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ABSTRACT

THE SOCIAL MEDIA PRESIDENCY: THE NEW MEDIA AND UNILATERAL INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

by Harold N. Orndorff III

Two concurrent developments have been taking place in American politics over the past few decades: the development of social media and the growth of presidential power. It is the assertion of this work that the emergent social media is offering the presidency the ability to bypass the fourth estate. In short, the presidency is gaining autonomy in the 21st century not just from other governing institutions, but from the press itself. In order to document this change, this work proposes to examine the data from the current Obama administration to assess and examine how social media is changing executive governance and offering the presidency new press autonomy. Such an evolution can only serve to not only change the executive interaction with the press, but also with the populace at large.
THE SOCIAL MEDIA PRESIDENCY: NEW MEDIA AND UNILATERAL INFORMATION
DISSEMINATION

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To My Wife

Without whom none of these words would be written

To My Parents

Without whom I would have no words with which to write
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There have been two processes developing concurrently across the course of the last few decades. The first is the modern president’s consolidation of unilateral powers and the institutional understanding of the presidency. The second is the evolution of media from broadcast to point-to-point information flows. The possibility of a connection between these two processes is the underlying question and thesis of this dissertation. The goal here is to outline the potential connection and what such an interconnection means for the contemporary presidency and current theory on presidential power.

The presidency has been undergoing a transformative process. Presidents have been developing and strengthening unilateral powers to enhance their autonomy from coordinating branches. This has allowed the president to bypass traditional controls and balance of power restraints. Examples of emergent unilateral powers are signing statements\(^1\) and unilateral policy declarations.\(^2\) Collectively, the direct action theory of the president argues the thrust of presidential power resides in his ability to act unilaterally.\(^3\) Direct actions are counter to the previous prevailing theory in the literature: presidential persuasion as presidential power. One of the central claims of this work is that unilateral presidential powers are the defining characteristic of the office of the presidency and that it is necessary to extend the logic of unilateral powers or direct action to other theory puzzles concerning the executive office.

The puzzle begins with the apparent media transformation taking place in the last decade. Newspapers are systematically losing money and readers.\(^4\) Broadcast television is losing viewers, while cable, satellite, and broadband internet have become normal for most

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households. News aggregation websites, such as Matt Drudge’s Drudge Report, often break the stories of the day before traditional outlets. Candidates have Facebook pages and make YouTube speeches. The big three broadcasters, CBS, NBC and ABC, struggle to retain viewers.\textsuperscript{7} All of these changes are often put under the rubric, or attributed to, ‘new media.’

Given the important, symbiotic, relationship between president and press it seems worth asking of these changes – encompassing both media technology and press routines – are changing the dynamics of the press / president relationship? Further, if they are changing the dynamics what does this mean for the executive office or even the extent and nature of presidential power? Could the contemporary presidency, defined by its unilateral powers, be interacting in important ways with this emergent new media? How might new media be expected to alter the president’s relationship with the traditional press?

The primary thesis of this dissertation is that the Obama White House is employing new media as a logical extension of the unilateral powers thesis to bypass the institution of the press and thereby positively alter public discourse. If this is in fact the case then three things should be observable: (1) an increase in social media content emanating from the White House and (2) a restriction of traditional media content and access with the president and (3) a noticeable increase in news framed by the presidential content provider (with the obvious correlate a decrease in news framed by non-presidential or traditional news providers).

There is potential evidence for investigating further a link between the social media and the unilateral presidency. Evidence points to the possibility that the president might be using alternative media sources as a way to bypass traditional fourth estate controls on information dissemination. It is this link, if one does in fact exist, that will be investigated. In short, does


\textsuperscript{6} Matt Drudge’s report would be the first to break the 1996 news that Jack Kemp would be Republican Bob Dole’s running mate. In 1998 Drudge would solidify the website with another breaking news story – the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Since then the Drudge Report has broken a variety of stories first. During the presidential campaign 2004 the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth would first be reported on the Drudge Report and in 2008 linked photos of Barack Obama in Somali tribal dress would first be released on Drudge Report.

the emerging communication revolution have the potentiality to interact with a present defined by seeking and using unilateral powers?

Postulating that the presidency may be capitalizing on the press and new technological tools has a long history. Franklin Delano Roosevelt recognized and used the coming of a new era of professional journalism. FDR would also be the first to attempt to bypass the press via the radio. The possibility that the current technological evolution may bare similarities to the past has not gone unnoted. The potential for true presidential media autonomy has been labeled “Franklin Roosevelt 2.0” by The Washington Post and The Huffington Post. The potential link between presidential autonomy and new media has been considered, but mainly on a superficial level. Importantly, is there scholarly evidence to suggest such a process at a deeper level? Or is new media merely another overhyped new technology?

Two questions must be posed. One, is there an emergent contemporary fireside chat via social media? And two, even if there is, does this have any meaningful impact on the relationship between president and press? Does it have any bearing on presidential power? Farnsworth has noted in his work Spinner in Chief: “three-quarters of a century ago, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) would sit at his desk surrounded by a few dozen print reporters and regularly hold forth on the issues of the day. When he wanted to go over, under, or around the mass media, he did so through the famous ‘fireside chats’ on the then new medium of radio.”

Presidents appear to have a strong penchant for emerging technology. Is the contemporary president trying to go “over, under, or around the mass media” via social media? Does social media really change the way the president interacts with other actors, or is it but a minor evolutionary milestone? In short, is this actually a new process?

The earlier three part thesis might be condensed more simply: is the contemporary presidency using social media as a means to unilaterally disseminate information? As with any thesis there needs to be a level of evidence for a project to proceed and the first step here is to ask whether there is such evidence. Initially there appears to be at least prima facie evidence to push

forward with such a project. The emergent story of President Barack Obama is that surface evidence. Obama seems perplexing when it comes to media strategy and information control. The complexity is that Obama both pushes new media as a potential source for opening government; meanwhile these new venues appear to be pushing traditional outlets to the margins.

The perplexing, potential contradiction, is that the same technological abilities which were intended to allow “[the Obama administration to be] the most open and transparent in history,”\textsuperscript{10} appears also to allow the president to be one of the most elusive from the press.\textsuperscript{11} As has been noted by observers of the president: “day-to-day interaction with Obama is almost nonexistent, and he talks to the press corps far less often than Bill Clinton or even George W. Bush did. Clinton took questions nearly every weekday, on average. Obama barely does it once a week.”\textsuperscript{12} Given the Obama White House is not interacting with the traditional press, the question becomes what is the White House messaging strategy? Where is information being disseminated that has traditionally been disseminated via the press? The new White House messaging strategy appears to be using social media, opening up the possibility of sidelining the traditional press. And it seems to be a unique strategy of the 44\textsuperscript{th} president of the United States.

Such a process, one where the president increase contact via social media and decreases traditional press contact, leads to a simple two part prediction: a president who is closing the amount of mediated information while increasing the amount of unmediated information. The Obama administration is clearly forging an interesting policy puzzle where “openness” is being redefined. How does this fit in with the evolutionary trajectory of presidents and the media? One potential possibility, the one to be suggested here, is that the president is attempting to consolidate the power to disseminate information. This is a story of an administration laying institutional roots for new media use by the presidency.

\textsuperscript{11} “Why reporters are down on Obama,” \textit{Politico}, 28 April, 2010.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid
The story of President Obama’s electoral victory, and his emerging story of governance, is intertwined with the coming of age of social or new media. This relationship did not begin with Obama, but it marks a development which is not likely to reverse itself as the Obama administration begins to institutionalize the relationship. The presidency appears to be moving to the digital realm. This digital universe is populated by social media. If the president is moving into this sphere, then to understand the presidency and unilateral presidential power in the 21st century will require an understanding of the interaction of the presidency and the new social media. Further, to understand presidential communication it will be necessary to examine social media.

In 2008, two weeks fresh from his November victory, then President elect Obama released his first web speech. It would be posted on Change.gov and embedded via YouTube. When President Obama canceled a trip to Indonesia in order to remain in Washington to push for healthcare legislation, Press Secretary Gibbs ‘tweeted’ about it exclusively – much to the anger of many reporters. Obama’s Nuclear Security Summit was almost entirely a closed event. The only portion of the meeting open to the press, other than the news conference at the end, was an eight-minute opening statement after which the press was escorted out in totality.14

Insiders to the Obama administration are forcefully arguing social media matters. Rahaf Harfoush states in his recent work Yes We Did that social media was key to the electoral success of president Obama. His chronicle of the Obama campaign points to the power of emerging social media. He has a telling last chapter about “the new face of government.”15 It includes a number of ways “Obama demonstrated his willingness to engage the American people in a more interactive democratic process.”16 But it appears hasty to conclude that technology designed to promote “openness” or “transparency” will automatically do so applied to any situation. Predicting the actual system-level changes a new technology might bring about

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13 Tweet or tweeting is a verb used to describe posting a micro blog on the website Twitter. Twitter is part of what is considered to be the internet 2.0 a concept I explore later in this prospectus.
15 Rahaf Harfoush, Yes We Did: An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2009), 175.
16 Ibid, 176.
requires more careful investigation. If anything, the story thus far is one where “openness” via new media has resulted in further “closedness” with other, typically traditional, outlets.

Sixteen years ago another incoming Democratic president vowed to use emergent technologies to bypass the press and reach out and directly touch the people. President Clinton may have fantasized about such a possibility, but the resources to do so were clearly lacking. There appears to be strong evidence that the technological time has come for such a possibility. Andrew Rasiej argues “Barack Obama’s use of the Internet to communicate with the American public and the world will have a larger impact on the political media ecology than the declaration that the world was round had on the shipping industry in 1492.” Inherent in such statements, even if left unsaid, is the correlate that information and access via the press will be diminished.

Presidents wishing to bypass the media are not a new phenomenon. As noted earlier the bully pulpit has been an important element of the modern president, so has been adaptation to technological advancements such as the radio. However, the ability to go to the people has most often been one defined by press mediation. The fireside chat and the presidential television address did not offer a complete lack of filter. They were often contextualized by the press. In the age of the shrinking soundbite, it is not uncommon for presidents and presidential candidates to be heard only through the paraphrasing lens of the reporter. Social media may be altering this dynamic and allowing the president to circumvent the reporters’ lens.

The predictions presented are the extension of existing presidential paradigms. Cohen has already argued convincingly that the bully pulpit, in the face of media fragmentation, has gone local – turning Samuel Kernell’s theory of ‘going public’ upside down. Cohen restricts his arguments to local traditional media. Such an omission of new media seems puzzling in the 21st century. Media fragmentation is more than just the proliferation of traditional outlets; it has been about the revolutionary change in media distribution. Therefore Cohen rightly identifies that president’s “focus their public activities on building support in their party base, some

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17 “How will Obama Use the New Media?” Politico November 29, 2008.
18 Jeffrey E. Cohen, Going Local: Presidential Leadership in the Post-Broadcast Age (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
interest groups, and select localities”¹⁹ but somehow misses the means by which is probably most effective to carry out such a strategy: social media. Traditional local newspapers do not appear viable in the long term. Thus Cohen has the correct argument but it appears the bulk of his work is centered on a medium which is disappearing rather than on the emergent medium of social media, which could also be used to further the ends of going local. Or in this case it might be better identified as group targeting.

There appears to be a systematic drive in the current White House to use social media. There is no compelling reason to think the intentions behind this move are either random or pointless. Unless one assumes Gibbs tweeting exclusively and the increase in White House website output are meaningless, there is something which needs to be explained. It is an important puzzle. One potential explanation, as it has been outlined here, is that the president is using social media as a means of achieving autonomy of the press. Such a potentiality seems strong given the documented propensity for the president to consolidate unilateral powers within the office – the goal of the work presented here.

The recent technological revolution has given new leverage to the Waterman, Wright and Clair’s image-is-everything presidency. No longer must the president’s message primarily go through filters. It is now possible to postulate that the president will go around the White House Press corps and other filters. The new media is not just another channel in a high-choice environment.²⁰ It is, in fact, a new environment. As such it offers the presidency a unique ability to gain another unilateral power, in this instance not from the other governing institutions but rather from the fourth estate. Thus my thesis also rests on the proposition that the emergent new media environment is just that: a new environment.

Therefore, part of the project involved here is in explaining and describing the new media environment, because this budding environment is central to what specific forms predicted presidential strategy will take. If one misses the importance of the new media environment then one might postulate that local traditional news is more important than emergent new

¹⁹ Ibid, 3.
media sources. The new media environment thesis is thus very much a part of the current project. It is necessary to explain new media in order to predict its interaction with presidential communication.

The central questions are clearly: do social media enable the president to achieve autonomy from the traditional press and to frame political discourse? Can presidents seeking unilateral powers, in the new media environment, circumvent the traditional national media and unilaterally disseminate information? Is the two-pronged strategy of information dissemination visible? Is the White House restricting traditional access? Is the White House using increased social media content to replace what is being restricted from mediated sources?

If there indeed is a strategy shift in the White House in a move towards information control, the first step is to probe the data on White House and traditional media interactions. Is the White House bypassing the press and is that goal purposeful and linked to the drive for autonomy? It is also necessary to link this information with the emergent data on presidential new media output. Is there evidence of a linkage between this data? It is necessary to quantitatively examine the behavior of the White House. Does the data indicate a constriction of traditional press access? Can we measure new media interactions and are these increasing? What correlations can be found between these two data sets?

As I have stated at the outset my theory is the presidency, defined by unilateral powers, is using new media as a tool to bypass the press and disseminate unfiltered information. If my thesis is correct I expect to find a deliberate White House strategy which attempts to use emergent social media as a means of promoting presidential policies, while simultaneously to find a restriction in third party access to the president – especially from those in the national press. I call this set of interrelated concepts the *unilateral information dissemination thesis* and it is the primary question of this work.

The outline for the pages that follows will be structured according to the primary thesis. Chapter one will look deeply at the question of unilateral presidential power. What does this theoretical construct in the literature offer us and can it be a potential tool to be used to explain presidential behavior regarding information and the social media? Chapter two will
investigate the new media past and present. It will examine the question of whether or not we are living in a new media environment more closely and what the potential implications of such a new environment might be. Chapters three will present a model of new media and presidential interaction and attempt to test that model using data from the Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents. Can we actually measure a decrease in presidential contact with traditional outlets? Chapter four will examine the Obama presidency and its use of the new media qualitatively. Do we see support for the contention that Obama is using social media and restricting traditional media by examining new media output more closely? Specifically, what does the history of whitehouse.gov show about new media use by the Obama administration? Chapter five will outline the challenges such a strategy will face, if indeed the assertion is correct. Finally, chapter six will address what the future of new media and presidential power holds. Here it will be investigated what this theory means for the broader landscape of American politics.
CHAPTER TWO: THE PRESIDENT AND THE DRIVE FOR UNILATERAL POWERS

The current literature on the presidency has marked a shift from the Neustadtdian principle of persuasion. Briefly summarized Neustadt argued that presidential power was not found within the formal powers of the presidency, but rather stemmed from his ability to persuade other actors to follow the president’s lead.1 As Edwards has succinctly summed up Neustadt and the persuasion literature, “Perhaps the best known dictum regarding the American presidency is that ‘presidential power is the power to persuade.’”2 Neustadt’s persuasion thesis was a compelling argument, potentially the underpinning in a rise of power for the presidential office.

The persuasion thesis brought with it a focus on the personal, and personality of the, president.3 Moe and Howell note that the personal presidency “dominated the field for decades, but its influence is on the decline.”4 With a focus on the institutional presidency the persuasion thesis would begin a decline in popularity. The institutional presidency according to Heclo is not about the personal president, “it is not a single man making decisions, it is thousands of individuals providing information and working and one man trying to stay abreast of it all.”5 It is, as Heclo puts it, about deep structure; those facets of the presidency which are not easily manipulated, but which both enable and restrict particular presidents. The thesis of an institutional presidency pointed to an emergent theoretical need: understanding the formal powers and structures of the president.6

As the institutional view of the presidency began to break down the personal views of the presidency such as Neustadt’s persuasion thesis, many, like Howell, would argue that the persuasion thesis lacked a lot of the direct command the modern presidency wielded and thus

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1 I will refer to presidents with masculine pronouns both for ease of reading and due to the fact that all presidents to this point have indeed been male.
there was a push to rearticulate the direct, or unilateral, powers of the presidency. Moe and Howell would sum up this literature by noting:

Our aim here is to highlight a formal basis for presidential power that has gone largely unappreciated to this point, but, in our view, has become so pivotal to presidential leadership, and so central to an understanding of presidential power, that it virtually defines what is distinctively modern about the modern American presidency. This is the president’s formal capacity for taking unilateral action, and thus for making law on his own [emphasis added].

What differentiates the modern president, what is distinct in the words of Moe and Howell, is this ability to take direct or unilateral action. Howell would be central in pushing for the unilateral action thesis arguing that presidents enjoy a “first mover advantage” over other institutions such as congress or the courts. If such unilateral powers are the central force in the concept of presidential power, if they ‘virtually define’ the office, then it would be necessary to examine those powers more closely.

It would not be until relatively recently that unilateral powers have been given prime real estate in presidential studies. The subject itself has received only a few book length treatments. This emergent contemporary literature provides evidence that unilateral powers are a central feature of the modern presidency which wants to accomplish meaningful action in the face of seeming indecision on the part of other branches of government. Evidence has come from examining presidential use of powers known to be direct and unilateral or the uncovering of powers presidents have molded to be used unilaterally. Executive orders, signing

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statements\textsuperscript{13} and unilateral policy declarations\textsuperscript{14} are all examples of unilateral power vested in the president. These powers are virtually without check and they can be undertaken as long as another branch does not push back. Other branches however, especially Congress, are not prone to pushing back against presidential unilateral power, a point examined in some detail by Farrier.\textsuperscript{15}

This deep and emerging investigation into a new theory of presidential power posits that presidents are at base interested in their legacy.\textsuperscript{16} To achieve a legacy “they must at bottom be seekers of power.”\textsuperscript{17} At least on this point those advancing this new theory of presidential power agree with Neustadt, who argued power is the foundation of presidential success. The disagreement has been on the nature of the power – not on the president’s desire as an actor, or need as a politician, for power itself. Because of this need for power, it seems to be a truth of presidential power that all presidents attempt to enlarge and expand it whenever possible.\textsuperscript{18} Because the presidency is an institution, the expansion of one president creates a new base of possibilities for expansion by future presidents – a concept explored by Barilleaux as venture constitutionalism.\textsuperscript{19}

It must be importantly noted that this focus on unilateral powers does not mean to suggest a presidency which can accomplish any desired end without coordination with the other branches. Even during national crisis the president does not enjoy completely unchecked

\textsuperscript{15} Jasmine Farrier, “Executive Ambition Versus Congressional Ambivalence” \textit{Presidential Studies Quarterly} 40.2 (2010).
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 136.
power. However the president’s first mover advantage when he employs a unilateral power, while not unchecked, is remarkably successful,

On the whole, Congress has had a difficult time enacting laws that amend or overturn orders issued by presidents, though efforts to either codify in law or fund an executive order enjoy markedly higher success rates; and while judges and justices have appeared willing to strike down executive orders, the vast majority are never challenged, and for those that are, presidents win over 80 percent of the cases that actually go to trial.

The president enjoys an advantage in his unilateral powers. He is not easily displaced. But he does not roam entirely free either. Those who focus on unilateral powers are articulating that the scope of power upon which the president can call without needing other branches is larger than past literature has recognized.

Message Control: The Relationship between the Press and President

Neustadt was undoubtedly correct when he asserted that at base the desire of all presidents is power. The unilateral action theory of presidential power expands upon this position and asserts it is base to the goal of legacy creation to take all potential action which will advance the president’s agenda. It seems sound to assert that this axiom will become as commonplace to presidential theory as Mayhew’s theoretical assumption that legislator behavior is explained by a desire to seek reelection. It is also a foundational assumption of this work.

If a desire for legacy has accurately been found to drive a president to push the limits of his power in order to accomplish his agenda and, further, if this continual push increases over time and presidential administrations and becomes part of the institutional memory or deep structure of the presidency, then is there any theoretical reason to believe it will be limited to only other formal governmental institutions? Could it not be possible that the same drive to bypass Congress for a legacy might not encompass other, potentially non-governmental institutions for the same goal? It is at least theoretically possible to posit such.

Accepting the premise that the institutional presidency, which is continually seeking unilateral power as a means by which to create a successful legacy, leads to an important, perhaps even Neustadtian, question: how does a president consolidate unilateral power without pushback from the other branches? If unilateral powers are indeed part of a desire to build a legacy, at who is this legacy aimed? Not the transitory branches of government, but rather the collective memory of the public. If it is Congress and the Courts which seemingly impede the president’s path to legacy in the realm of lawmaking, would it not potentially be the press who are the primary roadblock to the president’s legacy with the public?

The modeling of the expansion of unilateral presidential powers to this point has been limited to law making and therefore limited in its scope to unilateral powers which are part of the lawmaking process and to the other branches of government. The literature thus far has focused exclusively on the issue of lawmaking. Yet, such a limitation might be problematic in an era where news, although not part of the formal governing process, is an important part of Washington politics. In fact the news media has been an important means by which the president has bypassed other governing institutions to go directly “to the people.” The importance of this ability does not seem to diminish with the theory of a unilateral presidential powers theory; instead, I argue, it appears to increase in importance.

There is nothing inherent in Howell’s propositions about unilateral power which would preclude it from being theoretically extended to actions to circumvent the press. According to Howell there are two distinguishing features of unilateral presidential action: (1) it is marked when the president moves first and waits for other actors to respond to this move and (2), when the president acts alone. Theoretically the actor in question who must respond could be the press, and the dissemination of information could be a situation whereby the president acts alone. While neither Howell nor others have applied this model to the press, nothing in its defining features prevent it from being so extended.

23 Timothy E. Cook Governing with the News (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).
One of the facets of the modern president has been suggested to be direct communication with the public. As Farnsworth and Lichter have put it, “today nearly all White House officials must consider public communications as part of their workday.” Communication strategies are basic to governing. Writing on the legacy of Bill Clinton Arnold notes, “[m]odern presidents built autonomous resources of organization and authority to circumvent the weakness of parties and partisan coalitions.” Arnold then explains the core of what this means “the consequence of all this [autonomous consolidation] is a presidency that responds to high public expectations through an autonomous organizational apparatus and generates support by stimulating public approval.” Presidential rhetoric is in a powerful position because of the presidency’s symbolic status.

Appealing directly to the people is a staple of the modern president. Eastland argues that part of an energetic, autonomous president is one who takes his case to the people. The use of the bully pulpit is not new. The bully pulpit, however, depended in large part on news media cooperation. The primary dissemination of information about the president, or information originally from the president, came from sources other than the president himself. Thus, the president was subject to the framing, gatekeeping, and watchdog roles traditionally assigned to the press and studied by social scientists. Even if the autonomous organization of the presidency was largely unchecked by Congress, it had to be vetted by the press. Unilateral or direct command actions made by the president had a modest check in the press. If indeed

presidents are legacy building, then even the action brought about by a unilateral action may be tempered by an unhappy press who might affect presidential legacy.

The very roles assigned found within the media created an important check on the president’s ability to disseminate information. The press was an alternative voice for setting the agenda and framing news. The central feature of the American system according to Farnsworth and Lichter is this struggle, “the struggle among reporters and public officials over the framing of news is a constant feature of America’s mediated government.”

Undoubtedly the press has not played the perfect part— even a brief survey of media literature reveals the shortcomings – but it did serve as an important filter, a filter that presidents have desired to be able to bypass. The desire to bypass is not fundamentally a new phenomenon, as noted earlier FDR would use radio for just such a purpose. There is a consistent effort by the president to control the message. What is potentially new is seeing this phenomenon in the context of the unilateral powers theory and emergent media tools which might allow a president to actually bypass the media in a more meaningful fashion than has taken place previously.

Franklin Roosevelt 2.0 did not appear ex nihilo; it has been part of a larger trajectory. Roosevelt would utilize radio to talk to voters across the country. President Eisenhower would be at the forefront of using television both in campaigns and governing. Nixon and Kennedy would refine the art of presidential television. What has happened over time is that these strategies would become institutionalized within the presidency via the chief of staff, the director of communications, and the press secretary. This technological history can be summed up as presidents trying to find ways to define their own message. It is the story of presidents

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encountering new means of message control and attempting to use it and then, by using it, institutionalizing a response which would then alter (ether in a large or small manner) the system and the institution of the presidency itself. By changing the institutional structure of the presidency, each president would then leave an imprint for successors who followed.

News organizations offer presidents both a resource and a pressure source. As might be suspected, the relationship between press and president at root is both symbiotic and adversarial. The president wants to put out a message and the press needs to fill news holes. Such a relationship creates a situation whereby, as Kumar has noted,

the White House staff faces an operation in place over which they have no directional authority, which is poised to cover the president. The approximately one hundred people included among those regularly working at the White House for news organizations expect a president to make news and for the White House staff to provide them on a regular basis with the information they need in order to file their reports and go on the air.

This White House press corps exists prior to the coming of any particular president. Before a new president takes office “he will have a waiting press corps already settled into its Press Room quarters.” The White House is a unique press beat. It differs from its closest sibling, Congress, in that “[t]he House of Representatives and the Senate are accessible institutions whose members and their leaders meet regularly with members of the press corps.” By contrast the White House is constantly trying to get its particular message across to reporters, so that the main challenge of the press is to seek information it wants despite what the White House would have released. This means that for the press “you almost never get information directly from the White House, not anything useful.”

This does not mean that when dealing with the traditional press that the White House has the ability to completely frame the message. On the contrary there are numerous examples where the president (and his staff) is forced to respond to articles they find to be baseless, harmful, incorrect, or otherwise damaging. The White House consistently attempts to “set the record straight.” The relationship has been relatively stable over time. It is this very stability which is apparently being altered by the addition of a new variable: social media. There appears to be a potentially new avenue of presidential power; one which is both inherently a device of a unilateral seeking presidency and a profound change in media. Social media is offering a qualitatively different tool for the president.

**The Presidency and New Media**

Mike McCurry writes an insightful memo to Obama. In it McCurry states:

> We are in a time of extraordinary flux in how Americans get information about public issues. The traditional role of what we call the mainstream media has diminished. We do not gather around a common village campfire each night to hear a village elder (i.e., Walter Cronkite) pronounce “that’s the way it is.” Almost three-quarters of America tuned in to the network news at dinner time as recently as the 1990s but the percentage is now less than a third. Major newsprint circulations are down as well. There is no coherent “mass communication” channel because the universe of Americans interested in politics has increased, but it has splintered across many new platforms for news gathering distribution: cable TV, news websites, political Web sites, YouTube, the Daily Show and Colbert, and the new 21st-century pamphleteers, the bloggers. The result is we have vast amounts of information, but without the understanding we need accompanying it.  

After arguing that the media world is changing, McCurry argues the incoming administration needs to recognize what this means for governing, “The technologies and Internet demands of the 21st century require something new and different.” McCurry’s point is that very little in communications has fundamentally changed, except he argues allowing cameras in for briefings, until this new media revolution. This media revolution is the advent of social media. It is, according to McCurry, an increase in outlets, amount of information, and form of dissemination.

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44 Mike McCurry, “Memorandum to the President-Elect,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38.4 (December, 2008), 701.
Presidential strategy often seems to mimic marketing strategy. As such it is useful to compare recent Nielsen data on new media marketing and the suggestions by some, like McCurry, that the president must embrace new media technology. Nielsen has found, when examining brands, that new media campaigns – those which look to create Facebook fans and Twitter followers etc. – have three important impacts on consumers. First, it makes consumers more likely to notice and recall a brand. Second, it increases message awareness. Third, it increases interest in making a purchase. Obviously, the conclusion according to Nielsen is that social media is an important emerging outlet in which brands must engage to reach consumers.

Obviously, McCurry does not substantiate his point. And branding data does not translate one to one to presidential outcomes. The important question remains: could social media be important in a similar manner for the president as it is for brands as McCurry and the Nielsen data suggest? For the interested researcher there appears to be emergent evidence that social media allows presidents the ability to package, frame, and disseminate their own messages free from other filters. Could there be an unfiltered bully pulpit arising in the contemporary presidential landscape? And might this occurrence be part of a larger theory of the presidency?

In the past for a president to reach out and go public required ample use of the press. Messages from president to the people were not typically unmediated. Even if a television address or a radio speech were to be allowed unmediated through the airwaves, it would be the focus of the press, and coming from a source not under political control. Thus, the interpretive lens would still come from the press – a process in the media effects literature known as the gatekeeping role. The stories would also be framed based on the interpretive lens of the reporter. In short, there was no lack of mediations or alternative information about the president.

New technological developments may be giving the president an additional ability to consolidate unilateral power. If this is the case then one would predict that both a restriction

on traditional media access would be combined with a strategy of putting out unfiltered information via social media. There would be a restriction of mediated information flow while there would be a simultaneous increase in unmediated information. The Office of Communication might be the signing statement office of the future.

Earlier I set out the thesis of this work. Having now examined the proposition of a legacy building president, who uses unilateral powers to advance his ends, it is possible to restate the central claims in more concrete terms. The underlying thesis of this work is that social media have offered presidents, interested in legacy building and through unilateralism, the ability to unilaterally disseminate information. If accurate then the thesis gives rise to two specific hypotheses: (1) mediated information flow should be restricted and (2) unmediated media flow should be increasing in both volume and in content or one might say that the amount of resources spent on unmediated media should be seen to increase. The suggestion here then is that an emergent source for presidential constitutional venture is information. The president is attempting to be a unilateral information disseminator, allowing him to effectively bypass traditional media in an analogous manner and for the same underlying reasons as he has attempted to bypass Congress and the Courts. If Congress has stood in the way of building a legacy through a specific legislative agenda, it is no less true that the press have stood in the way of legacy creation through critical analysis.

Obviously the president will not have claimed the sole power over the use of social media. The ability to unilaterally disseminate information comes with the concurrent ability of any set of individuals to interpret and talk about that information. The power granted individuals via social media has been rightly called transformative. In an open information environment, there appears reason to believe the base content will be the material supplied from the White House. In such a way a president becomes the more important framer and agenda setter of information rather than the press. Even if anyone can freely speak about the meaning of what the president says there is a different political environment than one where what gets out is in and of itself mediated and gathered independently.
Applying the theory of the autonomous president to the press is, in view of the preliminary evidence, an important theoretical step for the study of the presidency. While such application of an autonomous presidency to the press is unique, it should not be a startling enterprise. The way information is being disseminated is changing and it is changing in fundamental ways that needs to be modeled and understood. The very environment of information is changing and this change is an evolutionary step in presidential theory. Social media is becoming an interwoven part of the fabric of life and it will alter the political landscape accordingly. It is necessary in order to examine the hypotheses presented here to now examine and define social media, the task to which I turn next.
CHAPTER THREE: NEW MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

It is 7:00 am and Cassandra Casey, college student at State University, is just waking up. She checks her iPhone (or Android / Blackberry). While she was sleeping her friends had been posting Facebook messages. There are ten new e-mail messages – five from friends and five from professors – about things happening today. Several new Twitter updates inform her that the cafeteria is serving her least favorite meal for breakfast. It is 7:05 am and Cassandra has already been brought up to speed on the happenings of her friends and classes.

Cassandra takes a moment to post a Twitter update about where she is headed – McDonalds – in order to bypass the cafeteria. Because of Twitteroid (a plug-in for Facebook) her Twitter post is simultaneously sent to Facebook and inserted as her newest status. Several of her friends read the post and reply about the horrible food at State U, several go to other universities. One friend meets her at McDonalds, having found the location using Google maps, which interfaced with the phone and offered Cassandra’s friends the ability to know the location she was headed.

At McDonalds Cassandra opens up her netbook – a small, portable, highly cheap computer – and connects to the free Wi-Fi provided by McDonalds. She scans the headlines of the day on her favorite sites – Yahoo and DrudgeReport – which have links to news stories from all over the world. One she links to as a post on Facebook and Twitter. Her friends should see it! In a separate window she is watching last night’s episode of Colbert Report on Hulu, a television streaming website. Meanwhile she starts typing out an e-mail to her study group. They need to work on a project for her political science class. Each student has been jointly editing the paper with GoogleDocs for a week now, but John has failed to make any comments and she wants him to start work, the project is due in another week.

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1 iPhones and Android devices are types of ‘smartphones.’ Smartphones can access the internet and are thus capable of communicating with e-mail servers, social media sites, via applications written for the purpose. Further, smartphones are capable of accessing the web itself via browsers. All major browsers now offer phone versions which scale text and column size to fit phone screen limitations. Most new cell phones being produced in the United States are smartphones and the number of features which come with these phones are quickly increasing. The iPhone 4, for instance, has video chat. Android 2.2 offers users the ability to broadcast their location.
She has received another fifty text messages, twenty-five e-mails, and several Facebook messages before she leaves McDonalds for class. Her professor is lecturing on media effects today. As he talks about the framing effects of the mainstream television media, she is instant messaging a friend on the computer on which she is also taking notes – which via Dropbox are automatically updated to the notes on an iMac in her dorm -- they are talking about the story she linked to earlier. The professor omits any reference to emerging social media. Yet Cassandra has been plugged into it all day. She has yet to turn on a television or read a traditional newspaper. She will not once, nor during the course of the semester will she, turn off her cellular phone which connects her continuously to the rest of the world. And for most of the day she will interact with a computer with internet connectivity.

Cassandra is not a real person, but the evidence suggests she would be a typical college age student. Data also suggests that the way Cassandra fictitiously lives is spreading to individuals not in the college demographic. As she grows up, the children behind her share and exceed her propensity to use social media even more so than she does. The *Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Pew Internet & American Life Project* found that 61% of Americans get their news online during a typical day. Further that the median age for such online news viewers is surprisingly high at 40.2 The “generation net” which will be coming to college next are even more heavily involved with technology.

This chapter sets will outline this data and to narrate the history of social media. How did we get to Cassandra? What does an emerging demographic of ‘Cassandras’ (and post Cassandra) mean for presidential communication? How do people’s evolving relationship with new media consumption change communication strategies? I intend to suggest the importance social media potentially has on the political realm and how it is changing the way researchers need to model media effects, specifically when speaking about presidential communication. New media represents a new environment for political strategists.

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2 *The Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Pew Internet & American Life Project* “Audience Behavior”  
**Defining Social Media**

Social media – media which is transferred via social networking and internet 2.0 sites – is an emerging area of academic interest. Many fields have begun to investigate social media. Unfortunately, those in political science have yet to consistently define a research agenda for this important new area of behavior. A few important exceptions, including Davis and Owen’s *New Media and American Politics* and Philip Howard’s *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*, will be examined.\(^3\) When Boyd and Ellison reviewed the current literature on social networking, they fail to cite or mention any work done relating to politics in their review of the current scholarship on social media.\(^4\) No work has comprehensively placed new media in a political theory framework which situates it within the broader traditional media. Further, few works expressly link the historical development of the American media system with the new media system. Even more absent is a coherent explanation of what all this technical terminology actually means and how it might have a tangible impact on political variables.

Yet social media is quickly, indeed among many demographics already has, become an integral part of our day to day lives. It has existed before Facebook and Twitter. The difference has become in its wide availability and penetration among most segments of society. What was a limited medium, confined to the technologically inclined with a deeper understanding of complex software, has become almost as ubiquitous as television sets and radios. The transition has not been fully completed, but the data points to a technological revolution on the cusp of complete mainstream penetration.

What is social media? There have been a few attempts to wrestle with the definitional problem of social or new media. Davis and Owen present a coherent picture of the new media as “mass communication forms with primarily nonpolitical origins that have acquired political roles.”\(^5\) Howard defines new media, or what he calls hypermedia, as those “components of a new system of political communication formed around online petitions, digital news sources,

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candidate Web sites, relational databases, and more.”\textsuperscript{6} Problematic with such definitions are that they miss what is importantly unique about social media: its point to point model of information dissemination. It misses “the creative, collaborative, and \textit{ad hoc} engagement with content for which user-led spaces such as the \textit{Wikipedia} act as examples.”\textsuperscript{7} Social media is an outgrowth of a shift in “the organization of information production.”\textsuperscript{8} It is the beginning of a social production of news. Social media marks the maturation of news coming through networked communities.\textsuperscript{9}

New media are those sources of media which are not communicated through the traditional communications means: print, television, and radio. While there is some debate whether or not talk radio constitutes a form of new media via an old medium, consistently new media are those sources of information such as bloggers which bypass both old mediums of communication and information distribution. These new media sources are increasingly using web 2.0 applications to interface with information gathers – a phenomenon which is often labeled social media. New media and social media are thus primarily the same content coming through two differing pipelines, although social media does have a higher focus on user generated content (i.e. via facebook or twitter) where the lines between information producer and consumer are blurred -- a concept I will take up in much greater detail in later sections.

The nomenclature of using the adjectives new and social is often interchangeable. The social media adjective arises from a focus on the avenue much new media is distributed: social networking.

Whenever social media is depicted it often comes with a related concept: internet 2.0. What is the internet 2.0? The term may often be used as a buzzword, but beneath the ‘techspeak’ there are important new concepts developing. An important initial distinction is the difference between the ‘World Wide Web’ and the ‘internet.’ These are actually, and importantly, two

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} Philip Howard, \textit{New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen} (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Axel Bruns, \textit{Blogs, \textit{Wikipedia}, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage} (New York: Pet\textit{er Lang}, 2008).
\item \textsuperscript{9} Mark Deuze, “The web and its journalism, considering the consequences of different types of newsmedia online,” \textit{New Media and Society} 5.3 (2003).
\end{itemize}
very different things. The World Wide Web is defined by the HyperText Markup Language (HTML). Simply put it is a language of tags which allows browsers to display content. The World Wide Web (or the Web) is defined by a Web Browser which interprets HTML and displays content. This information uses specific protocols (TCP/IP) to move bits of information around networks -- this operation is what is referred to as the internet.\(^\text{10}\) As Klotz notes “it is the computer protocol that technically defines the internet.”\(^\text{11}\) It is not the content, but the protocols which allow information to be sent. The bits being moved around were typically, in the infancy of the web, HTML code and the objects to which this code referred (such as pictures).

Web 2.0 refers to those emerging applications which use the internet but which are not necessarily tied to either HTML or web browsers. It is the ability to not just view, but to edit and upload content independent of servers which is the meat of the Web 2.0.\(^\text{12}\) These applications (often referred to as apps), use the internet, but are not part of the HTML world. They are applications on mobile phones, on game consoles, in cars, on airplanes or on computers which uses the internet but provide that information via an application rather than the HTML standard on the web (via a browser). This post Web world has been described by many who observe the technology industry including Chris Andrews who has declared: “The Web is Dead. Long Live the Internet.”\(^\text{13}\) Andrews points out that the web is losing out to walled gardens – apps – the backbone of the Web 2.0. The internet, the system of protocols for sending information, is continuing as an important avenue for the future. HTML and web browsers are slowly becoming technological dinosaurs.

Now with some definitions in mind, but before we analyze the data, let us look at the historical roots of the American media system and then the emergent social media. This combined historical story offers an interesting picture and allows the researcher to place this emerging

media within proper context. Social media cannot be understood ex nihilo; it must be understood and placed within the history of the American media and press system. The system which is being altered by social media began upon a unique base.

**History of the Traditional Media in America**

Important to note at the outset is how unique the American news media is from much of the rest of the democratic industrialized world. While the press is largely separated from government funds and direct intervention, as argued by Timothy Cook, the news media has not been free from government policy. Instead, the press has come to its private form, in large part, due to direct government shaping. This process is as true today as it was at the birth of the country. Early colonial news for example was not free from governmental control,

New England may have had printing, but it was by no means free of government control. For much of the period, printers could work only if they were licensed by the Puritan authorities. Throughout the colonies, the early American press faced substantial limits on its freedom. That the press should be free to criticize government was a foreign concept to most colonists.\(^\text{14}\)

Whether it was in the form of broadsides (posters covered with writing), magazines, pamphlets, or books, the flow of information was part of government regulation. Harold Nelson notes that “printers were forever being called before the bars of legislative bodies to answer for ‘affronts,’ breach of privilege, ‘impudence,’ ‘indignities’ upon authority, and ‘libels.’”\(^\text{15}\)

Not only did colonial newspapers lack the freedom of press associated with it in the modern world, but “there was no pretense of journalistic objectivity.”\(^\text{16}\) Tories and their newspapers experienced hardships during the time leading towards the American Revolution. Newspapers were not a way to express objectivity; they were a means to present the best case possible for a particular, overt, position. Similar now to the way one might picture lawyers during trial. The close of the American Revolution would not see the end of the close relationship between


printers, newspapers, and government. On the contrary, governmental policy would continue to direct the shape the form of the bourgeoning news media.\footnote{17}

The early American period is known as the partisan press era. Strict laws, despite the newly emergent First Amendment, were enacted to protect against sedition and libel such as the \textit{Alien and Sedition Act}. Neither did the First Amendment prevent government from actively supporting the newspaper business with subsidies. The most important being discount rates for newspaper delivery, free exchange between printers, and the use of the postal office to collect and inform on subscriptions.\footnote{18} Further, lucrative government printing jobs could be meted out to newspaper partisans who were friends of the administration. No better example may be Jefferson:

Jefferson began an administration newspaper by inviting Samuel Harrison Smith to the new capital of Washington before his election to start the National Intelligencer. As soon as Jefferson took power, Smith obtained printing from the State Department of around $2,000 dollars per year, plus that of other departments and by the end of 1801 he had also secured printing for the House which brought in about $4,000 annually.\footnote{19}

As Culver Smith expressed the thought, “it is indeed probable that many of the editors were not sure whether their interest was primarily with journalism or politics. But it is certain that those who counted most were politicians wielding newspapers.”\footnote{20} Newspapers, during the partisan era, were extensions of the political party. Perhaps even more fundamental than extensions – they were the backbone of the political system. As the party system formed, newspapers became the essence of the party necessary for political movements\footnote{21} or in the words of Jeremy Mayer the “institutional glue” of political parties.\footnote{22}

\footnote{18} Ibid, 20.
\footnote{19} Ibid, 28.
In many important ways, therefore, media, party and government were uniquely intertwined. Government and political parties, far from being neutral about the media, directed the media through the use of subsidies and positive political control. Further, the media was sanctioned through the use of libel and sedition laws. While the words of the First Amendment may seem to offer a barrier between the press and government, this was far from the case during the early partisan press era. Importantly the media was used as an outside force; it never came under direct governmental control. While the role they played may be public in nature, government policy reinforced the private control of the press.

Buchanan would be the first president to pull support from the official organ (a newspaper which was anointed as the administration’s position pusher and often received lucrative printing jobs from the government). With the opening of the Office of Government Press in 1860 and 1873, lucrative jobs could no longer be offered to the private press. The official end, however, to the partisan press would come with President Lincoln not restoring the official organ for the executive office. Earlier in the 1830s both Houses would give control of access to their proceedings to an outside source, a committee of journalists, which continues until this day. The era of the partisan press may have ended officially with Lincoln, but the intertwined relationship between media, party, and government would not end, instead it would merely evolve. As Mayer notes, “the journalistic norm of objectivity was far from universal among newspapers well into the twentieth century. Most newspapers retained an affiliation, or at least an affinity, with one of the two major parties.”

The next major shift would be the mass circulation paper, the true introduction of the mass media, with the arrival in 1834 of Benjamin Day’s *New York Sun*. The paper would revolutionize the newspaper industry by being sold for a penny; a stark contrast to the typical six cent press. This would be important because it would begin to change the way the press operated, “the growth of mass circulation newspapers and the commercialization of the press as a big business over the nineteenth century meant that newspapers became big, complex, specialized, and

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Such would be the embryonic beginnings of the media institution. And it would highlight the primary mechanism for profit: ad revenues.

Mass production changed the rules of the game for newspapers. No longer could partisans be relied upon to keep up subscriptions. Neither could government printing. Therefore “the pressure from advertisers and readers to be bipartisan or nonpartisan became increasingly strong” and “consumers now were making decisions about which paper to buy based on each day's headlines.” The early symptoms of consumer driven soft news might even reasonably be argued to be seen in this era with ‘yellow journalism.’ Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were both locked in a circulation battle in New York. Both publishers claimed the rights to a highly popular cartoon starting ‘Yellow Kid,’ “Both publishers claimed the rights to the cartoon and splashed yellow blotches on their papers to advertise that the wildly popular Kid was inside.” The underlying push was for sales numbers and advertisers, not ideological commitment.

This push towards sale was coupled with events taking place in the world. Historian Paul Johnson notes that the modern world begins in May 1919 with the first substantial proof of the theory of relativity. Johnson notes that this shook the previous view of the world as relatively stable. This is the world into which another budding field of thought will emerge: journalism schools. Journalism schools were influenced heavily by Progressives. They pushed objectivity. But what was objectivity in a world which had seemingly disproved it? Progressive professionalism argues objectivity is a result, not of the ability to render unfiltered facts to the public, but, “objectivity, in this sense, means that a person’s statements about the world can be trusted if they are submitted to established rules deemed legitimate by a professional community. Facts here are not aspects of the world, but consensually validated statements

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26 Ibid, 95.
27 Ibid, 95.
Johnson’s modern world redefined objectivity through institutional norms, and Progressives would apply this standard to newspaper journalism.

This way of viewing the world fit well with the objectives of progressivism:

The contemporary focus of news on events and individual actors within continuing stories rather than analyses of social and political conditions might seem to be a natural result of the demands of the medium of television, but in fact predates the broadcast media. It dates back to the Progressive Era’s emphasis on cleaning up the system by placing well-qualified individuals in positions of power where they would administer in a nonpartisan manner. The Progressive Era would witness the profession of journalism developed and ensconced, and the terms of journalism and roles of journalists devised then have not significantly shifted, even with the rise of radio and television.  

The progressives would offer a new mechanism to the word objectivity. It would be this focus: objectivity found through institutional norms via the form of continuing stories which would bring shape to the modern media institution.

The era would begin to see true institutional norms beginning and in a form recognizable to the contemporary scholar. Professionalization of newpersons would change the relationship between media and government. And to those in government able to see the importance of this factory of news it would provide unique opportunities to exploit for their advantage, “The commercialization of and growing market for news, the beginnings of a stable Washington press corps, and a newsbeat system all could be (and were) exploited by astute officials.” As Roosevelt, an early politician to sense the importance of the media, would state in a speech in 1919 “almost, if not quite, the most important profession is that of the newspaper man . . . The newspaper men -- publishers, editors, reporters -- are just as much public servants as are the men in government service themselves.”

The true professional age of the newspaper would begin in the 1920s. Schools of journalism would arise and newspaper writing would begin to become standardized. The inverted pyramid

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31 Ibid, 46.  
32 Ibid, 48.
would become the form for journalists writing stories. (The inverted pyramid is a style of writing which allows paragraphs to be cut from the end of a story without affecting the ability of a reader to comprehend the story; thus the most important and absolutely necessary elements are put in the first paragraph. This leads to a unique style which is not mimicked in any other medium.) Technology would also explode in this era. The newspaper would be challenged by radio and by television. No longer would it be possible to interchange newspapers for the press. It had transformed into the media.

Radio and television too brought new ideas about objectivity: “what was most distinctive about radio and television journalism during this period was the absence of bluntly partisan and editorial components. Radio and television were seen as public utilities whose limited bandwidth belonged in part to the public as well as the owners.”\(^{33}\) The connection between the media and government regulation became even more important with the newly emergent technology which used scarce public spectrum. While theoretically anyone could start a newspaper company, there was not a fixed amount of resources to pursue a newspaper business, and there was by nature a maximum number of media who could operate on the spectrum. Thus, the impetus to continue the mass media desire for objectivity was reinforced by recognition that the medium was ultimately part of the public sphere in a way that newspapers never had been. Broadcast media had to deal with coming across the public airwaves.

But even this process was not free from government control and neither was the end result determined:

Suffice it to say that the ultimate outcome -- whereby radio (and later, television) would be made up largely of powerful commercial broadcasters, each controlling a particular frequency to send out programs they themselves produced -- would be the result only of years of political battles from the navy’s first attempts to use the new medium to communication with ships at sea at the turn of the twentieth century all the way to the Communications Act of 1934, which established the FCC.\(^{34}\)

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What had begun during the era of the mass media would accelerate: the creation of national media corporations. Television and radio news became part of larger enterprises of which the parent company was only primarily interested in profitability in all divisions. This pattern continues into the present and has been harshly criticized by contemporary scholars. This corporate power is the direct result of active government policy, even if it has not necessarily been coherent.

Importantly for this discussion are the following conclusions on our brief historical overview of the media. First, the media has been shaped, since its conception, by governmental policy. Second that governmental shaping has been toward a privately owned and centrally held concept of media. Third the media is institutional in nature, stemming from common routines and practices – such as conceptions of objectivity over other possible views of news. Understanding the media, and the contemporary scholarly literature which examples it, requires one to begin here.

The modern media system in the United States has several important characteristics. It is privately owned (in contrast to the European system of media) and it is concentrated in the hands of large corporations and conglomerates. As such the news is primarily about profit margins. It has developed into a profession with common rules and assumptions: the media attempts to be objective, to be non-partisan and to rely on official sources. This process has led to an institutional structure of the media.

Such facts are important because the most recent literature finds that the important effects and biases of media do not arise out of individual level behavior (such as journalists having a liberal bias due to their tendency as a group to be more liberal than other cohorts), but from the structural arrangement of news organizations – the institution of the media. In their own

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words: “The collective nature of news production and market pressures can limit even the most powerful media ideologues.” Thus the effect of the news comes more from the production of the news and its institutional norms. News outlets can affect the public via which issue are given coverage and the manner in which issues are covered. Ideological bias has been shown in meta-analysis to have no basis in the data.

The modern American media is also often considered the ‘successor to party politics.’ Whereas the primary interactive component between government and media had been through party – such as during the partisan press age – in the media age the press takes a dominant role while the party steps further into the background. Polsby offers a number of reasons for this historic switch. Party rule changes in the 1960s led to a weakening of party elite in influencing the selection of candidates. After 1968 the selection of delegates to the national party convention was no longer in the hands of state and local party organizations. The clash of supporters between McCarthy and Humphrey (after the withdraw of Johnson) and the climatic suppression of protests outside the democratic convention hall would lead to the McGovern-Fraser commission. The McGovern-Fraser commission recommended the adoption of primaries and changes in campaign finance regulations. Iyengar and McGrady sum it up well: “the end result of party reform and the rapid spread of television was a shift from party-based campaigns to candidate-based campaigns waged on television . . . as the public became entirely dependent on television for political information, candidates altered their campaign strategies to maximize their television exposure.” Thus Jamieson and Waldman can argue that one of

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the important aspects of the press is as searching for candidates – an oxymoron in an earlier era.\textsuperscript{45}

In the contemporary era it seems nearly universally accepted (more on this in a moment) that the major influences on media effect come from the process of creating news and not from other individual level biases. The major underlying factors which shape the news in the contemporary era are market forces, professional norms and values of journalists, and the organizational process and routines of news rooms.\textsuperscript{46} This is in stark contrast to the hypothesis of liberal / conservative tendencies, though not mainstream in the literature, who some still advance.\textsuperscript{47}

More recently and yet to be linked with this history of the contemporary media, is the concurrent story of the development of social media. Next it is necessary to turn to the history of social media, its development, and interaction with the larger trajectory of press developments. Social media hinges on several key technological developments, but it is not completed defined by technology. The linking of these histories will allow a broader and more comprehensive basis for theory building in later chapters.

\textit{The Short History of Social Media}

In the 1970s a new form of social media first emerged: the bulletin board system (called the BBS). BBSes were small servers powered by personal computers attached to telephonic modems. Individuals could ‘dial-in’ and read messages, post to community discussion groups, and upload and download files. They were severely limited by access. Since dialing into a computer required dialing a number, long-distance charges could be applicable. BBSes could only have as many simultaneous users as there were dedicated lines (in the case of small ones, only one person could be logged in at a time). Further, they were limited by modem speeds. Even into the 1990s the fastest possible modem normal home users could own was a 56k. This

meant – under ideal circumstances – that the best total speed a user could achieve was 56 kilobytes per second.\textsuperscript{48} More typically users achieved 28.8 kilobytes per second. Sometimes speeds were considerably slower based on distance and the lines available. While this would allow text to be displayed, it meant that files now considered ‘small’ could take minutes – or hours – to transfer from BBS servers to home computers over traditional phone lines.

Another problem was that computers were far from the household standards they are today. They were expensive and not user friendly. Many home computers (all large desktops) cost several thousand dollars. BBSes required knowledge of coding and modems. Few people actively participated in BBSes because it would require time, money, and patience. BBS users were highly atypical individuals and, therefore, their usefulness as a widespread medium was limited. Further, the connections to broader social science theory were limited as well. It was not the general public using BBSes. Social science largely ignored the early developments of the technology because of its limited potentiality for the general public.

It would not be until the 1990s, when the World Wide Web (www) standard would become available to the majority of users that social media would emerge in a form recognizable to contemporary users.\textsuperscript{49} The World Wide Web would allow servers to interact simultaneously and allow users to access data from any particular server and simultaneously among many users. Instead of being limited to the hardware of a single BBS, the World Wide Web allowed users to interact with a set of servers which were networked. This mode of information too was limited because it was primarily limited to desktop computers. The price of portable computers would not become competitive until the late nineties and even more cost effective with netbooks in the late 2000s.

\textsuperscript{\textit{48}}To put a kilobyte into perspective there are 1,000 kilobytes in a megabyte. Many simple graphical pictures are now several megabytes. To display a single picture at this rate could require a wait of several minutes. Smartphones can download programs in less time over the air.

It has been even more recently that these beginnings have emerged into the more ubiquitous
forms we see today due to the rise of cell phone technology (including 3G and 4G), Wi-Fi, and
broadband internet. The World Wide Web would slowly start to bring rise to Web 2.0, which
included the embryonic forms of new media. As of 2010 Web 1.0 (HTML) traffic accounted for
only 23% of total internet traffic. Video, peer-to-peer sharing and smart devices constituted
the rest of the internet traffic. The expansion of the internet into an increasing number of
non-computer based devices – thereby increasing their general penetration into society –
continues and there is no data to suggest it will not continue at a similar pace. Already
smartphones are purchased at higher rates than laptops.

An important next step in social media ironically came from a site dedicated to sharing music:
Napster. Napster expanded on the way a multiplicity of users could share information and
revolutionized the possibilities of transferring media online. Users could now share their own
information and media via an open network with other users. Napster contained no
information other than the network protocols – the actual information was all shared and
stored by users on local storage devices. Napster also pointed to another fact: larger files could
now more generally be downloaded because faster broadband connections were slowly
becoming more typical of internet users. While the World Wide Web had allowed servers to
network, Napster was the first instance where users were using a bigger network to house a
smaller network dedicated to individuals sharing files on their own computers and not on
centralized servers. It was the beginning of peer-to-peer software – individuals using the
internet to share information on non-centralized computers.

The emergence of social networking appeared to be an extension of the principle of Napster:
users sharing information, not necessarily songs, but about their life, likes, and thoughts via a
network. Friendster would be the first social networking site, but it would be quickly surpassed

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50 3G and 4G stand for generations of mobile internet connectivity. 3G, or 3rd Generation, mobile internet was a
breakthrough because it allowed internet content on phones to begin to approach Wi-Fi like connections. As this
technology advances there is no reason to believe in the near future Wi-Fi and mobile internet will have
comparable upload and download rates.


52 International Data Corporation (IDC) report “Android Rises, Symbian and Windows Phone 7 Launch as
Worldwide Smartphone Shipments Increase 87.2% Year Over Year,” February 7th, 2011.
by those two now ubiquitous sites: MySpace and Facebook. The internet was no longer expensive or tech intensive. Everyday people had begun to use it and so the fear of revealing information slowly changed until many people now put up almost every aspect of their life for full display – with pictures and video! Importantly this information could come to users across a variety of devices, not necessarily the traditional desktop.

New media began changing the political campaigning in 1996.\textsuperscript{53} Web pages would be generally employed by candidates. Not only would online interaction provide up-to-date information for those following the campaigns, they would provide candidates with a wide range of information on their followers: sources of political information, annual income, credit history, musical tastes and other factors.\textsuperscript{54} The ability to track candidates began to change, slowly, but in important ways as websites became campaign staples. The information gathered electronically would work both ways, voters gaining information on candidates and candidates gaining information about potential voters.

Even traditional reporters were plugging into the system. In 1992 – four years prior to general web campaigning – reporters and producers were nearly universally using laptop computers and 84 percent were using modems.\textsuperscript{55} Thus while, also in 1992, Ross Perot’s suggestion of online venues for electronic town meetings was considered fringe, by 2004, “[m]eet-up technology, whereby people use the Internet to arrange physical meetings, was used extensively by presidential candidates, particularly Howard Dean, to mobilize voters in the 2004 presidential campaign.”\textsuperscript{56} The campaign environment was changing because the way people interacted was rapidly changing. Ross Perot’s suggested in 1992, branded as crazy at the time, if now predicted might be received with passé acknowledgement of the inevitable.

The growing role of social media would be “demonstrated on November 8, 1999, when President Clinton became the first president to go online to answer e-mail queries from citizens.”57 The end of the 90s and the beginning of the 2000s would mark the true rise of social media. Candidates now had more than just websites and e-mails lists. They had Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. Blackberry devices are part of every campaign, so much so that President Obama would remark before taking office they would have “to pry it out of my hands.”58 They would use cellular phone text messaging. A system which had begun over a 28.8 modem on a desktop via a BBS culminated in the arrival of social media, a media most individuals now carry around with them in their pocket constantly and on their portable computers daily.

The contemporary age seems to be marked by the very existence of social media and the communication system which has given it birth. As it was rightly noted and predicted in 1999: “with little exaggeration, we may call the twenty-first century the age of networks. Networks will be the nervous system of our future society, and we can expect this infrastructure to have more influence on our entire social and personal lives than did the construction of roads for transportsations of goods and people in the past.”59 As emergent research is showing, this statement has partially come true and it is in the process of becoming cliché.

**THE EMERGING REALITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

The Pew Reach Center for the People and the Press (PEW) has done extensive research on the coming of age of the new media. The backbone of the new media is the interaction of ubiquitous internet use and a broadband infrastructure to deliver internet (or web) 2.0 content.60 Internet use has increased to 74% of the total population according to PEW. Rice and Haythornthwaite report: “Between December 200 and April 2002, the proportion of the US population with access to the Internet remained at approximately 59 per cent. Yet, recent

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57 Ibid, xi.
60 Internet 2.0 is widely considered to be the emergence of the social media and the ability to disseminate video. Internet 3.0 content is generally considered the rise in wireless networks at those same speeds and the newly arriving ability to access the web via phones at those speeds utilizing 3G and 4G network coverage. The term was coined by Darcy DiNucci in “Fragmented Future” see [http://www.cdinucci.com/Darcy2/articles/Print/Printarticle7.html](http://www.cdinucci.com/Darcy2/articles/Print/Printarticle7.html)
figures show a rapid rise, from 66 per cent in 2003 to 75 per cent in 2004.”\footnote{Ronald E. Rice and Caroline Haythornthwaite, “Perspectives on Internet Use: Access, Involvement and Interaction,” in The Handbook of New Media Leah A. Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone eds. (London: Sage Publishing, 2006), 92.} Additionally 60% of Americans reported a broadband connection. If this connectivity was not enough 83% of all adults have cell phones or smartphones – with 35% of those able to connect to the internet via their cellular device.\footnote{Lee Raine, “Internet, broadband, and cell phone statistics,” Pew Research Center January 5, 2010.} These numbers will undoubtedly rise as smartphones continue to drop in price.

Nielsen as well has done extensive research into internet video consumption.\footnote{Nielsen “How People Watch: A Global Nielsen Consumer Report,” August 2010.} These findings indicate that internet video usage is becoming ubiquitous in consumers throughout the world, with the United States lagging slightly behind. A position, they contend, which will not last long. Further the number of devices which receive video, specifically from the internet, are increasing at such a rate as the typical three screen measurement (television, computer, and mobile phone) is quickly becoming outdated. Future research will have to account for internet connected TV’s, tablets, and other internet connected home devices (such as video game consoles).

In the 2008 presidential election, 74% of internet users used the medium to get news and information about the election. Put in terms of the entire population, this indicates that 55% of the entire adult population went online for their election news. This is the first election where more than half of the voting age population used the internet to connect to the electoral process. There appear to be no reasons for predicting it will be the last. When comparing the impacts of TV, newspaper, radio, magazine and internet, trends show that the internet is gaining as a major source of election news over other outlets.\footnote{“Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off: The Internet’s Broader Role in Campaign 2008,” Pew Research Center January 11, 2008.} While TV remains the dominant source of news, projections for those under 50 and those under 30 indicate that such dominance will not be long lived.
Broadcast TV is quickly becoming the fastest *slowing* source of information. As Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler have found “audiences for television, as well as for other mass media, are on a downward trend. Newspapers are losing readings and the main television outlets are losing viewers.” Further as Dizard state:

The 1990s were a troubled decade for the Big Three television networks, NBC, ABC, and CBS. For the first time since they began keeping records on the subject, their combined prime-time ratings dropped below 50 percent. It was a rude shock for a business that had attracted viewers in over 90 percent of American households every night for over forty years.

As Dizard moves on to say the reason for this drop is related to social media: “there are many reasons for this change, but the most important one is that television and the other older media are being challenged by the Internet and other technologies that offer an expanded range of information and entertainment services.” Social media is increasing viewers while broadcast television is rapidly declining. As ABC president in 1998 Robert Iger commented regarding the decline of television audience losses: “We used to think that the possibility existed that the erosion was going to stop, we were silly. It is never going to stop.”

Singling out just one face of the new social media, Facebook, is illustrative. As Rasiej and Sifry have stated, if Facebook were a country it would be the seventh largest in terms of population. It draws daily (often hourly) attention from its growing 175 million members. Each member of this community spends approximately twenty to thirty minutes on average *each day* on Facebook alone. This does not even include such important social media sites as Twitter or YouTube. The amount of time scanning Facebook is time which is no longer spent watching an evening newscast.

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67 Ibid, 1.
Looking at the 18 to 29 age group, 42% report that they learn about campaigns from the internet – with a specific emphasis on Facebook and MySpace.70 Further 26% of Americans now tell us that the internet is their first or second source of campaign information. Cross generational totals show a slip away from traditional sources and a pull towards the internet. Singling out younger demographics depicts the future. As more individuals who grow up on social media come to voting age, there appears little reason to believe the trend will reverse. The increase in broadband and cellular technology, combined with individuals who are comfortable as using them as their primary information tools points to a fundamentally new media environment as the next generation matures.

None of this should be particularly surprising. Research into news has long recognized that the high-choice environment has yielded an overall decline for standard television news. In 1990 Smoller could write of The Six O’Clock Presidency. Smoller would argue that to be successful a president must recognize the pattern of television news reporting and check it. According to Smoller a successful president, such as Reagan, is such because he manages the press well. He keeps them at a distance and manages information flows. Unsuccessful presidents, such as Carter, are so open they allow themselves to be defined by the television storyline. Manage yourself according to the peg of the six o’clock news or be defined by the news cycle argues Smoller.

Six o’clock has begun to matter less and less, but the importance of defining the message has not. Ari Fleischer has noted this fundamental shift from six o’clock to 24-7. Fleischer states,

[c]hanges are under way in the press corps. The networks have been losing viewers for years, and their remaining viewers are typically older. Cable TV news shows, especially those on Fox, are cutting deeply into territory that used to be the exclusive domain of the broadcast networks. As newspapers lose readers, younger Americans especially are turning to the Internet and to bloggers. The media is fracturing into more choices and more diversity . . . the immediacy of

the Internet and cable news has changed the way all White House reporters do their jobs – for better and for worse. 71

Concurrently as the number of outlets has grown and presidents have had an increasing amount of leverage over how they could break the news cycle. It also means presidents have to respond to news as it occurs, not necessary before important pegs like 6 o’clock. New media has increased their ability to define themselves apart and distinct from newscasters, but also made them slaves to a twenty-four hour news cycle.

Soft news outlets offer presidents and presidential candidates a bypass to the traditional press. It may not be surprising then to see presidential candidates, and now presidents using soft news outlets to advance their agenda or to find scholars like Baum, writing his recent Soft News Goes to War, looking to see if meaningful content can be disseminated by soft news sources.

Yet new media transcends soft news. To expand the thesis of Baum one must ask: what information are individuals getting from non-traditional news sources? From YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and The Daily Show? Soft news appears to be but one thread in a much larger phenomenon taking place in the United States.

Even as early as 1995 Diamond and Silverman would argue that “[i]n 1992, the primaries and general election took place mainly on soft-media formats, such as the call-in shows, the morning interview programs, and the candidate’s joint prime-time appearances.” 72 This would be the beginning of the change. Diamond and Silverman would talk of the internet as bulletin boards and dial-up. As reviewed here, something profound has occurred since the nineties.

The debate over soft news – and the concurrent one over whether sources such as The Daily Show or The Colbert Report actually inform – is important. 73 It, however, fundamentally misses the newest profound change: social / new media. It misses that information is now transferred instantaneously to devices everyone carries around in his or her pocket.

Obama would go on ESPN to discuss his tournament picks and then appear on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. More recently Obama would sit as a guest for Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show*. It was, as Charlie Cook put it, “most unusual for any elected official.” But the coming of age of the internet offers something unique. It offers the president control, for the first time, to bypass filters completely. This is no longer just about soft news. It is about social media. It is about the transformation from point to mass broadcast giving way to point to point interconnectivity. It is about presidents doing something very old -- defining themselves and their message -- but doing it in a very new way, with social media.

Breaking the cycle is certainly not a new development, the Reagan and Clinton administrations attempted to do as such. But even if one looks at Clinton, his presidency is marked by a unique shift: the internet. The story of the Clinton “propaganda machine” shows the beginning of the coming of the digital age. While new media was far from what it is today, even press secretary Mike McCurry complained of Drudge breaking stories. Drudge and other internet sites according to McCurry force traditional outlets, which would wait for a higher standard of confirmation, to run information more quickly or be left behind. As such new media offers both potentialities and challenges to the president. It marks a shift in the manner presidents have to strategize about message control.

During the Clinton presidency new media could primarily be understood as yet another channel in a high-choice broadcast environment. It can no longer be considered as such. This fundamental change in new media is central to the theory offered here. The shift has profound implications on the executive branch. It is central to the investigation proposed. Social media offers the president a new means by which to advance unilateral power, but also creates a situation in which he must respond to a constant news flow. In order to manage this constant news flow I argue that the president is pushing for unilateral message dissemination.

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As Micek and Whitlock have offered, “New Media is personal and participatory. It’s about conversations rather than lectures.” It is about a shift in how news is framed because “New Media is turning mass media on its head.” Social media is fundamentally the diffusion of news. It allows anyone to tap into a rich network with information. This should not be considered the end of elite power, nor is that what I offer. It is the story of a shifting of power which I will argue will allow the presidency – indeed is now allowing the presidency – to become autonomous from the press.

**FROM CONSUMER, TO USER, TO PRODUSER**

Axel Bruns has offered a compelling picture of the development of what he calls ‘produsage.’ It is this concept which appears best able to help define social media more accurately and, ultimately, lead to the predictions of how the presidency might use social media. According to Bruns produsage is a term to help understand the “processes of user-led content creation.” Importantly according to Bruns,

> It highlights that within the communities which engage in the collaborative creation and extension of information and knowledge that we examine in this book, the role of ‘consumer’ and even that of ‘end user’ have long disappeared, and the distinctions between producers and users of content have faded into comparative insignificance. In many of the spaces we encounter here, users are always already necessarily producers of the shared knowledge base, regardless of whether they are aware of this role – they have become a new, hybrid, produser.

According to Bruns produsage has become commonplace because of a combination of social software and web 2.0 technology. As social software has become part of everyday life, utilized over internet protocols and not necessarily limited to the HTML of web 1.0 technology, it has expanded across devices and become a potential reality.

79 Ibid, 11.
81 Ibid, 2.
82 Ibid, 2.
Bruns’ abstraction may be broken down more simply into a few concrete examples. As internet devices with social apps have become commonplace the ability for individuals to partake in the production of information has correspondingly increased. Take for instance video creation. News video was typically a production process. Expensive equipment converted video into broadcast ready format which could then be consumed by viewers. Social software and web 2.0 devices, however, allow users to produce content (and then take this content and modify it as well). On all smartphone devices individuals can take pictures and video and then instantaneously upload them to YouTube and link to these videos via Facebook and Twitter. Other users can take this content and use it in other contexts just as easily. This is Bruns’ combination of social software and web 2.0 combining to create the potentiality of produsage.

An example of the importance and power of this form of potential media creation is the recent Iranian election. It was deemed important enough that the State Department would ask Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance in order to avoid hindering Iranians and other news gathers from posting information about what was going on in Iran in the post-election aftermath of 2009.83 Twitter is “free, highly mobile, very personal and very quick. It’s also built to spread, and fast” which makes it “ideal for a mass protest movement, both very easy for the average citizen to use and very hard for any central authority to control.”84 It is in such a context that is possible to see the emergence of true produsage journalism:

We saw quite a few citizen journalists doing an excellent job of taking photos and videos of protests in Tehran almost in real-time. They have, indeed, filled an important niche. Networks like Twitter, similarly, have played a great role in attracting people’s attention to this user-generated content. So, Flickr provided great photos -- and Twitter provided great attention to these photos.85

As important as the produsage aspect of the Iranian election coverage from Twitter was it also highlighted an emerging fracture between social media and even live traditional television coverage.

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CNN would take a lot of heat from citizens in other countries for not dedicating enough resources to covering the Iranian election. Such an outcry would eventually force CNN to increase its coverage of the ongoing events in Iran. As Poniewozik noted this means that Twitter and other social media users demand news organizations to responsively cover such important events or be left behind.\textsuperscript{86} If nothing else the Iranian election crises would indicate that the importance of social media was climbing.

In order to understand the concept of produsage it is necessary to understand its contrasting characteristics from the traditional models of industrial production. Bruns notes that the industrial model of production emerges from the need to build, operate and maintain means of productions for physical goods.\textsuperscript{87} In the realm of the traditional news media this meant maintaining operations which would allow the production of broadcast (or print) information. Such information originates with a producer, is then sent out via a distributor and then used by a consumer. Browning and Reiss sum up the model by arguing: “old media divides the world intro producers and consumers: we’re either the authors or the readers, broadcasters or viewers, entertainers or audience, one-to-many communications in the jargon.”\textsuperscript{88} In this model consumers have a limited amount of feedback. According to Shirky “the consumers’ appointed role in this system gives them . . . no way to communicate anything about themselves except their preference between Coke and Pepsi, Bounty and Brawny, Trix and Chex.”\textsuperscript{89}

This model is challenged, according to Bruns, by the internet, “[t]he rise of the Internet as a mass medium – and as a mass medium which is significantly different from previous mass media – introduces a number of important challenges to the traditional, industrial model of information production and distribution.”\textsuperscript{90} Specifically in the context of broadcast news it requires conventional broadcasters to look to internet streaming media as the way to move

\textsuperscript{87} Axel Bruns, \textit{Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage} (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 9.
\textsuperscript{90} Axel Bruns, \textit{Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage} (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 13.
Television must abandon the production model according to Bruns and embrace the produsage model found on the internet. The significant new media innovations according to Dizard “is the distribution of voice, video, and print products on a common electronic channel, often in two-way, interactive formats that give consumers more control over what services they receive, when they receive the services, and the form of each service.” Alternatively as presented by Browning and Reiss: “New media, by contrast, gives everybody a chance to speak as well as to listen. Many speak to many – and the many speak back.”

The produsage model recognizes that media is not something which is given to consumers; rather “they become much more actively involved in shaping their own media and network usage.” The community begins to produce in a collective process described by Herz as the ‘hive mind.’ Or, as expressed by Berners-Lee produsage is about intercreativity.

Produsage is a process by which content goes into a system of user / produsers resulting in modified (or new content) which becomes part of the material used by other produser users.

Google is an instrumental example of utilizing the produsage model. Its complicated algorithms which result in search displays are also used by the algorithm to improve itself. Thus even the very act of searching on Google refines the search process, allowing future users to more easily find the information they are seeking. Even more blatantly produsage situations are those involving open source software and operating systems. These programs are completely open and thus users can change the programs to fit their needs and then those additions are made available to others. This has been the mindset behind such free enterprises as Ubuntu Linux.

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97 Ubuntu is a distribution of Linux. Because Linux is completely open source there is no one ‘definitive’ Linux operating system. There are many varieties or ‘distributions’ based on what produsers have done to alter or modify differing packages. Linux code is also the base for proprietary OS systems such as Google’s Android, which is based on Linux code and therefore part of the produsage model.
SOCIAL MEDIA, PRODUSERS, AND PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGES

The voice of Hillary Clinton drones in the background. Identical, grey, individuals march in lockstep as the voice of Clinton continues. Then, a brightly colored, attractive woman wearing the Obama logo is racing ahead of darkly clad security guards. Now we stare at the screen of Hillary Clinton as she continues to talk about the ‘conversation’ taking place. Ominously there are the flicking words across the screen: “this is our conversation.” The woman is still running but now we can see she is carrying a sledgehammer. She hurls it into the giant television screen. A flash and explosion as we can see the grey people are now lifted from their trance. The screen fades to white and tells us 2008 will not be like 1984, visit barackobama.com. This viral video from YouTube characterizes the importance of produsage and campaigning in the internet age.

Neither the use of emergent media nor theorizing about the impact of such environment is new. Norris has argued that campaigning has evolved due to changes in news media, party organization and the electorate through three stages: premodern, modern, and postmodern. The “premodern campaign has its origins in the 19th century expansion of franchise and was more or less reduced to electoral campaigning.” Campaigning modernized as technology advanced, “[t]he introduction and spread of radio and newsreels since the 1920s contributed to a strengthening of the national dimension of party organizations and campaigning structures.” Yet, for the premodern age, the primary purpose of campaigning was to reinforce partisan supporters.

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98 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h3G-lMZxjo
101 Ibid, 14.
The modern age was marked by “[c]hanges in media technology, media and political culture”\textsuperscript{103} and focuses on ‘mediated’ channels of voter communication.\textsuperscript{104} There seems to be reason to believe that the current political media environment is increasingly which could be characterized as the post-broadcast era.\textsuperscript{105} Some, such as Baum and Kernell, earlier saw this emerging post-broadcast age as a potential bane on presidential power. If going public is no longer a viable strategy through the mainstream press then the president would be in a “serious strategic dilemma in the future.”\textsuperscript{106} Baum and Kernell summed up the problem “if the presidents lose their prime-time audience, they will surrender a political asset that will be difficult to replace by other means . . . network television news no longer allows presidents to speak for themselves about their policies.”\textsuperscript{107} Baum and Kernell were writing in 1999, on the cusp of the produsage revolution. They may have been correct about the lost broadcast opportunity, but they seem very wrong in retrospect about the inability of the president to speak directly to the public through other means.

The fact that politicians, presidents in particular, deal with a shrinking sound bite in the mainstream media has been well documented.\textsuperscript{108} Therefore it is no surprise that Fogarty and Wolak argue, “[p]oliticians want to communicate with voters to inform and persuade them . . . rather than securing votes, the media are seeking consumers who will support the news as a commercial enterprise.”\textsuperscript{109} The consumer model of media has always been problematic for politicians. As cable and the internet began to fracture the voices of media and increase those who provided news what would happen next was not always necessarily clear, which worried such early analysts such as Baum and Kernell. What appeared to be happening, instead of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{104} P. Norris, \textit{A Virtuous Circle. Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 142.
\bibitem{106} Matthew A. Baum and Samuel Kernell, “Has Cable Ended the golden Age of Presidential Television?,” \textit{American Political Science Review} 93.1 (1999), 111.
\bibitem{107} Ibid, 99
\bibitem{109} Ibid, 133.
\end{thebibliography}
increasing silence from Washington, is that as that the produsage model was coming into play in politics.

Into this emerging era rose a chorus of voices which announced the arrival of the reinvigorated citizen activist. Feld and Wilcox write in this vein,

> just as things bottomed out [media consolidation and unenthusiastic citizens], thousands of citizen activists across America tapped into a powerful new means of communicating, informing, and organizing – the Internet. This latest evolution in communications technology empowered citizen activism just as broadcast and cable television had weakened it.\(^{110}\)

Feld and Wilcox were not alone in their enthusiasm. Kerbel acknowledged his own hopelessness for the future in his book *Remote and Controlled*. It was

about how television was damaging our national discourse and undermining our collective sense of political well-being. An entertainment medium by nature, television, I contended, was ill-suited to the task of informing us about and engaging us in politics. Television shows are staged events; they’re fake.\(^{111}\)

Kerbel then laments he saw no hope for the future. Until, “[s]everal years later, I noticed something strange. People on primitive websites were beginning to express their views about politics to no one in particular through something called weblogs . . . so I began to wonder: Could computers be the antitelevision?”\(^ {112}\) Kerbel eventually answers the question with a resounding yes as the internet “turns ordinary people into activists, it appears to be doing what television could not.”\(^ {113}\)

Despite produsage, and despite a proliferation of blogs and other new media tools, there still appears to be relative message consistency. The successful presidential campaign and president does not appear to be those that abandon messaging, but rather those who refuse to recognize the future conduits for the message. Despite what some models may present, new media does not seem to be primarily about the opening of information, but perhaps the stranglehold on it from some in elite positions.

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\(^{112}\) Ibid, x.

\(^{113}\) Ibid, xi.
An interesting paradox arises in the produser model of media information when the totality of information available on a subject is *a priori* limited. Further, the limitation is not equal, rather the total amount of contact information coming from the office of the president is – or at least can be – a limited sum based on the strategy of the White House. In short, there is no way for produsers to create original presidential information. Such requires the ability to have access to the president. Thus the model is a bit different if the source of potential content, even if it can be then put through the produser model, can be strategically managed.

If traditional news outlets gathered the ‘data’ of their stories, it required a careful dance. On the one hand outlets want to scoop other outlets. Further, they want to provide as much information as possible. This requires access to the object of desired information – in our case the president. Yet access to the president is not a guarantee. Neither, under the traditional model, could the president simply deny all access. Instead an access dance marked the traditional media’s relationship with the White House. It is the common story of all White House press offices.

Something fundamentally new is possible, however, when it is no longer access that matters, but rather increasingly just content data. The ‘open’ network model of the produser model becomes a choke point which can be strategically managed by a savvy political actor. Control the information flow, control the initial networks which gain the information, and you now have an entirely different framing process than was possible under the broadcast model of media news. And the model is not one which necessarily benefits the so-called netroots activist; it benefits those who can feed the information through the bottleneck, in this instance the president.

There are several problematic differences between the open source, or produsage, model in software and in media which I believe have not been properly examined. Social media cannot produce pure content in the same way as open source programmers can with software. Microsoft or Apple is not the sole provider of all potential content. When one is talking about the information from the White House, while the rule is certainly not absolute, it is also importantly true that it controls the primary access. Therefore social media, at least when
speaking about the presidency, are not completely free to produce content. Once content is
disseminated the open source model could be accurately employed. But it is this crucial
difference in access which differentiates the current process from a truly produsage model.

I would like to suggest that the difference between ‘limited’ produsage situations should be
modeled differently than ‘open’ produsage situations. This modeling difference is important
because by failing to distinguish between types of produsage results in a misunderstanding of
what White House communication strategy is in the post-broadcast age.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE DATA ON OBAMA, PRESS INTERVIEWS, AND THE NEW MEDIA

Up to this point the attempt has been to place a potential model of the interaction between new media and the president into both a theoretical and historical framework. It is now time to flesh out this model and see what hypotheses can be derived from the potential model. Further, it is necessary to begin testing the model against original empirical data collected for that purpose. This chapter begins with an overview of the proposed interaction between new media and the presidency and then tests three hypotheses utilizing data from the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, the Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents and the National Archives. The next chapter will expand on the quantitative work of this chapter by looking at website data from the National Archives and the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Library and other qualitative data gathered from the White House’s new media output.

LIMITED PRODUSAGE AND UNILATERAL PRESIDENTIAL POWER

As noted at the end of chapter three, new media has been argued to have altered the traditional production model of the news. Figure 1 visually depicts the traditional production model. A particular producer creates a product which is then distributed to a consumer who either buys or refrains from buying the product or content. This model accurately depicts the broadcast model of news. News content was produced by a newsroom and distributed via broadcast channels and viewers could either watch or refrain from watching. In this view news producers create a product -- information from sources -- the news, which is then distributed.

![Figure 1: Traditional Production Model](image-url)
The relationship between consumers and producers is basically economic. Producers and consumers gauged their relationship via pricing. Price signals are the sole (or at least primary) feedback consumers provided to producers. Consumers do not alter or change products directly; rather they give feedback to producers about the desirability of their goods or content on the basis of price—i.e. whether or not they purchase the goods or watched the content. As Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler have noted, “television is the quintessential broadcast medium: it transmits messages to a mass audience expected to receive or reject what it is offered.”

Figure 2 visually displays the produsage model. Here content is created by users who also produce, creating modified (presumably improved) content. This content is then used by other producer / consumers. This is the model of the open source community, such as wikis, and it has been the underpinning model for scholarly investigation into ‘netroots,’ the blogosphere, etc. Content is created and modified by a host of individuals and it does not center on a single distributor since it is open source. The relationship between producer and user is radically altered because they are, or at least potentially are, the same set of individuals. Again as Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler have argued, “the inherent feedback path of digital media subverts this transmission ethos by allowing message receivers to act upon media content. The digital text is never complete.” Problems with content can be altered by the produsers, unlike the consumer in the traditional model.

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2 Ibid, 171.
Chapter three had evidence for considering this model inaccurate of the relationship between president, social media, and the press. It has been an error of much of the literature on new media to claim that this model applies. An important element argued here is that the open source model will not accurately predict the behavior of the actors involved. Instead there is a ‘limited content’ produsage model more accurately portrays the relationship between the presidency, social media, and the press. In this instance producers cannot create the initial content; they are limited to manipulation of the original content put into the system from an outside source. Figure 3 models this limited content produsage model.

Figure 3: Limited Content Produsage Model

The limited content produsage model attempts to explain the more complicated relationship which takes place when one content producer has a content monopoly in an open source environment. Here an original content producer creates content, which then enters the usual produsage model. What is unique about this model is the inability for the produsers to create unique information in the first instance. Thus, suppose that an original content producer creates X and Y. The produser could take this and create X₁ to Xₓ, and Y₁ to Yₓ, but it could not create Z. After content is inserted into the system it appears like a normal produsage model, what differentiates this model is the produsage process is limited to those ‘pieces’ of information inserted by the original content producer.

If this limited produsage model accurately portrays new media and its potential interaction with presidents as a limited produsage model, how does this fit in with a president concerned with legacy building? What do presidents who seek unilateral power via venture constitutionalism
have to gain by controlling the limited content? If the model is correct, then the answer is potentially very much. New media might offer the president a more powerful control over functions which would typically be reserved to traditional news agencies such as gatekeeper and agenda setter. In essence, a limited produsage model offers a strategic minded president a potential chokehold on information.

I have explicitly modeled the limited produsage situation as it applies to the president in figure 4. Obviously, the press has not ceased to exist. Therefore, the balancing necessary of granting and withholding access continues. But presidents would want to limit the access of traditional media as much as possible. By distributing information through social media the president could correspondingly restrict press access. Providing content for social networks the White House has the ability to manipulate the content available for discussion within those networks.

![Diagram of Presidential Output in a Limited Produsage Model]

What makes the model potentially so important for presidential power is that the traditional media would still be reporting. Those who consumer media via distributors, which is still many people, would be getting information set out by the president via social channels, only then rebroadcast via traditional outlets. The press does not get shut out per se in the model, rather their ability to gather unique information decreases potentially -- in theory -- to the point of zero. Stemming from this model, in combination with our new understanding of the president, it is possible to more formally describe the theory and hypotheses the following chapters will attempt to test.
In the short run it is probable that these two models – the traditional production and the limited produsage – will function side by side. Important systemic changes are rarely wholesale replacements, but rather often come gradually. What is necessary to contemplate is this a change in degree or a change in kind? The model posited here is clearly one which fits to a degree of change. It is part of a larger trajectory of historical, technological and press developments. Yet at some point this evolutionary degree change becomes profoundly different enough that it has by degree become a new kind or type. The iterative changes amount to something fundamentally new in the whole, the evolutionary process was all degrees, but at some point the degrees have resulted in something new, something qualitatively different.

If our theory is correct there should be two overriding tendencies beginning with the Obama Administration: (H₁) a decrease in mediated information and (H₂) unmediated media flow should be increasing. The increase posted by H₂ should be seen both quantitatively in volume and qualitatively in terms of content and resources. If these processes do exist, there likelihood of continuation will be based on their institutionalization. Because of this we should predict to see (H₃) an increase in institutional structures supporting new media output. That is H₃ posits that the means of new media outlet should become standardized, institutionalized, and more sophisticated.

As stated at the outset, there seems to be reason to investigate the link between new media and unilateral presidential power. For one, as previously outlined, presidents are continually trying to push message control. Successful presidents do not just wield unilateral power; they spin it well too – if they want to have powerful legacies. Being suggested here is the possibility it might be time to realize that the Neustadtian and unilateral theories of presidential power may be linked more importantly than has yet been investigated. Further, this important link has become apparent because of the president’s emergent tendency to use new media.

What specifically does this mean? It means if we take seriously the unilateral power theorists and rightfully understand the transformative impact of new media then there is reason to believe that presidents will begin to co-opt traditional press related functions. In the short
term this might or might not be completely successful. But if it becomes established precedent, if we become habitualized to presidential information dissemination, it could radically alter the future of presidential power. The potential for this shift is where our attention is now directed.

**A Potential Strategy Shift**

Is there reason to believe that there is a communication strategy shift taking place in the current White House? David Carr relates an interesting and telling story:

In February 2007, a friend called Marc Andreessen, a founder of Netscape and a board member of Facebook, and asked if he wanted to meet with a man with an idea that sounded preposterous on its face . . . He wondered if social networking, with its tremendous communication capabilities and aggressive database development, might help him beat the overwhelming odds facing him . . . as it turns out, President-elect Barack Obama was right. ³

According to Carr, Obama was purposefully bringing a new tool to bear in his bid for presidential election. It is a story which seemed to define the election of candidate Obama. It also appears to be the story of the post election administration. Having now placed the potentiality of new media into a theoretical framework, the question remains whether there is data to support the assertion. Is there a shift in White House communication strategy?

The Obama administration itself would have you believe something new is taking place. On January 20th Macon Phillips kicked off the White House Blog – a new staple of WhiteHouse.gov. As Phillips noted in the first blog post, “[o]ne of the first changes is the White House's new website, which will serve as a place for the President and his administration to connect with the rest of the nation and the world.”⁴ It was not a surprise to see the White House take a definitive move towards the internet, Candidate Obama dominated Facebook with over a million ‘friends’ and helped him raise a half billion dollars online.⁵

According to Phillips this new media campaign will create higher communication, transparency, and participation. Phillips might as well have been echoing the sentiments of Facebook founder

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and CEO Mark Zuckerberg, “[o]ur main goal at Facebook is to help make the world more open and transparent.”

The goal of “transforming the YouTubing-Facebooking-texting-Twittering grass-roots organization that put Mr. Obama in the White House into an instrument of government” is “something Mr. Obama . . . told aides was a top priority, even before he was elected.”

There is reason for believing that there is something qualitatively different about Obama and his use of new media.

An intimate relationship between a president and the internet is a new phenomenon in many ways. While momentarily the history of the White House website will be examined, it is worth noting the minimal contact even President Bush had with the medium. As Klotz has noted “despite having websites, neither President Bush nor President Clinton were themselves frequent Internet users.”

President Clinton would send but two e-mails during his time in office. President Bush purposefully stopped using the e-mail upon taking office “fearing that any e-mail he sent might potentially be considered a public record.”

When Obama entered as president he would not shy away from the internet or the new media. If anything, the data found here shows an increased amount of contact between Obama and the internet via Facebook, Twitter, and other social media networks.

But does Obama’s use of social media mark more than just a personal curiosity? What is potentially new which could have long term impacts on the office? The answer lies in the earlier theoretical discussion of the institutional presidency and the limited produsage model.

If the institution of the presidency is altered, then it is probable to predict that not only will the outcomes of the current presidency differ from past presidents, but also to predict the probable permanency in outcomes this institutional change may yield given the undoubted certainty that new media is a lasting phenomenon like television in the 1950s.

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There is already clear evidence that the Obama administration is making institutional changes to the presidency concerning media and new media strategy. The shock of a social media savvy staff encountering the “backwards” technological infrastructure of the White House, which is also built on older models of institutionalization of these infrastructures, did not go unnoticed by observers of the office.\textsuperscript{11} Thus the creation of new institutional structures to embrace social media and the necessary infrastructure to support those social media tools should not be surprising goal of the current president. President Obama has implemented a new set of appointees specifically for the purpose of using new media. The new positions of Chief Technical Officer and Director of New Media,\textsuperscript{12} an apparent application of his goal to transform a new media campaign into a new media White House messaging strategy, presents a clear effort to institutionalize a presidential new media presence. The ties between these emergent positions and the realm of new media is quickly becoming clear as CTO Andrew McLauglin was found to have close ties with new media promoter and user Google.\textsuperscript{13} These positions present a new institutional framework for communications in the White House.

The CTO and DNM positions were given important roles in the first few days of the Obama Administration. On January 21, 2009 Obama sent out a memorandum on “Transparency and Open Government.”\textsuperscript{14} In it Obama argues government should be transparent, participatory, and collaborative – terms pulled directly from new media and open source advocates. To achieve these ends Obama directs the CTO to make recommendations so that executive agencies can meet the necessary levels of open, transparent government. Thus Obama’s first remarks to his White House Senior Staff that “Transparency and the rule of law will be the touchstones of this Presidency” seem to be integrally tied into technological questions – since he clearly gave a new set of powers to the CTO to achieve those ends.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Micah L. Sifry and Andrew Rasiej, “Obama’s chief tech duties” Politico December 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{15} Daily Comp. of Pres. Doc., “Remarks to White House Senior Staff” January 21, 2009 DCPD200900012.
Macon Phillip is the first (and currently only) individual to have held the position of DNM. This position has been considered one of the key new posts in the administration. Phillips appears to be the individual who has helped a new media candidate create a new media White House. The first step in this process was to put new media people into newly created positions for the purposes of targeting new media. Phillips is the first DNM, but it seems likely he will not be the last. The White House use of new media over traditional media has already been anecdotally examined and will be quantitatively examined later in this chapter.

Unsurprisingly perhaps the Republican National Committee (RNC) would follow the direction of the White House and appoint its own Director of New Media in March 2009. Given this institutional mimicking, it seems likely to conclude that Republican office holders will continue to have positions which target new media within the White House – continuing an apparent new tradition by the Obama Administration. Ultimately, the point is to note that new media use is not a partisan restricted activity.

Obama is the first president to make a stab at altering the Hecloian deep structure of the institutional presidency to use new media. The news media have already targeted the new media positions as positions of importance and highlighted individuals such as Macon Phillips for their important firsts in the field. This appears to be a potentially fundamental shift which will have profound implications for future presidents who inherit the tradition.

**Presidential Interviews: The Data**
Using data from the Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents (DCPD) it is possible to track and measure White House information output. There have been some who have questioned the accuracy and utility of using the DCPD as a data source. The reason behind these objections is primarily clustered around arguments concerning the potential inaccuracy of internal numbers. Kumar, however, has already skillfully answered those objections, and there use as a

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18 The predecessor to the Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents is the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents. All of the former material is now housed in the Daily Compilation. More information on this switch, which has taken place during the Obama Administration, can be obtained from the Government Printing Office online www.gpoaccess.gov
legitimate source of information about the president will not be questioned here. In this case the objections are particularly moot because the comparisons will be to earlier DCPD numbers and thus self referential. Any potential measurement error within the numbers should be consistent across time and, therefore, not bias our tests.

The DCPD keeps track of all White House output, including presidential news conferences, press statements, press releases, etc. One important aspect recorded by the DCPD are those times when the president allows comments and questions from either the press or other audience members. These encounters are labeled in the DCPD index for each month (or in the case of the WCPD, the index for each week). Key for the purposes undertaken here are those times when the traditional press can, although clearly managed, create unique news by asking questions of the president. Such situations are important because they are theoretically some of the few moments when reporters can gather original information which is not just filtered information coming from the White House – such as a press release.

Of central interest here is the amount of interaction the White House allows reporters to have with the president himself. Interviews opportunities with the president are an important benchmark of the amount of non-White House generated information available via reporters. A key indicator of traditional openness, therefore, appears to be the amount of interview time a president allows for reporters. While those managing presidential access, such Robert Gibbs, might consider press conferences “an arbitrary Washington measure” of access to the president, there does appear to be important information which comes from information gathered, not sent to, the press.20

Compiled here is the amount of interview contact which has occurred according to the WCPD and the DCPD since the Carter Administration.21 Interview contact is defined in the variable as any instances in which the DCPD or WCPD indicates press members were given the opportunity

21 The WCPD starts in 1965 so it would be possible to go back a bit further. Unfortunately due to the unique circumstances of the times, those years might not be good benchmarks for presidential averages. There was no WCPD, so an accurate measure is not possible by this same method for years prior to 1965.
to ask questions of the president. The goal is to offer a potential baseline by which to understand president Obama’s number of press interviews. Figure 5 presents the presidential interviews since Carter.

![Figure 5: Presidential Interviews since Carter]

Visually speaking there appears to be a degree of variability stability around 50 to 70 interviews a year. The first of the two spikes, on hitting over 200 interviews, is former President H.W. Bush. The second spike occurs during the early days of the Clinton Administration, apparently in the early years following the trend of President Bush. Stability returns until we hit the term of current President Obama where there is a precipitous fall from the average to 13 interviews for 2010, an historic low.

It is possible to detect some important trends from a summary overview of the data. In tables 1 through 6 we can see the number of interviews per year by each president in office.

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<td>49</td>
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Table 1: Carter’s Interviews by Year
Importantly we can see there is within year variation and year of office variation for the number of interviews a particular president allows. Such seasonality is not surprising in this type of data. Successful presidents are likely to have similar interview outputs based on the time of year, or the year of their administration. As elections approach it is likely to see an increase in output, while a decrease in output is likely immediately following an election.

A surprising number of interviews take place for the most recent year of data. Looking at 2010 we see that Obama has had the fewest total interviews of any president for a year. The next closest is Reagan in 1981, but even this number does not quite dip into the teens. Obama’s thirteen is a start dip in comparison to recent presidents. What is also odd about 2010 is that the number is even more surprising considering 2010 was a serious election year. 1981 for
Reagan was his first year in office and was an off-year. In this context the 2010 low point for interviews is even more striking.

Assuming institutional structures are important, the timing of the decrease is also interesting. Year one might presumably have spillover from the previous president. Assuming a president does not immediately control all institutional structures; data points which take place deeper into a president’s term are potentially more representative of the current president’s trends. Importantly there appears to be a level of decline for Obama in 2010, a year when one should assume his institutional changes may begin to bear fruit. Thus if the hypothesis of a new media strategy is correct, it would be safe to assume that one would see a transition period – Obama’s first year 2009 – and then a potential settling pattern as those changes started to effect White House output, presumably explaining 2010.

Figure 6 aggregates the data into the totals per year in administration to compare administration yearly totals by administration year. Obama in 2009 has a more “normal” interview year, but the following year he nets the fewest ever.\(^{22}\) This drop is interesting for a variety of reasons, and is worthy of closer examination. One interested point is that there is no necessary year one to year two drop noticeable throughout administrations in the internet age. Obama’s drop appears unique.

\(^{22}\) This drop to the fewest every includes all presidents in the dataset, not just those in the post-internet period.
The outlier nature of the Obama 2009 to 2010 year drop requires further examination. It is worth asking: is there something unique which is influencing this interview drop? What are potential explanations for this trend in data?

As noted above, President Clinton was the first president to hold office in era of the internet. In fact, the first White House website appeared during his presidency (a topic addressed in detail in the next section). Therefore one important element of the data will be interviews occurring after the advent of mainstream internet usage, which occurs around President Clinton’s first term (1993). In this smaller timeframe it might be possible to see if the internet more generally has had an effect on president / press interviews, and not just necessarily new media. This slice of more recent presidential activity will be examined in some detail.

Figure 7 simply offers a tracking of total presidential interviews over time starting in 1993 and ending in 2010. Displaying the data as sequential from 1993 to 2010 the drop becomes even more pronounced. There is potentially a change post 2009 period. One might rightfully infer from the data that there is no apparent change between a pre and post internet age, but that the same cannot be said about the age of social media. Obama seems in year one to be at a comparable level of press interviews as does his immediate predecessor, George W. Bush. But as we enter into 2010 it becomes apparent that there is a marked drop, resulting in the lowest number of press conferences recording for a year over the span of the data. Purely from a visual standpoint, there is a new apparent average of zero interviews. From a cursory empirical examination, there is potentially something unique about Obama’s most recent year in office which differentiates it both from administrations since Carter, but also since Clinton and the beginning of the age of the internet.
While this analysis is both important and enlightening, it is only one piece to the larger framework. Unless this decrease in presidential output can be found occurring as there is an increase in new media, a central element of the hypothesis would be found wanting. It is necessary, therefore, to examine new media output. While presidential interviews have been a source of scholarly examination, the source of presidential new media output has yet to be quantitatively (or qualitatively in many cases) examined.

It is to the question of new media output I now turn. Obviously an important first question is how to accurately measure new media output. A second question is what type of indicator could be considered to be similar enough to be compared to presidential interviews? One interesting fact is that the DCPD does not yet include new media output. There is no tracking of tweets, presidential Facebook posts, blog postings, etc. These “documents” for now are only preserved, when they are, by the original providers as long as they keep such information. It may be necessary in the future, as more information from the president is put out in the first instance online and through social networks, to capture presidential online documents for future historicity purposes.

Social media output by the President has not been frivolous. It appears to be the first place the president will make important statements. The penchant for the Obama administration to use social media for serious purposes has not gone unnoticed by the traditional press. For instance,
even the first White House tweet had nothing to do with “what [the President] was doing or what he wanted for lunch” instead “the Obama Administration jumped with both feet into the 140-character Twitterverse on May 1 [2009] with a one sentence post on how Americans can learn about swine flu directly by joining social networks” such as the CDC’s Facebook page.23 Twitter and Facebook are, at least in the context of the current administration, places where the president is taking positive policy positions and actively disseminating important information.

There are a variety of potential new media measures a researcher could use. One could look at total White House website output via Facebook and Twitter or measure the number of blogs put out on the White House website. While this could be useful in certain contexts, it is problematic as a comparable statistic to presidential interviews because this material does not come from the president directly.24 One potential statistic would be the amount of output from President Obama’s verified Tweeter account.25 These would be, presumably, direct quotes from the president himself, analogous to his output to the press interview. Thus while one might compare the number of blog posts from the White House generally to the amount of press releases, the Obama tweet output has the possibility to be comparable to interview numbers.

The usefulness of Twitter has an emergent indicator of opinion has been well established by O’Connor, Balasubramanyan, Routledge and Smith.26 As O’Connor et al. established, Twitter accurately measures public opinion. What O’Connor et al. finds is that traditional both traditional polling and measures of microblogging come to identical public opinion results. This consistency holds across consumer confidence, presidential job approval, and election polls.

24 These measures might be useful in tracking total presidential output. Here I was interested in unique content stemming from the president himself as a more useful, and more demanding, statistic.
25 As a result of individuals creating users to mimic public figures Tweeter introduced ‘Verified Accounts.’ Such accounts require public figures to prove who they are, and to take down individuals misrepresenting themselves as public figures. A verified account simply indicates that the public person who is tweeting has been confirmed to be the person represented.
These findings have led others, notably Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox and Shah, to use digital indicators to explore media questions.\textsuperscript{27} Sayre et al. use social media to track agenda setting during the California Proposition 8 debate. O’Connor et al. and Sayre et al. establish the usefulness of Twitter as an indicator in social science resource in examining politics and media questions.

Given this previous research employing Twitter, numbers from Twitter on the posts per month by President Obama post inauguration (January 2009 – December 2010) were gathered.\textsuperscript{28} These numbers are compiled and compared to presidential interviews. In figure 8, we have the number of Obama interviews and the number of Obama tweets for 2009 and 2010 graphed concurrently. Unfortunately, since Obama has only been in office two years our total number of tweets and interviews as a sample is relatively small. However, for the data available currently there appears to be a reverse interview trend taking place for new media. New media output, as tracked by tweets shows an increase over time, not a decrease.

Interestingly, figure 8 reveals that Obama has almost doubled his Twitter output in the second year of his administration, the same time during which he dropped from a more ‘normal’ level of press interviews to a historic low in 2010. Obama’s number of interviews has dropped to almost non-existence during the same period of time as his tweets have doubled. It is this combination of evidence which is worthy of note. During the same interval which created an outlier in presidential interviews comes an explosion of twitter output. Either one alone is of interest, but the combination of the two occurring simultaneously is evidence in support of a strategy shift at the White House. While both data points may be respective outliers as more data presents itself, as the data now stands it is not in conflict with the theory presented here.


\textsuperscript{28} Twitter currently stores posts indefinitely. Currently, it is possible to see every post President Obama has ever made. Twitter also provides this data to Library of Congress. Unfortunately, this data is not managed or usable via the DCPD. Nor does the Library of Congress or the DCPD compile Facebook, blog posts, are a variety of other new media outputs currently. Even, as I will examine later, even previous presidential websites are not all maintained. As more and more data is put out electronically, it will be necessary to store this information for future generations.
Further, the simultaneous increase in new media output, while not conclusive on the basis of two years, also agrees with the predicted outcomes from our earlier theoretical overview.

![Figure 8: Obama's Interviews and Tweets](image)

Another potential measure of new media output is Facebook posts, which has already been used by others in the literature to examine campaign effects. Unfortunately Facebook does not keep posts indefinitely. However the data is available for 2010 and figure 9 offers a comparison trend over 12 months for the Obama Administrations output of Facebook posts, Twitter updates, and traditional interviews.

![Figure 9: Facebook, Twitter, and Interview Output for the Obama Administration in 2010](image)

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For the data available in 2010 we see that there is a large amount of presidential output via social media channels in 2010. Facebook posts begin at a similar rate as Twitter posts, and then drastically rise in March 2010, settling into a slight decline. Fascinatingly during the campaign season Twitter output spikes and Facebook declines, then returns to pre-election levels in November.

Simultaneously as the large and interesting activity in new media presidential interviews remain basically non-existent. The data to this point paints an interesting picture. In the 2010 election year there is a dearth of presidential interviews, with no interesting spikes occurring around or prior to the election season. Instead, all of the interesting variation takes place in our new media indicators, tweets and Facebook posts. How does kind of activity compare with past presidents?

President Clinton, another Democrat who would suffer Congressional defeat in his second year in office might hold insight into current trends. What was President Clinton’s interview output in 1994, presumably a similar year to Obama’s in 2010? Figure 10 offers a comparison for interview output between the two presidents in 1994 and 2010 respectively.
The Clinton / Obama comparison yields interesting results. Clinton totals 146 interviews in 1994 to Obama’s thirteen. For comparison this means Clinton held a little more than 11 times the number of interviews to Obama. Obama will not have any noticeable increase in interviews leading up to October, and only begins any noticeable activity in November with a spike to five interviews. Clinton, in contrast, begins a steady increase of interviews in August, which reaches its high in November and then drops during the holiday season, a common occurrence.

The data indicates that Obama differed in output from Clinton in several interesting and important ways. The Obama election activity occurs almost exclusively in the new media data. This is a break from Clinton, where the activity occurs in the interview data. While Clinton clearly uses the interview for the purposes of the election, Obama uses new media sources for the purpose of the election at the expense of interviews. It seems as if the election ‘activity’ finds a new outlet in the Obama administration. Whereas Clinton clearly saw a need to engage the press, Obama would use new media sources. Further, at least electorally, both strategies would fail electorally. However, in this instance, the interest is not so much on electoral outcomes as presidential strategies and communication output. Despite similar results, the communication strategy, the activity referred to above, seems to shift to new media sources during the Obama era.

One initial test of a potential new average level of press conferences is an analysis of variance. Such a test allows hypothesis testing of differences in variation among categories (or a category) of an independent variable. In the context of the current work our interest is in if slicing up the interview data at the point of the Obama administration results in less variation within each category and significantly different levels of variation among the categories. Such analysis will allow us to test the potentiality of whether or not what appears to be a meaningful drop in interviews is, in fact, significant. Because the data has more than 30 data points the analysis of variance test used will be an F-Test.

The first question is whether or not Obama has a statistically different number of interviews than past presidents. This is accomplished by employing an F Test. Table 9 and 10 shows the output from the F-Test. The mean average is both different and statistically significant.
Obama’s output since 2009 is significantly different from past presidents. Importantly, Bartlett’s test for equal variances returns at a level of 0.205. A non-significant Bartlett test indicates that the assumptions of the ANOVA F-test are reliable.

Table 8 and 9 indicate that there is a difference between the Pre and Post Obama periods. Our F statistic at 0.0132 is well below the significant .05 threshold. Therefore it is possible to say that Obama is statistically different in interview output than presidents since Carter and that this difference is statistically significant. Further the difference is in the expected negative direction, Obama having a lower mean average than previous presidents. At least from the initial F-Test we garner a measure of support for $H_1$. It is necessary to offer a cautionary note on this significance however. The 2009 year is clearly within the average mean level, while the 2010 drives the significance finding with the historic low. While this is supportive evidence of the theory, it is not without problems. Obviously, it would be possible for 2011 to be a more normal year and create a potential outlier of the 2010 data. Therefore the significance test does not falsify the proposed theory, but the significance finding alone and in isolation is not sufficient for conclusion.

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Table 7: Summary of Press Interviews (Complete)

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</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Analysis of Variance (Complete)

One potential objection to the above analysis is that the difference actually lies at another breaking point – the proliferation of the internet more widely. Potentially the Internet itself is marking a change in presidential behavior and not just new media and the Obama
administration. To test this counter hypothesis another F test has been run, starting with President Clinton in 1993 – who is marked as being the first internet president. These numbers are recorded in table 9 and 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Obama</td>
<td>6.40625</td>
<td>4.6939376</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>3.33333</td>
<td>3.863617</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.0648148</td>
<td>4.7018515</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Summary of Press Interviews (Internet Age)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Prob &gt; F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2.01446759</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>201.446759</td>
<td>9.47</td>
<td>0.0024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Group</td>
<td>4551.64583</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>21.2693731</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4753.09259</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>22.1074074</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Analysis of Variance (Internet Age)

Fascinatingly enough, when we restrict the independent variable to the post-internet age the difference between previous presidents and Obama becomes even greater. The significance drops even lower than the previous test to 0.0024, even further below the .05 significance level. Therefore whether or not we look at all of the data available from the DCPD or just at the period since the inception of the internet the Obama administration has had significantly less interviews than the previous presidential average. The Obama presidency stands out even more starkly when compared to other internet presidents, an important and interesting insight; which again must be noted hinges, until further data is available, on the 2010 data.

What this indicates is that the Obama presidency is in fact doing something new, so new it stands in contrast to his most comparable recent predecessors. It also means that the cause of this drop is not technology per se, or the drop would be visible occurring with the proliferation of the internet. Instead, the model earlier proposed appears to find support. The data offers evidence in favor of what was already hypothesized: the Obama administration’s use of new media might be lowering his interview output with the traditional media. The proposed model thus far fits the data very well.
Obama has only recently completed his second full year in office. Another useful question is: how does Obama’s first two years compare with previous administrations first two years? What if we are to compare Obama with only the first two years of each president’s term since Carter? In this instance, because sample sizes in terms of months over two years is lower than 30, a t-test is employed instead of the ANOVA F-Test. Also, here we are just testing the relationship between two means and not both the between and within variation of the F statistic given the lower N size of 24 cases per sample. These results of the t-tests are reported in tables 13 – 17.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.33333</td>
<td>.7886575</td>
<td>3.863617</td>
<td>1.702 – 4.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.58333</td>
<td>.4378665</td>
<td>2.145099</td>
<td>3.677 – 5.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
<td>.961675</td>
<td>4.711226</td>
<td>-3.239 -.739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(T &lt; t) = 0.1033</td>
<td>Df = 23</td>
<td>t = -1.2998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 11: Obama and Carter T-Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.33333</td>
<td>.7886575</td>
<td>3.863617</td>
<td>1.702 – 4.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.791667</td>
<td>.4125704</td>
<td>2.021174</td>
<td>1.938 -- 3.645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.5416667</td>
<td>.9724077</td>
<td>4.763805</td>
<td>-1.469 -- 2.553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(T &lt; t) = 0.7086</td>
<td>Df = 23</td>
<td>t = -0.557</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 12: Obama and Reagan T-Test*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.3333</td>
<td>.7886575</td>
<td>3.863617</td>
<td>1.702 – 4.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>1.297992</td>
<td>6.358835</td>
<td>-7.685 -- -2.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(T &lt; t) = 0.0004</td>
<td>Df = 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t = -3.8521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Obama and H.W. Bush T-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.3333</td>
<td>.7886575</td>
<td>3.863617</td>
<td>1.702 – 4.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13.2083</td>
<td>1.326949</td>
<td>6.500697</td>
<td>10.463 -- 15.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-9.875</td>
<td>1.198297</td>
<td>5.870431</td>
<td>-12.354 -- -7.396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(T &lt; t) = 0.0000</td>
<td>Df = 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t = -8.2409</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Obama and Clinton T-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.3333</td>
<td>.7886575</td>
<td>3.863617</td>
<td>1.702 – 4.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.W. Bush</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5.291667</td>
<td>.7359288</td>
<td>3.6053</td>
<td>3.769 -- 6.814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-1.958333</td>
<td>1.075887</td>
<td>5.270749</td>
<td>-4.184 -- .267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr(T &lt; t) = 0.0409</td>
<td>Df = 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t = -1.8202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Obama and G.W. Bush T-Test

What is fascinating is that Obama when only compared to the first two years of each president is not statistically different from Carter or Reagan, but is from H.W. Bush, Clinton and G.W. Bush. In all cases, significant or otherwise, the direction of the means relationship is negative. Indicating Obama is lower in output, but that it is simply not significantly different for Carter or Reagan’s first two years.

As a whole then Obama is statistically different from his predecessors, but when pulling out the first two years alone Obama only shows a difference beginning with H.W. Bush. This alone is interesting and it points to the importance of continuing to gather and comparing Obama’s
data to earlier presidents. It also indicates that Obama is very different from past internet presidents. Instead of continuing a potential increase in interviews, the presidency is marked by a drop. While this drop is significantly different than pasts presidents aggregated, it is only partially significant when the data is pulled out by the first two years of each president.

What is interesting is to posit what might happen in the remaining two years of Obama’s term. The Obama administration would have to see a dramatic reversal of trends to match the later output of the Carter and Reagan administrations. When the final numbers can be gathered, it is likely given the current behavior of the Obama administration, that Obama will have a significantly different level of interviews than Carter or Reagan. Of course this is merely a prediction based on the past behavior of the Obama administration and assumes his current trends continue. There is as of yet, however, no reason to resist that assumption.

There appears to be evidence to believe that the Obama presidency is the mark of something new. Again it is worth noting that 2010 is a watershed year for presidential interviews as the lowest in history. Future research might compare the full presidency of Obama to the full presidency of past presidents (instead of only the first two years now possible). If Obama continues at a consistent rate, which there is no reason to assume he will not, then such would definitely create statistically significant differences from past presidents.

What we have thus far then is a presidency which is marked by two important trends: (1) a decrease in contact with the press and (2) an increase in new media output. Further these trends are new in the sense that past presidents have not ever dropped to such low levels of interview output since President Carter and that this drop is even more pronounced during the era of the internet. Also importantly, there is apparently no evidence to suggest it was the internet which is effecting this change. If such was the case, then one would suspect to see a more abrupt change occurring post 1993 and not, instead post 2009.

**Summarizing the Evidence**

At the outset of this work and reformulated at the beginning of this chapter were outlined three hypotheses, all of which were theorized to be potentially present beginning with the Obama administration. The evidence of this chapter dealt with the first two:
H₁: a decrease in mediated information

H₂: unmediated media flow increase

H₁ was interested in the amount of information being put through traditional mediated avenues by the White House. This was operationalized as presidential interviews. In an interview setting there is a potential for unique information to be gathered by reporters for use in their coverage. Beginning with the Obama administration there is evidence supporting H₁. Currently the trend from 2009 to 2010 is a significant drop in interviews, such that in 2010 Obama has fewer interviews than any other president in history. Starting with the Obama administration there is a mean level of interviews hovering around 0, while previous administrations were closer to the 70 – 80 range, in several cases far higher. A means test was used to measure if this difference was statistically significant and the null hypothesis was rejected. It was possible to say that the average level of presidential interviews during the Obama administration is statistically different from the average of previous presidents. These tests support H₁ -- that there should be a detectable decrease in the level of presidential contact with the press.

Importantly this only represents two years out of a four year term, and thus it is impossible to say with certainty what his first term totals will be. But even assuming in the next two years (2011 and 2012) that the administration increases total interviews from the historic low of 2010, it would need to do so at a higher average than past presidents to prevent Obama from having the lowest interviews for any president for any given full four year term. Such being the case, even if one were to assume a trend reversal – where the Obama administration not only grants more interviews, but does so at an even higher rate than other presidents – the reversal would have to be more than dramatic to hit the average number of previous presidents. Therefore, one can say given the 2009 and 2010 data points (half a term) that there is, at least, emergent evidence in support of H₁. It is unlikely to think that the data in support of H₁ will be overturned by new data in 2011 and 2012.

There are also clear indicators affirming H₂ on the basis of current data. New media output has increased quantitatively at an astonishing rate and qualitatively has become far more robust
than even the most recent presidency of Bush. Quantitatively the indicator for new media was operationalized in Twitter and Facebook output. Twitter numbers began strong in 2009 and have doubled in 2010. Fascinating about the Twitter increase is its timing. As if there were a maximum level of communication output, as new media doubled, Obama interviews sank to their historic lows. Of course even if such were not the case, there is clearly an increase in new media output.

Another interesting insight is the election activity findings. Accounting for within term variation, there is evidence that the activity normally seen occurring in interview output around an election has shifted during the Obama administration in 2010 to new media output. As demonstrated, where Clinton had an interview increase during an election cycle, Obama saw a dramatic increase in Twitter and Facebook output, but an actual minor decrease in interview output. This too supports the proposition that there is both a numerical increase in new media output, but that importantly, this output is substantive in character. It is safe to say that the Obama campaign strategy in 2010 was focused primarily on new media to the near exclusion of any kind of interview presence. Thus there is support for the H2 hypothesis.

In the next chapter we turn to a more structured qualitative design. It is necessary to examine the White House new media strategy more closely. Is the Obama messaging strategy different from previous administrations? Has the Obama administration created a new kind of media presence via social media channels? How does this presence compare with previous administrations? It is to these questions we turn in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: OBAMA, A NEW MEDIA STRATEGY AND WHITESTRATEGY AND WHITEHOUSE.GOV

The data of the previous chapter is also illustrated more concretely by an intensifying argument between reporters and the White House over access, information sources, and modes of communication. The underlying conflict between White House Correspondents and the White House itself has been over the issue of information originator, which is consistent with the findings and hypotheses advanced earlier. In a recent high profile meeting between members of the White House Correspondents Association and Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, one of the points of contention was over who would take photographs of the president. In the past news photographers had the opportunity, based on a rotating pool, to photograph the president. Increasingly Obama aides post photos by staff photographers and do not allow journalists to take the photos.¹

The tendency of information to originate inside the White House was recently examined by *The New York Times* in a piece by Virginia Heffernan entitled “The YouTube Presidency.”² Heffernan begins by noting that starting with the Obama campaign the power of YouTube was recognized and as a result BarackObama.com uploaded 1,800 videos during the campaign and now Obama “maintains an entire staff devoted to new media.”³ These clips are designed to replace news, “among the clips recently uploaded by the administration are events like Obama’s signing, on March 30, of a public-land-protection bill.”⁴ The clip was not poorly designed, instead, “in the hands of the Obama team, the video has Hollywood polish.”⁵ In addition since being elected the White House new media team has supplied YouTube with Obama’s Weekly Addresses and a variety of other in house produced news clips.

The Obama campaign team and White House are creating news to compete with the traditional media. The campaign “made a point of feeding YouTubers a steady diet of carefully designed videos, a series of beautifully choreographed speeches and interviews, many heavy with

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³ Ibid
⁴ Ibid
⁵ Ibid
applause that is hard to edit out.” Heffernan then sums up what differentiates Obama from other politicians use of media:

When past politicians have been praised for their ‘use’ of media, they’re often seen as having deftly orchestrated an advantageous relationship with the press – having somehow one them over, as democratic politicians might generally aim to do. Obama’s team, in producing and distributing more video (by far) than any past administration, has not so much won over political journalists as led the pack to become the new media on the White House beat. Does that strike anyone as unsettling?

Jackson, Dorton, and Heindl offer a more scholarly examination of the points made by Heffernan. They looked to the Grant Park celebration of Obama’s election as a defining moment of Obama’s use of new media, specifically targeting Jackson et al. argues the support of millennials. Millennials are defined, according to Jackson et al., by their relationship to technology. They are the generation who grew up with technology at their fingertips. They are digital natives, not digital immigrants according to the Sweeney typology, meaning that computer technology and networks have been a consistent part of their lives since birth. As such they interact with the world differently and Jackson et al. trace how this interaction allows the president a new means of communication.

To reach the millennials, according to Jackson et al. it was necessary to use “emerging digital media to release new information and form a bond with his supporters, methods that appealed to the youth audience’s need to feel special, ‘in-the-know,’ empowered, and connected.” A striking example of using new media to connect to voters was using text-messaging to announce Joe Biden as the vice-presidential running mate. Ultimately, according to Jackson et al., it would be the combination of text messaging, MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube as tools

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7 Ibid
for direct information dissemination which would “render traditional news media meaningless or irrelevant” while simultaneously “reaffirm[ing] the personal connection between Obama and his supporters.”\textsuperscript{12} It is Thompson’s digital intimacy used to build political support.\textsuperscript{13} Digital natives desire seemingly direct communication, offering savvy politicians an even greater chance to disseminate messages unfiltered.

Even when the material being disseminated was not technically in-house, the Obama campaign was willing to push user generated content to further political ends. The Obama campaign would not back away from user-generated Web content which might be combative, but politically useful, such as \textit{Hillary 1984}, \textit{The Obama Girl}, and \textit{Yes We Can}. Instead the Obama campaign would push these videos trying to make and keep them viral, even if they were able to keep some distance from the more controversial elements of the clips because they were not produced in house. Both using outside content and direct dissemination have a common outcome: marginalizing the traditional press.

The data of the previous chapter indicates clearly the way the White House puts out information is undergoing a significant change. The previous chapter highlights a presidency which is interviewing less and tweeting more. The White House is putting out more direct content. A presidency which is pushing direct content via digital outlets requires a very different tool set than previous administrations. Therefore it is probable that if there is a content revolution taking place in the White House, those numbers should be backed by a qualitative change in the digital communication of the Obama Administration. This chapter highlights the important changes in digital communication from the White House since 1993 and the advent of the first website.

Particularly interesting, especially considering the story of the interview data, is the revolutionary shift the White House webpage has seen with the Obama administration, even from the presidency of George W. Bush. The mark of this shift might be counted with former

\textsuperscript{12} Katchy Merlocke Jackson, Harold Dorton, and Brett Heindl, “A Celebration That Defined a Generation: Grant Park, New Media, and Barack Obama’s Historic Victory of the US Presidency,” \textit{The Journal Of American Culture} 33.1 (March 2010), 44.

President Bush creating a new first by having a post-presidency inaugural address via Facebook and YouTube.\textsuperscript{14} The Obama presidency is putting out more information than ever before and it is being done with more sophistication than in the past via a website which has seen increasing complexity. This sophistication allows the White House to put out material without ever interacting with the traditional press. The evolution and institutionalization of the White House’s digital direct content is the subject of this chapter.

\textbf{CHANGE AT WHITEHOUSE.GOV}

The previous chapter established sound evidence for the thesis that the White House is undergoing a communication strategy shift. While interviews with the president have plummeted, direct information sources via social media have steadily increased. Putting out original direct content with social media leaves its own qualitative footprint as well. It is one matter to find that the president is using new media extensively and the traditional press little, it is another matter to investigate what those new media numbers look like. What kind of information is being disseminated? How does this information look similar to or different from information put out by previous presidents? The potential to transform the office by social media has been compared by some to that of Kennedy and television.\textsuperscript{15}

One important element of the new media strategy, in addition to using Facebook, Twitter, and Flicker, has been a focus on revamping the White House website (whitehouse.gov). Some of the important elements of social and new media can be illustrated by examining the brief history of the executive’s webpage and Obama’s sweeping changes to the site. These changes can be directly linked to current Director of New Media Macon Phillips and is further indication of the earlier posited institutional changes. If the numbers show a downplay of traditional press interviews to an increase in new media output, it is worth examining what some of this broader new media output looks like and how it compares to past presidents and their use of the internet.

The first White House website was created in 1994. It is possible to compare the innovation and evolution of WhiteHouse.gov because these pages have been stored and achieved electronically since 1995. The National Achieve has preserved whitehouse.gov for former President Bush and it remains a historic site “frozen in time.”16 Former President Clinton’s website remains available in all of its iterations through the Clinton Presidential Library.17 Because of this storage it is possible to track a number of important changes as the site develops, due to interplay of technological advances and strategy shifts from differing administrations.

The first White House website under President Clinton was understandably minimalistic, and will undoubtedly appear primitive to the contemporary viewer and can be viewed in figure 11.

![Figure 11: The First White House Website]

The most prominent image is the structure of the White House itself. There are only eight main links, all of which are primarily text driven. Contact with the White House via the 1995 page is limited to a guest book18 and a comments section. Despite a section entitled ‘new’ information, all the content on the original site was static. Clicking on “Executive Branch” results in another minimalistic page full of low resolution pictures offering four options: “Some Recent Presidential Initiatives,” “Biography,” “Some of the President’s Recent Public Addresses” and

16 http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/
17 http://www.clintonlibrary.gov/archiveseach.html
18 Guest books were popular on early websites mimicking BBC technology. There technical children are the more modern wiki’s and discussion boards.
“White House Offices and Agencies.” Even the welcome messages, both short text blurbs, from the President and Vice-President use generic language. Note that by visiting the initial 1995 webpage, one would not automatically either see pictures of President Clinton, or even see him addressed by name until clicking through several layers of links.

By 1999, subtle changes had been made to the website. Faster computers and internet access has allowed for higher resolution pictures, but the White House website remains basic for the time, although changes are beginning to emerge.

![White House Website 1999](image)

**Figure 12: What House Website 1999**

Now it is at least possible to see the president and vice president in pictorial form. However their names continue to be absent from the front page. There is also now a bit of extended contact information and individuals can actually “do” things on the White House website. It is possible to learn about tours, there is a White House technical help section, and it is possible to send e-mail presumably to the president and vice-president. Also newly emergent are links at
the top of the page which include advocacy for particular issues and name the president. In the site achieved by the Clinton Presidential Library, it is Clinton who is offering an important plan which visitors should investigate further.

Moving forward a year into late December 2000 the White House website has received another facelift. Stories and links to more recent Presidential activity are highlighted, and President Clinton is now a reoccurring word on the site. All of these changes can be seen in figure 12. There is also a deeper database of information accessible from the 2000 website’s link bar. Contacting the White House has become more centralized and there are now interesting links entitled “The Briefing Room” and “Record of Progress.”

Skipping ahead seven years the White House website becomes much more complex and more interesting. Instead of a focus on the building of the White House, the person holding the office has become front and center. The 2007 site includes detailed photos, most of the first family and of George W. Bush. Further, the revamped picture of the White House now comes with the ‘subtitle’ of “President George W. Bush” in the upper left hand corner. There is far more
information on the 2007 site and much of it advocacy in nature and now contains numerous references to then sitting President Bush. Bush’s 2007 website can be seen in figure 14.

The depth of information to be found on the website has increased exponentially since even the 2000 incarnation of the site. There are news sections containing information from current news, to press briefings, proclamations, executive orders, radio address, and advocacy pieces. The 2007 website also importantly contains both streaming video and audio. Users can still
watch George W. Bush deliver his farewell address. Other videos are advocacy pieces ranging from war to Medicaid. Importantly these pieces are not housed in larger social media networked. Videos are directly embedded and are not cross-listed on video sharing sites such as YouTube.

One of the important features absent from the 2007 webpage, that will become a reality with President Obama is that whitehouse.gov in 2007 lacks a mobile version. Mobile versions of webpages are designed to be easily accessible on smaller screens, need less bandwidth, and have easier access to information individuals might want while roaming. Also notably lacking are any ways users can interact with the site. While the amount of information presented and the sophistication of this presentation has clearly increased astonishingly since the website debuted in 1994, the ability for users to interact in a meaningful way is still lacking into 2007 – an era of Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones, wikis, and other web 2.0 devices. In short, even up until the waning days of the President Bush administration, the White House was not overtly utilizing social media in any meaningful way, at least as can be detected from a close examination of their achieved websites.

The current whitehouse.gov website in 2010 is far more advanced than anything seen even in 2007. It includes a standard and mobile version (m.whitehouse.gov) – an important step forward into social media integration. It is highly visual. It includes numerous video and audio elements. Importantly, President Obama is seen on nearly every page and seen and heard on subsequent inner pages. Whitehouse.gov in 2010 does something else completely unique to any of its predecessors. For the first time whitehouse.gov is a hub website to a variety of other “.gov” webpages also under control of the executive branch.
The sites range from advocacy and information for healthcare (healthcare.gov), numbers related to economic growth and President Obama’s stimulus package (recovery.gov), access to government databases in conjunction with the White House’s Open Government Initiative (data.gov), to even information on the infamous “Cash for Clunkers” program which continues to advocate for new fuel sources (cars.gov). Pictured in figure 16 is recovery.gov as it last looked in 2010.

In the upper right hand corner, the website offers the ability to “connect” via Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and Flicker. Positive up-to-date information is provided on where recovery money is headed. Users can repost all of this material via a single click. Further, users can generate their own tables and databases via the provided tools and easily upload this information as well.
Interactivity and social media are now integral parts of both the main whitehouse.gov webpage, and its specific advocacy websites such as recovery.gov. No longer content to just have a ‘feedback’ page, the White House can be followed on RSS feeds, Twitter, and Facebook. New pictures and videos are constantly being released from staff photographers via Flicker and YouTube. Administration information and advocacy looks almost indistinguishable from news stories for the typical viewer. Importantly, the information coming from these sources are micro-targeted. Obama’s Twitter feed offers unique perspective on the presidents day to day activities, Facebook offers a more personal feeling, while RSS feeds portray themselves as current event news stories. Obviously those following recovery.gov will receive differing information than those who are following healthcare.gov. With social media comes the ability to microtarget.

A recent example of social media website use can be seen in a recent White House contest. The White House, integrating Facebook, YouTube, socialsecurity.gov and whitehouse.gov, created a video contest entitled “How Social Security Has Made a Difference in My Life.” Users created their own videos and posted them on YouTube (linked to the contest aggregation website). The winner’s story was highlighted on whitehouse.gov and socialsecurity.gov. In essence the social media allowed the White House to both gather unique information for re-dissemination for advocacy purposes and to advocate simultaneously with contacting new unique users.

This type of social media was simply not part of even the previous Bush Administration’s strategy. While the internet may have brought many profound changes to society, it appears to be social media (not the internet) which may be having the most important impacts on the executive branch. One interesting measure of the penetration of the administration’s message is in its regurgitation via social media. While these numbers are not available for all social media, they are available for open outlets such as Twitter.

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19 [http://www.socialsecurity.gov/open/contest/](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/open/contest/) last visited 10/10/10

20 Facebook, for instance, is a ‘closed garden.’ This means that information posted by users is not automatically available to anyone. One cannot obtain aggregate information about wall posts for example from Facebook.
The increase in media forms means that the White House itself is framing its own images in ways never before possible. Looking at the White House’s live feeds it is possible to see news worthy images which come straight from internal sources. Title captions even offer the illusion of editorial design, similar to Video News Releases (VNRs). In fact there are many similarities between VNRs and recent social media targeting trends.

VNRs are so-called news releases put out by interest groups, nonprofit organizations, and public relations firms and were produced beginning in the 1980s. The purpose of VNRs is to have news rooms (typically local news rooms) use the material instead of producing more costly original content.21 Problematic ethically, VNRs are typically released without recognizing the source was external to the independent press. President Bush was criticized for utilizing VNRs during his administration and President Clinton would initiate their use.22

Looking at the bottom of the recovery.gov page one finds an interesting and important link seen in figure 17. The media kit offers journalists a variety of prepackaged information – including press releases, video, and transcripts to recent meetings. It also offers the ability of journalists to connect via social media with the newest information coming from recovery.gov. The material could be easily reposted without editing, much like VNRs.

What Clinton and Bush pioneered appears to be transformed in the social media centric Obama Administration. By exporting professional video, audio, pictures, and news via social media, it is possible to not just hope to have press rooms use the material, but to actually disseminate that information yourself. As social media blurs the lines between the sources of news, it becomes

easier – given enough information output – for a president to package, frame, and disseminate his own message. Social media appears to have met VNRs. The incremental increase of presidential power is evident.

The transition into a social media whitehouse.gov was clearly purposive. Neither was it a surprise. President Obama’s transition website, change.gov, was a foreshadowing of the changes to come to whitehouse.gov. Obama would create a transition team, which was noted by technology industry insiders as composed of social media centric individuals. Macon Phillips would direct the effort to create a transition government website for Obama in change.gov. When Obama would take office, his new media would follow suit and change.gov would essentially be ported over and enhanced into whitehouse.gov. Slowly the additional sites, such as healthcare.gov and recovery.gov, would go live and promote the president’s positions.

**New Media, Whitehouse.gov and the 2010 Election**

As outlined above in some detail, there is a switch between 2009 and 2010 for the Obama administration. During this interview the data indicated that interviews decreased to nearly non-existent levels in 2010, while new media output (measured in terms of Twitter and Facebook) more than doubled. The net result of which was that in 2010 the Obama Administration has nearly no interviews, but a stable and high number of social media interactions. Further, the activity of new media was even more prominent given the election year nature of 2010. While Clinton in 1994 would use the traditional press and the interview during the election season, Obama would not, but visible instead was a spike in new media output occurring around the election.

Beginning in September and holding until November there is a drastic increase in output on Obama’s twitter account. Meanwhile interviews remain consistently low. Beyond just the numerical interest in the activity switch to new media is the content of this new media output itself. These tweets and Facebook posts were consistently about mobilization and the election

during the election push. They contained links to BarackObama.com and get out the vote efforts.

A sampling of these tweets nearing the end of October will indicate there general information and trend: “I’m fired up—are you? Help get out the vote tomorrow. Find local canvasses and phone banks in your community,” “There are two days to make an impact before Tuesday’s elections. Take time today to call voters in your state,” and “I need you to help get out the vote—if everybody who fought for change in ’08 shows up in ’10, we'll win this election.” All of these tweets included links – an important aspect of new media. They also contained revolutionary new ways of mobilizing voters and organizing campaign efforts.

The links were a smorgasbord of new media interactivity, from the aforementioned BarackObama.com to Facebook and even the unique and interesting, perhaps revolutionary, “Vote 2010 Call Tool” website. This website, which was given very little press, was an innovated strategy to increase turnout. In the past phone banks for campaigns have been located at a geographic location and the system has been all in house. Local networked computers generated the information live callers were to say and then took feedback to create databases about precincts and voters. The Vote 2010 Call Tool on the new Call.BarackObama.com offered people the ability to phone bank from home. What had previously been done on local networks was expanded to the internet via a social network. While not covered in any detail by reporters, screenshots of the system in action were available from users. Figure 18 displays a screenshot of the calling tool as captured by a user.

A more primitive version of the system had been employed by Obama in 2009, also without much fanfare. Its success was in its abilities to use mobilized voters from around the country to target areas of the country where workers were thin. The McCain campaign saw it as one of the many new media tool areas on which they needed to mimic. Yet, the system has


remained largely unexamined, except by a few who were worried by privacy concerns.  

Despite its minimal press online phone banking is paradigmatic of the social media mindset and the apparent strategy shift beginning with the Obama administration towards the use of such media.

Figure 18: Vote 2010 Calling Tool

Even when Obama has an interview, he exploits new media outlets as a source of expanding it beyond the traditional setting. On November 3rd Obama would have a press conference, but as he would post on Twitter and Facebook, after the press interview he would be holding a ‘conference call’ open to the public on “what’s next and where we go from here.” He also regularly has YouTube embedded video on his Facebook wall speaking to voters, and on November 4th thanking online campaign workers.

Using new media to interact unilaterally and unmediated to the public combined with the ability to target micro-audiences (such as online campaign support) appears to be the two-pronged new media strategy emanating from the White House. A more detailed look at

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WhiteHouse.Gov, Twitter, and Facebook reveal that meaningful information is being communicated. Beyond even this new trend – new media output at the expense of traditional media output – is the related trend of the online phone banks. Social media is not limited to one-way communication. It is possible to use social media to mobilize. Just as new media has effect understanding what a group is and where it can meet, so too might it affect campaign strategies.28

In this case the mobilization is not new in form, a phone bank, but in technology. What once required a physical presence can now be accomplished at a distance. Ease of use is probably not even the most important aspect of this emerging technique. Rather, it is the dexterous capability of such a phone bank. People in an individual state, borders, etc. become less meaningful. If you precinct, state, or region are already locked for a given candidate your usefulness to the campaign is no longer diminished. Stronghold areas can be used as a resource, via social media, in a way not possible even a decade ago.

The ability to employ such techniques is simple not possible through the traditional press. The traditional press and the traditional interview are static. While they are interactive for the participants – i.e. the reporter and the president – they contain static information for the wider audience. By limiting static and mediated information transfer, a president who uses new media outlets provides both for unmediated information transfer and, concurrently, dynamic information flows.

**SUMMARIZING THE EVIDENCE**
The presidency is putting out information in a new way. The White House evolution from Bush to Obama marks something revolutionary. Presidents are putting out content directly via new media tools. While Chapter four highlighted the shift, chapter five has offered a picture of what this shift has meant. Information coming through new media channels is not just measurable quantitatively, but qualitatively as well. The digital presidency has seen a marked shift from

Bush to Obama. While it may not be particularly surprising, it does offer support for the hypothesis that the president is institutionalizing a new media presence.

In addition to the evidence supporting $H_1$ and $H_2$, there has been a qualitative change in the use of new media outlets. While the historical differences in White House web pages are interesting, the most important and interesting comparisons come between Obama and George W. Bush. There has been a qualitatively radical change in WhiteHouse.gov depth, type, breadth, and use. President Obama is markedly different from even President Bush by his use of social media; a venue which appears to allow the president to put out a far higher level of information than did earlier presidents, even Bush who had no social media presence whatsoever via WhiteHouse.gov. By using a variety of websites Obama has been able to disseminate and frame information either not available or not employed by earlier office holders. It appears that this qualitative change has had important quantitative outcomes – specifically the lowering interview levels to historic lows.

The qualitative difference might be best seen as a realized political outcome in his virtual phone banks; the melding of technology to existing methods of campaigning point to a maturity of social networks and media. It also shows the qualitative change which social media is having on how the president interacts with the general public. Further, it is evidence of a specific purposeful use of social media for the purposes of political gain. If nothing else and there is clearly to believe there is more, such use of social networks is evidence of Obama’s strategy of new media. The White House is not merely using new media because of trendiness, but is using it as a strategic tool for furthering the goals of the White House and the Democratic Party at large. As such it appears evident there is support for the $H_3$ hypothesis that there is an institutionalization of the new media response by the Obama White House.
CHAPTER SIX: CHALLENGES TO THE NEW MEDIA STRATEGY

Despite social media’s advantages for the executive office outlined in detail, it’s not an unmitigated positive for the White House: Tweets, Facebook, Flicker, etc. also present challenges for the president. The opportunity of unilateral information dissemination does not come without 21st century challenges. There are three large challenges for the president presented here: (1) the ambiguity about what is “on-the-record” in the internet age, (2) the twenty-four hour consumer news cycle and (3) an increasing number of voices which can present information – all potentially negative in nature.

New media blurs the lines between what is “on” and “off” the record. In 2009 ABC Nightline anchor Terry Moran tweeted that President Obama once referred to (famous rapper) Kanye West as a “jackass.” The comment was thought by President Obama to be off-the-record. This revelation would result in an exchange and debate over the place of tweeting in news coverage.¹ Eventually Moran would remove the tweet, but the damage had already occurred. One potential of social media is it allows reporters to use more material than previously possible – all information is potentially news worthy. Material once considered background can be instantaneously reported. Such an environment requires the president to be continually guarded with information. The necessity to be always “on” is substantially different from FDR’s on / off approach with reporters. It also extends to situations were non-reporters might be able to gather original news using cell phone and other social media technology.

Social media also creates a faster news environment. As Crouch and Maltese note, “[a key difference] between media demands on past and modern presidents is how quickly and easily the public can access information.”² The six o’clock hooks of a past era have “given way to a twenty-four-hour news cycle featuring cable television channels such as CNN and Fox News, and Internet Web pages and blogs such as Drudge Report and Daily Kos . . . overall, the number and speed of mass media outlets is greater now than ever before.”³ This increased news cycle

³ Ibid, 20 – 21.
puts pressure on the executive branch in two ways. First, it increases demand for a coherent response from the president. Second, it creates a situation where important news can come out at any time. The executive office which does not respond to shifting world events in real time is increasingly becoming a White House which is criticized as a slow responder.

The increased rapidity of news can lead to additional embarrassing moments for a president, such as President Obama’s remarks during a question-and-answer session in Shanghai, China. In response to a question about the importance of the internet and open communications, which focused on the role of the free use of Twitter, president Obama responded by saying: “Well, first of all, let me say that I have never used Twitter. I notice that young people, they’re very busy with all these electronics. My thumbs are too clumsy to type in things on the phone.” The comment was undoubtedly surprising to his numerous followers on twitter considering he had been actively using Twitter both during his administration and during his campaign. In fact, he had already told Matt Lauer he was intent on keeping his Blackberry while in the White House, in part to remain active on Twitter.

The number of people with whom the president must contend also increases with new media. No longer are just the main networks and the editorial boards of major newspaper the primary concern of the White House. Now blogs, Facebook pages, news aggregation sites, and others offer potentially critical commentary on every move a President makes. As President Clinton learned during the breaking news of the Monica Lewinski story, news aggregation sites can be a powerful source of news and an important push on traditional sources to increase the speed of their reporting. This exponential increase in sources combined with the twenty-four hour news cycle creates a variety of new problems for presidents who want to manage the press effectively.

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5 Interview with Matt Lauer of NBC’s “Today,” February 1, 2009 DCPD200900048.
When Are Presidents on the Record?

Talking about presidential answers being on or off the record date back to Theodore Roosevelt’s use of the press to influence public opinion⁶ and, as such, TR is considered the founder of the presidential press conference.⁷ As Smith would sum up the goal of TR, “he created news.”⁸ Roosevelt would talk to reporters privately, off-the-record, “to convince them of the rightness of his policies.”⁹ He would warn bureau chiefs that violating his on-the-record / off-the-record policy would be detrimental to their access and to future information.¹⁰ Off-the-record would be created with the genesis of the press conference. Open and closed press conferences began with Roosevelt precisely because they were an excellent tool of press management.

Theodore Roosevelt would not be the last president to use the on-the-record / off-the-record technique to manipulate and manage the press. Woodrow Wilson would hold the first formal press conferences as an extension of policies under TR.¹¹ But it would be reserved for Franklin Delano Roosevelt to perfect the art of using the on/off-the-record method combined with a new kind of reporting, background information, as a formable press management tool. For FDR, information was classified into four kinds: off the record, background, indirect quote, and direct quotable.¹²

FDR’s ground rules gave him significant leverage in managing the press. Off-the-record material could not be talked about among other reporters or editors. Background information could be written about, but only on the authority of the reporter. As Smith has noted, “Roosevelt’s clever use of off-the-record comments and backgrounders gave the illusion that he did not conceal information from reporters.”¹³ Instead Roosevelt appeared able to “discuss with them

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⁹ Ibid, 22.
[reporters] the most confidential policies.”\textsuperscript{14} Indirect quotes could be attributed to the White House generally, but not the president specifically. Only directly quotable moments could be used as coming directly from FDR himself.

The live press conference, which began with Kennedy on January 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1961, would be the next change in the on / off-the-record saga. Now the president not only contended with a press conference, he did so while being recorded and broadcast. It was Kennedy who understood that the live press conference, while it would close off some forms of press – president communication, would ultimately allow the president a venue by which to reach a new audience. Potentially the president would not have to use mediated voices to be heard. It was at least possible for citizens to hear a president respond, in his own words, with the live press conference. As Kurtz has stated Kennedy’s live press conference “permanently altered the nature of White House communications by staging a regular drama, with the reporters as extras, that reached every American living room.”\textsuperscript{15} Later presidents have had to exist in this environment or “risk the wrath of the media and the voters by refusing to face the press and the public simultaneously.”\textsuperscript{16}

The live press conference brought with it many dangers. While it is possible, and many presidents have, attempted to manage press conferences, it cannot be completely controlled. It is a moment where news can be created. The creation of news not generated by the president is always a dangerous moment for the president. Control is the driving aspect of any president’s message and therefore anytime control is ceded to others, especially journalists, is a dangerous gambit. The underlying desire is for message control. As Ron Charles has put it in a recent review, the process is marked by “just how effectively presidential campaigners plan, draft and articulate the political discourse that the press pretends it controls.”\textsuperscript{17}

New media changes the president – press dynamic. The United States is increasingly a place where nothing which happens in front of others can be considered private. The very devices

\textsuperscript{14} William J. Small, Political Power and the Press (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 83.
which allow for continual attachment to the news, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, etc. are also capable recording devices. Information can be captured and transmitted by anyone anywhere. If there was any doubt concerning the capability of these new devices, Park Chan-wook’s recent film – filmed entirely using smartphones – is a testament to their ability.\textsuperscript{18} If iPhone’s can create movie worthy video, it is likely they can capture unfortunate political moments to be posted on instantaneously YouTube.

This is precisely what happened to the president in the aforementioned 2009 ABC \textit{Nightline} incident. President Obama, assuming an off the record moment with Terry Moran, would find that his reference to Kanye West immediately posted in Twitter.\textsuperscript{19} For the strategic president then, do you want a reporter with the capability of posted information immediately through a filter, or would you rather go directly to the ‘source’ and publish your own information without mediation?

President Obama has used off-the-record meetings for strategic advantage, including speaking with prominent political writers and journalists.\textsuperscript{20} During the 2010 campaign season, bloggers invited to an off-the-record meeting leaked information and a video clip of the president.\textsuperscript{21} What was particularly interesting about the leaked clip was what President Obama was discussing. Obama noted how the internet was allowing the administration to reach out to new audiences. Simultaneously, his supposedly off-the-record meeting was posted at the blog ConcreteLoop.com. When the president interacts with anyone he must now continually treat it as if he were ‘live.’

Ironically it seems that the best strategy to overcome an always on the record new media environment is to bypass the traditional media in the first place so that the recording of the new media is unfiltered. More importantly, on the message you want instead of how it was captured by others. The always live aspect of the press conference which did not begin until

\textsuperscript{18} Jaeyeon Woo, “From an iPhone to a Theater Near You,” \textit{Wall Street Journal} January 11, 2011; Staff Reporter, “Top Director Shot Entire Movie with iPhone,” \textit{International Business Times} January 10, 2011.


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Kennedy is now part of the very fabric of every interview a president has. This is the fundamental change brought about by new media: all interviews are in a very real sense ‘live.’ There is no definitive ability to know what is on or off, just as with the so-called off the record blogger speech. The line has become blurred. The best strategy is to use the conduit but to ditch the messenger. If the Twitterverse is going to talk about you, better it talk about you on your own terms rather than through the filter of a reporter or the video of a smartphone on YouTube.

The Twenty-Four Hour News Cycle and the Twenty-Four Hour Consumption

The twenty-four-hour news cycle has its roots in cable television – specifically the Cable News Network (CNN). CNN would be catapulted into prominence by it’s around the clock coverage of the first Gulf War. CNN would fundamentally change the way media is delivered by creating a continual news cycle. Dizard has summed up CNN’s media impact succinctly: “Its [CNN’s] stock-in-trade, a twenty-four-hour news service, added a new dimension to electronic news, especially for coverage of fast-breaking events.” Cable news grew as broadcast television audiences shrank, but now even cable news is facing a new media environment. No longer is the twenty-four-hour news cycle about production alone, it is also about consumption. New media is about the twenty-four-hour consumption pattern.

Not only is news produced continually, it is now consumed continually, and it can be consumed anywhere. As Carey and Maynard indicate, “For the consumer, news will be available just about anywhere. Pervasive access will be made available by wireless networks in public places, advanced cell phones, wireless personal digital assistants, satellite radio to cars, and even electronic signs on highways that display headlines, traffic information, and the weather.” No longer must one be sitting in front of a traditional television to consume CNN. Now news comes to you continually and anywhere. It is a subtle shift in the twenty-four-hour news cycle, but it is nonetheless an important one. While CNN ushered in the era of twenty-four-hour

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22 Barbara Zelizer, “CNN, the Fult War, and Journalistic Practice,” Journal of Communications 42.1 (Winter 1992).
news production, new media appears to be introducing the world to twenty-four-hour anywhere you are news consumption. This shift can be seen in PEW research which has expanded the number of screens it measures for viewer patterns. Once television was the only screen, now PEW looks at mobile views and computer views.

A recent study by d’Haenens, Jankowski and Heuvelman, illustrates the online news shift taking place at the consumer level. d’Haenens et al. found that the online and print versions of newspapers were not radically different in composition. The only major difference being in the number of front page stories being increased for online news, which has more space. The real difference was in consumer consumption patterns. Consumers would skim a higher proportion of stories and would read a different mix of stories online than they would in the print version. One difference is that sports would receive less views and national news would see an increase in views. While not the express purpose of the study, d’Haenens et al. illustrate that the move online has less to do with changing a twenty-four-hour news production cycle and more to do about users consuming at a twenty-four-hour news pace.25

The profound impact of new media in the context of the twenty-four-hour news cycle has been on the way consumers relate to news. A recent report for the Project for Excellence in Journalism has summed up the evidence nicely: “the Internet and cell phones are changing people’s relationship to news.”26 The report goes on to state, “how they [consumers] interact, what they are most likely to learn there, and what they do in response, are different in the digital space than it is in older platforms. It is making news more portable, perpetual, personalized, and participatory.”27 The alteration of the way consumers consume news has profound effects on the means and methods by which the president can attempt to enter into the news flow. While the 20th century culminated with the twenty-four-hour news production cycle, the 21st century has brought with it a twenty-four-hour – and anywhere -- news consumption cycle.

27 Ibid.
In many ways it might be right to argue that social media will be for the consumer what CNN was for the broadcaster. CNN created the continual news production cycle. It appears that new media is producing the continual news consumer. Importantly, consumers who digest the news continually differ in their consumption patterns than those who do not. The way you think about news, what you see, is impact by the way you gather the information. This should not be particularly surprising. The importance of typical media effects, such as framing and agenda setting, seem to be altered on the means by which you consume your information. Given that social media has changed the way we gather information and news, it is not surprising then that this effects how we view and relate to the world. Therefore as news continues to move into the new media realm, the way people think about the news will probably change with it. Past models of thinking about news as a production / consumption cycle are simply unable to account for such systemic changes.

It should not be surprising that the president is attempting to insert his voice into this new medium. Obama needs to be in the Twitter feed if he is to remain relevant. If the way people gather and consume news is changing, then successful presidents will necessarily need to change messaging strategies to reach them. All other content being equal, if more users are gathering their news through non-traditional, non-mediated sources, then it should be expected the president would need to tap into this messaging system. What this means for the president is there is a wider audience for his messaging strategy. The tools which worked with White House Press Corps will undoubtedly not be as effective dealing with the Twitterverse or with Facebook. A change of medium and a change of consumer patterns almost necessitate new presidential communication strategies.

Shifting consumer patterns are clearly a messaging barrier which the White House will need to overcome as it attempts to bypass the traditional press. Releasing information in 140 characters on Twitter, having the capacity to create unique audio and video output, and the variety of other necessities to engage new media will require a messaging shift. While it is clear from the current data that this shift is underway, it is not by any means set, nor is it possible to
know where those shifting consumer patterns will eventually settle. This stands a formidable barrier to the president.

One likely continued trend is the need for the present to respond nearly instantaneously to world events. Consumers who cannot find the president’s voice will likely assume the president is not relevant. Given a consumer base which now intakes news continually, the president no longer has the luxury of waiting for news pegs, he must respond or be considered mute. Even if the president’s response is only 150 characters, it is likely to be important to have that message out as soon as events occur, rather than waiting for the traditional news cycle. In the twenty-four-hour news consumption cycle of the new media, a president must respond in real-time.

**The Exponential Increase in Voices**

One of the important factors of new media examined by the literature has been its impact on policy making. As early as 1998, Davis and Owen found that emerging new media was not interested in engaging the electorate in policy debates. The same, however, can no longer be said for 2010 and beyond. Soft media sources – individuals who were not suppose to have an impact on policy – have become deeply involved in engaging the public. Steven Colbert, a comedian who plays a conservative character, testified before Congress in character. Jon Stewart, host of the popular mock news program *The Daily Show*, would hold a pre-election rally entitled “Rally to Restore Sanity” on the Washington Mall. Both 2010 events mark the beginning of something new. A host of new voices have become important political advocates. Perhaps such should not be surprising in an era when Jon Stewart was named ‘the most trusted man in news’ by a *Times* magazine poll in 2009.

Importantly for political actors is to engage this emerging media set. Serious political candidates are interviewed by Stewart. In October 2010, President Obama would sit down with the host of *The Daily Show*. Instead of receiving the easy questions one might consider typical of soft news, President Obama would receive tough questioning form Stewart. Obama would

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have to defend his record from a fellow liberal, and now critic, who has argued President Obama has not fulfilled the promise of hope and change and instead continued the policies of former President Bush. Not exactly what one might expect from a source primarily interested in entertaining.

The development of serious news issues being addressed in new media, or a soft news format, puts much of the literature on its head. Previous literature has examined if soft news or infotainment programming has political importance or influence. These formats are now being explicitly used, both by the producers and by political actors, for political purposes. It is no longer a question if tangential political information can come through these mediums, because now political information is being put through them purposefully; even if, as is probably the case, there is entertainment value in presenting politics. The emergent question is how should / will political actors manage this change?

For the executive branch, the increase in voices means inserting your voice into a stream where more and more potential individuals have the ability to speak than has been the case during the heyday of the traditional media. If politics really is the struggle to be heard, then new media increases the number of potential voices through which one must shout in order to be heard. In addition to the obvious mention of individuals like Stewart, there are now bloggers, podcasters, Facebook organizers, and others who are continually putting out political commentary. The president must contend with all of these voices if he hopes to be successful in managing his message.

The interesting paradox for the president is that new media allows his voice to be heard unfiltered, but it simultaneously allows more voices than ever before to comment on it. An earlier model can be brought to bear on this subject. As was argued previously, unilateral information dissemination allows the president to create the original unique content (X), which subsequent actors can then act upon (i.e. comment, or X₁, X₂, X₃, etc.). So in the past we might

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have argued that information coming out about the executive branch might have been more diverse, the traditional media can create its own unique content (Y). In the traditional broadcast era there was X and Y, but the iterations – the ability to comment on it – was limited. Now the source material may be limited to X, but there may be more iterations than in the past.

![Figure 19: Iterated Content Compared](image)

What an increase in commentary on unilateral information means for the presidency is an interesting paradox. As traditional media ($Y^b$) content continues to decrease and unilaterally disseminated information ($x^b$) becomes more heavily commented upon, a new system emerges. Instead of a president competing with major editorial or press agencies (Y), the president must now craft messages for a mass of commentaries, but with little to no mediation. This type of relationship poses new challenges for a president trying to stay on message.

What this means is that White House strategy must slowly shift from producing events which cut through mediation and instead focusing increasing attention and energy on packaging compelling original content, which will allow for positive commentary. As the unilateral information becomes more important, as might be tracked by subsequent iterations and
commentaries, the importance begins to shift to content creation. Content creation is not an entirely foreign subject for the White House, but it clearly is clearly a new focus. The content must also play well in the arenas in which people are commenting – social media venues.

Content creation also creates a new unique problem for the White House. It is no longer the job of an outside source to package compelling news. While the president has had to deal with the reality of selling stories, it is likely to take a new dimension as social media continues to mature. For example, the president must try and make his voice heard on channels primarily used for entertainment and personal interactions. The goal will to be create compelling content which will generate clicks and views. It will be an internal matter when content is kept or discarded. Video production and dissemination will become increasingly an in-house affair.

The issue of hard news and soft news will increasingly rest on the White House. Creating content which will be viewed, when there are literally millions of other options, will fall to White House staff. The presidential message will undoubtedly no longer be tailored for the mainstream press. It will be created with an eye toward social media dissemination. This alone is a challenge and it probably will represent a continually profound change in the presidency as the office evolves. As social media continues to gain shares at the expense of broadcast media, the president will need to bolster his ability to produce content. Future presidents will be successful messengers to the extent they create relevant, and venue appropriate material for dissemination across social networks.

**Conclusion on the Challenges of New Media**

The preceding chapter has intended to offer the challenges new media present to the president. New media does not offer the president boundless opportunities. Nor does the unilateral dissemination model intend to present a view where the new media is an unbridled positive for the presidency. Rather, it is merely a new way presidents engage the public. And it presents new communication strategy challenges. It is the president adapting to a new environment. The new environment presents opportunities to the president, but not without challenges. Just as radio and television allowed presidents to go public, so too did they change the nature and challenges of interacting with the press.
It does seem likely that the opportunity and the challenges of new media will not be equally distributed among government. Future research might well focus on changes in the balance of power, especially between Congress and the President, as a result of new media. It seems probable that these interrelationships could not help but be altered by communication changes. Such will be left to future research, but the potentiality is at least suggested by both the unilateral dissemination model and the challenges presented here.

The president clearly has an opportunity to insert an original product into social media networks. But this opportunity is also increasingly an expectation. If not met, it could mean failure for future presidents. It also means successful presidents will need an increasingly complex communications strategy. The changing nature of on-the-record, the twenty-four-hour news consumption cycle, and the increase of commentary will strain presidents. Successful presidents will need to exploit the opportunities of social media, while overcoming and avoiding the new pitfalls it simultaneously creates.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FUTURE OF NEW MEDIA AND PRESIDENTIAL POWER

As Arnold has aptly summed up presidents throughout the 20th century, culminating his case with a study of former President Clinton, “presidents sought more robust autonomy during the twentieth century.”1 What this increased autonomy has yielded has been an increased institutional structure for the presidency, primarily through The Executive Office of the President (EOP).2 It is, as Greenstein has put it, a presidential government. All of the theorizing about autonomy, however, seems often to bypass inclusion of the press. As Arnold states, “within the institutional presidency the incumbent gains political and policy advice, personnel services, communication staff and facilities, and a travel organization to whisk the president, staff, and the attentive press anywhere on short notice [emphasis added].”3

It has been the argument throughout that an understanding of presidential autonomy in the age of new media needs to encompass more specifically a relationship with the press. The one important avenue that the institutional presidency has attempted to circumvent more robustly in the 21st century is the press itself. No longer need the White House whisk the press away to cover events as Arnold noted, the White House can cover events and disseminate that information via social media. News organizations then use this output for their own stories, reinforcing the powerful position of the president and minimizing opportunities for unique news to be gathered by independent sources. Instead, in this role, the press merely takes unilaterally disseminated information and amplifies it, potentially with commentary. Or, many will begin to cut out the middleman and news viewers will consume unilaterally disseminated information directly from the president via social media networks.

The why may be fairly obvious: as Patterson notes, “journalists are increasingly influential political actors. Their heightened power is partly attributable to changes in communication,

chiefly the emergence of television as a major medium.”

Just as the emergence of the power of television, coupled with the McGovern Commission, would rewrite the political landscape for parties and candidates, so too is it possible that the emergence of new media might again have political ramifications. To this point many are in agreement, the disagreement concerns what these outcomes may be. Journalists as political actors are no less important to presidential legacy building than Congress. Thus a president seeking unilateral power may very well, as we have seen appears to be so doing, attempt to bypass the press or potentially managing the press uniquely by putting most information into social media first.

Many who have written on the subject of politics and new media have focused on the transition which would be brought about to journalism. Few have asked the concurrent question: what does the transition mean for political institutions? Those who have asked about the ramifications for political institutions, such as Feld and Wilcox, see the rise of new media as a reemergence of grassroots power. It is viewed as the rebirth of public journalism through a new medium. The research done here however points to a unique conclusion. A consolidation of power as a result of new media may be a surprising conclusion. There is a large amount of work written in the vein of netroots which argues social media is a popularization of media. Explicitly arguing the internet and new media will bring back to individuals a level of power that was lost in the annals of history.

The problem others have had in predicting the outcome of new media has been in not fully conceptualizing or theorizing what such media actually is. There is nothing inherent about the technology of networked protocols which leads inevitably or inexorably to openness. The medium cannot create openness. Given the long history that presidents have for managing

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information flows, assuming a technological innovation will radically alter behavior is problematic. More likely, once the actual nature of the process of new media and produser relationships are opened up is a chokepoint on information – not a proliferation.

The work here offers a cautionary note to those who assume, *ipso facto*, that technological networks of information will lead to renewed citizen journalism. Or even that networks will open up more information to public dissemination. If one properly understands the desired outcome of presidents, legacy building, and if it is realized that legacy building begins by information control then it becomes less likely to assume new mediums will not be harnessed for this express purpose. While there have been many arguments about the relationship of new media and politics, offered here is a unique view which hopes to offer a better theoretical foundation – based on empirical evidence – than past work.

**The Arguments about New Media and Politics**

As the internet became of scholarly interest, especially to the political and social sciences, it has been viewed under the nomenclature of ‘new media’ and there have been two primary responses: one positive and the other negative.⁸ The negative view has taken a variety of tracks. One is that in increasingly high choice environments individuals will simply further tune out the news. As Iyengar and McGrady argue, pessimists ask, “if ‘serious’ news coverage cannot attract television viewers, why should it draw people online . . . is there any reason to suppose that they will suddenly access the BBC or the Press Trust of India just because it’s possible to do so?”⁹ Also possible according to pessimists is Sunstein’s argument of the walled garden; individuals will turn only to certain, reinforcing sources and not attempt to widen their horizons;¹⁰ a potentiality that some, such as Jamieson and Cappella, argue is in no longer a possibility, but a current political reality which they label the echo chamber.¹¹

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These pessimists, or realists, argue new media does not automatically empower citizens. In fact “the so-called NASCAR dads and soccer moms, for the most part, have other matters that come first.” Some, such as Davis, argue a cautious view is more appropriate, “[voters] will not become different people just because there are resources at their disposal to follow politics quite closely.” The basic arguments which permeate the pessimist position are either the system will not undergo a change as a result of new media and the internet, or, if a change is to result it will mean that people pay even less attention to politics than before because of a proliferation of choice in outlets. The advancement of technology will do little for the mass public, which will only be used by elites.

The optimists, or in the term coined by Wilhelm neofuturists, primarily view the internet as a mechanism by which information might proliferate. They were spurred on by a variety of studies which showed a high level of potential for grassroots revival emerging from new technological systems. Such a proliferation of information through new technological development was hoped to create a remedy for an inequality in political information. No less than Robert Dahl would argue as such in his seminal *Democracy and Its Critics*. Theorists from the communitarian political theory tradition would propose that technological developments would result in a leveling or equality in information dissemination. It is this view which appears to be dominating contemporaneously, especially pushed by those taking part in politics, including Howard Dean Campaign manager Joe Trippi and social media political

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Arianna Huffington, who argue the internet – via social networking – will create more democratic elections and government.\textsuperscript{20}

Bimber sees the technological revolution as explaining the mass mobilization of smaller groups.\textsuperscript{21} According to Bimber the internet can overcome the “practical requirements of citizen based policy advocacy”\textsuperscript{22} of Walker by lowering the cost of disseminating information.\textsuperscript{23} Such themes are familiar to progressives arguing that new media and information technology are a catalyst for a revitalization of public journalism. The internet, according to those in line with Bimber, reduces the cost of information gathering. It is the mass mobilization revolution of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century and it will change the way people engage in politics. It will reinvigorate the citizen journalist according to netroot advocates.

For the advocates of the revolution of new media, it is typically hoped that the transition from point-to-point broadcast to networked communities will remedy a modern structural problem of the institutional, ‘traditional,’ news. As Bryan, Tsagarousianou and Tambini argued in 1998:

> There may be a silver lining in the cloud launched by the critics of the media: the media as we know them are passing. Mass-broadcast, one-to-many- TV is a medium of the past. Newspapers will be replaced by interactive bulletins that we will be able to read and publish from the tops of our desks on the machine that will replace our TV and our PC. New media, and particularly computer-mediated communication, it is hoped, will undo the damage done to politics by old media. Far from the telescreen dystopias, new media technology hails a rebirth of democratic life.\textsuperscript{24}

Bryan et al. was a response to those such as Fishkin who argue that the underlying structural problems of modern politics are attributable to the traditional media.\textsuperscript{25} Even in 1998 Bryan et al. appear to be correctly identifying the coming proliferation of devices with internet

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Joe Trippi, \textit{The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Democracy, The Internet, and the Overthrow of Everything} (New York: Regan, 2008).
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{25} J. Fishkin “Talk of the Tube: How to get Teledemocracy Right,” \textit{The American Prospect} Fall 11 (1992).
\end{itemize}
connectivity – laptops and phones – but their underlying hope for fundamental change does not appear to have been substantiated.

Neither the arguments of the pessimists nor the optimists seem to account for the emerging data trends. Pessimists, while right in cautioning against a technological optimistic determinism, wrongly boxed new media as a proliferation of channels. While partly true, this misses what is fundamentally new about new media, and as a result overlooks the important changes new media brings. Optimists, especially netroot writings, predicting a new media which will create grassroots revitalization also appear to be missing the underlying theory. For the netroot writers it appears to be the result of misapplying the theory of open source networks to situations of the political dynamics of news dissemination. Open source models do not accurately describe current news trends and there is no compelling reason to assume they should.

Open source theory derived its thinking from software development, primarily the story of Linux. Open source was a way of allowing code to be distributed and modified without attaching propriety restrictions. To many it was paradoxical because “the system positively benefits from what are typically thought of as free riders in a collective good.”

As a system of coding it offered to hurt proprietary software creators, which in the story of operating systems would come to light in 1998 with Microsoft’s Halloween Memo. It would highlight how the open source philosophy could undercut both profits and its quasi-monopolistic positions.

Netroot activists appear to have assumed that an ‘open source’ news media would be no less liberating to the press as it was to software. If open source could free software, was it not possible for open source to free the media from the monopolistic practices of the mass media? This seems to be the underlying argument from many progressives and echoed in much of the literature on new media: whether revitalizing the media, or creating an ‘open source’

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government structure, new media and the internet have often been portrayed as panaceas to societal and governmental ills alike. Yet such prescriptions can easily become a form of technological determinism, as highlighted by West.30

In short, neither pessimists nor optimists seem to have clearly grasped the fundamental changes taking place to the political system by new media. While each made important contributions to the field, a comprehensive understanding of new media and its effects on politics has yet to solidify in the literature. The results of the previous chapters not only offer enlightenment on presidential power, it also offers an alternative theory for those studying the intersection of new media and politics. New media is neither a panacea for structural concerns, nor is it merely an addition to an already crowded channel set, as the name might suggest it is something fundamentally new.

**AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY**
The theory advanced here hopes to bypass the pitfalls of many of the works which have come before it. Technology, unconceptualized and unoperationalized, does not lead to robust theory building. Related to the problem of determinism, is the issue of theory applicability. Open source models may explain software, but is there a one-to-one translation to government? New media may increase consumer choice, but is it really just the proliferation of information channels? The past literature has either failed to develop parsimonious and meaningful theory or it has attempted to misapply existing ones.

The theory and evidence advanced here hopes to point to an alternative path. First, it argues that new media will not have a one size fits all theory status. Instead, how it might interact with government – or even more specific branches of government – is an important area of emergent research. In the context of the American executive, the framework of a limited produsage model seems useful. Indeed it may well be possible to translate the limited produsage model to other aspects of government. Yet, even if it cannot be translated beyond

the relationship of president and press, it stands as an important project: accurately modeling
the effect of social media starting with theory building.

Second, this alternative path hopes to point out that new media does not \textit{ipso facto} lead to
greater openness, transparency, or the other goals associated with open source models. Nor is it simply channel proliferation. While new media has been used in certain contexts for openness, it does not follow that all situations will follow suite; especially in situations, such as
government and press, where information is decidedly asymmetric in nature. Neither does
government use of social media as an information disseminator point to yet another kind of channel on a dial. Communication models cannot be imported outright into the political realm. Open, networked, communities may produce a proliferation of high quality information for software, but there is no theoretical reason why open, networked communities will do the same thing for news or specifically news about a president.

Third, the alternative here posits specific testable predictions. A problem of much of the early work on the interaction between social media and government has been a lack of testable propositions. It is necessary to get beyond the cliché of arguing ‘something new’ is taking place. Rather it is now time to articulate what this ‘new’ thing is and what it might mean for the distribution of power between press and president – or any set of potential political actors. Such theory building is important if we accept Patterson’s proposition that the main contest for modern politics is the struggle between the reporters and candidates to both be heard and set the tone.\footnote{Thomas E. Patterson, \textit{Out of Order} (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).} Emergent technology which can alter this balance of power is inherently important to the student of politics.

The alternative path here looks back to earlier changes in politics on the basis of television media in order to create a theory moving forward. Just as television changed the political game, so too does social media. Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler note the changes television brought to politics: (1) created journalists as definers of reality, (2) depoliticize the political game by pushing away from issues and towards personalities, (3) transformed politics from a public domain and turned it into something private, in the living room and (4) formation of...
professionals working to push political actors. The emergence of digital social media has changed these features:

Rather than seeing these changes as a process of displacement, with new, digital media becoming dominant as analogue, print-broadcast atrophy, they may be interpreted as evidence of an ecological reconfiguration, recasting roles and relationships within an evolving media landscape.

Social media, even now without any kind of replacement from point-to-mass broadcasting, affects the political balance of power. It changes the “ecological reconfiguration” of president and press relationships. As Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler go on to state, this new environment then has profound implications for political actors: “politicians have also become aware of these altered roles and, ever sensitive to shifts in their audiences’ media use, have adapted the channels of their message delivery to connect with Internet users wherever they may surf.”

Not only do the new media change the analogue political communication, it shifts journalist politician’s balance of power by reconfiguring “access to people, services, information and technology in ways that substantially alter social, organizational and economic relationships across geographical and time boundaries.”

Therefore even if television persists as being numerically dominant in news dissemination, the political environment, including television news itself, will be changed, “the media ecology that surrounds television is being radically reconfigured with major consequences for the norms and practices of political communication.” The way people communicate is political. Alterations to the mechanisms of political communication bring with them the inherent potential for an altered political relationship. New media is changing the environment of news and in the process, even if it never becomes dominant numerically, will be important nonetheless.

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33 Ibid, 167.
34 Ibid, 167.
The importance here is that at some point an evolutionary change in communication mechanisms has resulted in a revolutionary change in political relationships. An evolutionary change becomes revolutionary when it reconfigures political relationships; the institutionalization and behavior changes noted in the previous chapter point to the revolutionary aspect of the limited produser model. Presidential power is tied up in questions of communication. New media is changing the nature of communication. Therefore, an important implication of the limited produser model is the potential changes to presidential power.

**Presidential Power and a Theory of Social Media**

In order to understand social media, in any particularistic context, to move beyond the problematic theorizing of the past, it is necessary to incorporate our existing political theories. In the case of the executive, I have presented the evidence that the social media offers the president the ability to continue a longstanding tradition: consolidate autonomy. In order to theorize about social media it is necessary to move beyond the positions of pessimist and optimists and ask how the emergent technology will alter the political landscape. Only when the theory of that emergent technology is accurately understood in light of the theory of presidential power, is it possible to theorize and hypothesize about their interrelated outcomes. Indeed, as argued earlier, they are inherently interrelated.

The future of presidential power and the limited produser model is to see an increase in media circumvention on a scale not before possible. The inherent goal for presidents will be attempting to become a news source. The place people go to gather news. This possibility is an expressed worry by some in the media, including Brian Lamb, C-SPAN founder,

The only really big threat to us [the press] is the millions and millions of undocumented taxpayer dollars that are being spent right now by the federal government to do their own television about their own institutions, controlled by their own cameras. It’s going on throughout government, and no one is paying any attention to it. One day we’re all going to wake up, and everything that the government is doing, at least as viewed by government staff, is going to be one the Web, and people might say, ‘Why do we need you?’ The big threat is
that they will run the cameras themselves, that they’ll decide what shots they get. Journalism will be diminished even further by that.\textsuperscript{37}

It has been the possibility of government disseminated information which has been explored here, within the context of the president, which seems to confirm the worry of Lamb. While there may be obstacles to absolute presidential dissemination, the research here indicates a move in that direction. A government bypass of the press is important both on empirical grounds, as established earlier and on normative grounds as is illustrated by Lamb. The openness theory of the internet is misleading. More likely, at least in the context of the president and given the data collected, is a world where information is chosen, framed, and disseminated by the executive office, without the intervening lens of the press. The potentiality of the media bypass has been suggested by others: “In the United States, Barack Obama’s presidential campaign relied considerably upon the viral capabilities of social networking sites as a way of overcoming perceived mass-media obstacles.”\textsuperscript{38}

It would seem paradoxical that presidents would not attempt to move towards unilateral information dissemination. Bypassing the press is not a new desire. The newness is found in the ability for the president to package, frame and disseminate himself unilaterally. As Cary has reported of the situation, “Instead of providing regular access at press conferences, the White House chooses what news to release, when to release it, and where to release it. Sure, presidents have been doing that since FDR’s ‘fireside chats’ and Reagan’s Oval Office addresses, but this White House seems to pride itself on using new media as no one has before. The result is unfiltered White House spin, no questions asked.”\textsuperscript{39} The intuitions of reporters are backed up by the data presented here. The White House is neglecting press interviews at a historic rate, while simultaneously pushing new media outlets at historic rates. The correlation does not appear to be unrelated.

Social media is more than presidential speech broadcast live between press commentaries. It is the president completely packaging information and disseminating it as news and both

\textsuperscript{37} Brian Lamb, Interview with \textit{Reason} December 2010.
individuals and the traditional press treating it as such. Even when vying for message control with the press itself, the Obama White House has taken advantage of twitter. In early 2010 when Vice-President Biden would use colorful language, noting the Healthcare bill was a big f—ing deal, at the signing of the healthcare bill, Gibbs would use Twitter for instant message control stating: “and yes Mr. Vice President, you’re right.” The press secretaries tweet “was an omen of the dramatic new direction the Obama White House has taken to manage news in the 24/7 Internet driven news cycle.”

The incentive for the traditional media to accept unilaterally disseminated information can be boiled down to a single word: cost. The cost of producing content is high, and while the social benefit may be great it does not necessarily mean huge profits. Salwen notes that news corporations are slow to produce original web content because it is costly. Salwen states: “Producing original news is costly and labor intensive, requiring investments in bureaus, reporters, editors, graphics specialists, and content designers; and most publishers and general managers of news outlets find these expenditures unnecessary when they already have news from their offline outlets and the wire services.” How easy would it be for those same publishers and general managers to get news from presidential sources? The answer is already occurring: it is very easy. And if that is all the news does, reproduce unilaterally disseminated information, how long before – as Lamb suggested – people ask why do we need a press?

There is no compelling reason to theorize that the media, as an institution, will push back against presidential encroachments on information dissemination. If anything, it will continue its pattern of cost savings maneuverings which as has already been examined is decreasing the size of news agencies. Just as it is easier to pouch material from offline outlets and wire services, so too is it easier to just take governmental information and content already created expressly for the purpose. If it is already appealingly packaged that just means less need for graphics specialists and others – so be it that the information may be framed by an inherently biased source.


Therefore it is likely to theorize that analogously to increases of presidential unilateral power against Congress, for which there was little or no pushback, will be similar for the press. There is no inherent motive for the media to systematically pushback against an outsourcing of content production to sources other than the press. Indeed, as has already been seen, the press has been doing this willingly. The scale and scope of president Obama’s media output is unique, but it is not unique because of personality. It is unique because there was a lack of capacity for earlier presidents to use new media. The underlying prediction for the future is given presidents who seek unilateral power to enhance legacy, combined with the technological ability to produce and disseminate information, in an environment in which the current content producers have no economic benefit – and further actually have an economic benefit – to not pushback, the outcome of the executive branch becoming a stronger unilateral information disseminator seems likely. The evidence itself bears witness to the potential continuing into the future without many roadblocks.

What about the president’s current popularity? If the press is angered by a president who bypasses them, could they not seek revenge by being overly negative and, in the process, hurting the long-term legacy of a president? Which, it can be reminded, was posited as the defining characteristic of presidential action? This arguing is valid, but the data does not yet exist to test it. As Obama continues and eventually ends his tenure in office, a second possibility is just as likely. Perhaps, if the future is framed by social media, it will not matter as much what the press says. Perhaps, instead, it will be what his Facebook friends post and Twitter user’s tweet that will define a president. Such is at least a plausible alternative. As the press as an institution continues to lose prestige and status, it is likely the agenda and priming functions of the press will wane as those functions are transferred more heavily to new media. The definition of a historically great president may no longer be dependent, in part, on the attitude of the press. It may be the attitude of that emerging great network: social media.

**Conclusion**
There have been two prevailing predictions about the theory of technology and politics: one arguing optimistically about increased openness and the other arguing new media is but another channel on an overcrowded dial. It has been argued here, however, that there needs
to be an alternative model. The data presented does not fit with past discussion on the topic. The problem in understanding new media is precisely how both important and nuanced it really is in its interactions with politics. New media is not something which has happened in a vacuum, *ex nihilo*. It is the culmination of an evolutionary process, triangulating a variety of concepts including power, the press, and technology. Yet the end result of new media, even though it comes through an evolutionary process, is fundamentally revolutionary for political actors. It is changing the fundamental balance of power between the great American struggle between presidents and the press to be heard and set the message.

The president has always and will continue to attempt to expand his unilateral powers for the purpose of legacy building. The desire of presidents to bypass the press is at its root not a new phenomenon. What is uniquely new, as the result of networked communities to which the executive branch has access, is the ability to completely circumvent press messages. The ability for presidents to package, frame, and disseminate his message independently of any other actors is revolutionary. Unilateral information dissemination stands to be a key element for presidents in the 21st century. Even with the challenges new media may offer executives, it is no doubt that these challenges will be met within this emergent space, not outside of it. In short, to combat the potential pitfalls of new media will not pressure a president back into a closer relationship with the White House Press Corp. It will more likely push it further apart.

Presidents will continue to seek the power to define himself. Tools which avail the president of this ability will be deployed. Social media networks are such a tool. The White House Press Corp will not cease to exist. Instead, its relevancy is merely declining as new ways of communicating and learning about the president continues to mature. Social media does not change the desire of the actors; rather, it reorients the board on which the game is played. Social media offers the president a new powerful tool for managing the press and, importantly, the image of the president. Because at base presidential political communications are about selling a product: the man or woman in the White House.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUDING THE EVIDENCE

The preceding chapters have presented a unique model of presidential communication strategy. Drawing on the work of previous scholars who have researched unilateral presidential power this piece has extrapolated a new model of presidential communication. Grounded in history and previous work in presidential studies the unilateral information dissemination model attempts to explain and predict presidential communication patterns in the 21st century. Unlike both the optimist and the pessimists of the past, it is a third way forward for understanding current developments in presidential communication strategy and the political effects of new media.

The predictions of the unilateral dissemination model are deceptively simple, yet profound. Presidents are bypassing the traditional press by way of social media channels. The data supports this assertion. The Obama administration is marked by three important trends: (1) a precipitous drop in interviews to the lowest levels in history, and (2) a dramatic and profound increase in social media communication, (3) an increased sophistication and institutionalization of social media use. What has also been interesting is that these appear to be related. In time series where one would expect to see increases in interviews, what is actually occurring is an increase in social media output. Where interviews are becoming scarcer, social media output is becoming more prevalent.

The most recent presidents preceding Obama, Clinton and G.W. Bush, who also sat during the age of the internet, had seen an increase in presidential interview output. Obama has reversed this trend. It appears likely that the unilateral information dissemination model helps to explain why. Presidents want to communicate unfiltered to the public. This much is not questioned. The problem has been in the how. How does a president bypass the traditional press? Can a president bypass the traditional press? The answer to these questions appears to be: social media.

This work confirms suggestions by many in the media that social media is creating problems for the traditional press. Dwyer has suggested that President Obama’s use of social media and the internet is doing “an end-run around the traditional press” and has asked if the practice does
not amount to “State Run Media 2.0.”¹ Dwyer rightly notes that, “Over the past few months, as
White House cameras have been granted free reign behind the scenes, officials have blocked
broadcast news outlets from events traditionally open to coverage and limited opportunities to
publicly question the president himself.”² The use of social media by the president has clearly
allowed a restriction of traditional media access and as some in the media have suggested,
direct content is far different from traditional press content.

Social media networks are not adapt at producing original information about a source such as
the president of the United States. Instead, they are better at disseminating and commenting
upon already created content. As long as the content fits the norms and standards of these
networks, its original origin appears less relevant. As such it has been possible for the president
to insert his own information directly into social networks sans any intermediary press
institutions. Direct information dissemination may allow for the appearance of transparency,
but without unbiased reporting, it lacks true transparency.

Such a shift has implications. When third party institutions are part of content creation, there is
a check on the president. Even if the president can often have his voice heard it comes at the
price of negotiating with the press. The complex relationship between the press and the
president, if nothing else, is a check on the president’s ability to communicate. As content has
shifted to electronic social networks, it is now possible for the president to compete with news
agencies in a new and unique way. The analogous relationship would have been if the
president had previously had his own TV channel, radio station, and newspaper which put out
information directly from the White House. Social media provides a similar possibility to the
president.

While the president owning and controlling a TV station would have been seen as a conflict of
interest, and a breach of power, his ability to producing original video content and distribute via
social networks has been deemed politically acceptable, if initially controversial. In this light it
might make the findings of this work less surprising. If a president can pick his own camera

² Ibid
crew, choose his own packaging, and have final editorial control of his content, why would he choose to go to a third party? Why allow others to set your agenda and tone when you can produce and distribute in-house? Unless the system has a way to push back, the clear answer is a president will always prefer in-house production and distribution.

Currently there are no reasons to refrain from presidential content creation. The current interview numbers are indication that this new content production is taking place within the White House. If previous administrations lacked the technological knowledge to take advantage of social media, future administrations will not. The legacy of content creation will undoubtedly leave an institutional footprint. Just as the televised press conference became an enduring staple once it was begun, so too will social media. Future presidents will not have to begin from scratch, they will have institutional memory to help create content. As this institutional structure solidifies over time it will become more adapt at creating and disseminating information. It is likely that the unilateral dissemination model will increase presidential options and thereby increase presidential power.

Presidential power is not a fixed substance. Its fluidity and character are the primary research agendas for students of the presidency. Presidential power is an elusive concept. Despite decades of work its fundamental nature is still debated. Yet it is also this fluidity which undergirds its very nature as a power. Inexorably presidents seek power in order to have meaningful legacies. Such appears to be the emergent truism from years of scholarly presidential research: presidents consolidate power. The second truism is that presidents consolidate power atop the previous president’s consolidation of power. What this informs the student of presidential power is that the primary question is: how will presidents consolidate power? In what areas will presidents consolidate power? At the expense of what other institution will presidents consolidate power? Presidents will continue to push for expanded presidential power to the limits of its containment in order to create larger and more lasting legacies.

The thesis of this work has been that one check upon presidential power has been the press. By shining the spotlight upon the activities of the executive branch the fourth estate has at its
best moments been a bulwark against excessive presidential power. It has not been perfect, but it has been an important element in the system of presidential power. The press possessed the means and medium of communication needed, but not owned, by presidents. It was this unique relationship, a press with the tools necessary for a successful president, which allowed the media to be an important player in restricting presidential power. The fundamental shift has been the new media removing the primary communication outlets from the press. The press no longer has a monopoly on the tools necessary for the president to communicate with the public.

Slowly, like an evolutionary process, the medium and means of communication have altered and with it a political balance of power. Social networks, diffuse points of information dissemination, are replacing the traditional broadcast model. The current fall of the broadcast model of news and the traditional production model of news dissemination is changing the very environment of the press. The change is apparent and appears permanent. What is important is what these changes mean for the system and other actors within the system. It has important ramifications on the relationship between the president and the press. A world which disseminates information via social networks will not operate like a world in which information is broadcast.

For the president this new system means that an old barrier to legacy building, and the power consolidation behind the legacy building, has been breached. Potentially the executive branch can control the means and medium of information dissemination. As the president’s reliance on the press wanes, his ability to restrict access increases. The powerful tool that gave the press a monopoly with the president, the broadcast model of the news, has crumbled. In its wake is an emergent system which has the potential to give increased information control to the president. Social media, by inadvertently wresting the primary control over the means of communication from the press, has offered the president the ability to disseminate information about himself without directly interacting with the traditional press. New media gives the president additional leverage over the press while simultaneously taking a tool of control away from the press.
Early examinations of this fall mistakenly assumed the proliferation of communications would mean increased oversight of governmental activity. The evidence presented here contradicts that conclusion. At least in the case of presidential politics the data points to quite the opposite outcome. The monopoly breakdown of the press offers the president the unique opportunity to consolidate power over information dissemination. Far from empowering citizens it might simply allow the president to put out his own information without competition. Social networks might offer more individuals the ability to share their opinion, but increasingly that opinion will be about the information released by the president and not independent third parties.

Undoubtedly new media creates challenges for the president. Presidents must respond to information in real time. They must provide compelling information sources if they want to remain dominant and relevant. Users have little patience for things which do not work. Further, new media allows others to easily comment and criticize the information of the president. What new media does not so easily allow is independent information to be publicized about the president. Content must originate somewhere and if the primary source of this information comes from in-house then the ability to more easily comment on it does not detract from its unilateral source. Content monopolies are never good for information. Social media produces a tendency towards unilaterally produced source material in the case of presidential communication.

If the data predicts anything, it offers a glimpse into the future of the content creation presidency. Future presidents will create unique and original content about themselves and the office. Instead of selling themselves to the public via the press they will package and sell themselves to the public directly. No need to hear what newscasters think of the president when we can see what he is saying on Twitter, when we open up our Facebook accounts, or when we glance at our phone. The president will be in our pocket and on your tablets; he will communicate more directly than at any other point in history. He will come to us on our devices without mediation and with minimal to no effort to gather that information on our part.
As Kurtz noted about the Clinton presidency, but which could be stated about any presidency, “They [the White House] had to manage the news, to package the presidency in a way that people would buy the product.”\(^3\) Packaging the presidency will undoubtedly remain. What will be new, what will be unique, will be that it will be less about press management and more about content creation. Internal questions surrounding how to present the president to the press will increasingly become questions of: how should we film this event? What kind of music highlights the president’s mood? What kind of pictures should be released of the president right now? Questions once asked by editors and journalists will increasingly be handled from within by White House by staffers.

The expansion of presidential power to unique content creator points to an expanding presidency. It is yet to be seen or measured if the other branches of government will gain leverage with the president as the news shifts further into social networks. Nor is there an obvious institution which will replace the bulwark once set in place by the press. The data simply describes a world where the president has become a unilateral information disseminator. Where the editorial policies once associated with the private press are handled by political agents. The data points to the further consolidation of presidential power at the expense of the traditional press. The president will be increasingly a competitive, if not primary, content creator.

Presidents have long felt stifled by the complexities of governing in the American system. This has created a temptation to bypass the traditional mechanisms and opt for unilateral actions.\(^4\) The process of presidents pushing unilateral action to bypass Congress is well documented. What has been left out is the potential of the president to push for unilateral action to bypass other potential actors. President as a content creator is inherently sidestepping the press. While the press does not create legislative agendas, they are an important and meaningful force in American politics. One does not talk so much to ‘the people’ as one talk to the press.

As both press and president begin to feed the social media networks, the balance of power will shift. Now presidents and press will be competing as content creators. The press had leverage in the age where they controlled the means of communication. Now the president will be at least on an equal, if not superior, footing. As the evolution of news continues, a revolution of presidential communication is occurring. The information on the news feeds of the future will increasingly contain content originally created, produced, and designed by the White House. Such an ability to communicate and package information will have profound implications for presidential power. The content creation presidency will continue to have an impact on the American political system and on presidential power.
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