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Social Media and its Potential Effects on Civic Engagement

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
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Honors Capstone Project in Political Science

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#Abstract

Social media has been predicted as a tool to change the democratic process and turn around the substantial decline in political participation that has occurred among American citizens in the most recent years. Yet, since it is still relatively young and unharnessed, many argue that any effect that social media can have on civic engagement cannot be determined yet. This thesis explores and discusses how the emergence of social media as a campaign tool could effect traditional forms of civic engagement as well as produce new forms.

In the 2008 election, social media was capitalized by the presidential campaign of Barack Obama. Through the analysis of the strategies employed by the Obama campaign as well as the insight into the emergence of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter in politics, the understanding of the potential effect emerges. From the initial understanding, I was able to analyze two different 2010 midterm elections that occurred in Central New York. Those two case studies allowed me to analyze the strategies employed by the campaigns, the online interaction with citizens, and to discuss the potential offline activities. Finally, my research led me to conduct interviews with current undergraduates. The interviews provided an insight into the current generation's understanding of civic engagement as well as how they used social media for their own political use. My research provides further discussion into the relatively new topic and how the 2012 general election and beyond could be changed as a result.

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#Preface

Origination of the Idea

I came from a small town that did not focus on civic engagement. The civics education that I received in high school was a small unit in the senior year American government class. Even then, the civics lesson lasted about a day, highlighted voting, and allowed those who had not registered to fill out the voting registration forms. When I graduated from high school in 2008, it would be the first election that I was ever able to participate in. No discussion of the Democrat or Republican primaries occurred in class. I had filled out my registration form before I turned 18, and I was often seen sporting my Obama 2008 shirt around high school. I specifically remember the day after Super Tuesday when I asked a friend if they had seen the results, and they did not even know that there had been primaries the day before. To me, I felt that, for my generation, I was an outsider in my high school because of my interests and concerns with what was occurring in our country.

My background to civic engagement occurred because of the way I was brought up. I gained my basic understanding of civic engagement as result of growing up in small, family-owned businesses and having active parents in the community. Main Street in Groton, New York was and still is similar to many other small-towns across America. Losses of manufacturing and businesses have changed the landscape of Groton dramatically since the late 1980s. Thus, it is no surprise that from a young age, I was being educated on issues that were important to Groton, but as well as to New York State and the country.

As a young girl, I soon began to realize my passions because of the involvement that my parents took in the community and for the resources that they provided me to grow as a person. I grew up with a public service father who had been both fire chief and the local town and village magistrate. By the time my father retired from being a magistrate when I was in middle school, he had served for thirty years. My mother, although not serving in an elected capacity, was just as involved. I remember attending planning board meetings regularly. I was thrown into attending community events to raise awareness, money, and to lend a helping hand when something was needed. Both of my parents have always been committed to trying to make a difference in as many ways as possible. To this day, they are still active, volunteering their time even in their busy lives.

“All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first thousand days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin”

-President John F. Kennedy

Besides my parents, my passion for public service was a result of my love for reading biographies of the politicians who had come before my time. Immediately, growing up, I was drawn to President Kennedy. Despite the scandals, the passion that he demonstrated for the American people to enter public service inspired me right away. Reading biographies, visiting the JFK library as well as studying the historical events that occurred during his administration set

me on the career path that I am on. A combination of growing up understanding issues that affected the people around me, to my parents being very active in the community to those who tried to make a difference have made me who I am today. Being involved and informed are at the core.

Coming to Syracuse, I was witness to the 2008 presidential election. The first day of my freshman year, I sat in the Maxwell Auditorium for the first day of class. My first class was MAX 123: Critical Issues of the United States. Listening to Professor Robert McClure, I knew I was going to embark on a journey through the entire semester. Through the numerous reading and discussions, my first semester as a freshman, I started to gain knowledge of the various debates involving civic engagement. Understanding the different levels of engagement and learning what it means to not be a spectator was enlightening. And, due to it being 2008, I was able to apply what I was learning right away.

During my first semester as a freshman, I cast my vote for the first time in my entire life. I specifically remember Election Night when the announcement that Barack Obama had won and running to the quad to celebrate. It was a time of victory and a range of emotions. Overall the rest of that semester as well as my following semester when I viewed the inauguration, I was proud to say that I had been part of historical moment. Fundamentally, the election and the course I took during the first semester of my freshman year laid the foundation for this paper as well as my future career goals.

This capstone project was born out of my first semester freshman year, but also through another introduction political science course. A paper I wrote in the

spring of 2009 for PSC 202: Introduction to Political Analysis was based on the notion of what social media could play on elections. Working with my now-reader, Professor Hanson, I discovered a field that had still been relatively unexplored. Social media, just as it is now, is constantly changing. It sparked my interest into social media in both my personal use as well as how it could change a variety of industries. Thus, when it came to declaring my honors capstone proposal in my junior year, I knew that there had to be a combination of two interests that have heavily contributed to my education interests as well as future career goals.

Importance/Audience/Hope

This capstone project is intended for all generations, but specifically, for the youth of the United States. During my time at Syracuse University as well as the years that I spent in high school, I saw only limited forms of civic engagement. Yet, I would often hear complaints about issues going unnoticed or things not changing. With the scholarly research done to show a decline in civic duties over the past several decades, my hope is that this capstone project interests some to become more involved. Knowing issues, whether it comes via a viral video or traditional news media, is important. Casting one's vote from a local election to the president of the United States must be done. This capstone project is not designed to change a wide population, but rather inform.

Those who pick up this capstone- whatever age or demographic- will hopefully begin to see the way civic engagement has declined as well as the way social media has ultimately changed campaigns over the past four years. Any

person cannot go a day almost anymore without hearing of a Saturday Night Live sketch of a politician to a recent political story. Yet, my intended audience for this paper (Generation Z) often does not see the real significance of the news they are digesting. Understanding an issue and in turn, taking action needs to happen. The intended results of using social media to mobilize have, thus, resulted in new activities. To me, that is one of the strongest points that I want to advocate through this paper. Engaging does need to continue offline, specifically voting, but online engagement through forums can occur as well.

Social media, in my opinion, does have the potential to effect offline activities. The use of social media has been used to start flash-mobs and host parties. Therefore, through the analysis of research in this paper as well as the numerous other sources that have been written about the topic, my hope reigns high. The certain strategies employed in this paper were to represent a broad range of opinions on the idea and further the discussion. Social media has been capitalized by the United States Department of State to work with people around the world. Getting people of other countries to understand what the United States is doing as well as interacting with those citizens is a parallel example of how it could affect political campaigns.

Overall, this paper has been in progress since I was a young-child, but especially during my four years as a student at Syracuse University. It is my hope that those who pick up this paper and read the following pages understand the potential future effects of social media. Social media affects all walks of life, and political campaigns and civic duties are not excluded.

#Acknowledgements

Over my years as an undergraduate student, there have been numerous moments that have allowed me to grow academically as well as personally. When I entered Syracuse University, I was an entirely different person than I will be Commencement Weekend. To that, there are several people who have truly made a profound impact on my experience as a student as well as how I've changed personally.

To begin with, I owe my parents so much. My parents have been the most supportive people that I have had in my life since I was a child. Through everything, whether a personal matter or a stressful science class, they have stood by me. They always encourage me to follow my dreams and achieve my best. To my brother, Brian, I know you are no longer physically with me, but so much of my drive comes from the memories that I have of you. This paper is clearly a reflective of that drive inside of me.

To my capstone adviser, Kristi Andersen, I owe you so much. Through the two years of the capstone project, you have been supportive of my graduate degree career path, my often limited time to work on research and the paper, and determination to help me improve my writing and my knowledge of my topic. Thank you for pushing me to produce my best.

To Bill Coplin, you have provided me with the background of policy, the tenacity to continue to always stand up for myself, and have helped me improve in all walks of life since the moment I stepped into your class. I do not think I will ever go a week in my life and not think, "life is an aggregation problem."

Finally, to Jonathan Hanson, Matthew Guardino, David Richardson, Wolfgang Deckers, Vicky Bickel, and Hanna Richardson, you have all provided me opportunities to grow in numerous ways while still supporting me in many capacities. And, to my friends that I have made during my time at Syracuse, thank you for all of the memories, late library nights, Starbucks runs, and laughter.

#Advice to Future Honors Students

During my freshman year, I sat in PAF 101: Introduction to Public Policy, and I heard my life being explained before my eyes. Professor William Coplin was discussing why college students procrastinate.

“It’s your fear of failing.”

He said what I had known since my senior year of high school. I reheard that lecture during my sophomore year when I was serving as a teaching assistant, and I continued to remember that anecdote through the rest of my academic career at Syracuse University.

“Start writing in the fall of senior year.”

“Get your research done in junior year.”

This capstone project was a project of procrastination in many stages. For the past two years, I’ve watched many friends procrastinate their capstone projects up until the last deadline. I told myself that I would not be like them. I would like to say that I listened to them, but I did not. It is April 19th at 12:39AM, and my capstone is due in a week. There is the fear in the back of mind that even as I put the finishing touches on my paper and complete the final requirements that I will not finish in time. Therefore, instead of retelling what my friends told me over and over, my advice will be different.

First, remember that it does not have to be perfect. As a perfectionist, Type A personality, I have always been the student who will get upset if I receive a B+. I’ve sacrificed sleep over proofreading, perfecting a graph, and going the extra mile. And, while I will continue to try and perfect my capstone project up

until April 25th at 9AM, I do understand that there is a point where I have to give it up.

Obviously, I will hand in my best work no matter what, but being a perfectionist did prevent me from writing earlier. It plays into my fear of failing, but also because I knew that once I started, I would not want to end. This is something that I learned the hard way when starting to write. I was scarred that whatever I wrote would not be perfect. When I hand in my project, I know there will be more things that I wish I had added in or checked one more time. Being a perfectionist is a disease often. My first piece of advice is just to do your best with the project.

My second piece of advice may be obvious, but choose *a topic that you enjoy*. At the beginning of choosing my topic, I was excited about the possibilities of where my capstone could go. Ideas were rolling through my head- even when I was studying abroad. Suddenly, though, I started to dislike my topic during the end of my junior year. I became frustrated with researching social media platforms as well as working with the data. Growing tired of my topic was something that I kept experiencing until I really started writing this semester. Sometimes, during my first semester as a senior, I would not touch my topic for a week. However, when I started writing this semester, I realized again why I had chosen my topic. My main point to choosing a topic that you enjoy is that even when you do grow tired of it, you can become fascinated with it again. Life distractions and other schoolwork most likely caused my dislike for brief periods of time, but my enjoyment did re-emerge.

Two very simple points is the only advice that I can leave. My hope will be that you will not procrastinate, but I know that as a college student, that it is almost inevitable. *Choose a topic you love and go after it. Don't be perfect, but rather find new interests and ideas for your topic in numerous drafts.*

Chapter One

#Introduction

The discussion of the rise of social media is in everyday conversation. One cannot go a day without hearing the words "wall" or "tweet," or hear of the latest viral video that has descended upon the American public. The study of social media is an ever-evolving field with no sign of slowing down, and sometimes it seems as if there will never be a way to truly understand the effect that social media is having on the world population. The introduction of Klout scores during the summer of 2011 illustrates that people are trying to begin to map the impact.

It is no surprise, then, that in campaigns all candidates for political offices are using social media to gain influence and to reach out to constituents. However, the effect of social media on elections and the scale of this effect is still in question. The technology of using social media in campaigns is still a relatively new idea, one that emerged only "officially" during the 2008 presidential election. The first real Twitter election was the 2010 midterm election. Since then, the use of social media has risen dramatically in all walks of life, including campaigns.

Due to the increased presence of social media, many scholars are predicting that it will be an "essential tool in enhancing the democratic process (Williams and Gulati "What is the Social Network Worth?" 11)." In particular, some scholars believe that social media will play an even more significant role in the democratic process especially elections in the next few years-- including the 2012 presidential election. However, those scholars predicting that social media will enhance the democratic process are simply speculating. With social media

still being relatively young, many scholars and traditional news journalists (for example, Clarence Page) are arguing that social media will not be understood for years to come (Page). Thus, to what effect that it will enhance the democratic process is still merely a prediction.

Traditionally, it is a well- established fact that the youth population of the United States is less politically inclined than older citizens and less likely to vote in elections. The lack of youth participation is reflective of a larger phenomenon Americans have become less civically engaged in a variety of different ways throughout the past two decades. Compared with the mid-twentieth century, people are less likely to attend rallies, run for local public offices, or stay informed on issues that matter to their communities (Putnam). Initiatives in the past decade, including the campaign, "Rock the Vote" sponsored by MTV, have tried to motivate the younger generation, or Generation Y, to become more politically active in the nation. Specifically, the target of that organization was to increase voting turnout for Generation Y. Did the campaign succeed? No. Turnout for young people has remained low.

Thus, the low participation by Generation Y is one of the primary reasons why the idea of new media is becoming a rising interest in terms of campaigns and civic engagement. Scholars argue, "New media may well challenge the role or fill some of the gap left by traditionally strong socializers such as family, church, and school (Bakker and Vreese 4)." New media is the next strategy in a long line of predecessors to attempt to reach across a generation gap. The effect that new media could have on Generation Y to become more civically engaged is

still somewhat new, and has not been explored in a great depth. Furthermore, the effect that new media might have on older generations to also become more civically engaged has not been explored.

Therefore, this paper proposes several questions in order to raise discussion on what effect social media will have in the future when used by political campaigns. First, what effect will social media truly have on civic engagement as a result of its increased use during political campaigns? Will there be an increase in the number of voters within Generation Y due to the rise of the use of social media as a campaign strategy? And, to what extent will the rise of social media have an effect on other forms of civic engagement? Due to the fact that social media is still a new phenomenon; no definite conclusion can be drawn. This paper, however, will try to assess potential effects.

In order to try to answer the research questions, this paper will examine a variety of different sources. To begin, the definition or rather definitions that shape the understanding of what civic engagement is must be stated. Since the research questions deal with the effect that social media is having upon civic activities, the traditional sense of the idea must be understood. From there, this paper will explore why there is a problem with civic engagement specifically focusing on the younger generation (Generation Y) compared to that of older generations including the Baby Boomers.

The paper will then summarize the history of the use of the Internet in campaigns dating back to the early 1990s and including the presidential election of 2000. Background information will be presented on the "big three" social

networking websites that campaigns are using. Those websites, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, have provided the most evidence on the impact of social media on engagement. I will also analyze the use of social media in the 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama; this will allow for additional understanding of the uses and results of interacting with citizens in a new way.

Finally, this paper will present the findings of my empirical research. First, I will present the data analysis that I conducted based upon two different elections. The first was the 2010 39th State Senate district race in New York State that was between Senator David Valesky and Andrew Russo in 2010. The second was the 2010 25th District Congressional race in New York State between Dan Maffei and Ann Marie Buerkle. Tracking these candidates' Facebook statuses and tweets from Twitter allowed for the principles and proposed uses of social media to be studied to see if the populations in Central New York could have been affected by social media strategies employed by the campaigns. While there can be no real conclusions drawn about whether people who followed a candidate on Twitter would have gone to an event or voted, this analysis can provide an insight into the potential of future strategies to encourage interaction.

The third portion of my empirical research involved interviewing ten undergraduate students at Syracuse University on their use of social media and interaction with candidates. Through a series of one-on-one interviews these students were also asked about their definition of civic engagement and how they think social media can change the traditional definitions. These interviews, while a small sample size, allow some insights into the minds of Generation Y and their

ideas. It allows the discussion of potential effects to be discussed in a different way and provide more insight into new civic engagement activities.

Chapter Two

#Civic #Engagement

" Participation in public life doesn't mean that you all have to run for public office - though we could certainly use some fresh faces in Washington. But it does mean that you should pay attention and contribute in any way that you can. Stay informed. Write letters, or make phone calls on behalf of an issue you care about. If electoral politics isn't your thing, continue the tradition so many of you started here at Michigan and find a way to serve your community and your country - an act that will help you stay connected to your fellow citizens and improve the lives of those around you. " (Obama)

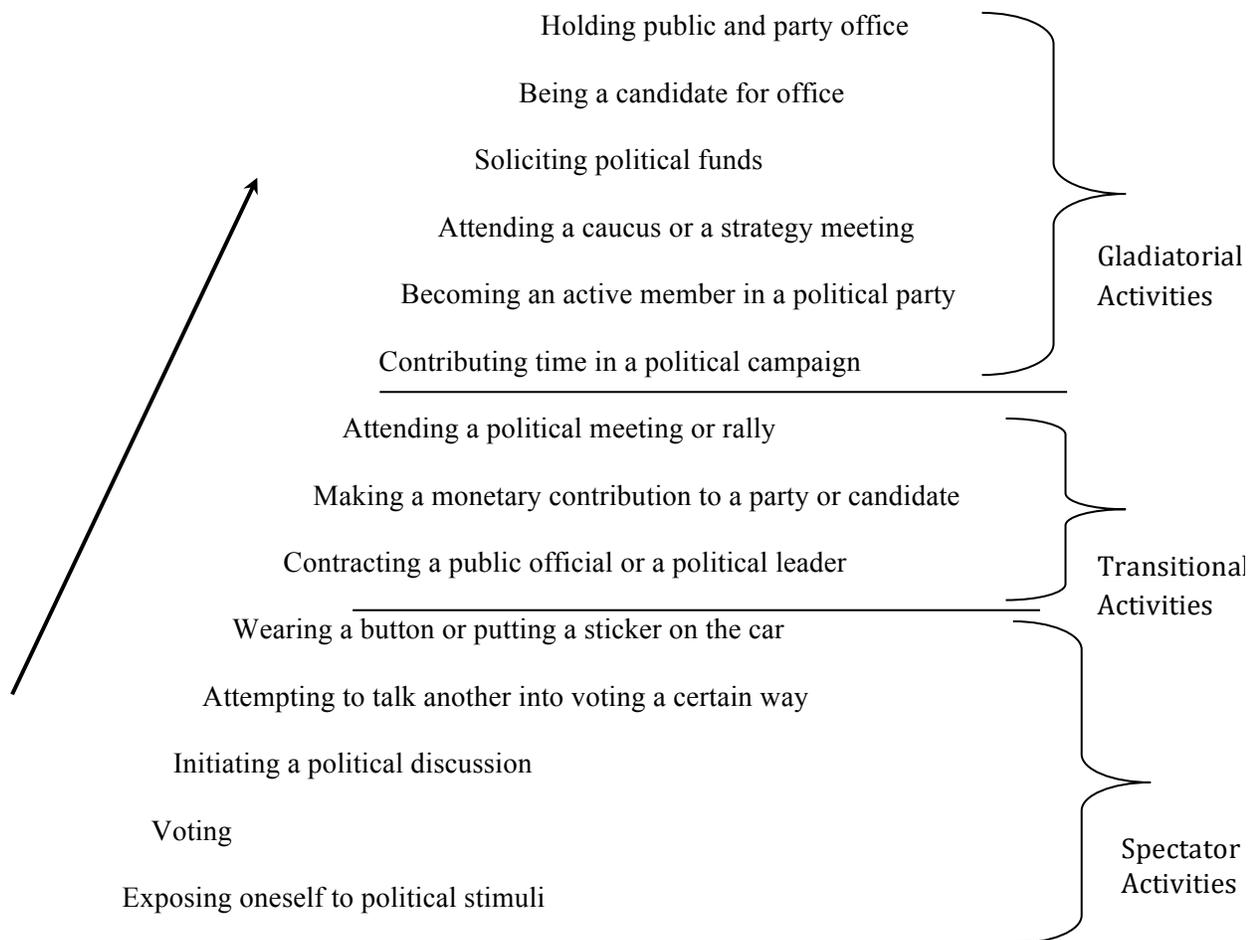
-President Barack Obama, 2010 University of Michigan Commencement

In order to begin to address the research questions posed in this thesis, the understanding of civic engagement must be presented. The basic understanding of civic engagement as well as problems plaguing the notion help to understand the belief that social media could bring about a change especially during elections. Furthermore, the understanding of traditional civic activities will allow comparisons with the new forms of online civic activities that have resulted from campaigns using social media.

Many argue that the United States' problems with healthcare, immigration control, and education stem from the failing idea of civic engagement. The problems that are plaguing the 21st century are hard to deal with because both American citizens and politics have "lost [their] civic voice" (Sandel 57). Good civic engagement is generally built on moral obligations from citizens in a

democracy. Moral obligations that influence good civic engagement include the fundamental obligations to deliberate issues facing the nation; voting; and speaking up, via petitioning and protest, when one disagrees with positions taken or legislation passed by the government. Many scholars and political scientists argue that in order to correct the problems facing the nation, the obligations of civic engagement need to be more widely practiced.

Political scientist Lester Milbrath, author of *Political Participation*, gave a brief sketch of what the hierarchy of political involvement is. The civic activities that he outlines in his book allow for a basis of understanding the effect of how social media could play on these offline activities. Milbrath's hierarchy of political engagement activities echoes much of what President Obama stated in his 2010 commencement address. Milbrath's hierarchy is reproduced below (Rimmerman 5).

Figure 1 (Rimmerman5)

Milbrath's hierarchy provides a framework for defining what effective and meaningful civic engagement is (Rimmerman 5). A citizen does not have to reach the highest level known as gladiatorial activities, but the spectator activities should be reached. The spectator activities include the most simplistic ways of becoming active in the democratic process, and yet, many citizens fail to reach even that low level. Engagement by citizens in a democratic system allows for the vitality of the system of government to succeed (Dahlgren 5). The United States

should be a non-spectator environment. Basic fundamental obligations must be met.

Aristotle wrote, "A citizen is one who rules and is ruled in turn" (Politics). This principle implies that a citizen must be educated. There is concern among many that the education for the American youth is not at the level that it once was. That is confirmed by the numerous reports published by the United States government as well as private institutions showing a discouraging downward slope of the American education system. Additionally, what has become an additional concern in the K-12 system is the lack of civics education. Michael McCurry, former White House Press Secretary for President William Clinton, stated, "civics are not being taught well at the high school level and even the college level" (Rosenstone and Hansen 44). A member of the American public needs to understand civics as well as current events, so that he or she can think critically about issues that arise during an election cycle. The bottom line is that the more knowledge an individual has, the more likely they are to participate in the broad range of participation forms (Rosenstone and Hansen 44). It's a fundamental obligation that is seen as part of the traditional idea of civic engagement (Rimmerman 5).

"The steady decline in voting is the most visible evidence that something is wrong. Elections are the most direct link to governing power-the collective lever that is meant to make citizens sovereign and officeholders accountable to them. So, why don't people use it, especially when they are so unhappy with the government?" (Rimmerman 5) William Greider stated that in *Who Will Tell the*

People.¹ It's no surprise that voter turnout is at an all time low. People are less likely to go cast their ballot on the first Tuesday of November. Robert Putnam cited in his book, *Bowling Alone*, that between 1960 and 1990, voter turnout in presidential elections dropped 25% (17). In the 21st century, there has been a renewed hope that turnout will increase. But the United States still has a voting turnout lower than of most other democratic countries (Putnam 17). In the 21st century where there are numerous domestic and foreign issues that are constantly a subject of discussion, the voting turnout rate for local elections to federal elections is disappointingly low. The United States Census Bureau published a report following the 2008 presidential election citing that in both 2004 and 2008, roughly 54 percent of the voting-age population turned out to vote. This was higher than the elections of 1996 and 2000. Yet, the number of those registering to vote did not change and were not higher than the 2000 presidential election (2). Figure two, below, illustrates those percentages and the little variance over this period.

Figure 2

Presidential election year	Total	Citizens							Registered	
		Total	Registered			Voted			Percent reported voted	90 percent confidence interval
			Number	Percent	90 percent confidence interval	Number	Percent	90 percent confidence interval		
2008.	225,499	206,072	146,311	71.0	69.7–71.4	131,144	63.6	63.3–63.9	89.6	89.4–89.8
2004.	215,694	197,005	142,070	72.1	71.8–72.4	125,736	63.8	63.5–64.1	88.5	88.3–88.7
2000.	202,609	186,366	129,549	69.5	69.2–69.8	110,826	59.5	59.2–59.8	85.5	85.2–85.8
1996.	193,651	179,935	127,661	70.9	70.6–71.2	105,017	58.4	58.1–58.7	82.3	82.0–82.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008.

(2)

¹ As reproduced in *Who Will Tell the People* by William Greider.

² Meetup.com was a website that allowed users to connect with one another when attending events

The low voter turnout suggests a general decline in civic engagement. Citizens may feel as if their vote is not being heard, or they may simply not have the desire to influence political decisions. Ironically, many citizens who choose not to participate in the democratic process by voting then feel that their voice is not being reflected in the laws that are being passed. If civic engagement is to be re-conceived or reinvented, citizens will need to return to the polls, especially the younger generation.

Americans aged eighteen to twenty were given the right to vote in 1971. Though the belief in 1971 was that this change would address youth alienation of that period, the results proved to be the exact opposite (Rimmerman 41). There has been a steady decline in youth voting rates since 1971 with one of the worst participation years in 1990. In 1990, only "one in five eighteen-to-twenty years-old bothered to vote (Rimmerman 41)." In general, the statistics available since 1990 have not gotten better, though there was an upward trend in youth voting in 2008. News media were quick to argue that this was at least partially the result of social media, but there were probably multiple reasons why the youth population turned out to vote. Further, the one national election that helped rise the youth voting statistics in 2008 does not reverse the prior trend. Therefore, with the trend of low voting by the youth of America, questions continually arise with why the younger generation is not involved (Rimmerman 43).

Stephen R. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen argue in their book, *"Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America,"* that the only way people participate in electoral politics is because something or someone gets them

inspired to do so. In order to increase mobilization among citizens, political parties have offered incentives (161) such as a chance at winning dinner with the candidate (Harfoush 84). Rosenstone and Hansen's argument reminds us that people usually participate because they are invited by others, or mobilized. Yet, over the past several decades, this motivation has clearly decreased. Thus, it is no surprise that scholars and activists are interested in whether social media can reverse this trend.

It is no surprise with the evidence presented here as well as numerous scholarly works that civic engagement has in fact declined. It is all a result of changes of the American social and family structures, the increased time spent in the workplace, and an overall change of attitudes over the past 50 years. Robert Putnam wrote at the end of his book:

Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 many more Americans will participate in the public life of our communities- running for office, attending public meetings, serving on committees, campaigning in elections, and even voting. (412).

At the time of his writing, the Internet had started assume an important role in American life. Thus, while traditional forms of civic engagement have declined, there are new forms of civic engagement that have started to change the democratic process and the American people. The mobilization of citizens is moving into a new chapter.

Chapter Three

#History

In order to analyze the effects that social media in campaigns is having on civic engagement, a brief review of the use of the Internet in campaigns is useful. Without the understanding of such history, including for example, Governor Howard Dean's 2004 primary campaign, the analysis of the 2008 election and 2010 midterm elections will be less effective.

Politics has been practiced online for more than two decades now. While 2004 was heralded as the coming-of-age point, the Internet, e-mail, and even analytics were being used prior to 2004. Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign used e-mail and a personal website. The website only contained speeches and position papers, but the effect that created was enough to launch the White House website during the Clinton administration (Price 769).

In 2004, the year of what became known as "cyberpolitics" emerged (Price 757). The Internet had been used in campaigns prior to 2004, but in 2004, there was an emergence that changed the political landscape and how campaigns shared information. In 2004, Governor Howard Dean used the Internet very effectively. His head of Internet outreach, Joe Trippi, used websites such as meetup.com² to encourage citizens to attend events and to raise funds (Price 759). Without the knowledge provided by Trippi, Dean's campaign would not have seen the same influx of those looking to get involved. Furthermore, Dean's campaign started to lead the change in political websites. Phil Noble, a consultant

² Meetup.com was a website that allowed users to connect with one another when attending events and rallies.

for PoliticsOnline.com, considered one of the leading political websites, stated during the 2004 presidential primary that, “the internet was Dean’s rocket ship, and nobody could deny how far and how fast the rocket ship took him up” (Price 759). As Dean said in an interview in January 2012, his Internet strategy was intended to allow citizens to “self educate and self examine” the issues and allow for a neutral playing field (“The Candidate”). At first glance, the phrase “neutral playing field,” seems strange for a presidential campaign, but he meant that it allowed citizens to receive unbiased information more so than mass media outlets.

In 2004, since the use of the Internet in campaigns was such a relatively new idea, it was often argued that it would have little or no impact upon those using it. In 2004, there were no real predictions about how the Internet would transform itself in subsequent years. There were only primitive social media websites, at best, during the 2004 election. Nonetheless, the Internet could be used in a way that would further advance technology for years to come in the politics industry. Bruce Brimber, the director of the Center of Information Technology and Society at the University of California, said at the time that, “it [the internet] takes fewer resources and less political experience to identify and energize a group of people of like-minded people and to have a voice” (Price 761). Brimber thought that the use of Internet could be harnessed into the new medium to reach those voters who normally would not usually be reached. However, in 2004, most people using the Internet were most likely in the middle or upper classes, rather than lower class or minority citizens who were less likely to vote (Rainie 4). Thus, while many thought the Internet would reach across barriers to allow citizens to

gain information and become involved, in 2004, the Internet use targeted the upper middle class. Moving forward into the 2008 election, this would continue to be the case, thus casting some doubt on whether social media encouraged a range of citizens to become more involved.

From 2004 into the 2006-midterm elections, there was a spark of technology including the introduction of Facebook and YouTube as primary actors in the social media world that increased the opportunity for the Internet to be used in campaigns. What has been described, as new media is a continued path of technology that has shaped political campaigns for over two decades now.

Chapter Four

#YouTube

Since the 2008 presidential election, YouTube has been heralded as one of the social networking websites, along with Facebook, that plays a dramatic role in elections. YouTube has been used in elections to raise funds, seek out voters, and promote new advertising campaigns. It has allowed campaign staffers to have a new way of transmitting videos of the candidate without airtime restrictions.

The beginnings of YouTube highlight it as one of the earliest websites considered to be "new media." The website that would allow viral videos to spread instantly was registered online in February 2005 by three former employees of PayPal ("YouTube"). At the start, it seemed as if YouTube's potential remained unknown just as other video websites that were launching at a similar time. By December 2005, though, there were "more than two million video views each day" with that number doubling to 25 million views in January 2006 ("YouTube"). The staggering increase demonstrated the powerful effect that YouTube had on the American public as well as worldwide viewers. With the eventual purchase of YouTube by Google, the potential increased. Even in the 2006-midterm elections, with YouTube being used as a secondary source of viewing political content, there were many predictions that it would change the democratic process and eventually civic engagement.

Similar to other social media, YouTube allows for candidates to reach their constituents without going through traditional media. The ability of YouTube to allow instant access to campaign speeches, interviews, and even

mistakes by candidates has revolutionized campaigns just as the television did during the 1960 presidential election. With YouTube offering a variety of different services, it is no surprise that many relate YouTube back to a statement that "a democracy is a political system that rewards communication power" (Gueorgeuieva 292). Thus, by using YouTube, constituents have the power to learn as little or as much about the candidate as they want to. But at the same time, the fact that constituents could also view politicians' mistakes has contributed to new and stressful problems for the campaign staffs. For example, in 2006, Republican Senator George Allen was a YouTube sensation after he "was caught on camera by one of his opponents' supporters using the racial slur 'macaca'" (Gueorgeuieva 292). The proliferation of this video demonstrated that YouTube could increase the public's knowledge about politicians.

During the 2008 presidential election, YouTube emerged as a "significant political communication medium" (May 502). Emerging as a new medium that allowed candidates and news networks to broadcast messages in a realm comparable to a 24 hours news network, YouTube presented a new opportunity to be harnessed. The significance of the new political communication medium was confirmed when during the course of the 2008 election cycle, seven presidential candidates announced their choice to run on YouTube. In addition, 110 channels devoted to individual candidates were created during that time period (May 702). In a matter of three years, the influence of YouTube far exceeded predictions, and it became part of the new media communication environment.

In March of 2008, prior to the presidential primary election in South Carolina, a study concluded that the most common videos being watched on YouTube related to politics could be broken into five distinct groups. The five distinct groups were "traditional news programs, comedy news programs, political campaign advertisements, and direct-to-camera commentary from candidates, and mash-up videos created by YouTube users by editing video and/or audio clips together" (Hanson 6-7). Given these various forms of YouTube, it seems that YouTube was stealing time from traditional broadcast methods in 2008. The Pew Research Center found that during the 2008 presidential election, roughly 35 percent of Americans eligible to vote watched videos related to the campaigns on the internet. That number was triple what it was in 2004 ("YouTube for president?").

Videos like "Joe the Plumber" and "Obama Girl" were memorable parts of the campaign. In the 2008 election, YouTube created a specific channel known as "YouChoose '08." It combined candidate information from YouTube and other websites into one venue. Campaign staff utilized YouTube to reduce costs while still exposing their candidate to the constituents in a substantive manner. One reason why campaign staffers began utilizing this new channel on YouTube was because they believed that "political audiences are likely to seek out and believe information that is consistent with their prior beliefs" (Bimber and Davis 126). Additionally, this shows that the general public will seek out information from both traditional forms and new media. YouTube also allowed viewers to watch political humor videos during this past election season. One such political video

that received attention in the 2008 presidential election dealt with Sarah Palin versus Hilary Clinton. Will.i.am and other celebrities, who tried to inspire people and help them realize that exercising their right to vote is important, recorded another popular video, "Yes We Can." "Yes We Can" was seen more than 20 million times (Wallsten 169).

Overall, the YouTube sensation that occurred in 2008 put a new notion in the democratic process. YouTube has given a fresh take in how Americans learn about elections. As a POLITICO article stated in 2008, that "if, in the past, Americans mulled over politics by talking with their friends at the local diner or their co-workers at the coffee machine, now those same conversations have expanded exponentially online" ("YouTube for president?"). Users of YouTube are generally more inclined to share videos with others via e-mail or other forms of social media. It's a chance to pass along knowledge about issues as well as information related to the platform of a candidate. YouTube has given a new opportunity for candidates to be heard, for news to be spread, and to give people a new way to express themselves. Whether or not those online conversations or interactions with new forms of media will translate into offline activities is still in question. YouTube does appear to have opened a new door into the democratic process (Hanson 13).

Chapter Five

#Facebook

"The Facebook Effect" was created in 2008. The use of Facebook pages for campaigns, though, started in the 2006 midterm elections. The creation of Facebook pages for all Congressional and gubernatorial candidates was done by Facebook Headquarters." (Williams and Gulati, "Social Networks" 3). Facebook emerged as one of the new innovative and main social networking websites in 2007 and early 2008. It replaced prior networks such as Xanga and started to replace the popular MySpace at the time. With the emergence and rising popularity, Facebook gave the opportunity for candidates and those voting a freer exchange on the Internet. Comparable to a public town hall or forum, the exchange of knowledge and information on issues gave rise to a comparable participatory online democracy. A strategic communication tool emerged.

Recently, Facebook launched the feature known as Timeline for pages as well as individuals using the social networking website. The option of using Timeline now for pages is a viable new strategy for candidates and politicians because education, highlighted career successes, and key pieces of legislation that were passed can be highlighted. Prior to Timeline and some of the more advanced features, there were two main ways that communication about a candidate would occur. The basic fan page was available, but the option of an open or closed group was seen as an option. With both groups and fan pages, users were able to engage others in discussion on walls as well as post videos and photographs (Williams and Gulati, "Social Networks" 7). When Facebook decided to give the option of

pages for candidates and politicians over the continued use of groups as seen in the earlier periods of Facebook, it was clear that Facebook emerged as one of the most important social media sites in the political realm (Williams and Gulati, “Social Networks” 7).



(Obama, “Facebook Page”)

Political pages have the ability to label those liking a page as supporters rather than friends" (Dalsgaard 86). Through liking a page or becoming a fan of a candidate, Facebook has given the opportunity for users to not only socialize their beliefs or stances on issues, but they have been given the opportunity to potentially confirm those beliefs as well as offer a chance to try to persuade others (Dahlgren 180). Strategic use of the social network site has the potential to offer valuable results both in terms of spreading campaign information, but as well as the potential for producing offline engagement. Facebook specifically targets a demographic referred to as Generations Y and Z. Those born between 1980 and

2000 have been the most active on the platform (Small 86) (the Baby Boomer Generation has seen a rise in the use of social media, though) (Smith, “Why Americans” 8). The citation of the Barack Obama campaign is the best example of how a social media strategy was defined to include Facebook and make it one of the leading communication tools. It targeted the youth demographic primary using the website. Accessibility and the branding of the campaign allowed for the success and set the precedent for future use of Facebook as a campaign tool.

While Facebook has emerged as the new communication tool for campaigns, the question of mobilization for offline engagement activities has been studied numerous times. Through a wide variety of studies, it was concluded that while the number of Facebook supporters truly capture the likability of a candidate, the offline participation is severely lacking. For one, the numbers of those liking a candidate are often ineligible to vote (Dahlgren 180). Another possible reason why there is a disproportionate lack of offline engagement that has emerged as one of the more effective communication tools is the lack of promotion of events as well as a lack of those monitoring the page (Williams and Gulati, “What is a Social” 18). All could potentially contribute to the lack of offline engagement seen through campaigns at all levels. Overall, Facebook has been one of the more effective social media tools to share information, but the mobilization offline still has yet to be captured.

Chapter Six

#Twitter

The world seems to revolve around the lingo of Twitter these days.

Tweeting is a sensation that has hit every industry. Television shows are now promoting handles and hashtags during shows. Twitter Chats, hundreds of chats taking place via Twitter using a specific hashtag, have allowed users of the website acquire more knowledge in minutes than ever before. Twitter Chats are real-time, spontaneous, and allow for all to participate by merely tweeting (Khazan). The Google document containing the number of Twitter Chats is constantly updated, allowing millions to tap into a chance to partake in a chat that would increase their reach, their Klout score, and their number of followers. 140 characters is everyday language to many now. Even the idea of a hashtag being used in offline media is not out of the norm anymore. Some of the differences between Facebook and Twitter are disappearing. Twitter allows for the chance to share photos and videos, and recently, the company started offering their own link shortener in order to allow easier sharing of articles. The wealth of information that can be processed in a short two minutes of strolling through one's Twitter feed has become more than most people used to receive in one day.

However, Twitter has only recently become popular. The history of Twitter began in 2006 when other websites such as MySpace and even Xanga were still more prevalent on the Internet (“The History of Twitter”). Social media at that time was seen by Generation Z as a place to post photos of their likes, their dislikes. Essentially, what was deemed social media at the time was a soundboard

for pre-teens. Yet, social media was evolving at the same time with new websites.³ The first tweet was sent by Jack Dorsey (@jack), one of the founders, the name of Twitter was still twttr. Eventually, the name was changed to Twitter (“The History of Twitter”). And, while @jack's first tweet was just the beginning, the birth of 140 characters or standard text messaging format on the Internet was born. The bird began tweeting.

The dictionary definition of Twitter states that it is "a small tremulous intermittent sound" (“Twitter”). Surprisingly, the Merriam Webster definition pertaining to the sounds of what would appear to be birds is accurate to describe the bursts of information passed to others via the website. Incorporating the idea of the traditional definition has been present in all forms of the design of the website with the bird logo for the website, and the home button representing a birdhouse. Design elements have allowed for the sensation to grow just as much as the wealth of information and a new way to be in touch with friends, celebrities, and news media has allowed for the website to grow. As of July 2011, there were 350 billion Tweets sent in a day (Twitter Engineering Tweet) with numerous records being set through the course of those five years. For example, after Osama Bin Laden was killed, there was an average of 3,000 tweets sent per second (“The History of Twitter”). In short, one can see the potential impact of how Twitter will have in the future. Furthermore, since the 2008 presidential election, Twitter has been seen as a new campaign tool.

During the course of the 2008 presidential election, Twitter was still relatively new. However, that did not stop the use of the website by Barack

³ See Sections on Facebook and YouTube.

Obama's campaign. Barack Obama used Twitter to announce shortly after victory, "this is history" (Tumasjan 1). Flash forward to the 2010 midterm elections, and it was evident that Twitter was becoming more popular in the use of sharing information by candidates. And by 2010, both parties were able to use Twitter effectively.

The use of traditional news media outlets on Twitter has allowed for a way to deliver news faster than ever. Traditional news media outlets are gathering information more and more quickly. John Harwood stated that in addition to the end of print journalism as a result of the iPad, Twitter is faster than the AP wire ("Politics, the Media"). Harwood's point of Twitter being faster than the AP wire is important to understand especially in terms of how citizens are receiving their information. If there were an issue, particularly one of interest during an election, a citizen would probably turn to a news outlet account before connecting to a candidate. Twitter, therefore, does provide a way for increased information, but for news outlets more than candidates.

Campaign strategists have begun to try to harness the possibilities of the Twitter in terms of campaigns despite what would appear to be dominance by traditional news media. In *Socially Elected*, Craig Agranoff and Herbert Tabin present three areas of focus that a campaign should target when using Twitter. They begin their argument that Twitter is the "equivalent of the digital handshake (Agranoff and Tabin 73)." Arguing that Twitter is a way to in a sense be a megaphone for the campaign (Agranoff and Tabin 73), it would appear that the very purpose of Twitter was made for the purpose of elections. Yet, what

Agranoff and Tabin forget is that there is no direct way to measure the digital handshakes effectively. While hashtags and replying to citizens via mentions or direct messages are seen as initial effective tools (Agranoff and Tabin 73), there is no real quantifiable way of showing that supporters are being mobilized. After all, based on the Pew Research Center report, most of those participating in rallies or other campaign related events would have done so without the use of social media (“Why Americans use social media”).

Agranoff and Tabin 's three points revolve around collecting the masses to their call of action: their civic duties (71). Yet, Twitter has been already primarily cast as a new way to gather information. Whether it is a person who would already be reading the news or someone who just stumbles across information while using Twitter to interact with peers, Twitter does not mobilize the masses to become civically engaged. One of the only valid points that is present in the book is how research can be done using hashtags and keeping track of followers (Agranoff and Tabin 71). In a sense, a campaign can utilize the information posted by followers as a way to show off political powers as well as gather information that can be used in later events. But, that information does not show that citizens are becoming mobilized or engaged.

With the specified length of Twitter being 140 characters, one questions campaign using the social media tool even more so. It is not 140 words, but just a mere 140 characters. For a rough idea, of 140 characters, the first two sentences of this paragraph are 147 characters. While Agranoff and Tabin clearly cite effective strategies for using Twitter during a campaign, the limit on what can be

said must be further explored in order to draw a closer conclusion for why social media is not having an immediate effect on citizens participating in off-line activities. Some strategists believe that even using 100 characters are more effective than 140 characters for it allows users to retweet and provide their own opinion without deleting the original tweet. Additionally, some argue that sometimes hashtags should be avoided in order to allow for easier discussions and engagement as well (Green). Thus, what others are arguing is reflective of some of the principles cited in *Socially Elected*, that do in fact allow for engagement: online engagement.

Chapter Seven

#Obama

"The Obama campaign marks a new age of innovation that could shift the way we approach democracy itself, especially within government institutions."

(Harfoush XVIII)

"The 2008 presidential campaign was by far the most engaging in modern history because there were so many ways for voters, journalists, politicians, and politician organizations to follow the action or join in." (Harfoush XVIII)

In 2008, the Barack Obama campaign capitalized on the potential impact of social networking as a key strategic tool. From the announcement that Barack Obama was running for president to the night of the election, the Obama campaign understood that by trying to engage voters in online methods, it could potentially increase offline activity. The 2010 midterm election and the 2012 election were shaped by the Obama campaign.

The Obama campaign was a grassroots campaign specifically when it came to new media. Joe Trippi, the manager of Howard Dean's campaign in 2004, stated that "They were Apollo 11 and we were the Wright Brothers," (Nagourney) in reference to the notion that the Obama campaign used the internet to not only collect donations, but to organize as well. The Obama campaign, under the leadership of David Axelrod, also understood that "creating meaningful online relationships...[was] an investment of time, effort, and energy (Harfoush 7)."

Comparable to the traditional methods of campaigning, just because it was no longer an entirely offline campaign, time, effort, and energy were needed to ensure that citizens felt a part of the campaign. The constant connection was critical to the campaign's goal of increasing engagement. To do this, the Obama campaign employed several main strategies.

First, the campaign hired Chris Hughes.⁴ Chris Hughes was one of the three Harvard roommates who helped create Facebook in 2004 (Clayton 140). Bringing in Chris Hughes along with an immediate emphasis on collecting donations online was a result of a conversation that Anita Dunn and David Plouffe had in 2006 when the campaign was being born. Dunn and Plouffe recognized the impact of online donations, especially after Plouffe had helped with the success of Deval Patrick in the quest for the Massachusetts governorship (Heilemann and Halperin 32). The Obama campaign employed strategic planning in all aspects of the campaign. Using strategic management in all aspects of the campaign, the media and technology aspects of the grassroots campaign allowed for exploration into new media. In addition to Chris Hughes, the Obama campaign hired a technologist who had worked at Orbitz (Heilemann and Halperin 107) to help build the online presence of the campaign.

Under the direction of New Media Director Joe Rospars in conjunction with Hughes and the rest of the new media team, the Obama campaign helped give birth to a new community online. The creation of my.barackobama.com (MyBO) would be the preferred social media platform during the entire campaign by the campaign (Harfoush 9). By combining different attributes and features

⁴ Chris Hughes would eventually become Obama's Director of Internal Organizing.

from the prevailing social media websites at the time, the creation of MyBO would emerge as a way that Obama supporters could connect with others across different mediums and helped amplify issues, news, and events in an unpredicted manner (Harfoush 7). With the creation of MyBO being the first main social media strategy in the campaign, it is no surprise that those more than 2 million users eventually created profiles on my.barackobama.com during campaign (Iyengar 4). As the second main strategy employed by the Obama campaign in the emerging world of social media as a political tool, the strategists capitalized on the opportunity to personalize the experience, increase engagement, and amplify already existing support.



5

Barack Obama's grassroots campaign was an example of how he mastered the new media spectacle (Kellner 708). New media for the Barack Obama campaign was organized to include internal organizing, external organizing, video, blogging, e-mail, online advertisements, and analytics. The internal

⁵ Reproduced from *Yes We Did* by Rafah Harfoush and MyBo.com. (See Works Cited)

organizing included my.barackobama.com or MyBO, and external organizing included other social networking platforms (Harfoush 54). The organization of new media allowed for the grassroots organization to succeed in strategic planning as well as the potential to exceed other media and Internet strategies employed by other candidates. Obama devoted more resources to new media than his primary rivals and more than Senator John McCain. For example, whereas the Obama campaign had hired industry experts, the McCain campaign was severely under staffed in terms of Web 2.0. The launch of McCainSpace as a rival to MyBO was deemed a failure and ultimately abandoned (Harfoush 54). As POLITICO reported almost two weeks following the 2008 election, McCainSpace will be considered a failure that will go down into history as a "strategic error of the highest order" ("The Web: 2008's"). Thus, while still new, the team of strategists on the Barack Obama campaign were clearly ahead of the game, learning from mistakes made by campaigns in 2004 and outspending rivals in the area of social media.



(McCainSpace)

The Obama website was easily recognizable and allowed for easy interaction. The logo which greeted visitors to MyBO was reflective of the United States flag and was a symbol of hope. It was all part of the strategy. "Keep it Local, Keep it Real" (Harfoush 73). Usability was key in the design for the MyBO website. Unlike the above photograph of the McCainSpace website, the streamlined design of the MyBO allowed for easier ways to participate in the new forms of engagement. Users were encouraged to log on regularly to receive campaign updates as well as to take actions listed on their dashboard. The Action Center was launched to give supporters a new task every two weeks (Harfoush 77). Recognition, usability, and easy access to participatory activities helped

advance the Barack Obama social media strategy with MyBO to reach new heights.



⁶ Reproduced from *Yes We Did* by Rafah Harfoush and MyBo.com. (See Works Cited)

⁷ Reproduced from *Yes We Did* by Rafah Harfoush and MyBo.com. (See Works Cited)

One of the most interesting ways that the campaign was able to harness the possibility of engaging citizens was to offer them incentives throughout the entire campaign and especially on my.barackobama.com. Online phone banking was one of the first tools that allowed citizens to become engaged during the primary season. It relates back to the notion of Milbrath's spectator activities, one of which is trying to convince another person to vote a certain way. The campaign started out small. The overall goal was 300,000 additional phone calls through the new online system, but each user was only asked to make five phone calls. The result? Within 48 hours of the call to action, 1.5 million calls had been made, with a total of 2,049,133 calls made up to Super Tuesday (Harfoush 34). As one user of the website wrote in a comment, "I've never done something like this before, but five calls seem like such a small way to help bring about big change that I couldn't say no" (Harfoush 34). Connecting on a personal level in the online social capability allowed for change to occur because users were getting involved. Something that helped during the primary season and eventually during the general election was asking for a small contribution resulted in an even larger outcome.⁸ Personification, it appears, was a strategy that the grassroots organization helped citizens to become more engaged in new forms of civic responsibilities.

Offline activities were attempted and in many instances, a success as a result of MyBO. The emergence of opportunities to participate in events that Barack Obama (or others, such as Joe Biden) would attend was broadcasted via

⁸ During the general election, the idea of Neighbor to Neighbor was used to encourage online phone banking.

MyBO as well as other forms of social media. Just as Governor Howard Dean used meetup.org in 2004, social media was a way for citizens to connect with one another to form new offline events. These events always embodied the Obama brand, but essentially, they could be implemented anywhere (Harfoush 84). Making the personal connections and allowing those interested in the goals and ideals that Obama stood for was reflected through this strategy. These events were in a sense:

“to rebuild the American's public's trust in politicians through reputation and a track record of civic service and to demonstrate that through grassroots organizing, big changes can take place” (Harfoush 84).

Respect for civic service as well as trust in politicians and a renewal of the American public was a goal of the grassroots campaign. The campaign hoped that on-line participation would encourage citizens to continue to participate in civic activities including voting in the general election in November 2008. Some of these events included birthday parties celebrating Obama (BarackFest) breakfasts in order to raise money for the campaign, and dance competitions to recruit volunteers and raise money (Harfoush 85). Overall, the implementation of these new events represents the potential for how social media can continue to affect offline civic activities.

"Some people only go to MySpace. It's where they're on all day. Some only go to LinkedIn. Our goal is to make sure that each supporter online, regardless of where they are, has a connection with Obama. Then, as much as we can, we try to drive everyone to our site." (Harfoush 138)

-Scott Goodstein, Director of External Online Organizing

"When it came to MySpace, we decided to take a leap. We decided to make the attempt to combine the organic support and community-building of a grassroots effort with the official campaign outreach efforts." (Harfoush 138)

-Joe Rospars, Chief Digital Director, Obama for America

In addition to my.barackobama.com, the campaign used other social networking websites to help broadcast their message. In total, the campaign used 16 different social networking platforms in order to achieve the most effective communication strategy (Harfoush 140). Using a multitude of social media websites, it allowed for all demographics to be reached including minorities and immigrants who could have been used a specific platform designed for a different language. The four main websites that were used are the four most commonly associated with social media dominance in 2012: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and MySpace. While MySpace may not be so common to many in 2012, it is still used as an effective medium for communication. With the strategic use of the four main websites, the grassroots campaign was able to reach across to a variety of people as echoed by Scott Goodstein's quote. Additionally, through the use of

YouTube and viral videos that allowed for quick recognition of the Obama brand. Videos including the famous music video of "Yes, We Can" by Will.i.am exceeded fifteen million views whereas the actual speech of "Yes, We Can," only reached two million views (Clayton 144). McCain's campaign offered no real competition in terms of even the more general social media websites. The Obama campaign was able to connect with the American people. It's no surprise that on the night of the election, the campaign tweeted that "this is history" (Tumasjan 1).

With the constant belief that the campaign should "Keep it Local, Keep it Real," it's interesting to try to assess the impact of the strategy employed by the Obama campaign in relation to potential offline engagement. Joe Carson, National Field Director for the Obama campaign ("About the Office"), admitted to the mistake that the campaign made about the hopeful offline impact. Jon Carson stated that besides a bump in volunteer numbers, "the online contact was emphasized too much." Those who had wanted to become engaged in the offline activities had already been "enfolded into a traditional model" (Jamieson 52). A prime example of this was the groups that users were able to join on MyBO. By the end of the campaign, there were 35,000 different online groups. Groups were available for any cause and any demographic, but there was perhaps too much emphasis placed on the use of these blogs for online fundraising and online discussion (Harfoush 80). Online interaction was obviously a way to get people more informed about issues and engaging with others on actions that could be taken on issues. Yet, besides the sponsored campaign events featuring public appearances by Obama or the events created through MyBO, there was nothing

else substantive to generate effective offline engagement. However, that does not mean that in the future, a successful strategy similar to what Barack Obama ran might not be effective in engaging voters (Iyengar 5).

Chapter Eight

#casestudy1

"All media were once new media" (Smith 167).

The 2010-midterm elections took place during a period that saw changing ideas about how social media could be used in a campaign setting rather than just for personal use. In the span of four years (2006 to 2010), there was a significant change in the way people went about using the internet for gathering news as well as learning about potential candidates. Recently, the Pew Research Center found 21% of online adults used social networking websites to engage with the 2010 elections (Smith, "The internet"). Yet, despite the increase in the number of Americans using the internet, specifically, social media during the 2010 midterm election, this does not prove that people are becoming more civically involved. Some argue that those sharing news stories or following the campaign via social media would have followed the campaign with or without social media (Doctor 21). Moreover, the increase use of social media by a campaign does not necessary produce an increase in offline engagement. What follows is the first of two case studies that I conducted to try to understand how campaigns have started to use social media and whether we can determine whether such strategies seem to have any effect on traditional forms of civic engagement.

The New York State Senate District 49 election was one case study that I analyzed in order to understand how social media could change elections. The two candidates, Senator David J. Valesky and Andrew Russo, used social media entirely different during the course of the campaign season. Senator Valesky's

campaign used Facebook more frequently whereas Andrew Russo's campaign used Twitter. Russo's campaign mirrored what the Pew Research Center found in their report: that Republicans were taking better advantage of social media, compared to Democrats (Smith, "The internet").

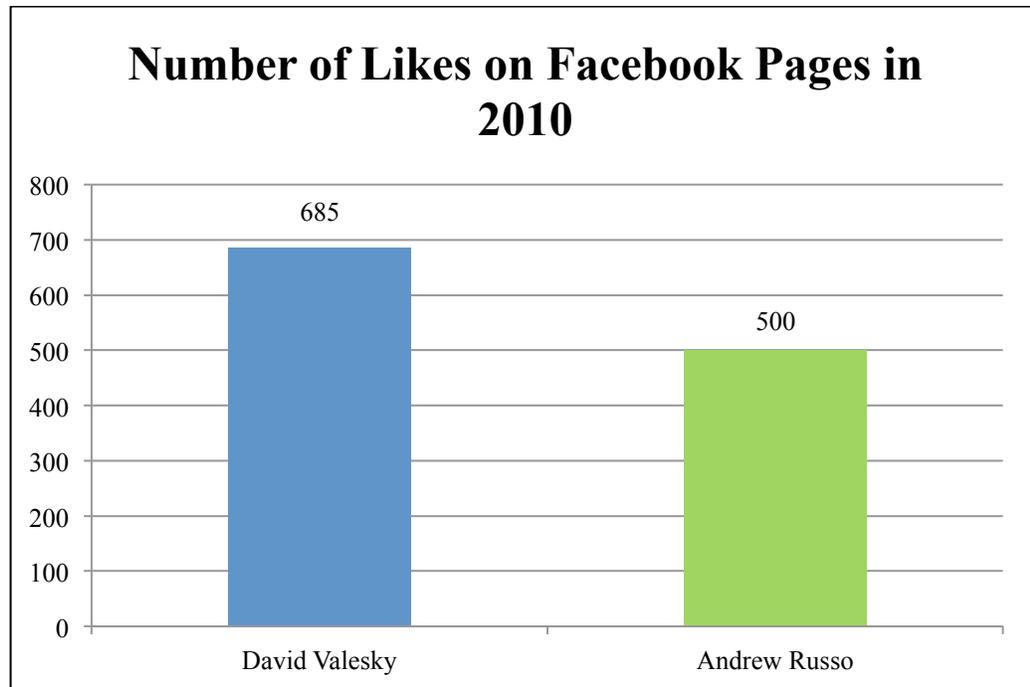
I analyzed the use of Facebook and Twitter for both campaigns. The Facebook statuses as well as information for each page were recorded and later analyzed for the interaction with those who "liked" the page. This analysis dealt with how the campaign interacted with users via statuses as well as photographs and videos. The Facebook analysis was limited due to my strategy. The first one was that I did not develop a thought-out strategy at recording the time-stamps as well as comments from the constituents. Because of the lack of strategy, it limited the discussion and analysis into how Facebook was used as a campaign tool in 2010. Facebook does not allow for the in-depth analysis that Twitter allowed for. In order to analyze the tweets, I gathered the tweets from the Russo Twitter account and created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. (Senator David Valesky's Twitter account only had one tweet during the period.) After recording the tweets, I created a codebook (see appendix) that allowed for the type of tweet to be coded along with information pertaining to retweets, mentions, hashtags, and URLs. This allowed for an easier comparison across several months.

Before beginning to examine the data, relevant background must be provided. Senator David J. Valesky, a native of Central New York, received his Bachelor's degree from the State University of Potsdam and a Master's degree from the University of Connecticut. He was first elected to the New York State

Senate in 2004 (“New York State”). Valesky, who is a Democrat, won the 2010 midterm election narrowly over Andrew Russo. Andrew Russo, a Republican, earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Julliard School in New York City, and then continued his post-graduate studies abroad (Andrew Russo).

The study of Valesky and Russo's Facebook pages provide an interesting comparison. Valesky's Facebook page was designed specifically for the campaign. Since Valesky's Facebook page has been active since October 2009, I only analyzed the posts up until Election Day 2010. With that, there were a total of 203 wall posts. These wall posts that were analyzed were those that were only written under the Facebook page owner. Individual wall posts written by citizens were not taken into account for this study. This was done because my study explicitly looked at how Valesky's campaign was using Facebook as a strategy. Russo's Facebook Page started in November 2009, but did not become active until January 2010. The page totaled 31 posts up until the day after Election Day 2010. Whereas the Russo campaign dominated the Twitter activity, the Valesky campaign dominated Facebook. The Valesky campaign dominated the number of posts, but also the number of likes as shown below.⁹

⁹ The number of likes is based upon the information gathered on February 1, 2010.



One of the most vital ways to target those using social media for the purpose of politics is to customize Facebook pages. While old traditional mediums (for example, appearances at local events or mailings to constituents) were (and still are) used for engagement with citizens, the ability to post videos, photos, and create events allows for an increase in dialogue among citizens and between citizens and candidates. While Senator Valesky posted fewer tweets than Andrew Russo's campaign, there appears to have been more of a strategy with the Facebook page. Specifically, the number of notes that were available on the page versus the zero that were provided by the Russo campaign present an interesting argument. For example, during the months leading up to the election, notes were generally related to pieces of legislation that Valesky supported. These notes could be a combination of a press release or the opinion of Valesky (see images below).

Major Reform Victory

Wednesday, September 15, 2010

Yesterday, those of us who are fighting to fix our state government won a major victory with the ouster of Pedro Espada and the defeat of Hiram Monserrate.

For too long, politicians in both parties have looked the other way when abuse occurred. Early on, I called for Monserrate's removal and for Espada to resign his post. Yesterday's outcomes put p...

[View Full Note](#) · [Like](#) · [Comment](#)

 10 people like this.

 [View 1 comment](#)

10

Valesky Legislation Expanding Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Signed into Law

Wednesday, September 1, 2010

SYRACUSE, N.Y. – Legislation sponsored by State Senator David J. Valesky (D-Oneida) that expands the Historic Preservation Tax Credit (S.7556) was signed into law. The expansion allows banks and insurance companies to claim the tax credit, which will have a positive effect on commercial development efforts of historic structures across the state.

...

[View Full Note](#) · [Like](#) · [Comment](#)

 4 people like this.

 [View all 2 comments](#)

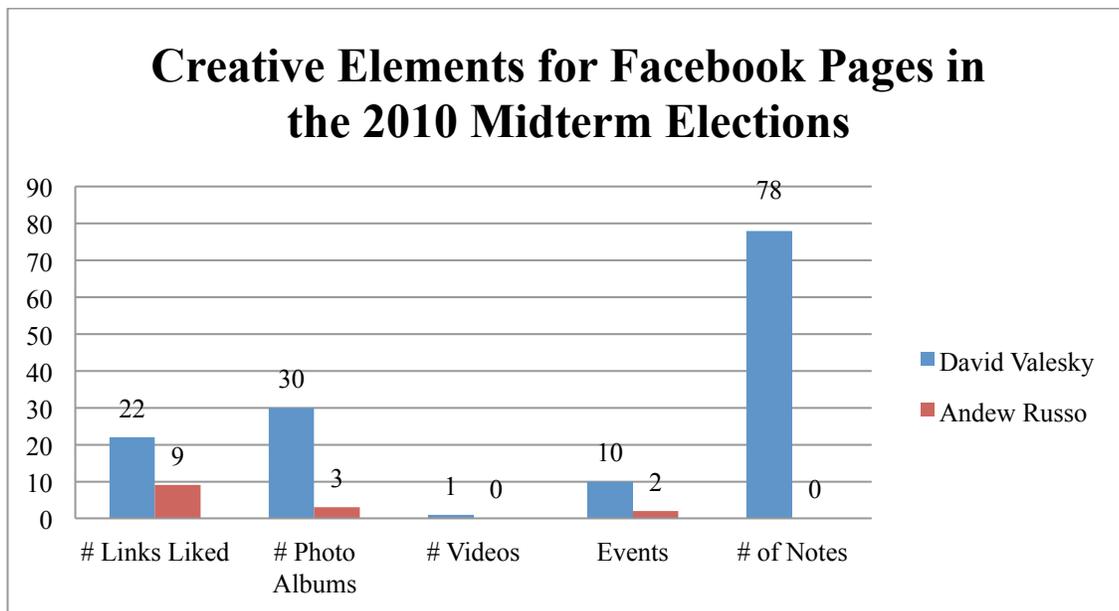
11

In addition to highlighting pieces of legislation that he supported or sponsored, Valesky's notes were also aimed at providing information about his

¹⁰ Reproduced from Senator David Valesky's Facebook Page (See Works Cited).

¹¹ Reproduced from Senator David Valesky's Facebook Page (See Works Cited).

platform for re-election. In terms of Russo's Facebook page, there were no notes providing information about the platform that he would support. The stark contrast between the two Facebook pages and the material on each represent a different strategy for social media. This holds true with this conclusion that those seeking opportunities will have to seek additional knowledge.



While 2010 has been heralded as the Twitter Election, it is essential to note that the Valesky Twitter Page (@SenDavidValesky) did not see any real activity. Leading up to the 2010 Election, there was only one tweet from the account compared to the 21 tweets that have been sent in total from the account.¹²



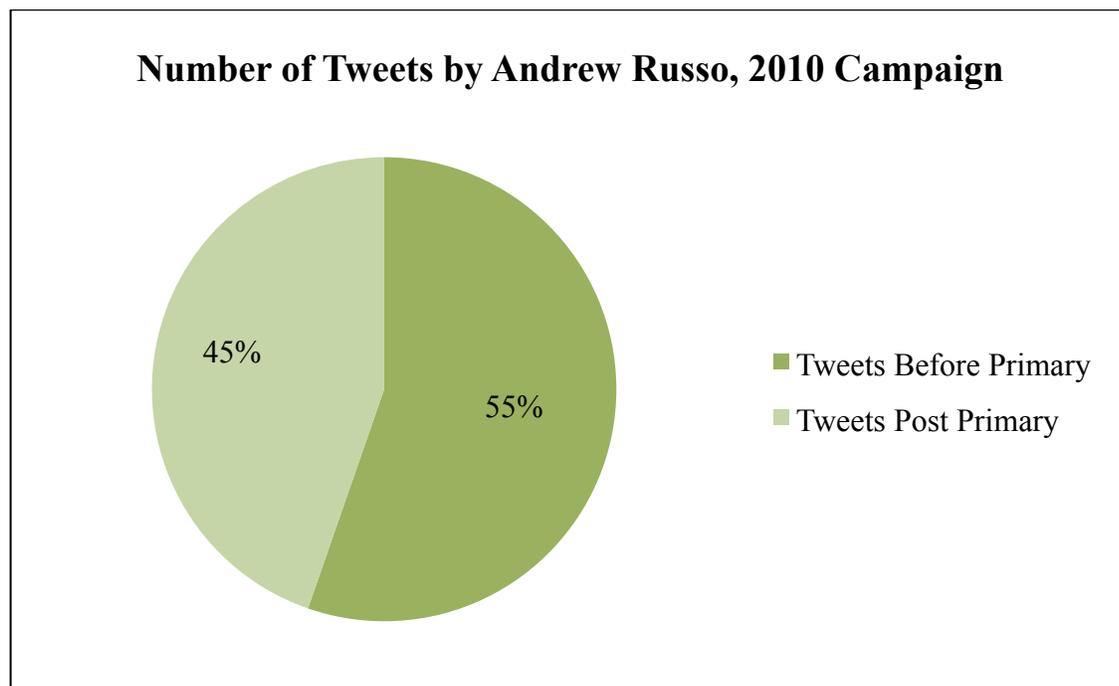
13

¹² Correct at the time of writing.

¹³ Reproduced from Senator David Valesky's Twitter Account (See Works Cited).

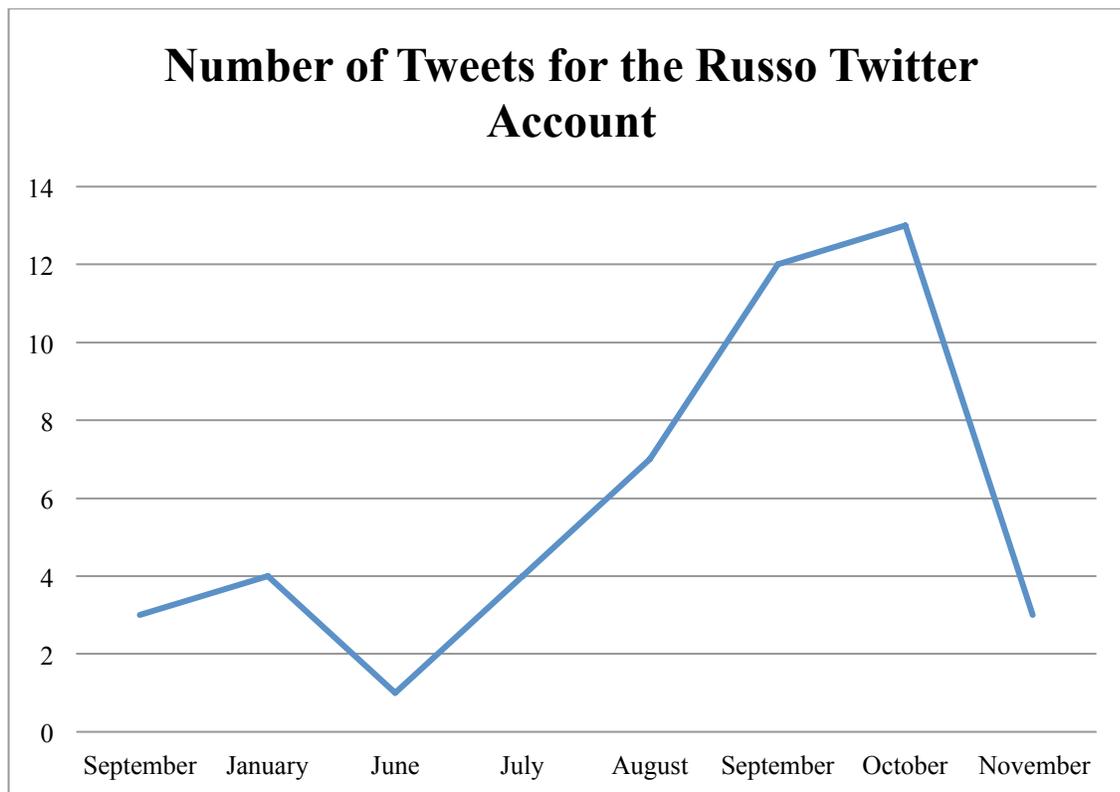
It's important to note that since there was only one tweet from the account it cannot really be compared with the Twitter feed of the Republican candidate, Andrew C. Russo. Without further tweets from Valesky's account or rather a separate account for the campaign, it does not allow for the comparison to the findings of the Pew Research Center Report either.

The greater activity of Andrew Russo's Twitter account might be attributed to two different factors, the first of which was that there was a primary in the Republican Party before the November General Election. The Russo Twitter Account had 48 tweets during the entire time the account was active.¹⁴ The number of Tweets leading up to the primary and including that day equaled more than half of the entire number of tweets for the account as shown in chart below. Second, the Russo Twitter account could have been more active merely as a strategy since Russo was generally unknown at the time.



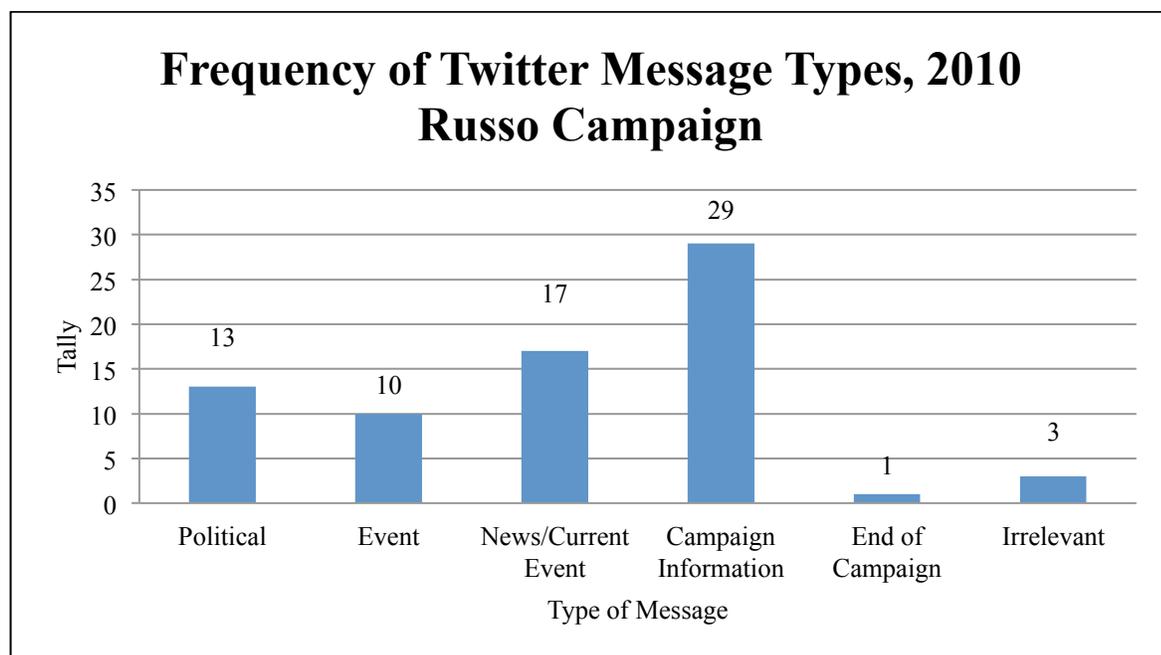
¹⁴ It has since been deleted from the Twitter directory.

By analyzing the tweets for the Russo Twitter account, it allowed for an easier understanding to see when there were more tweets than other times. In the aforementioned paragraph, there was a distinct difference in the number of tweets before and after the primary. That is reflective also of the number of tweets per month specifically around the primary election month and the month of November.



Russo's Twitter Account does provide for interesting analysis into the type of messages that were tweeted. Based upon the 48 tweets that were entered into the Excel document for the Andrew Russo account, the messages within each

tweet were able to be classified into common categories.¹⁵ If a tweet contained more than one message, this was noted and included in both categories.



As shown in the graph, the number of tweets containing information in regards to the campaign had the most mentions at 29 followed by the news articles and mentions of politics. The campaign information was related to tweets surrounding pictures as well as general information.

Campaign strategists say that interaction with supporters via Twitter is easier and more accessible than Facebook and other media forms. By using direct messages to thank those who follow the account or tweet at the account handle, it allows followers or "supporters" to feel more connected with the candidate (Agranoff and Tabin 74). Thus, it allows for promotion of the campaign including relevant messages, as retweets frequently result in further followers and

¹⁵ The common categories for coding purposes included an endorsement, news article, debate, an event, healthcare, campaign information, and donations. A separate category was used if there was a specific issue such as the economy or more-in-depth information pertaining to health care, was mentioned.

supporters. In 2010, though, much of this knowledge was not understood. Even in 2012, the use of social media as a tool to allow citizens to become involved has still not been harnessed. It will not be this generation or even Generation Z, which will harness the technology of really connecting with citizens via social media (Page). It will be Generation Z. Nonetheless, in terms of analysis of the Russo campaign, the tweets that contained other handles was only 8%. There was only one retweet by the account. There was no way of measuring whether or not the campaign sent direct messages. Therefore, to the extent of the information provided, it can be concluded that the Russo campaign still used Twitter more efficiently than Valesky's campaign. It represents a disparity in harnessing the new technology.

"Make strategic use of hashtags to get your campaign Twitter stream included in relevant searches" (Agranoff and Tabin 76). The phrase hashtag is more commonly associated with Twitter. Nevertheless, the use of a hashtag allows for relevant searches, Twitter chats, and even the possibility to gain a bigger base of followers/supporters. Once again, though, since the 2010 midterm election was considered the first Twitter election, Russo's account only made use of two hashtags in the entire 48 tweets. There was no evidence of any other mention of a hashtag designed such as #NY49 or #RussoforSenate. In order for Twitter to be more powerful and to fully engage others, the use of hashtags must be used as depicted below in a screenshot from the Barack Obama Twitter account.



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Overall, as shown by the case study comparing the Valesky and Russo campaigns dealing with social media, it can be determined that in 2010, the strategies to employ social media effectively had not been grasped. Therefore, the exact level of political communication that increased (Smith 181) cannot be determined. In the final analysis, both campaigns used social media in a primitive way to inform constituents about their campaigns and positions. Russo used Twitter and Valesky used Facebook more effectively. Offline traditional forms of civic engagement could have increased as a result of interaction through likes, comments, tweets, and mentions. But, a further in-depth analysis would need to occur to see whether or not those organizing on the Internet would be effective on the ground (Williams and Gulati, "Facebook Grows Up" 18). If the idea that "all media were once new media" (Smith 167) holds true, than the same argument can be made about the future of social media. It will take progress to capture the capabilities of the use in social media, but the future could result in offline engagement.

¹⁶ Reproduced from the Barack Obama Twitter account (See Works Cited).

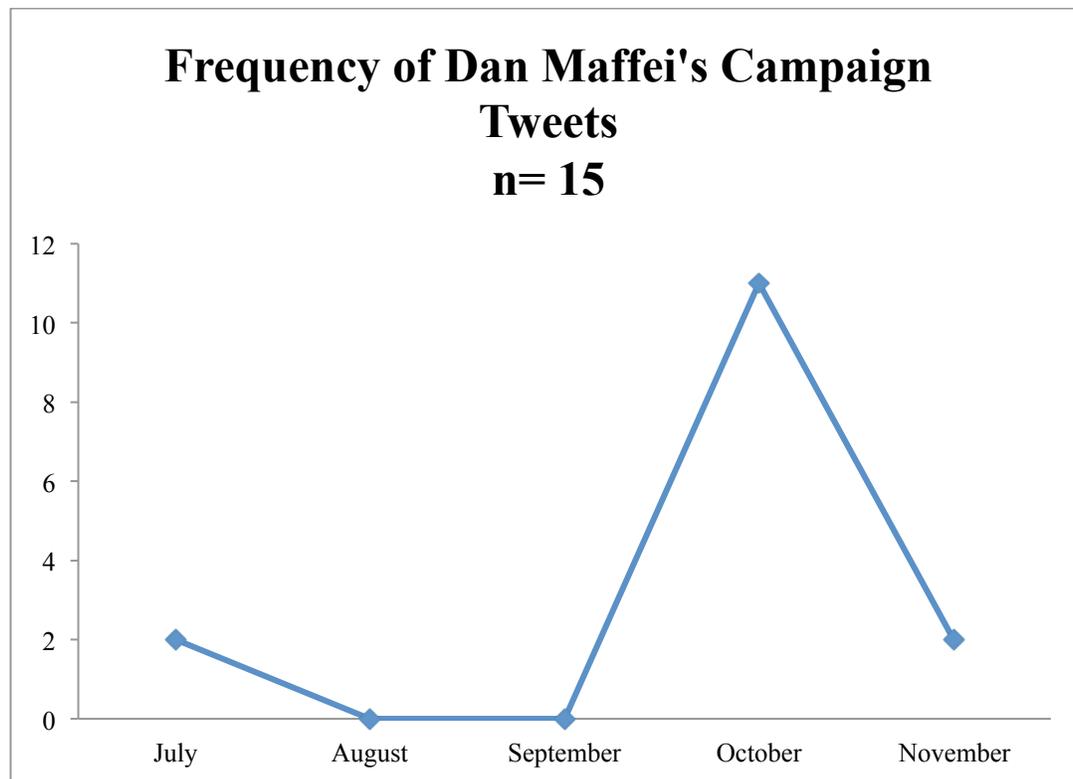
Chapter Nine

#casestudy2

The second case study that I conducted and analyzed social media for the 2010 midterm elections dealt with the Congressional Race for the 25th District in New York State. It was considered one of the most heated races in New York State during 2010. Similar to the Valesky and Russo case study, the campaigns of Ann Marie Buerkle and Dan Maffei provide for an analysis into how campaigns used social media. The difference between a state and federal election is presented through Buerkle's use of social media. Additionally, through this case study, there is continued confirmation of the Pew Research Center's report that Republicans had gained significant ground since the 2008 election (Smith, "The internet").

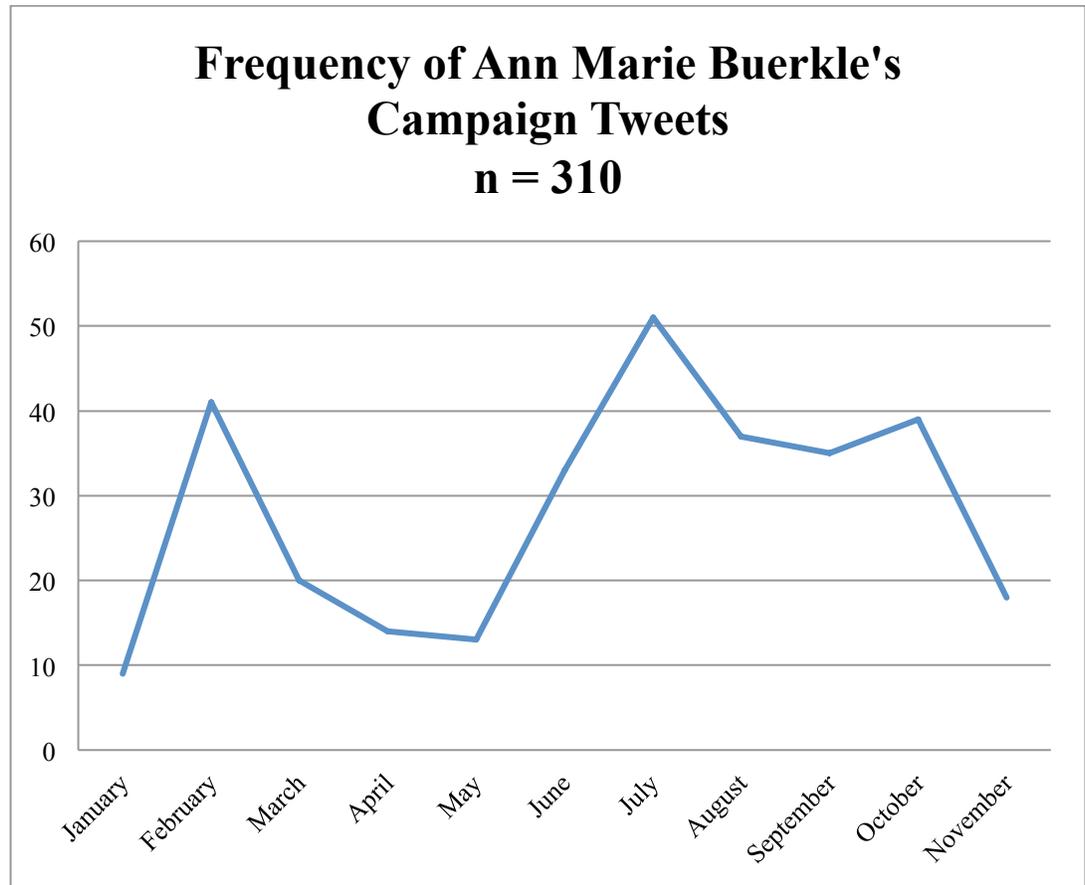
Former Representative Dan Maffei, a Democrat, is a native of Syracuse, New York. He earned his Bachelor's from Brown University, his Master's from Columbia University, and his Master's in Public Policy from Harvard University. He had a prior unsuccessful election bid for the United States House of Representatives in 2006. He served in the 111th Congress (January 3, 2009-January 3, 2011) ("Biographical Information"). Current Representative Ann Marie Buerkle is also a native of Central New York. Born in Auburn, Buerkle won the 2010 midterm election. Her education has consisted of a nursing degree from St. Joseph's Hospital of Nursing, a Bachelor of Science degree from Le Moyne College, and a Juris Doctorate degree from Syracuse University College of Law ("Biography").

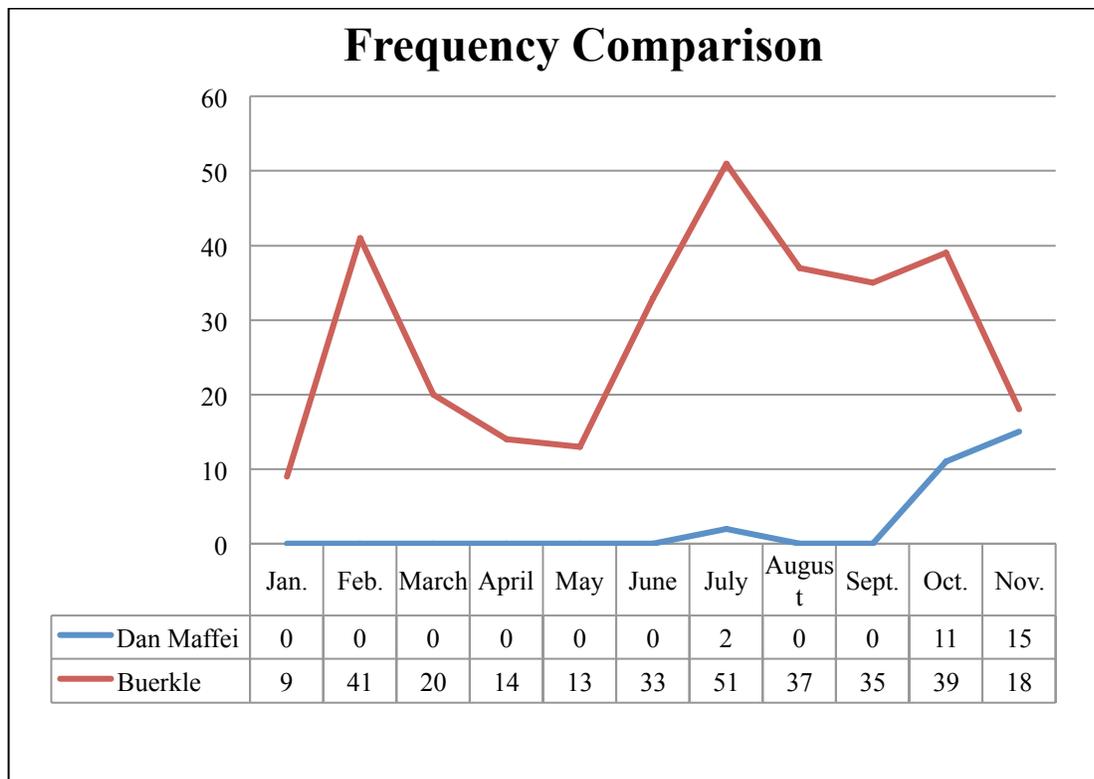
With Dan Maffei's Twitter account, there was no real activity until October 2010. There was an upward spike from zero tweets present in both August and September to 12 during the month of October. During the month of November, the only tweets present were the ones that dealt with the hopeful continued support during the delayed results.



In comparison to that of the Ann Marie Buerkle account, there is a clear difference in social media strategies. It's important to note that different strategies may have different impact on citizen involvement with offline activities. The tracking period for the tweets sent by the Ann Marie Beurkle Twitter account was from January 2010 until the tweet marking the end of the election season. It was longer due to the fact that the Twitter account was created more in advance of

than was Maffei's. In comparison to the Twitter account of Dan Maffei, Buerkle's Twitter strategy produced more frequent and more consistent posts.

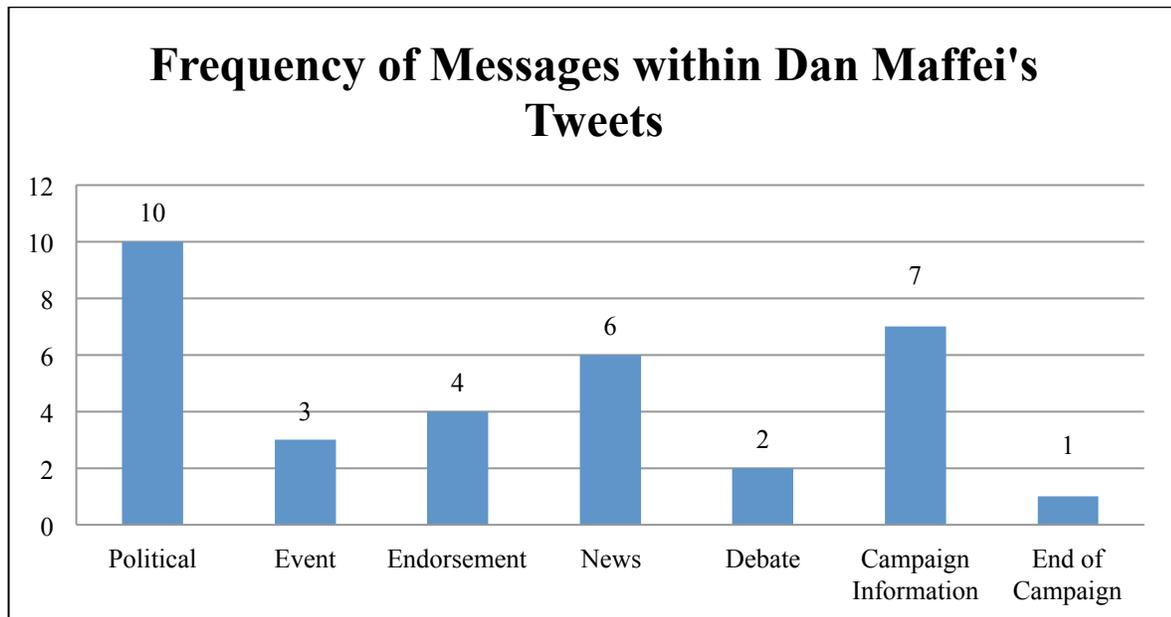




With the side-by-side comparison, it is clear that the strategy for the Maffei Twitter account was undefined. One possible way for the Maffei account to have increased the number of tweets would have been to do cross-promotion through Facebook. It's seen as a viable strategy especially if the campaign lacks expertise in the area of social media (Agranoff and Tabin 77).

As with the first case study dealing with Senator David Valesky and Andrew Russo, the tweets from the Buerkle and Maffei Twitter accounts were categorized and coded to analyze the messages that were being sent. Primarily, the tweets contained political themes and campaign information. As with the codebook with the tweets for the first case study, a tweet was classified as political if it contained any reference to a piece of legislation, opposing party platform. It's clear, through the graph depicted below, that there was usually more

than one message per tweet. If there is generally more than one message within 140 characters, it may cause confusion, and thus have less impact on the citizen reading the tweet. .

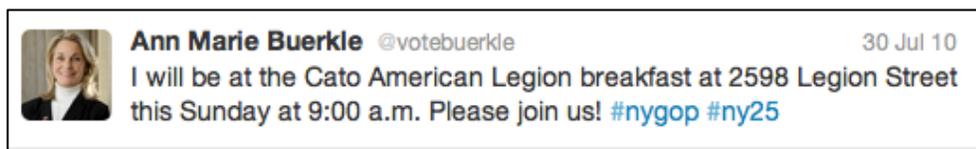


Additionally, through the frequency of tweets, it's shown that there was a general lack of tweets broadcasting events. While there were tweets containing campaign information, they were more likely to have been related to his platform or in a combination message with a news article. Events spread through social media allow users to participate in offline, traditional civic activities. Because Maffei's tweets did not generally focus on events or opportunities to participate, his Twitter use was not particularly effective as a mobilizing social media strategy.

But Buerkle's tweets were also a mixture, and might have been confusing for followers. Repetitive messages were not uncommon, and often, there were

irrelevant tweets pertaining to Syracuse sports handles.¹⁷ A mixture of messages within tweets (Agranoff and Tabin 78) or irrelevant tweets have the potential of confusing followers, not providing usable information, and thus not encouraging offline participation.

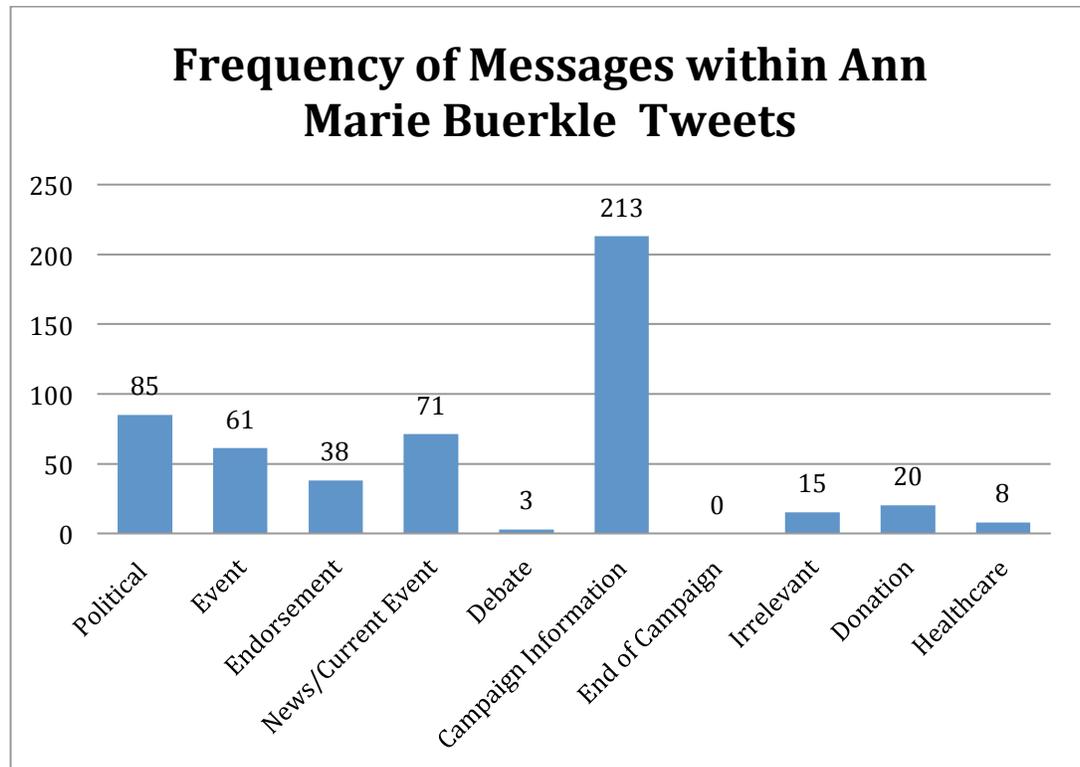
For the Buerkle Twitter account, there was a total of 310 tweets, but the number of individual messages contained in those tweets (as illustrated in the graph below) was 514. This makes it clear that many tweets contained multiple messages. Campaign information was the most common type of tweet for the Buerkle account. There was a substantial number of tweets pertaining to events. For example, during the summer months, there were various tweets containing information related to town halls and forums, but also for local community events that she would be attending.



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¹⁷ A handle is the name for a username on Twitter.

¹⁸ Reproduced from the Ann Marie Buerkle Twitter Account (See Works Cited).



Maffei did not use hashtags¹⁹, mentions of other handles, or retweets. Conversely, the Buerkle Twitter account did capitalize on those opportunities, creating an additional communication method with followers and potential voters.

The use of hashtags can spark further discussion in citizens' personal accounts as well as create a way to monitor specifics surrounding the election and/or an issue. Hashtags have been employed by the reelection campaign of President Barack Obama specifically in Twitter town halls (Harfoush 144). The percentage of the tweets sent from the Buerkle account that contained hashtags was 41%. Almost half of the tweets sent contained at least one hashtag with

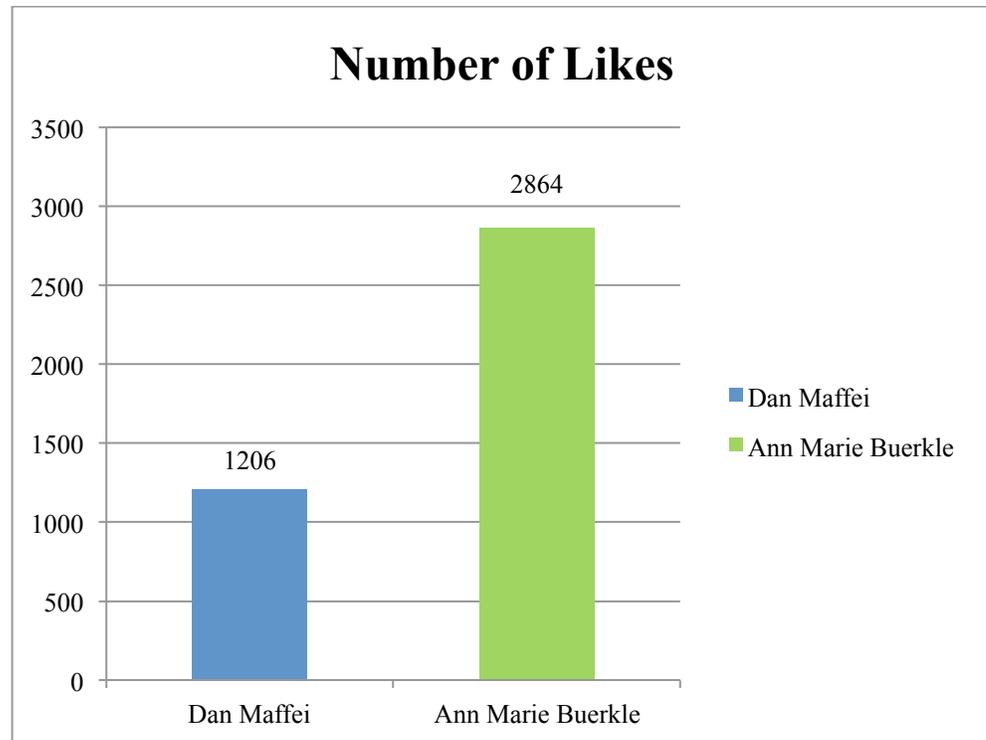
¹⁹ A hashtag is the term used to describe a word preceded by “#.” It represents a trend or a common phrase. It allows users of Twitter to follow a topic closely.

following regional groups, Syracuse University Athletic programs, and local news channels.

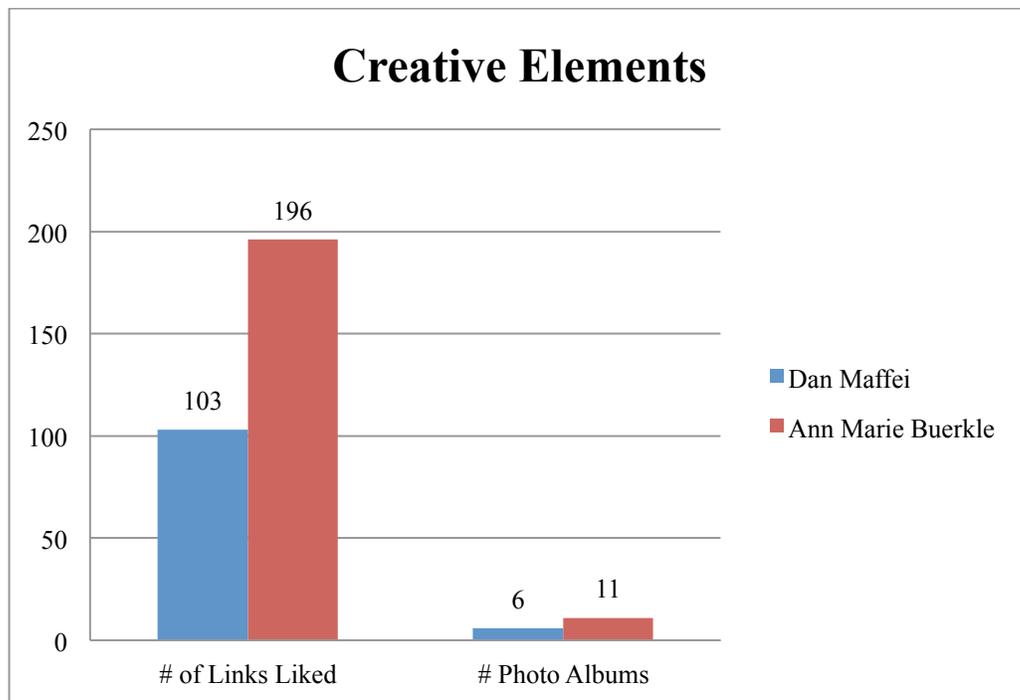
Finally, Buerkle Twitter account's interaction with other users far exceeds that of Maffei's Twitter account as already stated, but also exceeds any interaction with users from the first case study. For the Buerkle account, the account retweeted other users 16% of the time. The account mentioned other handles 28% of the time. While still a small percentage, this demonstrates the potential of interaction with citizens.

The other social networking website that was used by both Buerkle and Maffei during the 2010 midterm election was Facebook. Facebook gives the advantage of allowing more information to be given out. While there are constraints to a status, the limitation of 140 characters that Twitter has per tweet is removed. Campaigns have almost unlimited options of adding additional features to the pages (Harfoush 145).

Analyzing the number of likes per page reflects what has been stated already, that the Maffei campaign did not seem to have a formal social media strategy. On the campaign website, there was no promotion of the Facebook page (similar to the lack of promotion with the Twitter page). Therefore, finding the page for a citizen was rather difficult.



For the Maffei Twitter account, there was rare interaction with citizens through comments. Posts made by the campaign were often commented upon by users, but ignored (not responded to) by the campaign. Neither campaign used the full array of Facebook features. For example, there were no videos available for users, and few campaign photos.



Overall, while the Buerkle account may have had more of a strategy for dealing with Twitter, there was an apparent disconnect in strategies for dealing with Facebook for both campaign. Given that, it is not possible to estimate the civic engagement impact of the campaigns, but we can infer that without a strategic plan for targeting and interacting with citizens, there can be no effect on offline activities.

Chapter Ten

#Interviews

As part of my empirical research, I interviewed fourteen different undergraduates²⁰ at Syracuse University to collect their thoughts on how social media is effecting civic engagement.

The questions were brief, yet, the analysis into what each student stated allows for analysis in comparison to the other research presented in this paper.

The questions are listed below.

1. What social networking websites do you currently use?
2. How often do you go on these sites?
3. How often do you use social networking to stay connected with friends or family?
4. Have you ever "liked" a candidate or politician on Facebook?
5. Do you follow any candidates on Twitter?
6. What is your definition of civic engagement in the traditional sense?
7. How do you view civic engagement changing as a result of social media?
8. How do you think social media affected Obama's campaign?
9. Do you feel citizens are becoming more engaged in the understanding of issues?

Student A:

Student A is a senior studying public relations and policy studies. His own social media includes Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, PATH,²¹ Foursquare, and Tumblr.²² The frequency that he visits each website varies, but on each day,

²⁰ Cited in Works Cited under Student Interviews.

²¹ PATH is a social media platform that allows users to keep an electronic journal (PATH).

²² Tumblr is a social media platform that allows users to blog as well as interact with others over common interests (Tumblr).

he visits at least Facebook and Twitter. Reviewing his social media habits during the interview, for Facebook, he has liked six different candidates, and as for Twitter, he follows a lot.

His personal definition of civic engagement deals with actively being aware of issues affecting one's own community. One should take action on issues that one finds the most pressing. It means being aware of state and federal issues as well. As for actions, one can do a multitude of different activities including going to rallies, discussing the issues, speaking to politicians, writing letters, interning with politicians, and voting.

He sees social media as allowing politicians an easier way of reaching out to constituents. It also allows for access to those constituents who would not normally be informed or involved. However, he notes that interacting with politicians or candidates via social media through a retweet or a like does not mean that you are engaged or even educated enough on the issues. It's only slightly improving the education of the American public and only offering a slight chance of civic engagement.

For the Obama campaign, he believes that it was very innovative. Instead of the 2010 midterm election, he argued that 2008 was actually the Twitter election. The Obama campaign was able to reach out to the youth of America to influence them to vote, and be educated. Yet, while he believes that the campaign was able to capitalize on the social media movement, the creation of my.barackobama.com was stupid. He believes that the campaign would have been successful enough without the use of that website.

For future impact including the 2012 campaign, he argued that the Obama campaign would still lead the current strategy of employing social media. The only negative would be any further social network platforms including MyBO that would cause a lack of interaction. Social media has made it easier for people to be educated and involved, but it still does not do enough, in Student A's opinion (Student A).

Student B

Student B is a current senior studying public relations. Limited in social media use, she only uses Facebook and LinkedIn. Accessing Facebook only a few times a day, her only purpose of using Facebook is to interact with family members and friends. She has only liked the Barack Obama Facebook page.

Her definition of civic engagement is the idea that citizens should be actively engaged in a dialogue. Instead of talking to politicians, citizens should be engaging in dialogues with each other. Being involved in the community is also essential for ensuring that people are becoming educated and spreading the word on issues.

As for social media, she believes that it's only educating people to a certain extent. If people do not already watch the news or stay informed, social media will not help. The only instance of social media playing a difference in terms of campaigns, she believes, is that it is forcing politicians to becoming more honest. Every scandal is monitored instantly.

In 2008, Obama's campaign was really interactive, and that they understood people needed to feel as if they were individually being targeted. She

doesn't believe that there will be the same effect in the 2012 general election. And, as for any change to civic engagement, as a result of social media, she believes that if you are not already being exposed to issues or being active by attending rallies or forums, then social media cannot change that. It's similar to that of being aware of elections and election events. If the person is already not being engaged enough to know about an event with a candidate or a candidate's platform, then social media cannot change that (Student B).

Student C

Student C is a freshman majoring in political science. The social media platforms that she uses include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, BlogSpot, Blogger, and Google Plus. She believes that she is constantly using the majority of the websites even if only a check once a day. Her blogs are used less frequently, but she checks them daily for analytics. She's liked multiple candidates on Facebook, naming specifically Jon Huntsman, Joe Lieberman, and Hillary Clinton. Remarking on the 2008 Obama campaign, she believes that Facebook was really taken by storm in terms of all social media platforms. Additionally, she commented that the campaign set the precedent for all other future campaigns.

Her belief about civic engagement is that each person should put the public before himself or herself. It also means being involved in the community, both domestically and internationally. Social media has given rise to a change in civic engagement for two reasons. First, it allows citizens to know more information because of accessibility. Second, it allows citizens to be more informed on events happening in the community (Student C).

Student D

Student D is a senior studying broadcast journalism and sport management. Her social media use includes Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Flickr, and Instagram. She uses each of the platforms almost every day. She remarked that having a smartphone such as the iPhone has allowed her to use more platforms regularly. The 2008 election was the first election that she could vote in which caused her to be active on Obama's Facebook page. She remarked that it made her feel like she had a personal connection with the candidate, and that even not paying deliberate attention each day, she felt that the campaign was always present.

Her definition of civic engagement immediately had her citing the Constitution. Being involved, becoming educated on issues, and voting are all ways citizens must participate in the democracy. Social media has changed civic engagement because the youth of America are more targeted. She believes that the youth generation who are turning out to the polls now are not just voting for a random candidate. She believes that social media has definitely changed this because pages of candidates and Twitter accounts such as the White House are reaching more users. Social media has also given the chance for politicians and candidates to become more relatable, and thus she believes that citizens will actually want to engage with them both online and offline (Student D).

Student E

Student E is a current senior majoring in history and political science. She only uses Twitter and Facebook, and says that she visits the websites multiple

times a day. Having liked the Obama campaign, she believes that social media was a huge cornerstone for his campaign and a major reason why he was able to win the nomination. She applauded his presence on Facebook.

Her definition of civic engagement is how an individual's participation best contributes to her community. That contribution happens through public service, volunteering, and the electoral process. With social media, she believes that individuals are becoming more informed of issues affecting their community. Yet, she remarked that while being informed is positive, mobilizing individuals would be even more difficult because social media may produce a loss of personal connections. She said that through traditional forms of communication such as telephone or in-person contact is better for mobilization. Social media will ultimately affect our civics by disconnecting ourselves from each other.

Her beliefs of disconnect and lack of mobilization is evident in her response to the engagement question as a result of social media. She believes that while citizens particularly the younger generation are learning more issues and reading the newspaper, there is still a problem of education. She cited instantly that the New York Times has just about the same number of followers on Twitter as the Lord Voldemort account. Overall, she believes that there will be a lack of mobilization if social media is heavily relied on in future campaigns (Student E).

Student F

Student F is a junior majoring in magazine journalism. She's active on a variety of social media websites including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Tumblr, Pinterest, Blogger, Wordpress, and Google+. For her

personal use, she uses the platforms multiple times a day. Additionally, she noted that through a virtual internship, she uses the platforms multiple times a day as well as scheduling tweets and posts ahead of time. In terms of liking candidates, she has only liked Obama on Facebook, but follows multiple candidates on Twitter. She believed that Obama was able to create awareness through social media, but also able to brand himself and the campaign through the platforms. Social media helped create the awareness to help him win the campaign, she said.

In the traditional meaning, she defined civic engagement as a personal identity issue to understand and address issues of public concern in your community. It means volunteering at a local soup kitchen or participating in the neighborhood watch program. With the increased presence of social media, she believes that ideas and problems are becoming more present in the minds of individuals, but not actions. Liking a page of a candidate or a cause does not mean that citizens will go out and do something. Awareness is fine, but action needs to be taken as well (Student F).

Student G

Student G is a senior majoring in magazine journalism. She uses Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. She checks Facebook and Twitter every hour, but the other platforms, she only uses several days a week. As for liking or following candidates or politicians, she has never done either.

She defines civic engagement as a way of engaging individually with the community in a positive way that is also beneficial to all. With social media, people are able to interact with candidates and receive more information. It's a

larger outlet of information than traditional media forms such as newspaper.

Overall, she believe that social media is impacting civic engagement only because citizens are becoming more informed on issues (Student G).

Student H

Student H is a senior history major. She uses Facebook and Pinterest, and she checks both of them around ten times a day. She's liked several candidates and politicians via Facebook. In terms of the Obama campaign in 2008, she felt that the Obama campaign was able to be personable and accessible, specifically targeting the youth. New people were able to become aware of his platform in a different capacity, and most likely, the youth would not have spent time reading issues via his website.

Student H defines civic engagement as somehow being involved in the community to help address issues on a public level. However, before being involved in actions to help the community, the citizen must be informed and able to think critically about possible solutions. With the introduction of social media, it's allowed all citizens to become more educated on issues pertaining to their community, but also on a state, federal, and international level. Viral links and videos are not just for funny videos via YouTube anymore. She went on to say that people no longer need to be physically present in order to being civically involved now. Actions can take place over the Internet. Her only fear is that due to constraints such as the 140 characters for Twitter is that people are only focusing on the blurb and not the entire story dealing with an issue (Student H).

Student I

Student I is a senior majoring in television, radio, and film, and history. Currently, she uses Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. She mentioned that she still has a MySpace account as well as the fact that she uses Stumble Upon and Google + occasionally. As for the primary social media platforms, she says uses Facebook many times a day to the point where she has considered deactivating due to such a time waster. LinkedIn, Twitter, and Pinterest are sometimes used once a day, but usually two to three times a week. When mentioning the candidates and politicians that she has liked on Facebook, she was quick to rattle off Obama and the Clintons. And, before continuing her interview, she was quick to say that she considered herself below average for her generation on the platforms.

She defined civic engagement as a constant changing notion. Initially, she cited that citizens should be inclined to share their opinion on a wide variety of issues, but still being able to interpret others' opinions in a marketplace of ideas. In terms of social media, she believed that in the beginning, it did hold the potential for essentially changing civic engagement. Her hope in the beginning was that by giving people the chance to learn about different topics in a new way would eventually make them more inclined to read newspapers, etc. and then participate. Now, though, she feels that if something is trending on Twitter, then it is worth retweeting even without the full understanding of the issues. She cited the killing of Gaddafi as an example of that.

In analyzing the Obama campaign of 2008, it was different than the current election year. In 2008, she had Facebook for just about a year, and that along with her peers, she had no full understanding of how social media would impact their life. They were able to use the emerging social media in a way to give a new way to communicate with the campaign. However, she believes that the current election year in terms of the Obama campaign will not be as strong. It's starting to dwindle away, and people are often being naïve with the social media. People, especially the youth of America are now more concerned with the latest trends once again, and not the issues, she said. People are naïve enough also to believe that Obama is actually tweeting when a tweet is signed BO. It's not the phenomenon that many anticipated staying since the emergence in 2008 (Student I).

Student J

Student J is a junior majoring in television, radio, and film. Her social media accounts include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Pinterest. She uses all of them multiple times a day. In terms of campaigns or politicians that she has liked or followed, she cited Obama, Tim Kaine, and Kirsten Gillibrand. In terms of Obama's campaign, she stated that because the messages were so clear on all the platforms that it was easy to follow, understand, support, and share.

She defined civic engagement as a how a citizen goes about learning about government, elections, and candidates while participating in their movements. It's also about spreading awareness, canvassing, and becoming part of a grassroots movement. Social media has helped with the awareness and canvassing aspects

because it's now a lot easier to share opinions and offer support in ways that had not existed before. She cited that since awareness and canvassing is two of the largest ways to be civically involved that in the future, social media will continue to play an important role (Student J).

Student K

Student K is a current sophomore majoring in information technology and advertising. She uses Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Stumble Upon, and Get Glue.²³ She uses Facebook and Twitter multiple times a day, but the others not as often. She especially cited that Pinterest was the least used since it's emerged as the new 2012 social media platform. She has never liked a candidate on Facebook and does not follow any politicians or candidates via Twitter.

Her definition of civic engagement was that an individual should be moderately involved in politics by understanding what is going on in the country. She also believed that a citizen should be voting in every election. With social media, she cited that individuals are often able to learn more about issues and candidates, but it does not add anything really substantive. Her example was with Obama's 2008 campaign and that while voters spent a lot of time reviewing issues, they still relied on traditional methods to learn about the issues. However, in the future, she hopes that will change, and social media will play a larger role (Student K).

²³ Get Glue is a social media platform that allows users to check into music they are listening to or television and films they are viewing. The platform allows users to earn stickers electronically and in a physical form (Get Glue).

Discussion of Interviews

As shown through the fourteen interviews, undergraduate students representing a small sample of the youth of America (Generation Z), have differing opinions of civic engagement and how social media can affect the future impact of civic engagement. It's important to note that these students were not a good sample of the United States population, specifically the youth generation. All of them used social media to some extent- some more than others. Additionally, these students that were interviewed also represent a potential bias in the small sample due to being more highly educated and possibly from higher socio-economic statuses.

One of the few areas of agreement among the students is that the 2008 Obama campaign was able to capitalize on and use social media to enhance the campaign for a politician who was a relative unknown in the beginning. The creation of the brand, the slogans, and the stance on certain issues was consistent through all platforms as well as MyBO. All of the interviewees stated something to that effect, and they all believed the Obama campaign understood that the youth generation needed to be targeted. It was reflected through the change in the voting record for the youth demographic. Yet, as Governor Howard Dean and numerous others have cited, that even though there was an increase in the voting turnout record for the youth demographic, it was a one-time instance ("The Candidate"). Thus, even though the interviewees cited the explicit branding of the Obama campaign, the future remains in question. The 2008 election and this year's election could have been a one-time instance.

Chapter Eleven

#Election2012 #Conclusion

The 2012 election is going to be a heated contest. It's already been a heated contest in the GOP primary season. Through the long primary season, there have been numerous efforts to use social media to create images of the candidates, as well as for news coverage, information related to issues, and events. For example, before withdrawing from the race, Governor Tim Plawenty tried to implement a combination of foursquare and Facebook. Users were able to earn badges for participating both offline and online (Moire, Wasserman). With the recent suspension of his campaign, Rick Santorum has left the nomination essentially to Mitt Romney. Thus, what Americans have presumed for many months despite the victories in primaries and caucuses is that the general election will be between President Barack Obama and the former Massachusetts governor. And, just as it was a viable strategy by the Obama campaign in 2008, social media has already been upgraded and re-launched to prepare for the November election.

Since the 2008 election, the social media strategy for Obama as well as the Democrats (the Democratic National Committee) has consistently added additional platforms as well as improved the prior methods used. In April 2011, Obama became the first sitting head of state to visit the headquarters of Facebook. There, he was able to embrace the piece of technology that has moved campaigns into a new era, an era that had been preceded by the television (Wohlsen). When it came to announce his re-election bid, the Obama team released a video. It was a video that did not include Obama, himself, but rather it came in an e-mail

“signed” by him as well as giving information about the re-launch of the campaign website (“Barack Obama announces”). Finally, for additional social media platforms, in the fall of 2011, Obama’s team re-vamped his LinkedIn profile including an on-site visit to the headquarters by Obama (“Obama’s Next Social”). As for photo sharing, Instagram has been integrated into the campaign. Instagram is targeted for the younger generation, and his campaign is clearly trying to garner that support once again (Slack). Other new platforms include foursquare (checking into the Oval Office) and Pinterest. The launch and improved of social media platforms has continued to give the Democrats, specifically the Obama campaign, the advantage. It’s an ever-expanding field that Obama’s team continues to dominate.

During the 2008 election, as noted in the chapter on Obama’s social media strategy, there were only minor campaign positions dealing with particular matters of the social media platforms. With the recent additions to platforms as well as what will shape up to be a long general elections season following the conventions in August, it is no surprise that the Obama campaign is investing in more talented staff. Mike Allen reported in *Playbook*, “But Obama for America made no formal effort on the infant Twitter, and Facebook was an afterthought. This time, a huge staff will specialize in various slices of social media” (“Will President Obama”). Representing the change that occurred within four years is ever-present, and thus, it will prove to be a discussed topic up until November 2012 and after. It’s the representative of the understanding that since the 2008 election, campaigns have never been the same (Wolford).

Throughout this entire paper, I have tried to answer several research questions in hopes of continuing the discussion on social media, campaigns, and how civic engagement could be transformed

What effect will social media have on civic engagement as a result of its increased use during political campaigns?

Many studies have been conducted since 2008 to measure the effect of how social media played a role in campaigns in 2008. These studies did not focus on civic engagement, but rather the overall effect. The only significant portion of prior studies that had any relevancy to the belief of social media dealt with gathering information. Yet, many of these studies conducted have proved popular belief wrong. One study found that users of all demographics including the youth of America still relied on traditional media forms (Kushin and Yamaoto 612-613). While that may hold true since it has only been four years since the 2008 election, the analysis of how the Internet influenced offline engagement is a strong comparison and a possible benchmark. When the Internet emerged as a campaign tool, many strategists and political scientists were arguing that the web would be a new tool to supplement the democratic process (Hendricks and Kaid 22). Yet, until 2001, there was no conclusive study that could confirm that those who had found the Internet helpful in understanding issues and wanting to become involved were actually doing so (Hendricks and Kaid 22). Clearly, if the Internet's effect on civic engagement took roughly five years, it could be just as long before the entire effect of social media is understood. Furthermore, because

social media is a constant changing medium,²⁴ any conclusions are constantly being subjected to new features and new ways of communicating.

As for the issue related to citizens gathering more information, it is clear that the platforms of social media have allowed for active participation to gain political knowledge (Kushin 613). Through the analysis of both case studies as well as the personal interviews conducted represented the sharing of information more freely. It additionally allowed users of social media who would not normally read the traditional forms of media. And, while there were some interviewees and scholars who suggested that those retweeting news stories or sharing viral videos such as the KONY video are not generally learning the knowledge related to the issues, it is a start to correct the numerous problems that have existed for years.

Will there be an increase in the number of voters within Generation Y due to the rise of the use of social media as a campaign strategy?

Just as there can be no definite conclusion drawn about how social media is affecting civic engagement, there can be no firm conclusions about the impact of social media on voter turnout. However, as demonstrated through the multiple chapters on social media including the Barack Obama chapter, it is clear that during the 2008 election, the youth generation using the social media platforms did turn out to cast their votes (Hendricks and Kaid 69). While many have argued and will continue to argue that the 2008 election was not changing the prior precedents, it does represent the possibility of the youth generation turning out to vote. The election this fall will allow for future analysis into whether or not social media is playing a role in the younger generation voting record.

²⁴ At the time of writing, Instagram had been bought for \$1 billion dollars the day prior.

Additionally, in the discussion of whether or not the youth demographic and other demographics in the United States will see a rise in voting, it is important to note that the 2008 election was the only national election that has allowed for the study of social media employed as a campaign strategy (Hendricks and Kaid 75). There were no precedents and there are no comparisons possible. Likewise, even with the two case studies presented on elections that occurred in the Syracuse, New York region, there were no clear measures of communication with citizens on these platforms. While some candidates used the platforms more efficiently than others, it confirms the idea that even if the voting record changed for specific demographics using Facebook or Twitter, it could have been a one-time occurrence, and it could have been related to factors other than social media. Since social media is so new, there can be nothing conclusive drawn. Furthermore, it should be noted that during the 2010 midterm election, the Pew Research Center published a report citing that the youth population that turned out to vote in 2008 dramatically decreased (Smith, "The internet"). Thus, it represents the idea that perhaps, social media could be a viable communication tool, but still does not hold the power to consistently mobilize offline activity.

To further the discussion on the question: *And, to what extent will the rise of social media have an effect on other forms of civic engagement?*, It's apparent through the interviews as well as the information dealing specifically with each of the platforms that the effect could produce new, online forms of civic engagement. As one study conducted to try to measure the effects of offline

engagement as a result of Facebook, the report was ended with the following quote:

As membership in traditional civic associations declines, we seen in these networks a new frontier for cultivating social capital, which candidates, elected officials and civic leaders can tap when wanting to mobilize citizens for political action. (Williams 19)

While the study was found to be inconclusive, the idea of a new call to action or mobilization through social media has emerged as a debated topic. New online civic engagement activities would clearly change the traditional definitions of civic engagement that were presented in this paper.

In the future, there will be numerous studies on how social media is transforming the campaign process. One possible area of study that was not analyzed in this paper includes how social media could potentially indicate the winner of a contest. The study of Facebook fans (likes), Twitter followers, analytics, and growth rates all could play a potential influence on predicting a winner before the day of a primary or general election (Zeng 1). Additionally, in the future, additional studies should conducted, whether through the Pew Research Center or other research centers. These future additional studies could be comparing social media use to public opinion approval polls, and a more substantive research study on how civic engagement or political engagement can be influenced.

Overall, in the next several months and over the next few years, politicians, and more specifically their campaigns, must grasp the understanding

that social media is not a one-way conversation. There should be more engagement with the citizens to create the two-way conversation. If that idea is grasped there is a chance that mobilization of citizens to become more involved could happen. Good political communication within the social system as well as the democratic system requires full participation (Kushin and Yamamoto 623-624) by all actors within the system. For now, though, there appear to be only slight effects occurring on offline engagement, and more online engagement by those who would have already been participating.

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Appendixes

Twitter Codebook

Column	Field Name	Definition	Code
A	Date	The Day the Tweet was Posted	Date Format
B	# of Characters	Number of Characters Used to Express Tweet	Numerical Value from 1-140
C	Message	What was the message that was trying to be sent?	1 - Political 2- Event 3- Endorsement 4- News/Current Event 5- Debate 6- Campaign Information 7- End of Campaign 8- Irrelevant 9- Donation 10- Healthcare
D	Issue	What issue(s) were being addressed?	1- Republican Endorsement 2- Economy 3- Global Warming 4- Tax 5- Racing 6- Corruption 7- Constitution

			Related Issues 8- War 0- N/A
E	Opponent Directed	Was the opponent mentioned?	1- Yes 2- No 3- Indirectly
F	URL	Was there an URL listed?	1- Yes 2- No
G	URL Article	If there was an URL, was it a link to an article?	1- Yes 2- No 0- N/A
H	URL Photo	If there was an URL, was it a link to a photograph?	1- Yes 2- No 0- N/A
I	Politicians	What other politicians were mentioned in the tweet?	1-Ann Marie Buerkle 2- Sarah Palin 3- President Obama 4- Governor Patterson 5- Other 0-N/A
J	Location	Specific City/Location Mentioned	1- Central New York 2- Western New

			York 3- Syracuse 4- Rochester 5- Albany 6- Rome 7-Oneida 0-N/A
K	Hashtags	Hashtag Listed	1- Yes 2- No
L	Hashtag Listed	Written Hashtag(s)	Text Format
M	Retweets	If either the tweet was a retweet	1- Yes 2- No
N	Mentions	If there was a mention of another Twitter account	1- Yes 2- No

#Capstone Summary

Social media is part of everyday conversation. There is no way of escaping from those tweeting to those “checking-in.” The world has been transformed in a matter of several years whereas the first form of online interaction consisted of a chat room. The field of social media is ever-evolving and thus, produces the issue of full understanding. Many scholars argue that it could be another generation before the medium is understood and used most effectively. That being said, though, there are numerous ways that different industries can take advantage of social media.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, the Barack Obama presidential campaign harnessed the emerging technology (new media) to create new connections with potential voters. Scholars have argued that due to the decrease in political participation as well as civic engagement over the past several decades could potentially be reversed due to reaching out to citizens in a new manner. The potential to change the democratic process as well as to encourage activities in a community have sparked the interest in many to pursue the analysis into this new spectrum.

This paper looked to further the discussion around three main research questions. First, this paper looked to advance the discussion on any impact that social media will have on civic engagement as a result of its increased use during political campaigns. Second, this paper looked to advance the discussion on whether or not social media could potentially increase the number of voters in

Generation Y and Z. Finally, this paper looked to further any notions on new forms of civic engagement that have resulted from social media. Social media is a new phenomenon that is constantly changing. Yet, even though a new platform could be released tomorrow, this discussion is relevant and will consistently play a role throughout the rest of the 2012 election and beyond.

In order to analyze the potential effects of social media on civic engagement, there were three main areas of research conducted. To begin, the basic history of the internet in campaigns as well as the overview of how the big three social media platforms had been introduced. The big three social media platforms, as they are most commonly referred to, are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Other social media platforms, such as MySpace, have seen a dramatic decrease over the past several years. Essentially, the foundation that was laid at the beginning of this paper allowed for subsequent analysis into the presidential campaign of Barack Obama during 2008. The Barack Obama presidential campaign clearly set the benchmark for social media in campaigns.

As part of the research that I conducted in order to analyze the potential effects, I conducted two case studies as well as fourteen personal interviews with current undergraduates on the Syracuse University campus. The two case studies dealt with two different 2010-midterm elections that occurred in Central New York. The first was the 2010 39th State Senate district race between Senator David Valesky and Andrew Russo. The second was the 2010 25th District Congressional race between Dan Maffei and Ann Marie Buerkle. Each of these candidates' Facebook pages and Twitter accounts were analyzed and coded to

study the strategies employed by the campaigns. And, while these case studies can also not provide a solid conclusion on whether citizens were more or less likely to vote or participate in traditional offline activities, it demonstrated the potential for future strategies that could create interaction.

For the interviews conducted, the fourteen undergraduate students at Syracuse University expressed their views of social media as well as what they understand to be civic engagement. While it was a small sample size for the entire Syracuse University undergraduate population as well as too small of a sample size to be representative of other college campuses, the interviews do provide for insight. The insight that was produced represented a broad range of thinking of social media use personally, to research current events and elections, as well as the broad interpretation of what civic engagement is. One of the few areas that most interviewees agreed upon was that the 2008 Obama campaign was able to capitalize on social media and allow Generation Y and Z to interact with the campaign.

Overall, the paper advanced the discussion of social media, the strategies to use the platforms in campaigns, and the overall effect or potential effects that social media could produce. Between the election of 2008 to the current primary season for the GOP field, there has been a large change in the number of platforms and the technology that has changed swiftly. It is no surprise, then, that many scholars support the idea that campaigns can never be the same again.

With respect to the research questions raised in this paper, each question drew upon material from the background research as well as the case studies and the interviews. In regards to citizens beginning to participate in traditional forms of civic engagement, the research presented in this thesis represent two different sides. The research presented, particularly the presidential campaign of Barack Obama, advanced the point that in the future social media will continue to encourage others to mobilize. The reverse argument is also true; the interviews conducted represent a discrepancy that could be true for Generation Z across the country.

This paper also attempted to further the question regarding the potential to see an increase in the percentage of those voting. There can be no distinct conclusions, but it can be determined that in 2008, there was a increase in the youth generation. The correlation between social media and casting a vote cannot be drawn yet, but the general election that will occur in November 2012 will help for future analysis. As for the question exploring future online civic activities, this paper was able to expand upon online forums that the Obama campaign has conducted as well as analyze the communication channels with the two locations. Overall, there is the potential for online engagement activities, yet, there still has to be offline activities including voting.

Since social media is such a relatively new concept, this project's significance relies more on the discussion of possibilities and potential for the future. Future studies in the interaction of social media and civic engagement need to occur. Having a consistent way of measuring offline traditional forms of

civic engagement as well as the new online forms must be developed in order to draw more significant conclusions. By having a more dependable way of measuring activities, there could be easier cross comparison drawn. Additionally, this paper raised the potential question of studying the Facebook fans and Twitter followers growth rates up to the day of a primary or a election. Through the analysis of the growth rates, it could eventually help predict a winner in the future, or help with forming a more definite conclusion on engagement. Essentially, many of the same questions that were raised in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 election still play a role in the current study due to the field always changing.