May Be Held At Your Mailbox Thanks To COVID-19." LAist. https://laist.com/2020/03/24/covid-19-coronavirus-voting-by-mail-expanding-in-los-angeles-california-elections.php

ability to alter the traditional methods of expression, communication, and organization in electoral politics.

This paper looks at the Bush and Obama eras chronologically and how the internet has impacted presidential candidates between the years 2000 and 2012. Each section describes the election (mostly after the primaries) where the two main candidates campaigned before and during the general election to give historical context. Descriptive detail and data on how both the main Republican and Democratic candidates used the internet will close each section. Research sources tended to lean left or right politically, but a non-partisan approach was the appropriate path taken for presenting and analyzing this research.

Usefulness of the internet has varied throughout each presidential campaign and depended on the year a candidate ran for office. Their use in new technology mediums shows a clear pattern of advancements in communication, persuasion, and exposition in political campaigning. Bill Clinton was considered the first presidential candidate to use the internet as a tool for campaigning in 1992. Clinton's campaign posted transcripts of his speeches, advertisements, proposals, and biographical information online. Widespread use of the internet among U.S citizens was not prevalent during that time, so there is no clear evidence of a direct benefit on Clinton's behalf from using the internet. Conclusively, though, Clinton did win the election against George H. W. Bush.[2]

In the book "*Campaigning Online*", Bruce Bimber and Andrew Davis made clear that "Former Clinton consultant Dick Morris believed these new technological capacities surely mean more engagement, better-informed citizens, and therefore improved politics."[3] Morris's

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[2] Bimber, Bruce A., and Richard Davis. *Campaigning Online: The Internet in U.S. Elections*. Oxford University Press, 2003. 23; Schulman, Marc. 1992 Presidential Elections. https://www.historycentral.com/elections/1992.html.
[3] Bimber & Davis. 7

statement on ways that new technologies advanced our political realm proved to be true to an extent. More information available opened doors for political absorption and discussion as seen today where citizens have access to a variety of websites containing political information.

By 1996, presidential candidates Bill Clinton and Robert Dole had the first known official presidential campaign websites made to advertise their accomplishments, beliefs, and goals. One of the website operatives Rob Kubasco spoke on the informative and interactive aspects of Dolekemp96.org stating that, "There wasn't much of a strategy. Although, Dole's site did feature an elaborate, highly detailed plan on restoring the American economy, complete with specific budget numbers, as well as pages where people could register to vote and make donations, along with a section labeled 'Dole Interactive' offering games, trivia, posters, and postcards."[4]

 Clinton and Dole both had unique visual templates and their websites also differed from each other content-wise. The campaigns of 1996 introduced a new way to strategically gain supporters for presidential elections in the U.S. Shifts in how candidates used the internet to their advantage developed over time bringing new additions to the playing field of campaigning. Campaign websites were the first steps taken by candidates when creating a basic online presence to further strengthen their campaign. Some candidates have worked with these tools better than others, and some have failed to recognize its potential to help gain support.[5]

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[4] Shields, Mike. 2020. "An Oral History Of The First Presidential Campaign Websites In 1996". *Wall Street Journal*.https://www.wsj.com/articles/an-oral-history-of-the-first-presidential-campaign-websites-in-1996-1455831487.
[5] Dole Kemp '96. http://www.dolekemp96.org/main.htm.;
"Clinton Gore '96: Main Menu." http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/websites/cg96/.

In 1995, Charlie Rose, a Democratic representative from North Carolina, predicted that "by the year 2000 [the internet] is going to be an indispensable campaign tool."[6] Candidates in America running for different positions other than the presidency have sampled the internet and its capabilities during elections as far back as 1994, although the 2000 presidential election showed tangible progress in the degree of effort, money, and innovation dedicated to the internet. The newly expanded idea of devoting finances toward building a robust online presence was one of the events that makes the 2000 election unique.[7]

As expected, campaigning online proved to be an essential method of communication between candidates and their voters in the 2000 election due to its ability to offer a clear, detailed, general concept of who the candidate was and what they stood for. Like any other trend, candidates caught on to the idea of creating a campaign website and made use of this new way to inform American citizens. The internet has only grown more pervasive and influential and candidates will continue to use this medium to help assist their campaign as long as it remains useful. Various ways a voter can obtain information about a candidate, the more knowledgeable they will be on who the candidate is and voters can decide if they favor the candidate or not. Campaign websites are one of the purest ways a voter can educate themselves on a candidate because no opposing partisan sources are filtering their information.[8]

The template and layout for a candidate's website is important. Each campaign website was designed to be easily navigable so that voters of all ages can wander on the website without any issue. Campaign websites are designed by a team for each candidate. Similar to the 2000

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[6] Saffir, Barbara, "Weaving Their Webs: The Candidates Race to Cyberspace," *Washington Post,* July 23, 1995, p. C3.
[7] Bimber & Davis. 3
[8] "Important Elements of a Political Campaign Website • CallHub." CallHub. May 17, 2018. https://callhub.io/elements-of-political-campaign-website/.

election, significant investment in campaigning online occurred during the 2004 election as well. In 1996, internet adoption in the United States was about 23% of the population, but by 2004 it had grown to 61% of the adult population. The percentage of adults who use the internet for political information has risen tremendously since 1996.[9]

The growing number of online political news consumers in 2004 contributes to the evidence of voter persuasion via the internet because information on the web is posted and shared from person to person allowing individuals to critique the candidates. Email, chatrooms, and blogs proved useful for citizens to voice their political opinions and became a popular way to share information on the web. Traditional methods of communicating, fundraising, and campaigning will not be replaced by the internet because it was not the only way to communicate, raise funds, or discover political information. Instead, it offers another strategic approach to campaigning.[10]

More and more, candidates used websites for strategic campaigning, especially after the 2004 election. One huge step in technological advancements was the sudden rise in mobile phone's having the ability to access the internet. This advancement was important because it allowed people to conveniently surf the web inside and outside of their homes. In 2008, websites such as YouTube and Twitter became popular examples of ways in which people shared videos, sent messages, and found information.

With social technology becoming a more relevant component in politics, candidates gradually became familiar with the newest forms of technology to assist their campaign. With an

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[9] Williams, Andrew P. *The Internet Election: Perspectives on the Web in Campaign 2004*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. 5

[10] Jones, Jeffrey M., and Joseph Carroll. "Changing Minds in the 2004 Election?" Gallup.com. October 21, 2018. https://news.gallup.com/poll/16576/changing-minds-2004-election.aspx.

analytical approach to how a candidate's use of the internet has impacted the chance of being elected, this paper will conclude with how this tool will play out in future campaigns. Overtime, campaign websites, email marketing, and social media platforms have proven to be a useful tool to target constituents in the United States.

Part 1: George W. Bush's Presidency

The 2000 Election: The 20th century ended, and a new president was on the rise to guide the people of America into the future. Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore were the primary presidential candidates for the 2000 election. Before Bush decided to run for president of the United States, he was a well-known politician in the state of Texas. George W. Bush, the son of former president George H. W. Bush, was active in Texas and had fought for education. He believed education and school funding plans in Texas were failing under Democratic governor Ann Richards. With no Republican candidates in sight, George W. Bush saw an opportunity to run against Ann Richards and eventually defeated her in the 1994 gubernatorial election. In 1998, George W. Bush won the gubernatorial reelection in Texas and considered running for president for the 2000 election.[11]

Bush's strongest Republican opponent was John McCain, a senator from Arizona. McCain dropped out of the 2000 Republican Primaries because of his loss in South Carolina. Experts believe that Bush's financial team led by Karl Rove, Ken Mehlman, and Republican strategist Lee Atwater helped Bush tremendously. Bush's financial teams abilities to raise funds

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[11] Federal Elections 2000: Presidential Primary Election Results by State. https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2000/2000presprim.htm.; "The Texas Politics Project." Texas Politics - Governors: George W. Bush. https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/archive/html/exec/governors/32.html.; Gary L. Gregg, University of Louisville, and University of Louisville. "George W. Bush: Life Before the Presidency." Miller Center. July 10, 2017.

and Lee Atwater's popular understanding of "dirty politics" ultimately gave Bush an advantage over other prospective Republican candidates.[12]

Al Gore has a rich political history: he won the election to the U.S House of Representatives in 1976 and was reelected three times before winning a spot in the Senate in 1984. Gore also ran to be the Democratic nominee for president in 1988 but he was defeated by Jesse Jackson in the South Carolina Primary election, who earned "more than half the total vote, three times that of his closest rival here, Senator Albert Gore Jr. of Tennessee."[13] In 1992, though, Bill Clinton chose Gore to be his running mate, so Gore became vice president of the United States when Bill Clinton defeated George H. W. Bush for the Oval Office in 1992.[14]

In 2000, Al Gore campaigned for the U.S. presidency against George W. Bush and won the popular vote but lost the electoral vote. The election was a close call due to a recount that took place in Florida, giving Bush the presidency. November 7, 2000, George W. Bush won 271 electoral votes breaking the minimum 270 votes needed to win the election. During the 1996 election: Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Tennessee, and West Virginia all went Democratic, although Bush flipped these states in the 2000 election. The 43rd president of the United States was sworn into office January 20,

[12] Vogel, Kenneth P. "Karl Rove and the Modern Money Machine." *POLITICO Magazine.* https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/06/karl-rove-and-the-modern-money-machine-108019_Page3.html.; Gooding, Richard. "The Trashing of John McCain." Vanity Fair.; "Bush Defeats McCain in S. Carolina Primary." *Los Angeles Times.* February 20, 2000. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-feb-20-mn-880-story.html. https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2004/11/mccain200411.
[13] Berke, Richard L. "Jackson's Triumph in South Carolina Illustrates Dramatic Change Since Vote in '84." *The New York Times.* March 14, 1988. https://www.nytimes.com/1988/03/14/us/jackson-s-triumph-in-south-carolina-illustrates-dramatic-change-since-vote-in-84.html?pagewanted=print.
[14] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Al Gore." *Encyclopædia Britannica.* December 12, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Al-Gore.

2001. After careful analysis of Bush's campaign, there was a constant agenda of Bush promoting himself as someone who could bring a "fresh" approach to politics in America.[15]

   Normalizing Internet Use: Expression and clarification were necessary for candidates to gather voters who share the same ideas as them. To promote themes that resonate with the U.S. population, candidates need as many platforms possible to express their ideas and clarify their political beliefs. Tracing back, evidence shows how the internet proved itself to be a powerful tool during both of their campaigns. Bimber and Davis state that, "The internet became a component of the campaign rather than an afterthought, serving as a vehicle for targeted information dissemination, supporter reinforcement, volunteer recruitment and utilization, fundraising, and voter mobilization."[16] This statement relates to the inevitable usefulness of the internet and its ability to help candidates win an election.

   Candidates enjoy many benefits with a presence on the internet. Creating new content can be costly; candidates who lacked a sum of money couldn't create more advanced websites than a wealthy opponent. An advanced website provided many perks that allows voters to learn about the candidate and participate in helping the candidate get elected, especially since more than half of American adults used the internet by the year 2000. The normal means of reaching out to voters via telephone or mail were not replaced by the internet, although surveys show that nearly one-third of Americans went online in 2000 to absorb political information and news. Arguably, adults were still using television and traditional printed information to absorb political

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[15] Kettle, Martin. "Florida 'recounts' Make Gore Winner." *The Guardian.* January 29, 2001.; "Presidential Election of 1996." 270toWin.com. https://www.270towin.com/1996_Election/.; "Presidential Election of 2000." 270toWin.com. https://www.270towin.com/2000_Election/.; Levy, Michael. "United States Presidential Election of 2000." *Encyclopædia Britannica.* October 31, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-2000.
[16] Bimber & Davis. 3-4

information. The popularity of Internet usage was growing and became more prevalent in homes during the early 2000s.[17]

Normalizing internet use in American homes raised many concerns. This change could alternate the working world in terms of being able to find jobs, and households with a higher income were more likely to have internet access. Selective use of the internet in certain homes could give families an upper hand while less-fortunate families may be vulnerable to falling behind in a rapidly advancing world. Based on data from a 2000 census, homes with incomes of $75,000 or more, 88% had at least one computer, and 79% had at least one household member who used the internet at home in 2000.[18]

More internet users in the U.S. meant more people retrieved political information digitally, and it gradually became a common activity in the United States by 2000. Access to such a wide range of information allowed for biased and unbiased voters to easily learn about current political information. With the internet, voters could filter the information available, ultimately making citizens more selective in what they knew about presidential candidates.[19]

Filtration can confuse citizens on what is factual and nonfactual. In the long run, candidates found it hard to rely on other dimensions of the internet other than their campaign websites. Information can easily become distorted and infected by bias on behalf of a left-or-right leaning platform. U.S citizens were somewhat relying on the internet to uphold the voices of candidates, although some media sources express subtle or large amounts of favoritism

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[17] Roser, Max, Hannah Ritchie, and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina. "Internet." Our World in Data. July 14, 2015. https://ourworldindata.org/internet.; Denton, Robert E., Judith S. Trent, and Robert V. Friedenberg. *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. 15; Bimber & Davis. 3-4
[18] Newburger, Eric C. "Home Computers and Internet Use in the United States: August 2000" https://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p23-207.pdf
[19] Pew Research Center. "EPolitics." Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. December 31, 2019. https://www.journalism.org/2000/04/10/epolitics/.

while attempting to be informative. Filtration also hindered some voters from learning about the opposition but it also kept other voters informed on the many aspects of politics—not just a dogmatic view of its content.[20]

Bimber and Davis found that "Bush and Gore urged website visitors to create their own 'versions' of the candidate's website."[21] Based on the interests of the users, they could select a topic and narrow their focus to specific interests. This ability allowed candidates to design their message based on the interests of the targeted individual. This abundance of personal information opened doors for personification online. For example, customizing specific information allowed candidates to target certain regions who appeared to be more religious than other areas of the United States.[22]

Some candidates admire religion or focus on special interests groups to help them get elected. If a citizen were to focus on a limited source of digital information, this limit could harm their overall knowledge of a candidate because candidates want to paint themselves in a positive light as much as possible. Because the campaign websites were birthed from whom the site was about, their choice of words could express biases on their own behalf. Candidates avoid bringing up negative information about themselves or their family on their website because that could harm their chances of winning the election. To further attract voters, different ways to keep tabs on a candidate were offered on the campaign websites.[23]

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[20] Pew Research Center. "EPolitics." Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. December 31, 2019. https://www.journalism.org/2000/04/10/epolitics/.
[21] Bimber & Davis. 51
[22] George W. Bush 2000 Web Site. http://www.4president.us/websites/2000/bush2000website.htm.
[23] "Religion and the Presidential Vote." Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. December 31, 2019. https://www.people-press.org/2004/12/06/religion-and-the-presidential-vote/.

The implementation of email lists on campaign websites allowed for voters to receive campaign news on their preferred candidate. Email served as a widely used method of communication during campaigning to persuade voters by stimulating interest and sharing information. Email was used to strategically reinforce voter confidence in candidates and provide campaign news. Both candidates took advantage of email during the 2000 election and its ability to contact possible voters.[24]

The Bush campaign was said to have 120,000 people on its email list. During the general election, Bush's email list grew to more than 400,000 subscribers. To procure email addresses without purchasing them, candidates encouraged website visitors to sign up for email announcement lists. Bimber and Davis noticed that Al Gore's campaign home page "encouraged visitors to become online field organizers responsible for sending email to their friends."[25] A first impression can make all the difference, and candidates and their web teams considered the possible negative impacts of directly emailing voters. Overwhelming a supporter with campaign propaganda could drive away a voter according to many campaign webmasters. "If you start to flood them with emails, then pretty soon they will unsubscribe and not want to hear from you ever again because you abused that privilege," said Bush campaign webmaster Cliff Angelo.[26]

Each campaign website sought volunteers online and encouraged them to do offline activities such as print out literature, organize fundraisers, or write letters to the editor. Past experiences from candidates continue to prove that raising money was a crucial part of

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[24] Marks, Peter. "In Bush-Gore Race, 3 Words For Media: 'You've Got Mail'." The New York Times. June 01, 2000. https://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/01/us/2000-campaign-communications-bush-gore-race-3-words-for-media-you-ve-got-mail.html.
[25] Bimber & Davis. 40
[26] Bimber & Davis 51,52; George W. Bush 2000 Web Site. http://www.4president.us/websites/2000/bush2000website.htm.

organizing a campaign. With the internet's ability to take in donations, the Bush campaign in 2000 earned around $300,000 after each emailing. Before Bush defeated McCain to become the Republican ticket for presidency, McCain raised $1.4 million via online contributions within three days after a swift victory during the primaries.[27]

To avoid fabrications on a candidate's policy proposals, campaign websites allowed candidates to clear up any disinformation. The Bush campaign took the opportunity to do so by creating a homepage feature called "Setting the Record Straight," which responded to any criticism or falsehoods that could hinder his chance at getting elected. The single biggest advanced technological development in the 2000 election was live chat. Al Gore's team used an instant messaging system that allowed his supporters to interact with each other in a live chat group. According to web master Ben Green, this chat group helped voters communicate and identify with one another as well as organize activities outside the campaign's agenda.[28]

The 2004 Election: In 2004, George W. Bush ran for a second term, striving to continue his presidency. The central issue during this election was terrorism and how America will handle it. The aftermath of the September, 11, 2001, terrorist attack that killed almost 3,000 people influenced many Americans to want revenge or complete separation from foreign affairs. The Iraq war was continued throughout this election and remained a key pivoting point in influencing voters to support the candidate who was either for or against war.

The Republican party nominated George W. Bush and his Vice President choice of Dick Cheyney with little opposition. William Tsangares (under the pseudonym Bill Wyatt) and Blake Ashby were Bush's only Republican challengers during the 2004 primaries. Bush had already

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[27] Isikoff, Michael. "How He's Catching a cash Wave" *Newsweek,* February 14, 2000; Bimber & Davis. 52
[28] Bimber & Davis. 40, 53

gained popularity, although citizens were polarized over foreign policy. Former U.S Senator

John Kerry was the Democratic presidential nominee for the 2004 election against incumbent

president George W. Bush.[29]

Kerry was a Vietnam war veteran and became the lieutenant governor of Massachusetts

in 1982. He served in the U.S senate, winning in 1990, 1996, and 2002. Bush campaigned well

during the general election although it was a close race in popularity according to the FEC

summary of the 2004 election. Many states were close in the popular vote spectrum of this

election, although some states stood out more than others. One example of a victory gap was one

led by Kerry in his success of getting D.C's popular vote; 21,256 to Kerry's 202,970 votes

during the general election.[30]

At the debate held in Coral Gables, Florida, Bush and Kerry presented different proposals

on how to address the War in Iraq (that started in March 2003), a primary concern. Journalist Jim

Lehrer, the debate moderator, asked John Kerry, "Do you believe you could do a better job than

President Bush in preventing another 9/11-type terrorist attack on the United States?"[31] A

simplified version of Kerry's response was that he and President Bush have different approaches

on how to go about the war. Building stronger alliances and training allies in Iraq to defend

themselves were a part of Kerry's plan.[32]

[29] Levy, Michael. "United States Presidential Election of 2004." *Encyclopædia Britannica.* October 26, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-2004.; Our Campaigns - Candidate - William J. "Bill" Wyatt. https://www.ourcampaigns.com/CandidateDetail.html?CandidateID=23198.
[30] "Federal Elections 2004 Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives."Federal Election Commission Washington, D.C. May 2005. FEC.gov. https://www.fec.gov/.; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "John Kerry." Encyclopædia Britannica. December 07, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Kerry.; PeoplePill. "John Kerry: American Politician, United States Secretary of State and Former Senator from Massachusetts - Biography and Life." PeoplePill. https://peoplepill.com/people/john-kerry-1/.
[31] "Transcript: Who Could Best Prevent Another 9/11?" CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/09/30/debate.transcript.1/index.html.
[32] Ibid

Lessening the number of American casualties by receiving reinforcements from allied countries was one of his strong points. Kerry said, "We're now 90 percent of the casualties in Iraq and 90 percent of the costs."[33] Overall, Kerry believed that "America is safest and strongest when we are leading the world and we are leading strong alliances."[34] Bush's rebuttal on Kerry's criticism on alliances was: "I understand free nations will reject terror. Free nations will answer the hopes and aspirations of their people. Free nations will help us achieve the peace we all want."[35] In the debate summary, Bush felt that Kerry was inconsistent on how to address The War in Iraq. Bush argued that Americas' duty is to fight terrorism so that it does not happen again. Kerry felt that President Bush was going head first into the war and had poor judgement and lacked the ability to be strategically smart in planning how to handle the war.[36]

Advertising Online: During the debate, the public was able to converse in a blog online to analyze what they had just witnessed. Politicians voiced their opinions on questions like, "who seemed more presidential during the debate, and who gave the best answers." When looking at the transcript of the debate, there is a section placed on the right hand side of the CNN debate blog page showing Paul Begala, Robert Novak, and Jessi Klein's blogs. All three of them were open to receiving questions from the public about the debate. Begala was a campaign strategist at one point, Novak was a journalist, and Klein was an actor. During the debate people would comment until it was over through the "send your comments" section of the CNN blog page.[37]

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[33] Ibid
[34] Ibid
[35] Ibid
[36] Ibid
[37] "Bush, Kerry: Nukes Most Serious Threat." CNN.
https://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/09/30/debate.main/index.html.

On election night November 2, 2004, George W. Bush defeated John Kerry by a close margin of electoral votes, but the maps in Federal Elections 2004 Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives showcased the number of states won by each candidate and was overwhelmingly red. Bush won more states than Kerry. Kerry nearly won by grabbing key states with a high number of electoral votes such as California, Illinois, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Bush won over 286 electoral votes while (Kerry won 251), allowing Bush to defeat Kerry in the 2004 election, and his second inauguration took place January 20, 2005.[38]

As time went on, new developments in technology occurred and regular use of the internet in the United States continued. In "*The Internet Election: Perspectives on the web in campaign 2004,*" Clifford A. Jones wrote, "For its time, the 2004 election saw the most significant employment of the internet in campaigns to date in terms of depth and scope."[39] According to the book's editors, Andrew Williams and Paul Tedesco, "Pew's findings demonstrate that more than half the online news consumers (52%) indicated that information from the internet helped in their vote decision making."[40] Absorption of news through the Internet was increasing and digital information was becoming a normal way of gaining political knowledge.

With campaign propaganda flooding the internet and personal email accounts, American citizens were barraged by this new medium of gaining political knowledge. The ability to be influenced to vote can come from multiple versions of advertising whether it be through a

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[38] Ibid; "Federal Elections 2004 Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives."Federal Election Commission Washington, D.C. May 2005. FEC.gov. https://www.fec.gov/.
[39] Williams & Todesco. 5
[40] Ibid. 1

television, telephone, or another person. The many ways in which someone can gain political

knowledge is abundant, although internet use proved to be an up-and-coming weapon for

politicians. Candidates could over-exaggerate and exercise perspectives on opposing candidates

through advertising. Another of the book's essayists Lynda Lee Kaid wrote, "Web ads combine

the precision of direct marketing, the dramatic power of video, and the cost-effectiveness and

viral distribution potential of the internet."[41]

The internet has more than just words available to influence voters. A video titled "Road

to Victory" on Bush's 2004 campaign website demonstrates how videos can dramatize and

exaggerate a candidacy. The beginning of the video unleashes a patriotic rock and roll

instrumental to set the tone and was followed by numerous trimmed versions of Bush's speeches

and an endorsement speech by Senator John McCain. The video was noticeably patriotic,

emotional, and symbolic of what Bush stands for and why citizens should vote for him in the

2004 election. This ad, though originally made for television, was posted on Bush's website,

making it accessible for anyone who wishes to view it.[42]

Videos by the opposition and the media that portrayed candidates in a negative light

existed in many iterations. Some videos were darker and gloomier while others were comedic

and entertaining. One example of a more comedic ad was the "John Kerry, International Man of

Mystery" ad produced by the Republican National Committee. In this video, Kerry was

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[41] Kaid, Lynda L. *The Internet Election: Perspectives on the Web in Campaign 2004*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. 67
[42] George W. Bush 2004 Presidential Campaign Website. http://www.4president.us/websites/2004/georgewbush2004website.htm#prettyPhoto[gallery]/1/.; "George W Bush Tv Ad - Road To Victory : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming." Internet Archive. January 01, 1970. https://archive.org/details/gwb_road_to_victory.

"unwilling to give up names or details regarding his experience with foreign affairs."[43] Along

with a psychedelic theme, the RNC portrayed Kerry as the fictional spy character Austin Powers.

Video production was a powerful weapon to distort perspective in a positive or negative manner.

Web-based ads shared through campaign websites, blogs, and other sites were cheaper to

produce and share with the United States whereas paying for an ad to be shown on television

could be more costly.[44]

In addition, Bush's web team emailed an ad questioning Kerry's commitment to

eliminating special interest influence to over 6 million Bush supporters. The email proclaimed

that John Kerry had "more special interest money than any other senator."[45] Special interest

groups are willing to back any candidate that they feel will support their interests. These groups

include telecoms, drug companies, and many others. Kerry responded with many ads including

one ad in particular that depicted Bush as a child with a budget and depicting him as incompetent

with math.[46]

Image ads on the internet are another form of effective advertising. Ads to raise money

were made useful during the 2004 election and became a popular way to fundraise. Essayist

Lynda Lee Kaid described one of Kerry's fundraising ads as an "animated video of George Bush

portrayed as a king sitting on a pile of money."[47] Along with the video was an audio clip that

proclaimed "Bush is attacking John Kerry with a mountain of money. Your $25 gift now can put

us over the top and help topple Bush."[48] In total for online fundraising though Kerry's website

[43] Staff, Agree. "John Kerry: The International Man of Mystery." I Agree to See. July 29, 2013.
https://www.iagreetosee.com/portfolio/john-kerry-man-of-mystery/.
[44] Kaid, Lynda L. 69
[45] "Cyber Ads." PBS. February 20, 2004. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/cyber-ads.
[46] Kaid, Lynda L. 73
[47] Ibid. 73
[48] Ibid. 73

(Johnkerry.com), over $80 million from 500,000 Americans was raised to support Kerry in the 2004 election. Bush raised $13.8 million online.[49]

These newly upgraded campaign websites and strategies of communication were effective ways in which candidates could push their message and refute false claims from their opposing parties while advertising their own claims simultaneously. The internet connecting millions of people was becoming a political battleground. The 2004 election was special because it was recorded as having spent the most money on political advertising and created the most negative advertising environment in the history of presidential campaigning. Elections since then have been far more competitive and costly, although this election showcased the true potential in strategies involving Internet use in the political realm of campaigning. The normalization of internet use in general became more common during and after the 2004 election.[50]

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[49] Default. John Kerry-Campaign Finances. http://p2004.org/kerry/kerrfin.html.;
Default. George W. Bush-Campaign Finances. http://p2004.org/bush/bushfin.html.
[50] Kaid, Lynda L. 67

Part 2: Barack Obama's Presidency

The 2008 Election: At different points in time, presidential candidates Barack Obama

(Democrat) and John McCain (Republican) were both senators in the U.S legislature. Obama had

served three terms in the Illinois senate from 1997-2004. He also taught constitutional law at the

University of Chicago Law School. By January 3, 2005, Illinois voters watched Obama become

their U.S senator. In front of the Old State House, February 10, 2007, in Springfield, Illinois,

Obama announced his presidential candidacy.[51]

Before the general election, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were the last two

contestants who survived the Democratic presidential primaries. The Democratic party had an

African American and a woman as the front runners. These candidates brought a new concept of

what a president could be regardless of their biological differences. This uniqueness caught the

country's attention because some people at the time opposed the idea of a female or black

president. These two impactful nominees made history and were household names during the

Democratic presidential primaries. With Obama leading in super and pledged delegates, Clinton

dropped out of the race June 7, 2008, making Obama the Democratic party's nominee for the

2008 election and Clinton endorsed Obama.[52]

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[51] Michael Nelson and Rhodes College. "Barack Obama: Campaigns and Elections." Miller Center. January 19, 2018. https://millercenter.org/president/obama/campaigns-and-elections.; *University of Chicago Law School > Media*. https://web.archive.org/web/20080608225931/http://www.law.uchicago.edu/media/index.html.; "Barack Obama." U.S. Senate: Barack Obama. February 14, 2020. https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Photo_Barack_Obama.htm.
[52] "2008 Democratic Delegates." RealClearPolitics. https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2008/president/democratic_delegate_count.html.; ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/hillary-clinton-bernie-sanders-history-lesson-dropping/story?id=38909381; "Section 4: Race and Gender in the Democratic Primary." Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. December 31, 2019. https://www.people-press.org/2008/05/29/section-4-race-and-gender-in-the-democratic-primary/.

The Republican candidates were not considered to be as culturally interesting as the Democratic candidates because they were absent of diversity in race or gender within their party's nominees. Because former Vice President Dick Cheney decided not to run for president, neither major party's presidential nominee in the 2008 election was incumbent. This nontraditional change in elections had not happened since 1952, when Republican nominee Dwight D. Eisenhower defeated Democrat Adlai E. Stevenson.[53]

The differences in wealth distribution and approaches to foreign affairs are key examples of policies that divided the two major parties. In 1976, U.S Vietnam war veteran John McCain served as the Navy's liaison to the U.S senate. He communicated with the U.S. senate on the Navy's behalf and years later he moved to Arizona in 1981. In 1982, Mr. McCain won a seat in the U.S House of Representatives after building strong public relations with local Arizonan politicians through his father-in-law's brew business.[54]

Filling Barry Goldwater's retired seat in the U.S senate chamber for a number of years made John McCain even more known and respected among other conservatives. McCain's goal to become U.S. president failed in 2000 when he lost to George W. Bush. By April 25, 2007, though, he gave another shot at becoming commander-in-chief and announced his second presidential run, representing the Republican party. When McCain defeated Mike Huckabee and

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[53] Holme, Richard. *United States Presidential Elections: Republicans versus Democrats*. Constitutional Reform Centre, 1988.; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "United States Presidential Election of 1952." Encyclopædia Britannica. October 28, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1952.
[54] "John McCain." Biography.com. June 17, 2019. https://www.biography.com/political-figure/john-mccain.

Ron Paul in the primaries, he established a strong delegate count based on the primaries, caucuses, and state conventions with an estimated total of 1,575 to Mike Huckabee's 278.[55]

The main topic of discussion during the second presidential debate was how each candidate would pull America from the recession if elected. Tom Brokaw moderated this debate, and he immediately acknowledged that "tens of thousands" of the questions were submitted online. Only a handful of questions from the audience and online made it to the debate, but the web's involvement with organizing the debate was profound.[56]

The first question went to Obama from an audience member asking, "With the economy on the downturn and retired and older citizens and workers losing their incomes, what's the fastest, most positive solution to bail these people out of the economic ruin?"[57] Obama replied, "The recession is a final result of economic policies that are strongly promoted by President Bush and supported by Sen. McCain."[58] Plans to hand the middle class a "rescue package" and lower their taxes were also key concepts of Obama's plan to restore the economy.[59]

When asked to address the same question, McCain proposed that his plan of energy independence and less spending from Washington D.C. will help stabilize the American economy. McCain said, "We've got to stop sending $700 billion a year to countries that don't want us, or like us very much."[60] McCain clarified his proposal stating, "I know how to do that, my friends. And it's my proposal, it's not Sen. Obama's proposal, it's not President Bush's

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[55] "Huckabee Drops out of the Presidential Race." NBCNews.com. March 5, 2008.
http://www.nbcnews.com/id/23473706/ns/politics-decision_08/t/huckabee-drops-out-presidential-race/#.Xkj9KVJKj
Vo.
[56] "Transcript of Second McCain, Obama Debate." CNN.
https://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/07/presidential.debate.transcript/.
[57] Ibid
[58] Ibid
[59] Ibid
[60] Ibid

proposal. But I know how to get America working again, restore our economy and take care of

working Americans. Thank you."[61]

The significance of this debate was the fact that thousands of questions were submitted

online. Political involvement online was growing and by having people submit questions online,

politicians are then able to see the many concerns people in America have. When a similar

question was repeatedly mentioned, debate organizers word a question that replicates the

numerous questions concerning the same issue. Before the debate began, Tom Brokaw said, "As

you might expect, many of the questions that we have from here in the hall tonight and from

online have to do with the American economy and, in fact, with global economic conditions."[62]

In this situation, questions concerning the same topic are more likely to make the stage because

statistically the question was a popular worry among voters.

With Obama being the Democratic nominee and McCain being the Republican's choice,

the winner of the 2008 election was expected to make changes in order to help Americas'

economy. The Global Financial Crisis in 2007-08 resulted in the Great Recession. America

before and after the election of 2008 was not strong economically. Many changes in the taxing

system needed to take place for America to build themselves from the ground up economically.

Both candidates had a plan to re-evaluate the economy and spending of the government.

During the general election, Obama won the electoral votes of important swing states

such as Florida and Ohio. The states with the most electoral votes were also key in helping him

win the election. Swing states tend to receive most of the candidates' focus because of their

citizens' vulnerability to be persuaded by one party. For instance, 2020 Florida was a swing state

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[61] Ibid

[62] "Transcript of Second McCain, Obama Debate." CNN.
https://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/07/presidential.debate.transcript/.

and, on top of that, it has 29 electoral votes. States such as California, Texas, New York, and Illinois (Texas is the only state that comes close to be considered a swing state) were also important states to win during the 2008 election due to their high number of electoral votes.

During the general election, McCain was not able to grab the states with the most electoral votes. Texas was the only state Senator McCain won with a considerably high number of electoral votes. Obama won all the swing states and the states with a high number of electoral votes. Obama defeated McCain, winning the electoral college and the popular vote by a near landslide. Obama won states that had not voted for the Democratic presidential candidate since 1976 (North Carolina) and 1964 (Indiana and Virginia). Obama achieved a record in popular votes won by a Democrat since Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. Compared to the 2016 election, Obama's total count of 69.5 million votes was still considered the highest tally of votes ever won by a presidential candidate. Converting states to vote for a Democratic candidate was impressive; same goes for Republicans who attempt to convert historically Democratic states.[63]

On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama defeated John McCain in the general election. Obama resigned from the U.S senate on November 13, 2008, to focus on his transitioning to presidency and officially became the 44th president of the United States on January 20, 2009. Barack Obama was the first African American to win a presidential election from a major party. The 2008 election came to an end and America was ready for this theme of change to be put into action. A pledge to help Americans during such a hard time was a promise Obama wanted to fulfill.[64]

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[63] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "United States Presidential Election of 2008." *Encyclopædia Britannica.* October 28, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-2008.
[64] "Obama, Barack." US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives. https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/19276.

Social Websites: Thanks to grassroot organizers and supporters, political messages made public on social media circulated and both Barack Obama and John McCain spread their influence across the Web. When social media became a common tool for communication, it proved to be a revolutionary addition to the web because of how instant it was for its time. According to researchers Andrew Perrin and Maeve Duggan, 74% of American adults used the internet in 2007 and 2008. Mobile Web access was also becoming more common in 2007 and people were then able to connect to the internet away from home and search the web in public spaces via WiFi (Wireless Fidelity).[65]

Both candidates in the 2008 election knew the internet was a powerful ally in helping them gain support because of their past experiences when using it. Yet, it was evident that one candidate took advantage of this tool more than the other. During the 2008 election, Obama and his staff were known to make great use of the World Wide Web and its abilities. Using social media platforms to communicate with presumptive voters was used in the past by other candidates, but no one had gained such a massive following to date quite like Obama.[66]

Andrew Rasiej, founder of the Personal Democracy Forum, a website that covers the relations of politics and technology, said, "The campaign, consciously or unconsciously, became much more of a media operation than simply a presidential campaign, because they recognized that by putting their message out onto these various platforms, their supporters would spread it

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[65] "15 Years of WiFi - a Timeline - Fon: The Global WiFi Network." Fon. May 28, 2018. https://fon.com/fon-wifi-infographic/.; Perrin, Andrew, and Maeve Duggan. "Americans Internet Access: Percent of Adults 2000-2015." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. December 31, 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/06/26/americans-internet-access-2000-2015/.

[66] Jeremiah, owyang. "Snapshot of Presidential Candidate Social Networking Stats: Nov 3, 2008." Jeremiah Owyang. November 4, 2008.; Bogost, Ian. "Obama Was Too Good at Social Media." *The Atlantic*. January 6, 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/01/did-america-need-a-social-media-president/512405/.

for them."[67] The Web allows supporters to share information and keep tabs on their preferred candidate through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Twitter. During the 2008 election Obama used over 15 different networking sites to expand his online presence.[68] A candidate's social media presence was important because it consists of a diverse audience and allows for an abundance of political conversation and avocation.

In comparison to McCain, Obama had the edge online when it came to using social media and creating an impressive campaign website. According to the Pew Research staff, "Obama has more MySpace friends by a nearly 6-to-1 margin, more Facebook supporters by more than a 5-to-1 margin, twice as many videos posted to his official YouTube channel, and has more YouTube channel subscribers, by an 11-to-1 margin."[69] According to a post from November 3, 2008, Obama had 2,379,102 supporters on Facebook compared with McCain's 620,359 supporters. On Myspace Obama had 833,161 followers compared with McCain's 217,811 and their YouTube subscribers differed with Obama having 114,559 subscribers in comparison with McCain's 28,419. MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter are primarily public and private messaging platforms made for text to be globalized. YouTube was a public video-based platform that allows people to post videos, comment, like/dislike videos from around the world.[70]

Obama's "plans for 2008" and McCain's "Ready to Lead" videos on their YouTube channels, "BarackObamaDotCom" and "John McCain," circulated the Web with the help of their

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[67] Talbot, David. "How Obama Really Did It." MIT Technology Review. December 19, 2015. https://www.technologyreview.com/s/410644/how-obama-really-did-it/.
[68] The Washington Post. http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/11/obama-raised-half-a-billion-on.html.
[69] Pew Research Center. "McCain vs. Obama on the Web." Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. December 31, 2019. https://www.journalism.org/2008/09/15/mccain-vs-obama-on-the-web/.
[70] Jeremiah_owyang. "Snapshot of Presidential Candidate Social Networking Stats: Nov 3, 2008." Jeremiah Owyang. November 4, 2008. https://web-strategist.com/blog/2008/11/03/snapshot-of-presidential-candidate-social-networking-stats-nov-2-2008/.

supporters and grassroots organizers with the power of sharing online via social platforms.

Barack Obama's supporters lead in the number of people who post political content online,

engage politically on an online social network, share photos, video or audio content, sign up

online for election updates, donate money online, sign up for email news alerts, and volunteer

online.[71]

This activity was crucial in helping a candidate for many reasons. Posting political

content online can keep others informed who may lack an interest in seeking out political

information. Engaging in political conversation online was important because it gives people the

opportunity to educate each other. Donating money online was also convenient because

constituents are able to do so whenever and wherever they are. Signing up for email news alerts

and volunteering keeps the supporters up-to-date and involved in new ways they can help their

chosen candidate.

As seen before, reaching out to constituents beyond the limits of doing so in person can

increase a candidate's popularity and helps promote participation, communication, and

transparency. First, citizens can participate in online activities, and while online they can

organize events held offline. Second, supporters can communicate with each other through the

Web, whether it be debate, questioning, or education. Lastly, candidates can lay out their

proposals and plans for the future. People can see where candidates stand on issues through

campaign websites, and this platform also will help the voter decide who to vote for.

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[71] Smith, Aaron. "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. December 31, 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2009/04/15/the-internets-role-in-campaign-2008/.; BarackObamadotcom. "BarackObamadotcom." YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/user/BarackObamadotcom.; "John McCain." YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/user/JohnMcCaindotcom/featured.

Like everything else, communication is key. Pew research and researchers alike also believe "voters are increasingly taking an active role in the political process by contributing their own thoughts or comments to the online debate."[72] When we see political parties participating in online conversation more frequently, we can see how this leads to more activism and participation, which was an overall benefit to a candidate. Obama put so much effort into campaigning online because he initially wanted to privately fund his campaign. According to Anthony Corrado's article on finance distribution in the 2008 election, "Democratic challenger Barack Obama chose to forgo the public option and rely solely on private fundraising to finance his campaign."[73]

This was the first time that a major party nominee had decided to use private funds alone since the adoption of the public funding program in 1974. There was a budget when using public funds for a campaign, McCain decided to use the Public grant of $84.1 million while Obama raised $337 million during the general election alone. Author Anthony Corrado wrote, "Obama illustrated how traditional fundraising practices can be combined with the Internet and other digital technologies to build an extensive base of small donors."[74] Reaching out to various donors allowed for Obama to build a strong alliance of supporters and separated himself from the constraints of public funding.[75]

With the 2008 election being a momentous advancement in how people use the web, these new additions ultimately helped spread information about Barack Obama and John

[72] Smith, Aaron. "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. December 31, 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2009/04/15/the-internets-role-in-campaign-2008/.
[73] Corrado, Anthony, and David B. Magleby. *Financing the 2008 Election: Assessing Reform*. Brookings Institution Press, 2011.
[74] Ibid. 127
[75] Ibid. 127

McCain. Both candidates continued using the resources available to them through the web, although research shows that Obama took better advantage of the tools available more than McCain. When people are informed and educated on politics they can decide where they lean politically, and the internet has made the spread of digital information possible.

The 2012 Election: Elected once again as the Democratic ticket for the 2012 election, President Barack Obama ran for a second term alongside Vice President Joe Biden. The president had ingrained a large amount of supporters within America's population during his first term. From October, 8, —October, 28, 2012, only a week or so before election day, President Obama had a consistent 50% approval rating based on a poll of voters. During that same time frame, 45% of voters disapproved of Obama's job as president.[76]

The Republican nominee for the 2012 election was Mitt Romney, son of former Republican party candidate, George Romney. During Romney's younger days, he attended Brigham Young University and Harvard, and then he eventually became an investor and businessman. Romney worked with the Bain & Company firm and made millions as an investor. Eventually, he ran against Shannon O'Brien (Democrat) in the Massachusetts gubernatorial election of 2002. Romney won the election and served as governor of Massachusetts from January, 2, 2003, till January 4, 2007.[77]

[76] Gallup. "Presidential Approval Ratings -- Barack Obama." Gallup.com. April 13, 2020.
https://news.gallup.com/poll/116479/barack-obama-presidential-job-approval.aspx.
[77] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Mitt Romney." Encyclopædia Britannica. March 08, 2020.
https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mitt-Romney.;
Leip, David. 2002 Gubernatorial General Election Results - Massachusetts.
https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state.php?year=2002&fips=25&f=0&off=5&elect=0.

Romney campaigned for the 2008 election, although he ended his run shortly after McCain's victory in winning the Republican primaries. Romney was third in the number of delegates toward the end of the primaries. In 2010, Romney decided to create a political action committee called "Restore Our Future." This committee was dedicated to helping Romney become the Republican presidential nominee. By July 2012, Restore Our Future raised more than $60 million in donations, with nearly half coming from Wall Street contributors. Preparation for the 2012 election was underway and Romney's fundraising efforts were progressing with the help of wealthy individuals and companies supporting Romney's campaign for the 2012 election.[78]

June, 2, 2011, Romney announced his candidacy for president for the 2012 election and continued to spread his influence across the country. The 2007 Great Recession still impacted many Americans and Romney felt that his financial experience would help turn the economy heal. During Romney's official announcement to run in the 2012 election, he said, "Turning around a crisis takes experience and bold action, for millions of Americans, the economy is in crisis today, and unless we change course, it will be a crisis for all of us tomorrow."[79]

Over 20 Republican candidates attempted to run in the 2012 election, but Mitt Romney gathered the highest delegate count during the Republican primaries and ultimately defeated Ron

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[78] Aaron Mehta, Reity O'Brien, Rachael Marcus, Paul Abowd, and Alexandra Duszak. "PAC Profile: Restore Our Future." Center for Public Integrity. January 30, 2012. https://publicintegrity.org/politics/pac-profile-restore-our-future/.
[79] Rucker, Philip. "Mitt Romney Announces 2012 Presidential Bid." *The Washington Post.* June 2, 2011. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/mitt-romney-announces-2012-presidential-bid/2011/06/02/AG05iJHH_story.html.; Burns, Alexander. "Romney: I'll 'bring This Country Back'." POLITICO. June 02, 2011. https://www.politico.com/story/2011/06/romney-ill-bring-this-country-back-056118.

Paul, Rick Santorum, and Newt Gingrich, who were once front runners in the 2012 election. Romney then became the nominee for the Republican ticket for the 2012 election, and he campaigned against Barack Obama who easily won the Democratic vote with no serious opposition. With traditional debates and strategic campaigning taking place across America, both candidates went on to pursue their goal in winning office with Obama hoping to continue his presidency and Romney seeking to begin his.[80]

Romney had a strong conservative following in most historically red states although his delegate count was not sufficient enough to win the general election. President Obama had won a surplus amount of electoral votes; 332 to Romney's 206. The election came to a close with Obama claiming victory over Mitt Romney and Obama then proceeded with taking an oath during his second term inauguration ceremony January 20, 2013. Barack Obama was then placed in office once again continuing his duty as the 44th president of the United States.[81]

Web Surfing: If an online user were to surf the web and stumble across either Mitt Romney's or Barack Obama's official campaign website, they could be considered a potential supporter. Personal information such as data within one's web history can trigger a wave of consistent campaign ads to be shown on nearly every website visited. Simply visiting a page that was affiliated with either candidate could turn an average web surfer into a potential supporter.

In a June 27, 2012, article, Lois Beckett described her experiences with becoming an online target. One day, she was searching for music and suddenly campaign ads for Mitt Romney were showing up on random websites that had nothing to do with Mitt Romney and his

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[80] "Presidential Election of 2012." 270toWin.com. https://www.270towin.com/2012_Election/.;
Munro, André. "United States Presidential Election of 2012." Encyclopædia Britannica. October 30, 2019.
https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-Presidential-Election-of-2012.
[81] Ibid

campaign. Claiming that she spent a fair amount of time on Mitt Romney's official campaign website, she then was targeted by the campaign staff as an online constituent. Backett stated that, "This is the same kind of online targeting used by sites that sell airline tickets or shoes. If you visit Zappos, advertisements for the sneakers you looked at will sometimes follow you around the web."[82] She also said that one ad suggested that she "learn more" and another asking to "donate."

With campaign advertisements being able to follow an online user across the web, this tactic could either bring a motivation to support the candidate or become annoyed by the candidate. In a 2012 search engine use telephone survey, 68% of the survey participants said, "I am not okay with targeted advertising because I don't like having my online behavior tracked and analyzed."[83] Obama also used personal online data to seek out possible voters and even hired a corporate data-mining expert, Rayid Ghani who previously researched how to use a retailer's record of customer purchases to predict what products might interest a specific customer. The same technique was used to predict the demographic of a customer.[84]

Both candidates during the general election of 2012 had elaborate websites with a clean interface. Web engineers such as Daniel Lacy agree that these campaign websites had their faults. Lacy dissected Obama and Romney's campaign websites by using performance tools such as Safari Web Inspector, DOM Monster, Yslow, and Firebug. Lacy's analysis on both campaign

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[82] Beckett, Lois. "How Mitt Romney Followed Me Around the Internet." ProPublica.
https://www.propublica.org/article/how-mitt-romney-followed-me-around-the-internet.
[83] Blase Ur, Pedro G. Leon, Lorrie Faith Cranor, Richard Shay and Yang Wang "Smart, Useful, Scary, Creepy: Perceptions of Online Behavioral Advertising." Carnegie Mellon University.
https://www.cylab.cmu.edu/_files/pdfs/tech_reports/CMUCyLab12007.pdf
[84] Beckett, Lois. "Three Things We Don't Know About Obama's Massive Voter Database." ProPublica.
https://www.propublica.org/article/three-things-we-dont-know-about-obamas-massive-voter-database.

websites showed: "For the most-part, Lacy says, Obama's site uses more modern components than Romney's, but it also seems to forget some of the basics."[85] The full analysis was detailed in presenting the differences in how easily a visitor could navigate the website and the minor details on parts of the website that make it superior to the other.[86]

As seen before, being active online can increase a candidate's digital presence because followers will share messages across the web. Once again, studies show that the Obama campaign posted close to four times as much content online compared to the Romney campaign. Receiving more responses from the public with twice the number of shares, views, and comments, Obama made impressive use of online platforms. Also, Obama was active on twice as many platforms which in return spreads his online presence even further. The numerous ways in which candidates can share their messages and watch them reach vast numbers of people was truly a dynamic, convenient, and powerful way to gain support.

Conclusion

In theory, a candidate will benefit from having a basic online presence because of its ability to engage voters, share political messages, and gain support financially. Voters and candidates can take advantage of the World Wide Web in many ways. The ability to help one another through a digital platform accommodates the absence of in-person activity. With that being said, it can also make plans for an in-person activity relating to a campaign or not. The extensive power of the internet allows for connecting across small or large distances. Even

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[85] Dannen, Chris. "Inside The Candidates' Code: What The Campaign Websites Say About Obama And Romney." Fast Company. March 05, 2013.
https://www.fastcompany.com/3002682/inside-candidates-code-what-campaign-websites-say-about-obama-and-romney.
[86] Ibid

though the odds of a voter meeting a candidate face-to-face are low, voters can interact with a candidate via internet services.

With this analytical research on how a candidate's strategic use of the internet has impacted their campaigning, we are able to see how this tool will interplay with future campaigns. Today, candidates for the 2020 election such as Donald J. Trump, Bernie Sanders, and Andrew Yang had or have a strong social media presence. As long as the World Wide Web remains a useful utility for candidates, future campaigns will continue to use this medium to gain support. Overall, advancements in technology will come in time and different uses of the web will continue to revolutionize America's democracy and its ability to encourage voters to become more participatory.

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-in-84.html?pagewanted=print.

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https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/01/did-america-need-a-social-media-president/512405/.
https://web-strategist.com/blog/2008/11/03/snapshot-of-presidential-candidate-social-networking-stats-nov-2-2008/.

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