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# Approaching Ideals through Innovation: Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Mass Media Technology and American Democracy

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Approaching Ideals through Innovation:  
Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Mass Media Technology and American Democracy

A senior thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts  
in Humanities

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## ABSTRACT

From the moment our First Amendment was adopted, America's ideal of democracy has been firmly intertwined with media communications between the President and the citizenry. Over time, technological advancements have altered the way this communication is facilitated, increasing the public's access to the Office of the Presidency, and visa versa, via new forms of media. Through an examination of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's use of the radio, the first televised debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960, and Barack Obama's use of Social Media and the Internet, this thesis will seek to answer the question of whether the greater access gained from new communication mediums has enhanced American democracy. While any increase in dialogue between the Office of the President and citizens undoubtedly brings us closer to our democratic ideals, it will likewise be demonstrated that each new form of media has been uniquely suited to increase transparency into the political process in ways relevant to the era in which politicians adopted them.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b><u>Timeline of Events</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>
<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>
<b><u>Democracy and the Radio</u></b>	<b><u>6</u></b>
<b><u>Democracy and Television</u></b>	<b><u>12</u></b>
NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION OR SUPERFICIAL IMAGE?	16
EFFECT OF TELEVISION ON DEMOCRACY	20
<b><u>Democracy and the Internet</u></b>	<b><u>23</u></b>
FROM TELEVISION TO THE WEB	23
THE 2008 OBAMA CAMPAIGN	25
OBAMA: THE INTERNET CANDIDATE?	29
DEMOCRACY IN A DIGITAL AGE	32
<b><u>Conclusion</u></b>	<b><u>35</u></b>
AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY	38
<b><u>Bibliography</u></b>	<b><u>39</u></b>

## TIMELINE

### *American Political History and Media Technology*

<b>1920</b> – November 2	First scheduled public broadcasting on a radio station
<b>1932</b> – November	Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) elected President
<b>1933</b> – March 12	FDR's first Fireside Chat
<b>1939</b> – April	FDR becomes first President to appear on television
<b>1943</b> – January 11	First sitting Presidential flight on an airplane
<b>1947</b> – October 5	Harry Truman delivers the first televised Presidential address from the White House
<b>1960</b> – November	John F. Kennedy (JFK) elected President
<b>1961</b> – January 25	JFK holds first live television news conference from the White House
<b>1991</b> –	Tim Berners-Lee introduces the World Wide Web for everyday use
<b>1992</b> –	Congress allows the Web to become used for commercial purposes
	<u>Presidential Election</u> : George H. Bush vs. Bill Clinton vs. Ross Perot
	Bill Clinton elected President
<b>1994</b> –	<u>Presidential Election</u> : Bill Clinton vs. Bob Dole vs. Ross Perot vs. Ralph Nader
<b>2000</b> –	John McCain runs in the Republican Primary, loses to George W. Bush
	<u>Presidential Election</u> : George W. Bush vs. Al Gore vs. Ralph Nader
	George W. Bush elected President
<b>2004</b> –	Howard Dean runs in Democratic Primary, loses to John Kerry
	<u>Presidential Election</u> : George W. Bush vs. John Kerry
<b>2005</b> – May	YouTube launched
<b>2006</b> – July 15	First version of Twitter launched

– September	Facebook made public beyond educational institutions
<b>2007</b> – January	First iPhone released
<b>2008</b> –	Hilary Clinton vs. Barack Obama in the Democratic Primary
	<u>Presidential Election:</u>
	Barack Obama/Joe Biden vs. John McCain/Sarah Palin

## INTRODUCTION

Americans have been striving for greater communication with their government since they were colonies separated from the King of England by 4,000 miles of ocean. It was the lack of ability to communicate with government through representation that led to the Declaration of Independence and American Revolution, and the struggle for a freer exchange of ideas between citizens and leaders has continued ever since. This quest has been aided by the protection of speech enshrined in America's Constitution, but there have simultaneously been moments in American history where the advancement of technology made access to those in power more available and the country's citizenry more connected. Radio, television (TV), and the Internet have been the most notable inventions in mass communication within the last century, each medium granting voters greater access to the marketplace of ideas in the nation's capital, to relevant areas of politician-assessment, and demanding that politicians possess skills uniquely important to their era.

More than any other society, Americans hold the belief that every citizen has the ability to contribute to the national conversation. The separation from British control in 1776 cemented this ethos in the national consciousness, "dramatically expanding the circle of people who considered themselves capable of thinking for themselves about issues of freedom, equality, sovereignty, and representation."<sup>1</sup> Maintaining an ongoing political conversation was considered so instrumental to the success of the new Republic that several of the Founding Fathers, including James Madison, believed that merely

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<sup>1</sup> Theda Skocpol, "How Americans Became Civic," in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, ed. Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, (Washington DC: Brooking Institution Press, 1999), 43, EBSCOhost eBook.

protecting free speech in the Constitution did not go far enough. He believed that the ability for Americans to freely communicate their ideas with each other should also be protected or even aided by the government, and as a result actively supported early legislation to subsidize the spread of public information through the Post Office.<sup>2</sup> This reflected the early feeling that ensuring the communications capacity of every citizen would be key in maintaining the delicate balance of a government that was truly for the people, by the people.

While it cannot be claimed that every politician has strived toward this aim, there have been a few during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that, more than any others, made use of and benefited from the new mass communication technologies of their time. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) made history with his weekly fireside chats, bringing the nation towards a larger collective identity and community during the darkness of the Great Depression. John F. Kennedy (JFK) used his image and nonverbal communication skills, projected via television, to both win Presidential debates against the incumbent Vice-President Richard Nixon and later to project American strength and resolve during some of the most frightening incidents of the Cold War. Barack Obama harnessed the organizing and fundraising power of the Internet to mobilize an army of on-the-ground volunteers in an old-school grassroots run for the Presidency, overcoming both the deeply institutional political power of Hilary Clinton during the Democratic Primary and the general election against John McCain to become the first African-American President in the nation's history. All of these politicians took a new mass communication technology, previously only used for commercial and entertainment

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce: Communication and Democracy in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 15.

purposes, and made it function to benefit not only themselves but potentially even bring America closer to the ideal of democracy envisioned by the nation's Founders.

This paper will detail and analyze the context of each of these politicians' adoption of new technology, dedicating a chapter to each. There are many factors to consider and not all of them will be able to be addressed, but the overarching question of whether these technologies have brought America closer to our democratic ideals or simply created more noise will be closely considered in each case. Each of these moments in history shed greater light on the intimate relationship between communication technology innovation and democracy, ultimately helping the reader understand both current developments with social media and government and the importance of continued inventiveness in the field of mass communication.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Democracy and the Radio*

Relying on face-to-face communications and newspapers sufficed for communication between government/party representatives and citizens during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but as technology evolved this became less and less effective. The stakes got higher as the telegraph began to transmit news worldwide with great speed, and America was drawn into overseas conflict from which it ultimately emerged as a major international power with a considerably stronger sense of national identity. It was during this time, after World War I, that the radio began to be used to broadcast entertainment shows and advertisements. Amidst this increasing public noise of jazz and budding commercialism, “a more politically and rhetorically assertive presidency” began to emerge.<sup>1</sup>

When the stock market crashed in October of 1929, Franklin Roosevelt was already developing strategies on how to use radio to communicate with the public as Governor of New York. Elected to that office in 1928, he immediately began developing a “rationalized system for using the radio to establish a relationship with the public,” frequently asking them “to send him their opinions” at the end of each of his addresses.<sup>2</sup> This served him well when he ran against Herbert Hoover, a man with a starkly different approach to media, for the Presidency in 1932. While Hoover rejected even a suggestion to “make a series of 10-minute radio addresses [during the campaign], saying that it was ‘difficult to deal with anything over the radio except generalities,’” Roosevelt was

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<sup>1</sup> David Michael Ryfe, “Franklin Roosevelt and The Fireside Chats,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 4 (1999): 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

working to perfect his use of the tool to engage the public.<sup>3</sup> By the time he was elected President, FDR had already developed an extraordinarily effective and highly crafted method of delivery that he immediately put to use while preparing his first “fireside chat” radio address regarding the ongoing bank crisis.

The methods of communication used in radio and popular culture were extremely helpful during the introduction of different elements of FDR’s New Deal. The program was a vast expansion of federal bureaucracy by any standard, designed to use government to help struggling citizens through the Great Depression. To make the changes less frightening, Roosevelt used conventions of radio’s media culture to close the perceived gap between the local and national political structures. His use of the terms ‘I,’ ‘you,’ and ‘we,’ helped make the overall tone of the chats more like private discussions than formal addresses, allowing individual listeners “to insert themselves into the conversation” just as popular radio show announcers of the time were trained to do.<sup>4</sup> Speaking to the public in this “folksy style developed by network broadcasters, Roosevelt was able to frame his policies in nonthreatening terms and thus to smooth the transition to the welfare state.”<sup>5</sup> For the first time in American history, the federal government began to be seen as something that could help citizens in their every day lives.<sup>6</sup>

This was, of course, a carefully constructed result of the narrative pushed by the fireside chats. Just as advertisers of the time designed campaigns that “aligned advertiser and potential consumer on the same side in opposition to a task or problem confronting the consumer” in order to sell a product, Roosevelt used the informal language of talk

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

radio to frame the Depression as a drama he and the public were facing together and the New Deal as the solution.<sup>7</sup> Beyond just that, he consistently portrayed the public as “central to [the] recovery,” and his “listeners as the moving force behind his efforts.”<sup>8</sup> This was a revolutionary way for a President to appeal to citizens, and over time it functioned to successfully transform Roosevelt into someone the mass public perceived as a friend. In each chat he performed, he “explicitly referenced the last in its opening lines,” making it seem as though each broadcast was “meant to be understood as statements within a larger, continuing conversation.”<sup>9</sup> The effect was such that it made the President seem like “an old acquaintance of the public who occasionally called to ‘catch up’ on things.”<sup>10</sup> The public became increasingly comfortable with the idea of government as a friendly force in their lives, and many even began to display pictures of Roosevelt in their private homes.<sup>11</sup>

The live broadcasting of the fireside chats had a profound effect on the American public and political culture. As noted by Katz and Dayan in their 1992 publication *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Roosevelt’s ritual of live electronic events allowed, for the first time, mass audiences to “partially overcome their dispersion and atomization” and affirm their “shared membership in a national community.”<sup>12</sup> While the President was addressing the nation, “all those within reach of a [radio were] simultaneously and equally exposed, and they share[d] the knowledge that everybody

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>12</sup> Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 196, EBSCOhost eBook.

else [was] too.”<sup>13</sup> This created a kind of cathartic experience for listeners as they became immersed in their “consciousness of the sheer size of the audience.”<sup>14</sup> The new technology of radio, in this way, helped create a greater sense of national identity and community that had never before been experienced.

However, a greater *sense* of community and partnership with government doesn’t necessarily fulfill Madison’s ideal of open democratic communication. Live media events, such as Roosevelt’s fireside chats, can also function to “downplay the roles of intermediaries and subordinates,” like Congress, which can lead “to a potentially dangerous concentration of power and an inflated image of unanimous followership.”<sup>15</sup> Katz describes this process as *disintermediation*, “represented as a principal (A) talking to a public (C) over the head of traditional intermediaries (B) by means of a new medium (D).”<sup>16</sup> The fireside chats are a prime example of this process in action, and while in Roosevelt’s case, “undercutting the power of former intermediaries” seems to have functioned primarily to foster “a communal and egalitarian experience” during the Great Depression and World War II, he did not always accurately assess his level of power or exercise it appropriately.<sup>17</sup>

The “Court-packing” campaign that began in early 1937 demonstrates Roosevelt’s greatest misstep and misuse of disintermediation. Bypassing the normal protocol of discussing new legislative efforts with Congressional leadership, FDR announced a plan to increase the number of Supreme Court Justices and “thereby gain

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

more sympathetic treatment of New Deal programs” during a live press conference.<sup>18</sup> This action brought criticism from all sides, resulting in “the only time he used one of his famous fireside chats to ask the public to pressure Congress on behalf of his policies,” and ultimately the “most stunning legislative failure in his twelve years in office.”<sup>19</sup> Roosevelt’s attempted use of disintermediation in this case reveals the unmistakable tension that existed between Congress and the new medium of live radio.<sup>20</sup>

Another challenge to the democratic ideal of free flowing ideas and conversation between citizens and government was due to the inherently one-sided nature of discussion that radio allowed. The propensity for the medium to become a “powerful tool of propaganda, where compelling voices could reach out to millions, without interruption or rejoinder,” was undeniable.<sup>21</sup> To counter this potential as much as possible, Roosevelt worked hard to continue a practice he had established as Governor of New York whereby he utilized staff to monitor reaction to the chats in editorials, news reports, mail, and special correspondence.<sup>22</sup> Every effort was made to listen to the public as well as speak to them. Public opinion mattered as Roosevelt strived to create a more intimate relationship between the Presidency and the public.

Despite the flaws of radio as a medium for political discussion, the good it did in bringing American society together during this difficult time in history cannot be outweighed and all the benefits not necessarily easily seen. One of the many effects of technology in political discourse is that it moved the ‘public-conversation sphere’ from

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<sup>18</sup> Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1997), 128.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>20</sup> Katz and Dayan, *Media Events*, 216.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce: Communication and Democracy in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 113.

<sup>22</sup> Ryfe, “Franklin Roosevelt and the Fireside Chats,” 91.

the town halls of Jefferson and Madison's era into private family living rooms. "Instead of the expressive crowd," society was now able to be "mobilized in small groups to participate in a [live] event through attention and discussion" that often took place behind closed doors.<sup>23</sup> Citizens may be fed a singular message through a medium like radio, but the ultimate democratic function of the message was not in its conveyance of a singular idea. The fireside chats aided American democracy primarily through the way they sparked further conversations on political topics among listeners and how they made Americans feel about overcoming their hardships together.

Considering the added sense of community and encouragement to freely exchange ideas with other citizens that the fireside chats invoked, they can be seen in the larger context of American democracy as bringing the nation closer to Madison and the Founders' ideal. There have been many challenges to this simplistic view of the effects mass media events have on democracy since Roosevelt's time – primarily stemming from the influence of massive communication corporations, their influence on public officials, the rise of consumerism, and the growth of twenty four hour news conglomerates – but underneath the noise there has remained an enduring truth. Each new form of communication or technology that has erupted onto the political scene has given Americans greater access to the marketplace of ideas that exists in the nation's capital, and with that access has always come conversation about it and a greater sense of connectedness, or at least insight, into government.

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<sup>23</sup> Katz and Dayan, *Media Events*, 211.

## **CHAPTER 2** *Democracy and Television*

The first time television (TV) played a major role in determining the course of American politics was during the 1960 Presidential Debates between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Just as radio had presented a one sided conversation between a politician and the public during FDR's fireside chats, TV also represented a one-sided form of communication – only with the added dimension of images and nonverbal expression. No one quite knew what this would mean for the candidates prior to their first televised debate on September 26, 1960, for “neither candidate, nor any candidates before them, had ever debated in front of a national television audience.”<sup>1</sup> It presented a new, untested challenge that necessitated a great deal of discussion, negotiation, and mutual agreements between the two campaigns beforehand, and, even with all that preparation, neither could know how the images might ultimately influence voter decision making.

With a September Gallup poll putting Nixon and Kennedy statistically tied at 47% to 46%, respectively, both were playing a high stakes game by placing themselves in front of the camera.<sup>2</sup> They knew that this new mass communication medium would demand that they manage to look presidential while simultaneously attacking and refuting their opponent's arguments, and so no minute detail of how to manipulate appearances and circumstances to their benefit in this respect was overlooked.<sup>3</sup> They both agreed, as Nixon stated in an August 2, 1960 press conference in Los Angeles, that what was needed was “a discussion of the issues without texts, without notes...so that the

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<sup>1</sup> John Self, “The First Debate over the Debates: How Kennedy and Nixon Negotiated the 1960 Presidential Debates,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2005): 362.

<sup>2</sup> Mark White, “Apparent Perfection: The Image of John F. Kennedy,” *History* 98, no. 330 (2013): 231.

<sup>3</sup> Self, “The First Debate over the Debates,” 362.

people can learn how [they] think and how [they] react to the questions that are raised by each other in the course of the debate.”<sup>4</sup> This, of course, meant that their appearances and reactions would be monitored, broadcast and compared throughout the debate on top of how they formally answered questions.

Once the network and debate format/rules negotiations were complete, the two campaigns turned the conversation directly to topics affecting image and the appearance of their candidates. Lighting, the use of makeup, and the airing of reaction shots during the program itself were all key elements of this discussion up until and even during the broadcast. Neither candidate wanted to admit to wearing TV makeup, with Nixon even going so far as to veto its use.<sup>5</sup> Behind the scenes, however, both Kennedy and Nixon privately relented, with Nixon having “someone put some ‘Lazy Shave’ [on him] to help cover his five o’clock shadow” and Kennedy receiving what Ted Sorensen, his aid and speechwriter, called “a light coat” of makeup as well.<sup>6</sup> The debate over reaction shots was a bit fiercer, with Kennedy’s advisers supporting the idea and Nixon’s production adviser, Ted Rogers, objecting. Ultimately, the executives from CBS determined it should be left to Don Hewitt, the Debate’s Producer and Director, to make the final decision on the matter and that “he should shoot it the way he thought best... Thus, there were reaction shots. The one consolation that the Nixon representatives received was that Hewitt agreed not to take reaction shots of Nixon while he was wiping sweat from his

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Nixon, “August 1 through November 7, 1960,” Press Conference, 2 August 1960, in *Final Report, Part II: The Speeches, Remarks, Press Conferences, and Study Papers of Vice President Richard M. Nixon*, Vol. Report 994, part 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961): 1143.

<sup>5</sup> Self, “The First Debate over the Debates,” 368.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

brow.”<sup>7</sup> This aspect of the broadcast ultimately led to the most interesting and highly discussed new elements of political mass communication via television.

There has never been any argument over which candidate was more visually appealing during the first debate. Whereas Kennedy had spent the majority of early September campaigning in California, Nixon had spent two weeks of August in the hospital after suffering a serious knee injury and resulting infection.<sup>8</sup> On top of that, Oliver Treyz, an ABC executive, “noticed [on the day of the debate] that Nixon looked ill and asked him if he felt all right. Nixon replied that he was running a fever of 102 and was on antibiotics,” but refused to postpone the debate out of concern “people [would] think [he was] chicken.”<sup>9</sup> This illness undoubtedly added to Nixon’s visible discomfort under the hot lights of the set stage. He was seen, particularly during reaction shots, frequently fidgeting and rapidly blinking or darting his eyes around, the “Lazy Shave” powder becoming slightly streaked by sweat throughout the course of the broadcast. Kennedy, in contrast, looked calm, steady, confident, tan, and supremely healthy. His dark-grey suit even contributed, “Contrasting sharply with the background of the television studio, whereas Nixon’s light-grey suit blended into it.”<sup>10</sup> In terms of a comparison of the images the candidates projected that day, Nixon was simply no match for Kennedy.

It is widely accepted throughout the political world that, as a result of these and other factors, Kennedy was ultimately more appealing to voters than Nixon during that

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>8</sup> Erika Allen, “The Kennedy-Nixon Presidential Debates, 1960,” Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Foundation, <http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/kennedy-nixon-debates> (accessed March 25, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Self, “The First Debate over the Debates,” 368.

<sup>10</sup> White, “Apparent Perfection,” 231.

first debate. Bill Moyers, then serving as an adviser to the Kennedy campaign and liaison between JFK and his Vice Presidential candidate, Lyndon B. Johnson, went so far in a post-debate telecast analysis as to declare, “Appearances were everything.”<sup>11</sup> More conservative analysts conceded, “A majority of those who listened to the first debate on radio believed it to be evenly matched, whilst most Americans who watched it on television thought Kennedy had triumphed.”<sup>12</sup> This result was confirmed in a Gallup poll conducted immediately following the debate, which determined that “43% of American thought Kennedy had won the first debate whilst only 23% believed that Nixon had triumphed.”<sup>13</sup> As a result of the way these dramatic debate results corresponded to the similarly stark difference in appearance between Nixon and Kennedy, political advisors and analysts around the world concluded that this debate proved the power and importance of visual images in politics.

But was this debate an example of Kennedy using both rhetoric and the visual image to connect with the American people or was it, as Vancil & Pendell claim, a demonstration that “appearance, or even illusion, trumps substance on television”?<sup>14</sup> It is true that Kennedy was “immersed in the world of Hollywood” before his presidential run, paying close attention “to matters such as his own sense of fashion and the styling of his hair...long before the time when later presidents took professional advice on these sorts of cosmetic issues.”<sup>15</sup> It was, after all, more than just the physical appearance of the two candidates that had impacted the result of the first debate. Nixon’s quick, rapid

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<sup>11</sup> David Vancil & Sue Pendell, “The Myth of Viewer-Listener Disagreement in the First Kennedy-Nixon Debate,” *Central States Speech Journal* 38, no. 1 (1987): 16.

<sup>12</sup> White, “Apparent Perfection,” 231.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>14</sup> Vancil & Pendell, “The Myth of Viewer-Listener Disagreement,” 16.

<sup>15</sup> White, “Apparent Perfection,” 230.

movements during reaction shots, while potentially being partly due to his illness, nevertheless made him appear nervous and uncomfortable to voters, who seem to have then decided that these were not desirable traits for a president to convey under pressure. Did television make voter evaluations of presidential candidates more superficial or did it simply add an assessment of their nonverbal communication skills into the myriad of other attributes voters compare?

### **Non-Verbal Communication or Superficial Image?**

In the responsiveness model of communication put forward by Rafaeli and Sudweeks, there are three exchanges that take place during the communication of any news event via the media. Any mass communication initiated by a “compelling news event” triggers an exchange of messages “among journalists who broadcast the action, elite sources who deliver the reaction, and viewers who process the action-reaction sequence.”<sup>16</sup> The first message of this exchange is the broadcast of the news event, and the second in this framework “is the politician’s televised reaction to the event.”<sup>17</sup> Viewers make up the final message of this three-stage interaction themselves, with “the outcome of the interaction between [the] two related messages [occurring] *within* the viewer, as a psychological state of heightened involvement induced by the action-reaction sequence.”<sup>18</sup> Understanding this interaction requires an acceptance of the premise that “the meanings of words are *not* in the words; they are in *us*. In brief, the meaning of a message is to be found in the listener (receiver) of the message, not the message itself

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<sup>16</sup> Erik Bucy & John Newhagen, “The Emotional Appropriateness Heuristic: Processing Televised Presidential Reactions to the News,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 4 (1999): 61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

(symbols) or the speaker (sender).”<sup>19</sup> Additionally, and in the context of the Kennedy-Nixon debate in particular, it is equally important to understand that how a receiver of a message interprets and understands it can be deeply affected by nonverbal communication.

Since television granted a mass window into the nonverbal communication of the presidential candidates simultaneously for the first time, the comparative skills of Kennedy and Nixon in that area dramatically and, perhaps unexpectedly for some, impacted the public’s opinions about them. As James Druckman explains in his 2003 article, *The Power of Television Images: The First Kennedy-Nixon Debate Revisited*, since people often “draw a multitude of inferences from human physical appearance and movements,” including about personality characteristics, “Judgments about deceptiveness and evasiveness tend to have significant nonverbal components.”<sup>20</sup> The implication of this, he suggests, “Is that, compared to audio listeners, television viewers will be more likely to make inferences about personality characteristics, and, thus, they will be more likely to rely on personality characteristics in their evaluations,” possibly affecting overall comparative assessments in favor of the candidate with the “better” perceived personality.<sup>21</sup>

The simultaneous transmission of both verbal and nonverbal messages, particularly due to the inclusion of reaction shots during the debate’s broadcast, presented voters with an entirely new cognitive process to go through while evaluating Kennedy and Nixon’s performances. Rafaeli and Sudweeks’ definition of interactivity as a series

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<sup>19</sup> Larry Samovar, “Ambiguity and Unequivocation in the Kennedy-Nixon Television Debates,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 48, no. 3 (1962): 277.

<sup>20</sup> James Druckman, “The Power of Television Images: The First Kennedy-Nixon Debate Revisited,” *Journal of Politics* 65, no. 2 (2003): 561.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 561.

of at least three exchanges in which “messages in a sequence relate to each other...especially the extent to which later messages recount the relatedness of earlier messages,” stresses the importance of consistency during the process of mass communication.<sup>22</sup> This includes not only consistency between verbal statements, which had also been important when the medium was newspapers and radio, but, with the addition of visual images granted by television, consistency between the simultaneous verbal and nonverbal messages from a single source as well.

Of all the ways the level of consistency between these simultaneous messages can be processed, perhaps the most relevant to the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate is put forward by Erik Bucy and John Newhagen in their 1999 article, *The Emotional Appropriateness Heuristic: Processing Televised Presidential Reactions to the News*. Bucy and Newhagen postulate that voters enter into “viewing situations, such as televised debates...with cognitions about the anticipated communication behavior of political actors.”<sup>23</sup> When the verbal and nonverbal communication of a candidate do not sync up, as was the case with Nixon, it creates a “nonverbal expectancy violation that shift[s] attention away from the topic of discussion...and onto the source of violation [Nixon], intensifying scrutiny of the source.”<sup>24</sup> Even if this occurs for “no other reason than to reconcile prior emotional expectations with the nonverbal violation that transpired in their visual field,”<sup>25</sup> the process of reconciling competing verbal and nonverbal messages prompt more thoughts regarding the source of the messaging than a message sequence

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<sup>22</sup> S. Rafaeli and F. Sudweeks, “Networked Interactivity,” *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 2, no. 4 (1999): 3.

<sup>23</sup> Bucy & Newhagen, “The Emotional Appropriateness Heuristic,” 72.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

regarded as appropriately congruent will.<sup>26</sup> Nixon, regardless of any valid reasons he may have had for it, was the candidate with the least congruent nonverbal messaging during the debate, and, as a result, inspired the most criticism.

Voters who watched the debate on television thus developed their evaluations of Kennedy and Nixon partially based on their perceived consistency between verbal and nonverbal communication. The result of this was that, while both candidates might have *sounded* equally strong when saying, for example, that they would stand up to the Soviet Union, the addition of nonverbal communication from television made Kennedy appear like “the image of the man who could stand up to Krushchev” while Nixon seemed small, nervous, and unsteady.<sup>27</sup> A study by Gabriel S. Lenz and Chappell Lawson, published in a 2011 article entitled *Looking the Part: Television Leads Citizens to Vote Based on Candidate Appearance*, takes the research on the effect of this cognitive process in television viewers even further, finding that the effect of this dynamic is “much greater among those who are poorly informed about politics and less pronounced among those who know a good deal.”<sup>28</sup> This means that the impact of Kennedy and Nixon’s nonverbal communication during the debates was greatest among the less informed, and, with an election ultimately decided by only 100,000 votes, it is entirely possible that it was the deciding factor in the 1960 election.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 71

<sup>27</sup> Earl Mazo, *The Great Debates* (Santa Barbara: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1962), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Gabriel Lenz and Chappell Lawson, “Looking the Part: Television Leads Less Informed Citizens to Vote Based on Candidates’ Appearance,” *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (2011): 577.

<sup>29</sup> William Benoit and Allison Harthcock, “Functions of the Great Debates: Acclaims, Attacks, and Defenses in the 1960 Presidential Debates,” *Communication Monographs* 66, no. 4 (1999): 342.

### Effect of Television on Democracy

There are some that make the argument that television shifts attention away from the substance of politics onto superficial factors such as appearance, but there are positive sides to the additional stimuli provided by the medium as well. There is evidence that “television may enhance issue learning,” particularly among unsophisticated voters.<sup>30</sup> A study performed by James Druckman for his article, *The Power of Television Images*, demonstrates convincing evidence that, while sophisticated voters almost always learn more from mass broadcasts than non-sophisticated voters regardless of the medium, “This learning gap closes when the medium is television: television enhances learning among non-sophisticates.”<sup>31</sup> Even if this learning comes from psychological mechanisms and heuristic processes triggered by appearance and nonverbal communication, it is still an avenue through which “citizens, irrespective of political knowledge, can accurately assess the performance of leaders in a mass democracy.”<sup>32</sup> This is an important fact to consider in an open democracy that allows politically uninformed voters to participate, for anything that enhances voter learning among that population ultimately elevates the decision making capabilities of the entire citizenry.

The phenomenon of voters being influenced by candidate appearance and charisma is not new. Politicians have been lamenting about the ability of some citizens to be “misled by the artful misrepresentations of interested men” since America’s founding.<sup>33</sup> Television has simply increased the “saturation levels of exposure to visual images of candidates” to a greater portion of the population than was previously possible

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<sup>30</sup> Druckman, “The Power of Television Images,” 568.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

<sup>32</sup> Bucy & Newhagen, “The Emotional Appropriateness Heuristic,” 75.

<sup>33</sup> James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1987), 63.

and therefore heightened fear regarding this possibility.<sup>34</sup> However, there are reasons a President's appearance and nonverbal communication skills became completely valid points of assessment in the later half of the twentieth century.

While it was easy to argue that “whether or not a candidate perspires under the hot studio lights should have no bearing on his possible performance as president” during earlier centuries, the reality of the modern, televised world is that Heads of State represent their nation in both their personal physical appearance and demeanor, particularly while traveling abroad.<sup>35</sup> In an age where Presidents are now able to fly around the globe on airplanes to visit with other leaders, consideration of their nonverbal communication skills has actually taken on greater importance than it had in previous ages when such travel was rare. It is true that some of the great former Presidents may not have been able to pass the test of televised debates that Kennedy and Nixon faced in 1960, but it is equally true that those former Presidents were far more rarely found outside of the United States borders. In fact, at the time of the first Kennedy-Nixon debate, it had only been 17 years since the first sitting United States President flew on an airplane, since before that time the Secret Service did not consider “airplanes...a safe form of transportation for an American President.”<sup>36</sup>

Given that this form of Presidential travel, which enabled them to participate directly in far more delicate negotiations and diplomacy than in previous eras, was still very new during the 1960 debates, candidates' nonverbal communication skills were also gaining relevancy to the modern job description. The imagery provided by television

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<sup>34</sup> Lenz & Lawson, “Looking the Part,” 587.

<sup>35</sup> Kathleen Jamieson, *Packaging the Presidency* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984), 159.

<sup>36</sup> Tony Reichhardt, “The First Presidential Flight,” *AirSpaceMag.com*, January 18, 2013, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.airspacemag.com/daily-planet/the-first-presidential-flight-2901615/?no-ist>.

granted voters the window they needed to evaluate this important ability, thus serving to increase transparency into the candidates in a way entirely appropriate to the modern age. Where Franklin Roosevelt had been able to use the radio to help citizens “partially overcome their dispersion and atomization” and affirm their “shared membership in a national community,” television was now doing the same for an increasingly connected global system where leaders now often discussed highly sensitive matters in person.<sup>37</sup>

It is difficult to argue, given the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the high tensions of the Cold War, that seeing Kennedy handle the most public moment of his life with calm assurance was not important for voters to consider, particularly when contrasted with Nixon. In the same way that had been the case during the live broadcasting of the fireside chats, American society was again gaining a kind of access to the political world of Washington D.C. that they had not previously had. Television, rather than solely being a mechanism of superficiality, actually provided voters with the information they needed to demand that their President have the ability to nonverbally communicate appropriately under extreme pressure, unfamiliar circumstances, and uncomfortable conditions in the increasingly international entanglements of the modern world. For the first time, the desired image of the man could be confirmed or denied by those who sought it visually.

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<sup>37</sup> Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 196, EBSCOhost eBook.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### *Democracy and the Internet*

#### **From Television to the Web**

The introduction of television into all aspects of the American political process has had profound effects on Presidential campaign culture. Partially inspired by the perceived impact of Kennedy's image, the years after the 1960 debate were characterized by an increasing emphasis on TV advertising and "candidate-centric strategies of communication" conducive to that media environment.<sup>1</sup> Ground level organizing, which had been central to strategy in the pre-broadcast era of campaigns, was "somewhat overshadowed by the 'air war' for some decades" as a result.<sup>2</sup> The need to purchase expensive airtime to run competing campaign ads amplified the importance of fundraising during the same period, and it was against this background that the Internet was slowly integrated into politics. While the use of this technology is still in the developmental stages, Barack Obama's revolutionary employment of the Internet's interactive communication abilities in 2008 was a clear demonstration of its potential to change the game yet again.

The use of the Internet as a political tool began in the early 1990s. Although there were no web-browsers as we know them today, the Clinton-Gore campaign actively experimented with disseminating information via email, e-bulletin boards, and online discussion groups and received up to 800 postings a day at the height of their 1992

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Bimber, "Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 11, no. 2 (2014): 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

campaign.<sup>3</sup> The 1996 election season saw Bob Dole become the first candidate to mention a campaign web site during a Presidential debate,<sup>4</sup> and then, in 1999, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) authorized online donations for the first time, which essentially blew the doors open in preparation for the 2000 election.<sup>5</sup> John McCain was perhaps the first to make real use of this new fundraising platform, using the Internet to turn his surprise primary victory in New Hampshire into a “fundraising juggernaut by raising a then-unprecedented \$4 million over the Internet.”<sup>6</sup> This success, however, was only a hint of what was to come in the next Presidential election cycle.

Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign is often regarded as the direct descendent of Howard Dean’s relatively short 2004 Presidential run.<sup>7</sup> It was during Dean’s campaign that the Internet was first “reconceived...as an organizational tool for electoral politics,”<sup>8</sup> with staffers arguing that the renewed democratic participation it enabled could help voters overcome “the psychological alienation caused by the much-maligned ‘broadcast model’ of political communication.”<sup>9</sup> With this so-called “net-roots” strategy, Dean succeeded in raising three times more money than his nearest rival during the summer months of that year’s primary and ultimately amassed over 150,000 online supporters.<sup>10</sup> His approach to campaigning, as well as the approach of the later 2008 Obama campaign, was principally motivated by a desire to “return grassroots activism to the political

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<sup>3</sup> Cheris Carpenter, “The Obamachine: Technopolitics 2.0,” *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 7, no. 2 (2010): 219.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Bimber and Lauren Copeland, “Digital Media and Traditional Political Participation Over Time in the U.S.,” *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 10, no. 2 (2013): 133.

<sup>6</sup> Carpenter, “The Obamachine,” 219.

<sup>7</sup> Bimber, “Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012,” 137.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Kreiss, “Open Source as Practice and Ideology: The Origin of Howard Dean’s Innovations in Electoral Politics,” *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 8, no. 3 (2011): 371.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

process” and get people to participate “instead of watching it on TV as consumers.”<sup>11</sup> The key structural difference between these two campaigns was in their ability to synthesize their online and offline components, and the Obama campaign, perhaps partially due to the blossoming of social media after 2004, was far more successful in that area.

The emergence of social media undoubtedly aided the Obama campaign’s ability to turn its online activity into the kind of on-the-ground action Howard Dean had struggled to mobilize. It was during the four year period between 2004 and 2008 that Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, as well as popular smartphones with fast web-browsing capabilities, such as the iPhone, were all invented and became mainstream.<sup>12</sup> The 2008 election cycle was thus the first in which these tools were even available for candidates to use, and they were still novel enough to be constantly innovating. Voters were excited about the new technology, and Obama absolutely made use of that attitude.

### **The 2008 Obama Campaign**

Facing the institutional political power of the Clintons during the primary race, Obama knew he was going to have to employ a unique and innovative strategy to have any chance of winning the Democratic nomination. He hired many of the same staff and consultants who had worked on the 2004 Dean campaign, and, with their help, shaped a revolutionary and interactive structure that placed equal emphasis on both online and traditional grassroots activities. His two major opponents, Hilary Clinton in the primary race and John McCain in the general election, also both used a variety of digital media

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<sup>11</sup> Joe Trippi, “Technology has Given Politics Back its Soul,” *Technology Review* 116, no. 1 (Jan 2013): 35-36.

<sup>12</sup> Bimber and Copeland, “Digital Media and Traditional Political Participation Over Time in the U.S.,” 134.

tools such as Facebook and YouTube, but neither took the Internet platform beyond simple one-directional communication with voters the way Obama did.<sup>13</sup> It was this complete transformation of communication, the additional directions his campaign messages were able to flow and be shared, that enabled Obama to channel, organize, and direct the “social movement-like excitement of his supporters” into on-the-ground action so successfully.<sup>14</sup>

While a great deal of spontaneous supporter organization took place on Facebook, the center of Obama’s 2008 online campaign was his own social media site, MyBarackObama.com, or, as it was affectionately called by campaign staffers, “MyBO.” When a supporter signed up on the site, it would function as an automated channel into the community of supporters and campaign ground efforts in that person’s area. Based on information provided by the user, each person who signed up was placed in a neighborhood “team” of volunteers with an identified local leader and could instantly see photographs or messages they had shared.<sup>15</sup> In addition, other volunteers or campaign staff would then individually reach out to new users in a more concentrated, personalized effort to get them involved. Anytime an event was created on the site, the person who initiated it was contacted by a member of Obama’s campaign staff so they could be provided with any support, training, and/or materials that they needed for the event to be successful. Over the course of the 2008 election cycle there were over 200,000 offline events initiated, planned, and outreached using the site in this way.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>15</sup> Bimber, “Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012,” 140.

<sup>16</sup> Max Friedman, “Simulacrobama: The Mediated Election of 2008,” *Journal of American Studies* 43, no. 2 (Aug 2009): 345.

Obama took several lessons from Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR's) use of the radio as he worked to overcome the passive, broadcast-era citizen that had emerged since Kennedy's run for office in 1960. Just as FDR had utilized his staff to "monitor reaction to [fireside] chats in editorials, news reports, mail, and special correspondence," Obama had Field Organizers monitor all social media activity of volunteers and supporters within assigned territories.<sup>17</sup> In competitive battlegrounds like Ohio, new volunteers were even met with, in person and on a one-on-one basis, so that staff could ascertain their individual skills and where they could be of most help to the campaign. Spontaneous online activities of supporters were thus almost immediately integrated into the campaign's offline efforts, as well as kept in continuous communication with staff via MyBO.

At times the campaign also posted explicit requests for precise sets of volunteers to carry out particular activities and/or events on a certain day, in a specific area, and with defined goals.<sup>18</sup> Incentives for compliance with these requests, such as additional help, recognition, and invitations to events with planned candidate appearances, were often provided to the volunteers that most closely followed the instructions.<sup>19</sup> As a result of the multi-directional nature of these efforts to communicate and organize offline activity, the Internet became far more than just a method of one-directional communication within the Obama campaign – it was the center of a service allowing citizens to “match their own

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<sup>17</sup> David Michael Ryfe, "Franklin Roosevelt and The Fireside Chats," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 4 (1999): 91.

<sup>18</sup> Cristian Vaccari, "Technology is a Commodity: The Internet in the 2008 United States Presidential Election," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 7, no. 4 (2010): 330.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

personalized interests” and the “styles of participation” they preferred and/or were available for to exactly what the funded structure of the campaign was doing.<sup>20</sup>

Campaign support of spontaneous supporter/volunteer activity online did not stop on Obama’s social networking site. Citizens could “like” him on Facebook, follow him on Twitter, watch, comment on, and share videos from YouTube, post their own sentiments or comments about the election for friends to see, or even make and contribute their own artwork or videos. There were many notable contributions from volunteers that made their way into the center of the campaign during 2008, including the video “Obama Girl,”<sup>21</sup> which was viewed roughly ten million times on YouTube and circulated purely by news media and supporters. The musician and producer Will.i.am made a simple, stylized viral video in which he set the text of an Obama speech, spoken or sung by a vast array of celebrity supporters, to music.<sup>22</sup> Shepard Fairey, a street artist in Los Angeles, designed and freely shared a “Worhol-esque” poster of a colorized and polarized Obama<sup>23</sup> that eventually appeared in shop windows and dorm rooms across the country, becoming a staple image of the campaign season.<sup>24</sup> Even reality TV stars, such as Paris Hilton, got in on the free media blitz, contributing a hilarious editorial video to FunnyOrDie.com<sup>25</sup> on the “celebrity politician” label that Republicans tried to pin on Obama.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bimber, “Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012,” 134.

<sup>21</sup> Can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU>

<sup>22</sup> Can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyqcx-mYY>

<sup>23</sup> Further information on this poster’s creation and integration into the campaign can be read in this Washington Post article: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/16/AR2008051601017.html>

<sup>24</sup> Friedman, “Simulacrobama,” 346.

<sup>25</sup> Can be viewed at: <http://www.funnyordie.com/videos/64ad536a6d/paris-hilton-responds-to-mccain-ad-from-paris-hilton-adam-ghost-panther-mckay-and-chris-henchy?playlist=210399>

<sup>26</sup> Merrie Spaeth, “Politics and Public Relations in 2008,” *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 3 (2009): 441.

Not all the online activity was positive, however, even on Obama's own social networking site. In June of 2008, the same month that he secured the Democratic nomination, a group was formed on MyBO to protest his vote in favor of expanding the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). When the group grew to about 24,000 and became the largest on Obama's own social media site, the campaign responded by both openly acknowledging the legitimacy of the group's presence, and, while not changing his stance on FISA, openly welcoming supporters' efforts to influence his decision.<sup>27</sup> There were many other and less friendly smear campaigns spread independently via the Internet, including claims that Obama had been educated in a madrassa<sup>28</sup> and/or that he had not been born in America. Eventually the Obama team created a response site, fightthesmears.com, where they posted video and other evidence as to the falsity of these rumors in one, central location that voters could be directed to.<sup>29</sup>

### **Obama: The Internet Candidate?**

Just as FDR had been aided by the radio and Kennedy is still seen as the candidate who most benefited from the emergence of television, "Observers of digital media in the U.S. [had] anticipated" the eventual emergence of an "Internet candidate who would use the medium decisively" since the late 1990s.<sup>30</sup> Post-2008 election comparison analyses have only contributed massive amounts of evidence to the existing narrative that Obama earned that title. While McCain did have some successful moments, it was "often judged to be more institutional and less open to external input," when it came to the use of the

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<sup>27</sup> Vaccari, "Technology is a Commodity," 332.

<sup>28</sup> An Islamic religious school.

<sup>29</sup> Friedman, "Simulacrobama," 351.

<sup>30</sup> Bimber, "Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012," 134.

Internet.<sup>31</sup> His campaign did not create a social media site of its own that could compare to MyBO, and supporters who attempted to organize an event through the site that did exist “needed approval from the campaign before their event was published.”<sup>32</sup> This one missing element of an Internet presence greatly hindered the McCain campaign’s ability to manage and organize volunteers in a way that could compete with Obama’s massive organization, contributing to the statistic that only 4 percent of his voters signed up to volunteer online compared to 11 percent of Obama voters.<sup>33</sup>

On top of failing to build his own Internet infrastructure, McCain was also completely absent on eight social media platforms where Obama was present.<sup>34</sup> His website did not feature links to any social media sites on its homepage, and throughout the election season the McCain campaign posted only 260 videos on YouTube compared to the Obama campaign’s 1,239.<sup>35</sup> McCain ended his 2008 campaign with 28,000 subscribers on YouTube compared to Obama’s 115,000; 5,000 Twitter followers compared to Obama’s 112,000; and 6,000 “likes” on Facebook compared to Obama’s over 2 million.<sup>36</sup> Six percent of McCain voters donated money online compared to 15 percent of Obama’s, 30 percent of Internet users visited Obama’s campaign website while 21 percent went on McCain’s, and 37 percent of email users received messages signed by Obama compared to 24 percent that reported the same from McCain.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, Obama was found to have contacted 25% of all voters in 2008 compared to

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<sup>31</sup> Vaccari, “Technology is a Commodity,” 329.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>34</sup> Bimber, “Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012,” 136.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>37</sup> Vaccari, “Technology is a Commodity,” 319.

18% by his opposition,<sup>38</sup> and on election day he won 66 percent of voters under the age of 30 and 56 percent of women, both of whom are counted among the most avid users of social media.<sup>39</sup>

It is likely that McCain will go on record as the last major party Presidential candidate to treat the digital media environment “as distinct and separate from the larger context for political communication.”<sup>40</sup> What Obama accomplished in 2008 has confounded communication and political theorists, effectively stepping outside of every model that either field has ever defined or understood. His campaign demonstrated how “traditional public relations, advertising and virtually all forms of communication are merging,”<sup>41</sup> turning political communication into a kind of “three-dimensional system” whereby “communication flow[s] to and from the campaign, as well as in any direction between and among voters.”<sup>42</sup> This forces both candidates and politicians to “treat citizens and supporters as strategic partners” rather than just “passive recipients of media content” as they had been for decades after the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear that the nature of American citizenship is changing, becoming far more personal and encouraging of individual expression through social engagement, even if done digitally. The power of Barack Obama in 2008 came not only from the way he was able to inspire, but also how he was able to tap into this change before anyone else understood it was happening. The old political mass communication model, centered on

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<sup>38</sup> Nate Silver, “The Contact Gap: Proof of the Importance of the Ground Game,” *The FiveThirtyEight Blog*, November 8, 2008, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/contact-gap-proof-of-importance-of/>.

<sup>39</sup> Bimber, “Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012,” 136.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>41</sup> Spaeth, “Presidential Politics and Public Relations in 2008,” 439.

<sup>42</sup> A. Rosenblatt, “Dimensions of Campaigns in the Age of Digital Networks,” in *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, ed. J. Thurber and C.J. Nelson (Boulder: Westview Press, 2010), 208.

<sup>43</sup> Lindsay Hoffman, “Participation or Communication? An Explication of Political Activity in the Internet Age,” *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 9, no. 3 (2012): 221.

television's delivery of "selective information to passive recipients," had "fit well with the American model of passive citizenship that favor[ed] biennial voting for preselected candidates."<sup>44</sup> It did not, however, fit in the world of "increased emphasis on expression, individual voice, volunteer-ship, and other non-institutional actions" that the 2008 election took place in.<sup>45</sup> The Internet was not the source of inspiration motivating voters to participate, but it was a crucial and previously missing organizing mechanism needed to effectively collect and direct *them to motivate each other* for a campaign's purposes. For the first time, there was no distinction or separation between an "offline" political operation and their "online" presence. The 2008 Obama campaign was, instead, a singular effort that pursued traditional campaign goals by aggressively utilizing the digital communication environment of their time.

### **Democracy in a Digital Age**

It is an undeniable and unavoidable fact that the innovations within a successful campaign will soon be matched and attempted in subsequent election cycles. This occurred with radio, television, direct mail efforts, and, since 2008, has likewise occurred with the Internet.<sup>46</sup> Obama's campaign signified a shift from the simple marketing of political messages, which operate by trying "to provide people with symbols and sources of information that will hopefully influence their behavior," to organizing communities, or "drawing people into relationships with one another" online through the "mutuality of

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<sup>44</sup> Friedman, "Simulacrobama," 343.

<sup>45</sup> Bimber and Copeland, "Digital Media and Traditional Political Participation Over Time in the U.S.," 135.

<sup>46</sup> Bimber, "Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012," 144.

commitment that in fact does shape behavior.”<sup>47</sup> The level of mutual commitment that translating these relationships into mass action requires, however, may ultimately depend on and be motivated by the attributes of the individual politician.

As the decreased turnout of the 2012 election demonstrated, future success imitating Obama’s accomplishments is not simply a matter of duplicating the structure of his organization and adopting the same tools. The effectiveness of integrating the web into offline campaign efforts may prove to depend “on contextual factors, such as the personality and message of the candidate and the ability to elicit a strong grassroots response from a large enough portion of the electorate.”<sup>48</sup> When these preconditions are absent, the impact of the very same online tools Obama used may be so marginal that they are difficult to even measure. Just as voter evaluation of nonverbal communication skills gained importance and relevance during the television era, the ability to inspire enthusiasm and strong mutual commitment among voters communicating online may become an important factor in the selection of candidates in today’s world of connectivity across vast distances.<sup>49</sup> The old idiom that “all politics are local” has been “supplanted by new ways in which all politics in the U.S. [are] personal,” and that change is likely to be durable.<sup>50</sup>

More than any other medium of communication, the Internet has actually altered the significance of geography in both civic and political American life. Communities are now born and thrive completely online, allowing citizens to be brought together through

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<sup>47</sup> Vaccari, “Technology is a Commodity,” 328.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>50</sup> Bimber, “Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012,” 147.

shared interests rather than their geographic proximity.<sup>51</sup> Studies have noted that these “online activities appear to prompt both online and offline civic and political engagement,” thus creating the potential for greater participation in American democracy when the necessary preconditions are met.<sup>52</sup> What began with FDR and the radio as a mere *sense* of overcoming dispersion and separation among the mass audiences tuning into his fireside chats, has now, due to the integration of the internet, become a reality of modern citizenship.

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<sup>51</sup> Joseph Kahne, Nam-Jin Lee, and Jessica Feezell, “The Civic and Political Significance of Online Participatory Cultures Among Youth Transitioning to Adulthood,” *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 10, no. 1 (Jan 2013): 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

## CONCLUSION

### *Democracy and New Media*

As one of the largest and most populous single nations in the world, one of the greatest challenges American democracy has faced has been the dissemination of information among its citizens. Print media, such as newspapers and pamphlets, served this purpose until the advent of public radio stations in 1920.<sup>1</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR) election to the Presidency twelve years later brought that new medium into the White House in a decisive manner, his weekly fireside chats connecting the nation as it had never been before. Then, during his third term in office, FDR became the first sitting United States President to fly on an airplane when he traveled across the Atlantic to discuss acceptable terms of surrender for the World War II Axis enemies with Winston Churchill in person. It was just seventeen years later, in 1960, that television brought the nonverbal communication skills of candidates before the American voting public for evaluation with the televised debate of Nixon and Kennedy.

Television ruled the mass media landscape for over four decades, keeping the country stuck in a multi-dimensional yet one-directional model of communication in which those in power could deliver messages to mass audiences who could not respond. American politics became increasingly image-centric as consultants began advising both candidates and in-office politicians on everything from hand gestures to the color of suit and tie to wear. As this process occurred, the non-verbal communication of politicians became increasingly practiced and pre-planned; ultimately losing the raw authenticity and thus the democratic value that had been seen in the Kennedy vs. Nixon debate.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Baudino and John Kittross, "Broadcasting's Oldest Stations: An Examination of Four Claimants," *Journal of Broadcasting* 21, no. 1 (1977): 63.

The advent of Internet video sharing websites, such as YouTube and social media giants Facebook and Twitter, began during 2005 and then took off with the launch of easy-to-use smartphones (such as the iPhone) in 2007. Suddenly anyone was able to record and share videos from anywhere at any time, rendering politicians unable control their on-screen image and thus dramatically increasing the transparency of electoral politics for the first time since 1960.<sup>2</sup> Mass media communication, which had been restricted to a standard one-directional model since the founding of the United States, was suddenly splintered into multiple dynamic dimensions. The relentless connection to friends and family that Americans now experience has made it increasingly difficult for politicians to penetrate the attention span of citizens, and particularly challenging to do so to the extent needed to inspire them into offline action.

No matter the personal qualities that helped him achieve it, Barack Obama was the first American politician in the Internet era to motivate voters to get offline and into concrete, organizing action. The recent nature of this event leaves it unclear whether the skills Obama displayed in 2008 will become a winnowing factor in the selection of major party candidates the way nonverbal communication did after 1960, but it is absolutely clear that the immediacy of the Internet age has heightened the scrutiny politicians face. They are no longer simply evaluated on what they purposely present to the world, but also on what citizens are able to capture when they aren't aware they are on camera. As a result, political messages can no longer maintain their constant consultant-fevered polish modern politicians are accustomed to. This has made the emotional appropriateness heuristic, first discussed as a mechanism of processing nonverbal communication

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<sup>2</sup> Cheri Carpenter, "The Obamachine: Technopolitics 2.0," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 7, no. 2 (2010): 217.

displayed on television, increasingly relevant to modern politics. Now the emotional appropriateness of public officials is judged not only in public moments, but also through private videos that individual citizens share publically via the Internet. Mass political messages are thus no longer simply one or two directional, but can occur in three dimensions from politician to voter, voter to politician, and voter to voter.

Politicians employed by the United States Government will always seek new mediums and methods to reach their constituents as technology makes them available. History has shown that adoption of new communication mediums has most often taken place during presidential campaign seasons, when politicians have the most motivation to take risks with innovation. Each time this has occurred, the candidate has attempted to take some aspect of the new technology into the White House with them, integrating new forms of mass communication deeper into the institutions of American government. As each new technology has granted greater access to areas of candidate/politician assessment that are particularly relevant to the age in which they are adopted, it can only be concluded that these technologies have each, at least for periods of time left undefined by this paper, brought America closer to its democratic ideals.

### Areas For Further Study

- What has the influence of corporations and government control done to shape the extent to which these technologies have been able to increase transparency and democracy in America?
  - How long was each medium allowed to operate outside of this influence/control?
- What effect has the Internet's ability to micro-target and collect personal information about voters had on the democratic process?
- If community is no longer tied to geography, how have these online, interest-based communities been able to foster offline civic activity?
  - Is there a socio-economic component to this?
- What are the personal attributes of candidates, running in elections post-Obama, who are able to achieve similar success by integrating the Internet into their campaigns?
  - Is there a trend to these attributes and what does it say about current American society?
- Why is it that all the politicians/Presidents who have most benefited from new technologies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been Democrats?
- Will the introduction of the Internet into politics have an impact on the influence of money in campaigns?

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