American Public Engagement and the Internet or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Net

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ABSTRACT

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In the past decade, Americans have rapidly embraced the Internet for a variety of uses. The proliferation of this new technology has changed the ways in which individuals interact with one another, and the ways in which they are organized to partake in political and/or otherwise public issues. It has also made it easier for citizens to become organizers themselves. As the Internet is a relatively new phenomenon in American culture, its implications for public engagement remain fairly unexplored. The ever-changing functions and demographic base of the Web require researchers to consider the most recent data and trends. In this thesis, I posit a conception of citizen participation called public engagement, which I situate in the context of Internet-use. Using various accounts of citizen participation and information from two recent national campaigns, I conclude that the Internet is beneficial in mobilizing citizens to engage in tangible participatory activities.

Approved: _____

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DEDICATION

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has fostered my own public engagement, and for encouraging me to pursue these activities no matter what form they might take.

A special thank you to:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

In early February of 2009, an invitation to a political rally was sent to thousands of college students via Facebook, a popular online social networking website[1]. This event was hosted by the National Center for Lesbian Rights, inviting students to a massive rally to overturn California's Proposition 8 (National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2009). With 16,798 confirmed guests from all over the country, one could at least expect some type of national news coverage for an event boasting this many protestors.

There was, however, one problem: the rally was online. The location was designated as "Attend online all month long – February 3rd – March 5th!" (National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2009). Individuals truly interested in participating in a rally to overturn Proposition 8 were sorely disappointed when all that was expected of them was to RSVP yes to the event[2]. Granted the "wall" feature - an area in which attendees can post comments - was brimming with feedback, and a link to the NCLR was posted on the page, attendees were asked to do virtually nothing else except click a button.

Rallies are often considered to be signs of a civically-involved public coming together to support (or oppose) a certain cause (Putnam, 2000). What, then, is an Internet rally? Was this supposed to serve as some sort of replacement for an actual, organized

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[1] Facebook's "event" feature serves as a type of online organizing tool for almost any event – from the casual pot-luck, to massive rallies and protests. The organizer and guests can see who has been invited, who plans to attend, who has declined; guests can add photos to the event, converse on message boards, and invite others, among other tasks.

[2] Attending a Facebook event can mean several things, depending on what the occasion is. If it is a physical event actually taking place in-person, you are expected to attend if you RSVP that you will. Other events (mostly those trying to gain recognition for an issue) require only symbolic attendance. Examples include "Support this Issue" or "I've Lost My Cat." In these situations, the user is not expected to do anything other than click "yes" or "no" on the RSVP list.

collective of individuals physically coming together? If so, does this mean that the Internet is lowering our standards of engagement? While Facebook is not considered an "academic" source, it is increasingly used as a political tool to organize others. Therefore, to understand how individuals are engaging in their communities, one must also assess the informal tools of the Internet, including social networking websites, and blogs. With more Americans than ever logging onto the Web (Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Trend Data*, 2008), the Internet has the substantial capacity to impact the way in which we participate, whether good or bad. The potentially serious possibilities of the Internet upon American civic life therefore command close consideration.

Initially, I was suspicious about the Internet's ability to impact citizen participation. An online rally is not the same as an in-person rally, organizing a Facebook fan group is not the same as managing campaign volunteers, and blogging about a candidate isn't the same as knocking on someone's door and talking about the issues. Even online-based activities resulting in traditional political activity – for example using online walk or call lists to actually contact people – pale in comparison when one considers the energy and friendships generated in a campaign office. Nonetheless, as I researched, I found out that the Internet has a variety of exciting benefits and in some ways actually expands the participant base in American civic life.

To fully consider the impact of the Internet in American politics, it is important to engage a variety of research and conceptions of what actually constitute meaningful community engagement. In this chapter, I will explore the existing literature in the area of participation. I will assess how different scholars determine participation, focusing upon

social capital, as well as political and civic forms of engagement. Throughout, I will lay the foundation for my own conception of participation: public engagement. In the second chapter, I will elaborate upon the most relevant research regarding participation and establish my reasons for adopting public engagement as a participatory measure. The third chapter is devoted specifically to exploring the Internet's role in public engagement, focusing upon the Dean 2004 and Obama 2008 campaigns as case studies. In the fourth and final chapter I will discuss the implications for the Internet as an avenue for public engagement, including its possibilities and my reservations.

Social Capital

Robert Putnam, the leading voice in social capital research, defines social capital as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Putnam's account is used because he is a leading scholar in the field. He provides an extensive and popular analysis of social capital, and his best-selling book on the subject has sparked renewed interest in social capital in the United States. He argues that a civic community rich in social capital enjoys a variety of benefits compared to those deficient in it - these communities are more successful, with "better schools, faster economic development, lower crime, and more effective government" (Putnam, 1995, p. 66-67).

Putnam explains that social capital is highly desirable in a community because it establishes collective norms, reciprocity, trust, and a template for future interactions (1995). Of course, the question arises: is the engaged citizenry the cause or consequence of the responsive government? This relationship is unclear; Putnam explains that social

capital builds in a "self-reinforcing and cumulative cycle" (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994, p. 177). This depiction hardly establishes a direction of causation. However, regardless of causality, communities rich in social capital are for one reason or another better-off than those which are not.

Putnam does note that not all forms of social capital are beneficial to the community, "just as biochemical training can be used to concoct a bioterror weapon or a life-saving drug" (Putnam, 2003, p. 2). Overall, however, he emphasizes that capital is integral to a successful, responsive democracy and a healthy community (Putnam, 2000). Clearly, social capital has real political consequences, yet not all forms of political engagement are considered to be social capital-building, such as voting (Putnam, 2000). In this way, social capital theory fails to highlight some of the activities that impact public matters. It is still a useful account because it embraces both the civic and political measures that will be outlined in the following section. As I discuss these, I will briefly explain why it is important to include these terms into one's conception of participation, and elaborate upon these reasons in the next chapter.

Civic, Political, and Public Engagement

For the purposes of this discussion, public engagement is comprised of both political and civic participation. Some argue that political and civic participation are separate entities, perhaps more distinct from one another than they really are. Before moving forward, it is important first to determine what types of activities are considered to have political significance lest the term "public engagement" have little meaning. Zukin, et al. refer to the "divide" between political and civic engagement, citing the

differences “in the goals, the targets of activity, the institutions or places in which they take place, [and] the level of effort entailed” (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2006, p. 51). Moreover, this divide has “deep roots, pitting direct individual, community, and private associational responses to public issues against the more formal and indirect mechanisms of representative government” (Zukin, et al., 2006, p. 51-52).

The language of one form being pitted against the other is almost adversarial, though the authors argue that both manifestations of engagement are important and must be well balanced in American society (Zukin, et al., 2006). When one invokes social capital, however, the distinction between civic and political participation is blurred, as civic engagement has political consequences and vice versa. For example, as previously noted, a more active civic community results in a more responsive government (Putnam, 1995). Even Zukin et al., point to Putnam’s work to demonstrate this connection, though they continue to emphasize the differences between the two forms of engagement until the conclusion of their book (2006).

There are many reasons to consider them linked, however. Again, as Zukin, et al. point out in their conclusion, “…one is hard pressed to think of any aspect of our daily lives…that is not affected and often even determined by the actions and inaction of government” (2006, p. 192). Additionally, those who partake in traditionally civic activities often see political relevance to their actions. For example, raising money to buy new textbooks for a local school district addresses the fact that the state cannot provide adequate funding for the school. Nearly half of those who volunteer see it as a means to attend to a political problem, as do 68% of those who partake in community problem-

solving activities (Zukin, et al., 2006). Additionally, merely because individuals do not self-report their activities as having political significance does not mean that their activities do not. Thus, civic engagement has important political significance and therefore it is appropriate to combine the civic and the political in the term public engagement.

To determine civic engagement, Zukin, et al. look at several factors, including regularly volunteering for or participating in a non-political group or association, working with others to resolve a community problem, or generating funds for charity. Putnam echoes these activities as social capital-building, though he also includes social activities such as membership in bowling leagues to signify civic engagement (Putnam, 1995, 2000). Zukin, et al. determined political participation by voting and encouraging others to do so, volunteering for a political entity, displaying political items such as buttons or bumper stickers, and contributing money to a party or candidate (2006).

Putnam would likely disagree with Zukin et al.'s account of political participation as social capital, however. He considers voting, following politics, and campaign contributions to be "relatively undemanding" activities (Putnam, 2000, p. 37). Nonetheless, the political activities discussed by Zukin et. al are important because they significantly influence the political landscape of American politics and should thus be included in the account of public engagement. More so, Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter give several reasons as to why following politics is important, including that it "fosters civic virtues, such as political tolerance," and "promotes active participation in politics" (as cited in Wattenberg, 2008, p. 90-91). Thus, even if one does not directly

interact with another person in Zukin et al.'s activities, they are still important to public engagement. Additionally, voting and other "relatively undemanding" activities may be a product of the deliberation fostered by social capital.

Wattenberg also researches traditionally political activities, yet focuses upon their relationship with America's youth (defined as 18-29 years old)[3]. Like Putnam, he looks at newspaper readership, but diverges when he also explores following political activities on the television (Wattenberg, 2008, Putnam, 1995). Analyzing other traditional measures of political participation such as voting behavior, Wattenberg concludes that it is just as important to look at civic measures of participation like volunteering as it is to explore political forms of engagement (2008).

Thus, determining participation is not as simple as one might think. It can include a wide variety of activities, some of which are found to be more desirable than others. The fact that one can publicly engage by varying degrees also complicates the issue. For example, an individual who volunteers ten hours per week in a community center is more publicly engaged that someone who occasionally reads the paper. It is important to recognize the value in even the simplest modes of participation, but also to understand that the more time and effort one devotes to civic and political endeavors, the more publicly engaged he or she is.

While in some venues it may be important to separate the social from the civic and political, for the purposes of studying the full impact of the Internet it is necessary to think of them together, within the singular term "public engagement." Social capital

[3] For the purposes of the discussions within this paper, I also define youth as 18-29 years old.

serves as a trusted model for conflating civic and political engagement, yet in some ways it still fails to capture all of the activities that can contribute to public outcomes. Public engagement includes the same measures as those discussed in social capital theory, such as activities that bolster social ties and deliberation between people; I also give weight, however, to the civic and political activities which may be done in solitude and thus are not otherwise included in Putnam's account. I will elaborate more fully upon my reasons for this in the next chapter. One thing most scholars can agree upon, though, is that almost all measures of participatory behavior are in decline.

The Decline of Public Engagement

There is a general consensus that public engagement is declining. Putnam points out that the decline began about thirty years ago, noting that "by almost every measure, Americans' direct engagement in politics and government has fallen steadily and sharply over the last generation, despite the fact that average levels of education – the best individual-level predictor of political participation – have risen sharply throughout the period" (Putnam, 1995, p. 68). Voter turnout has declined significantly amongst eligible Americans, from 62.8% in 1960 to only 48.9% in 1996 (Putnam, 1993). This downturn is "merely the most visible symptom of a broader disengagement from community life. Like a fever, electoral abstention is even more important as a sign of deeper trouble in the body politic than as a malady itself" (Putnam, 2000, p. 35).

Indeed, in many other ways, one can see the broader disengagement. Americans today are less likely to serve on local committees, go to campaign events, or work for a political party. Attendance at public meetings on community affairs has fallen by over a

third from 1973 to 1993 as well (Putnam, 1995). Additionally, fewer Americans attend church, are members of unions, volunteer, or fraternal organizations, or even partake in organized social activities such as bowling leagues. Indeed, there has been a "sudden, substantial, and nearly simultaneous decline" in formal group membership in the past several decades (Putnam, 1995, p. 70). Americans additionally socialize with their neighbors less often and have less trust in others than they used to (Putnam, 1995).

Putnam is not the only one who has found convincing evidence of America's civic decline. Wattenberg found that newspaper readership is down amongst all age groups, but particularly amongst young people. When young people do read the paper, fewer are seeking political information. Mentioning that perhaps the youth are turning to the Internet for their news, Wattenberg cautions that "newspaper web sites have a long way to go in order to take the place of the printed page as a source of political information" (2008, p. 29). The decline in newspaper readership is especially troubling because it is considered the best media outlet to stay politically informed (Wattenberg, 2008).

Putnam argues strongly that the television is a significant cause of the decline in social capital (1995, 2000). Wattenberg, however, finds television patterns to be significant in determining political involvement. He found that viewership of both the Democratic and Republican National Conventions has sharply declined since 1972. Audiences for election debates have also shrunk in the under-thirty age group, from 79% in 1960 to 39-44% in 2000. There are several other indicators marking the decline in public engagement, including the fact that a large portion of the youth claim to be

"clueless" about politics (p. 80), and fewer than 1/3 of Americans under thirty see voting as a duty or obligation (Wattenberg, 2008). Though youth political involvement is decreasing, social capital is roughly the same across all age groups (Zukin, et al., 2006).

The empirical evidence indicating diminishing social capital is overwhelming, and it doesn't take a social researcher to recognize that civic life is declining in America. In 1999, over 66% of Americans agreed that civic life "had weakened in recent years, that social and moral values were higher when they were growing up, and that our society was focused more on the individual than the community" (Putnam, 2000, p. 25). It is clear that public engagement has sharply and suddenly declined in the past several decades. The next question of course, is why?

Why Has Public Engagement Declined?

There are many postulations as to why engagement has recently declined. Theda Skocpol argues that civic groups have become more professionalized in recent decades, causing them to be less connected to the average citizen. She attributes this to the social turbulence of the 1960's, when rights-based advocacy organizations sprung up all over the country. Americans transitioned from well-established civic organizations to widespread social movements, which are by nature less structured. Unlike the old civic organizations, which commonly brought together individuals of different social locations – incomes, occupations, backgrounds – the new post-1960's organizations were highly specialized both in intent and purpose.

Additionally, national leadership in recent years has called upon Americans to perform a more individually-oriented service to their country. For example, Skocpol

notes that after the terrorist attacks on September 11th, President Bush urged Americans to stimulate the economy by buying more, or to donate to private charities (Skocpol, 2003). Skocpol's ultimate argument, however, is that these new, professionalized groups do not rely upon average citizens coming together on a local level for various causes. Rather, today's organizations are focused mostly upon a single issue or demographic. Civic organizations in the past were location-based, though members often came from neighboring towns and communities. These organizations "brought citizens together across class lines while linking thousands of local groups to one another and to representatively governed centers of state and national activity" (Skocpol, 2003, p. 24).

Today's groups advocate for a single demographic or issue. For example, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) serves America's senior citizens. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) organizes animal-rights enthusiasts, and the National Rifle Association (NRA) connects individuals interested in protecting the 2nd Amendment. This is not to say that "bridging" social capital - that is, capital which brings together people of different social locations - does not occur in contemporary organizations. For example in 2005, The Humane Society of the United States – an animal rights organization – and the Safari Club International – a leading hunting organization – came together to support a ban on online hunting[4] (Axtman, 2005). At the same time, this type of alliance is unusual and the brunt of the work is most often performed by professionals more so than community members.

[4] Online hunting is a practice by which an individual can operate a gun with a video camera on it over the Internet. The individual targets and actually shoots and kills an animal in the wilderness.

The locus of large, national organizations is often in the legislative or judicial arenas, rather than one's community. Given the professional aims of these organizations, the brunt of the work is done by just that – professionals. Mary Ann Glendon also critiques the proliferation of rights-based claims and their impact on democracy, arguing that Americans largely speak in terms of their personal liberties, rather than emphasizing communal responsibility (Glendon, 1991). This in effect privileges the courts over the town hall meeting for the place of deliberation.

Another issue with large advocacy organizations, as Skocpol points out, is that they often rely merely upon the donations of "members," and expect little else of them. They most often do not hold local meetings or maintain local chapters; other organizing events are sparse, if existent at all. Even groups boasting large memberships - Skocpol considers these to be organizations which have at least 1% of the adult population as members - mostly contact their members through mail. There is little, if any face-to-face interaction, let alone deliberation (Skocpol, 2006).

Skocpol emphasizes the need for face-to-face deliberation in civic life by citing a colleague, Marshall Ganz, in her description of the membership of these groups as "bodyless heads" (2006, p. 163). That is, the membership base is comprised of an ethereal collective, and a loose one at that. Without real, tangible interaction, the preferences of real people are lost. Skocpol explains that "Specializing in this or that constituency, cause, or activity, civic entrepreneurs by the thousands have founded advocacy organizations without individual members, groups that represent other organizations, and groups that speak for modest numbers of individual adherents who

respond to mass mailings or canvasses by giving money" (Skocpol, 2006. p. 163). In short, without individuals physically coming together, these groups are unrepresentative and require little of their "membership."

Putnam agrees that membership to these large organizations is hardly civic participation, as it requires no interaction or deliberation with others (Putnam, 2000). He explains that "the bond between any two members of the Sierra Club is less like the bond between any two members of a gardening club and more like the bond between any two Red Sox fans (or perhaps any two devoted Honda owners)" (Putnam, 1995, p. 70). Putnam cites several other reasons for the decline in civic engagement as well. Firstly, more women are employed today than in previous generations, increasing the average amount of time Americans work per week. Secondly, Americans today are more mobile than they were in the past, jeopardizing the "social rootedness of the average American" (Putnam, 1995, p. 75).

Finally, Putnam proposes that "the technological transformation of leisure"…is "radically 'privatizing' or 'individualizing' our use of leisure time and thus disrupting many opportunities for social-capital formation" (Putnam, 1995, p. 75). He first cites the rise of the television, explaining that it revolutionized the way in which Americans spend their time, causing them to spend less time in their community and more time at home. He then turns to "electronic networks," meaning the Internet (Putnam, 1995, p. 75-76). While in his article "Bowling Alone" he calls for more research, in his later book he determines that without in-person communication, "many opinions would be heard, but only as a muddle of disembodied voices neither engaging with one another nor offering

much guidance to decision makers" (Putnam, 2000, p. 341). In his book he takes a more positive stance towards the Internet and civic engagement, yet still maintains many reservations, such as the digital divide and quality of deliberation (Putnam, 2000). These concerns will be more fully addressed in Chapter 4. The Internet, however, has shown some initially promising advances in overall participation.

The Internet and Public Engagement

To fully understand the evolution of the Internet as a significant force in Americans' lives, I will first illustrate a brief history. This account is certainly not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a basic framework in which to understand the context of the Internet in American society. Sources chronicling the rise of the Internet as we know it are far and few between for several reasons. Firstly, in many ways the technological world is insulated from the mainstream. Understanding burgeoning technology often requires a specific lexicon and level of scientific understanding inaccessible to most individuals. This is not to say that it is "above" most Americans, but rather the unique nature of computer development has lent itself to a specific audience. As the personal computer did not even surface until late in the second half of the 20th century, developers had to generate an entirely new vocabulary to describe the inner-workings of computer processes.

The second, and related reason why sources are so difficult to locate is because the minutia of technology simply isn't a particularly fascinating subject to many Americans. Most people don't care about what the relationship is between Ethernet and broadband, or the difference between a gigabyte and gigahertz, so long as our computers

are doing what they are supposed to do. Often, we don't care about how something works until it stops working.

Likewise, we don't often care about the history of something unless it is something that has, does, or will impact our lives. At its inception, the computer, let alone the Internet was not really intended for use by the general public. Personal computers at the time were wildly expensive. Take for example, the computer future Dean for America campaign manager Joe Trippi purchased for the Tom Bradley campaign in 1981: at $17,000, this piece of equipment "looked like a washing machine, only bigger, with a plastic, Star Trek-looking one piece monitor/keyboard on top" (Trippi, 2004, p. 23). At the time personal computers were first available to the public, it seemed inconceivable that they would at some point be a fixture in most Americans' homes.

A primitive version of the Internet – called ARPANET[5] - began as an idea in 1967, was running in 1970, and went public in 1983. By the time it was replaced by the World Wide Web in 1992, ARPANET had over 1 million private users (Computer History Museum, 2006). Computer cost and complexity precluded many from logging onto the Internet until well into the 1990's[6]. As technological advancements generated more affordable and user-friendly computers, however, the Internet became a growing part of mainstream America, even inching its way into the political landscape.

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[5] ARPA stands for Advanced Research Projects Agency, a segment of the U.S. Department of Defense specializing in "high-risk, high-gain research." Their ARPANET provided the foundation for what we now know as the Internet (Computer History Museum, 2006).

[6] This serious consideration, dubbed the "Digital Divide," still exists today and will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

In 1992, the Clinton campaign became the first to publish information on the Web, such as speeches and policy positions, though this received relatively little attention given the fact that so few Americans used the Internet at this point. Then-Vice President Al Gore subsequently became the first public official to hold a news conference with others via the Internet in 1994. In 1996, Bob Dole became the first major candidate to establish and announce a campaign site to the public, sparking a rapid rise in websites amongst other candidates, parties, and local organizations (Davis, 1999). In 1999, President Bill Clinton became the first sitting president to answer e-mails and other inquiries from citizens online (Davis, 2005). The Internet was then harnessed by primary campaigns in 2000 when McCain, "tried to use it to drive his own insurgent campaign," though the technology was still nascent, only proving "mature enough to create a small buzz around an interesting candidate" (Trippi, 2004, p. 82).

In 2004, the Internet became a driving force in Howard Dean's fledgling candicacy for the Democratic presidential nomination. Upon adopting the Internet as a major campaign tool, Joe Trippi explains that all of the sudden the campaign had:

> An army of almost 600,000 fired-up supporters, not just a bunch of chicken-dinner donors, but activists, *believers*, people who have never been politically involved before and who were now living and breathing the campaign (2004, p. xii).

Where did these people come from? Trippi found that his campaign had "tapped into a whole new vein of democracy and proven the Internet to be a vibrant political tool" (2004, p. xii). The hardened veteran manager of countless political campaigns was for the

first time stunned when he saw the outpouring of support for his underdog presidential candidate, Governor Howard Dean, in the 2004 Democratic presidential primaries.

Trippi has also noticed the decline in public engagement throughout his lifetime. Like Putnam, Trippi attributes this decline in large part to the television (Trippi, 2004, Putnam, 1995, 2000). While Putnam blames the television for pulling Americans out of the public sphere and into their homes, Trippi argues that its content contaminates modern politics. He contends that television has commodified the electoral process, making it no different than any other hot product on the market. Trippi colorfully elucidates this point by explaining "If the Greeks were a people destroyed by hubris, the Aztecs by brutality, and the Romans by arrogance, Americans at the turn of the twenty-first century were a culture in danger of being ruined by *Must See TV*" (2004, p. 3).

Trippi argues that television has made politics more negative, less genuine, and overall less appealing to the American people, transforming them into consumers rather than citizens. More so, he points out that negative ads on television, though effective, are destroying the fabric of American politics. "Think about it," he says, "*the best ads – deceitful, negative, and manipulative – are the ones that fail the country the most*" (Trippi, 2004, p. 40). Citing Putnam, Trippi explains that the amount of television one watches is directly and negatively correlated with civic participation, to the tune of a 10% drop in participation per hour of television (2004).

All is not lost for public engagement according to Trippi, however. Despite the fact that the Dean campaign did not ultimately win the Democratic nomination for president, he attributes the fact that it got as far as it did to the empowering and

mobilizing ability of the Internet. He lauds the Internet as “the last place where democracy stood a chance,” (p. xvii) applauding its ability to mobilize from the bottom up in contrast to the top-down organization of most campaigns (Trippi, 2004). The Internet, he explains, spurned a movement of “thousands of Americans turning off their televisions and embracing the only form of technology that has allowed them to get involved again, to gain control of a process that alienated them years ago” (Trippi, 2004, p. xviii-xix).

Not only does Trippi believe that the Internet holds great potential for campaigns, but he also believes that it is a viable venue for social capital. He explains that e-Bay is in not just merely a website, but rather “a community, a city of people broken into neighborhoods by hobby and interest and commerce, a community of people who, if they banded together, could rise up, and in a single day change the world all by themselves” (Trippi, 2004, p. 13). He recounts several stories of how the Internet has impacted him and the lives of others, from mourning the loss of a friend he’d met on the Internet, to telling a story of an elderly man who, before being pulled into the campaign via its Internet organizing tools, saw no other reason to continue living. After discovering the community of Dean supporters on the Internet, the elderly man was motivated to get involved in the community and was given a renewed purpose (Trippi, 2004).

Trippi also documents the direct effects of the Internet upon the Dean campaign. After posting a link to MeetUp.com - a website that organizes in-person group meetings for individuals with similar interests - on the campaign website, the number of online supporters quickly jumped from 432 to over 190,000. The support wasn’t only online,

however –volunteers from all over the country then flooded the office, while in-person meetings around America hosted by MeetUp boasted hundreds. The campaign was the first to raise over 99,000 contributions, almost all of them in amounts of $100 or less (Trippi, 2004). Clearly, the Internet was a powerful organizing tool for the Dean campaign.

The Dean campaign, of course, is not the only one to use the Internet. The 2008 Barack Obama presidential campaign is widely known for its use of technology to advance its cause. Take for example, the use of the Obama campaign's iPhone application. The application would automatically rearrange one's phone book, placing friends in targeted states in the front. The supporter could then log whether or not he or she had left a message for their friend, if their friend had already voted, etc. All of the information was then automatically transferred to a database for Election Day (Thomas, 2009).

The campaign also announced Joe Biden as the running mate via text message to supporters, and ordered extra phone towers at the Democratic National Convention to be placed around Invesco Field so that attendees could phone bank during the acceptance speech events throughout the day (Thomas, 2009). All of these efforts made partaking in the campaign that much more accessible to the average, busy American. Trippi was clearly amazed by these efforts, stating that "if the Dean campaign was like the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk, then Obama was the Apollo program – in other words, in one cycle skipping over commercial aviation, jet travel, and supersonic transport to go

straight to the moon" (Thomas, 2009, p. 109). Of course, there are many reservations to be had when considering the Internet and public engagement.

The Other Side: Negative Impacts of the Internet

One of the concerns Putnam has with the Internet is the potential for "cyberbalkanization," or hyper-specialization (2000). Sunstein agrees that the Internet allows individuals to compartmentalize their information, causing users to receive only fragmented bits of news they are already interested in (2007). This has been a common concern with the rise of cable television as well, as channels are so specialized that information is too often "narrowcasted" to the viewer (Wattenberg, 2008, p. 34). Sunstein cites studies finding that politically left or right blogs are far more likely to link to and cite blogs or bloggers of the same ideology. When the opposing ideology is referenced, it is usually to criticize it. Sunstein explains that "In this way, real deliberation is often occurring within established points of view, but only infrequently across them" (2007, p. 149).

A consequence of this personal filtering is group polarization (Sunstein, 2007). This is similar to the psychological term "group think," which occurs when the beliefs of group members slowly become more extreme over time. Sunstein cites Youtube as an example: "[it] is a lot of fun, and in a way it is a genuine democratizing force; but there is risk that isolated clips, taken out of context, will lead like-minded people to end up with a distorted understanding of some issue, person, or practice" (2007, p. 69). Additionally, the fragmentation of the Internet reduces the amount of shared experience a society has,

which may “compromise some important social values,” and lessen feelings of community (Sunstein, 2007, p. 105).

Empirical Research on the Internet

A growing body of evidence indicates that the Internet is beneficial to public engagement. Trippi presents a detailed narrative about the importance of the Internet to the Dean campaign, while several researchers have conducted empirical research demonstrating that the Internet supplements social capital. Barry Wellman’s study found that Internet-use “neither increases nor decreases other forms of communication” (Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001, p. 444). This indicates that Americans are not substituting Internet communication for face-to-face interaction, a point which Putnam also makes using Wellman’s study (Putnam, 2000).

Wellman also found that Internet use and participation in organizations are positively correlated; additionally Internet use increases online political involvement. His study also demonstrated that “High Internet use is associated with high participatory involvement in organizations and politics. The more online participation in organizations and politics, the more offline participation in organizations and politics” (Wellman, et al., 2001, p. 448). Finally, the researchers concluded that individuals use the Internet to “supplement network capital by extending existing levels of face-to-face and telephone contact” (Wellman, et al., 2001, p. 450). Another study has also found that Internet networking websites are mostly used to maintain already-existing long distance relationships, “rather than using it as a substitute for offline interactions with those living nearby” (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007, n.p.).

Another study has additionally confirmed that groups are bolstered in influencing political outcomes with the Internet "by the additional online sharing of ideas and information" (Kavanaugh, Kim, Perez-Quinones, Schmitz, & Isenhour, 2008, p. 937). The same study also found that Internet-use increased political engagement in both politically active and politically passive individuals, but not in the politically apathetic population (Kavanaugh, et al., 2008). Empirical evidence has overwhelmingly found that the Internet is a supplement to public engagement, rather than a detriment.

The Internet and Deliberation

Social ties and deliberation are key components to public engagement. Social capital theory correctly gives meaning to recreational activities, establishing that they foster communal feelings of trust and kinship. This is important because these informal, social interactions often entail deliberation about public issues[7]. This deliberation is what may cause an individual to get involved in a community issue, or may help him or her decide whether or not to vote in an election. Individuals do not act in a vacuum; in many situations they are encouraged, coaxed, and convinced to act and this takes place through deliberation. This deliberation often takes place as a product of one's presence in social situations.

Of course, deliberation has a variety of meanings. Benjamin Barber emphasizes "strong" democracy, meaning "politics not as a way of life, but as a way of living," when "for the first time the possibilities of transforming private into public, dependency into interdependency, conflict into cooperation, license into self-legislation, need into love,

[7] In the next chapter I will discuss what "public" versus "private" means more fully.

and bondage into citizenship are placed in a context of participation" (Barber, 1984, p. 118, 120). This essentially means adopting deliberation into one's everyday life. Iris Young also argues for embracing deliberative democracy into one's daily life, arguing that it can take place through informal communications such as storytelling and humor (Benhabib, 1996). John Dryzek provides a simple, yet eloquent account: "The only condition for authentic *deliberation* is then the requirement that communication induce reflection upon preferences in a non-coercive fashion" (2000, p. 1-2).

Accounts of ideal deliberation can range from simple – non-coercive communication – to complex, such as adopting it as a lifestyle. In the next chapter, I will look into deliberation more deeply, finally positing 5 criteria to illustrate what I mean by "meaningful deliberation". The purpose of this is to elucidate the types of communication that are most desirable within the context of public engagement. In illustrating how deliberation should take place within these social and formal networks, we can determine whether or not the Internet bolsters or weakens the ability for individuals to engage with one another in a way that impacts their participation in public engagement.

Conclusion to Chapter One

The Internet has been shown to impact overall public engagement. Indeed, it is not perfect. There is a certain danger to cyberbalkanization and group polarization, particularly within groups with more insidious aims, such as white supremacists or terrorists. Further reservations are discussed in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, there is great hope that more Americans are turning off their televisions and getting involved again. The Internet might not be the neighborhood town meeting, but it is a more interactive,

empowering tool than the television. Nine years ago, Robert Putnam wrote that "…it is much too early to assess the long-run social effects of the Internet empirically" (Putnam, 2000, p. 171).

Nonetheless, researchers have begun to tackle the effects of Internet use and have found that it supplements rather than undermines many of the social capital activities that have been declining in the United States since the 1960's. In fact, the current presidential administration has embraced the Internet, using it to bring back the call to civic duty "through millions of e-mails, hundreds of thousands of YouTube views and a new social-networking site created by his Inaugural committee" (Scherer, 2009). Obama's USAService.org invites Americans to "Renew America Together," plugging them into volunteer opportunities in their local neighborhoods (Scherer, 2009).

Overall, the Internet contains an enormous potential to propel Americans to greater service and other public engagement activities. Of course, Putnam astutely recognizes that "The most important question is not what the Internet will do to us, but what we will do with it" (Putnam, 2000, p. 180). In recent years, it has become apparent that Americans will use the Internet to bring people together to improve their communities and boost their communication with one another. In the following chapters I will expand upon public engagement, how the Internet has impacted it, and the problems and possibilities therein.

CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE INTERNET

One morning, I received an e-mail from MySpace.com, asking me to confirm James Elliott's friendship[8]. At first glance, it seemed as though my seventeen-year-old brother was soliciting my friendship over the Internet. On the contrary, however, when I clicked upon James' profile I realized that it was not my brother wishing to be my Myspace friend, but rather my fifty-six year old father who had recently become an enthused participant in all things social on the Web. Though only a few years ago I had to explain to him the basics of Facebook (though, to date, he has refrained from becoming one of the millions to partake), he now calls me weekly to tell me about his most recent Twitter[9] update, or to ask if I'm available to Skype[10].

Internet forms of communication are rapidly proliferating American society. Within less than twenty years, the percentage of US adult Internet users skyrocketed from roughly 15% in 1995 over 70% in 2008. Over 80% of all American adults under fifty are Internet users, yet this technology is certainly not limited to the youngest Americans.

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[8] The term "friend" in the context of social networking is commonly used as a verb to indicate that one has permitted mutual access to his or her social networking profile (usually on Myspace or Facebook). Thus, if I were to "friend" someone, this means that I have requested access to his or her profile, and likewise s/he is permitted to access mine if they accept my friend request. An e-mail from the host site is sent to the person I would like to friend, and then they can either accept or deny my friendship and thus the access to one another's profiles.

[9] Twitter is another social networking website in which users post, in 140 characters or less, what they are doing or thinking at the moment. "Followers" can see the post, and reply if they wish. It is most analogous to a social news feed of sorts.

[10] Skype is a video-chat interface in which users can instant message, make phone calls, or video chat with other Skype users. It is often used as a verb to indicate that one is talking with another using this software, for example "I'm Skyping right now."

Nearly three quarters of those aged 50-64 are users, while over 40% of those 65 and older routinely log onto the information superhighway (Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Trend Data*, 2008). Even within the three-year span between 2002 and 2005, the percentage of adults who use the Internet at least once per day jumped from 27% to 35% (Horrigan & Rainie, 2006). Not only is the number of Americans utilizing the Internet growing, but so is the Web's importance in their lives.

Americans are soliciting the Internet's help in a variety of matters, from simplifying communication, to shopping, to determining the best set of directions to use, even to helping with major life issues. Research demonstrates that the Internet has helped many Americans make paramount life decisions – from 2002 to 2005, the number of Americans who used the Internet to help cope with a major illness increased 40%, while 45% more use it as a tool to make financial investment decisions than in 2002. Additionally, 43% more Americans said the Internet significantly contributed to their decision of where they or their children should attend college (Horrigan & Rainie, 2006).

The Internet's growing presence in American culture, as well as its increasing importance in one's life positions it to be a major player in American civic and political life. More Americans than ever are using the Internet as a tool to seek information and/or express their views. It should be noted that these are two largely different functions. Merely seeking information is fairly passive and on its own constitutes public engagement only in a very narrow sense. Expressing one's views, however, signifies two-way communication with others; this is in essence the crux of engagement. As we will

see throughout the following chapters, the Internet has revolutionized both of these activities.

The Internet holds the possibility to connect individuals to one another in a way never before conceivable. Not only is this important in one's personal life, but the Internet has recently been harnessed by political organizations in order to maximize citizen engagement and mobilization. While the proliferation of the Internet in American life is difficult to dispute, the resulting political, civic, and social implications are hotly debated. I thus seek to explore two related questions regarding Internet's role in America's civic and political landscape: whether the Internet provides a space for meaningful deliberation, and whether or not it effectively elicits citizen participation and mobilization. By meaningful deliberation, I mean the types of interactions that have the possibility to transform opinions and elicit engagement in public matters (I will expand upon this later in this chapter); effective participation and mobilization refers to activities that impact these matters. Social capital is important to this discussion because it lays the foundation of where deliberation can take place; social capital additionally lays the groundwork for deliberation between individuals.

Determining the Internet's role in citizen engagement is firstly contingent upon how one defines what experiences and issues are considered to be public or political, and secondly how one defines meaningful participation in this realm. There are many accounts of what these terms mean; it is therefore important to first develop or adopt a clear interpretation of what is public, political, and participatory before ascertaining how the Internet impacts engagement. Throughout this discussion, I will show the following:

that not only are the lines between “public” and “private” blurry, but that the boundary between “civic” and “political” share a similarly nebulous relationship. Thus, I posit public engagement as a measure for citizen participation: the integration of civic, political, and cultural activities, including those done with others and alone.

In the first chapter, I discussed how social capital theory provides a useful basis to blend civic and political measures into a single coherent term. In this chapter I will argue that it is still in some ways an insufficient mechanism to fully determine the ways in which Americans engage in civic and political life. Thus, I put forth my conception of “public engagement” as the most holistic and comprehensive lens through which to understand citizen participation particularly in examining its relationship to the Internet. I will then discuss the ways in which deliberation is necessary for public engagement. In analyzing deliberative democracy, I will also posit alternative accounts of deliberation, as well as the spaces in which democratic contestation can occur. My aim is not to advance an exhaustive account of social capital nor democratic deliberation, but rather to clarify what I mean by participation so as to relate it to the Internet in the following chapters.

A Definitional Exploration: Public v. Private

Indeed, there is debate about what is considered “public” versus “private.” The Internet complicates this, bringing public matters such as campaign mobilization into the private space of the home. Nancy Fraser explains that feminist theory often considers the public to be “anything that is outside the domestic or familial sphere.” (Fraser, 1997, p. 70). This depiction is in several ways problematic, however. Firstly, as Fraser argues, this account “conflates at least three analytically distinct things: the state, the official-

economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse" (Fraser, 1997, p. 70). The latter is the focus of this discussion. Secondly, the relationship between the public and the private is in fact quite ambiguous, with formerly private matters often later becoming part of the public discourse – Fraser uses domestic violence as an example (Fraser, 1997). Excluding so-called "private" matters from the public realm is not only ideologically problematic, but also politically oppressive in some cases (Fraser, 1997). Denying traditionally private issues access to the public or political arenas is particularly harmful to historically marginalized groups, such as women and minorities. The inclusion of private interests in public matters is not always appropriate, however.

Individuals have the right to exclude aspects of their personal lives from the public realm. In general, I adopt Iris Young's account of private. She argues for a conception that, opposed to "defining the private was what the public excludes…the private should be defined, as in one strain of liberal theory, as that aspect of his or her life and activity that any person has a right to exclude others from" (Young, 1990, p. 119). This definition is useful because it allows individuals the *option* to exclude certain matters from the public arena – the power to determine what is private rests with the individual, rather than the societal structure.

The Exploration Continued: Civic v. Political Engagement

In Chapter 1, I discussed the similar debate about the distinction between "civic" and "political" participation. These terms are often separated, as though they are two contrasting categories of involvement. In fact, not only are they separated, but they are often approached as adversarial forms of engagement, signifying a "divide" or "fault

line" in American civic participation (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, Delli Carpini, 2006, p. 5, 51-52). The two forms of engagement essentially compete against one another, in a battle of grassroots action versus the more structured and formal channels of government (Zukin, et al., 2006).

Under this model, civic engagement is thus separated from the state, with different goals and functions. This dichotomy presents political engagement as a mechanism for affecting the government and/or policy, while civic engagement emphasizes volunteerism in order to solve a problem or otherwise help others (Zukin, et al., 2006). Not only is the separation evident, but dominant liberal theory asserts that this separation is *necessary* to a healthily-functioning public. Fraser's use of the term "public sphere" versus the "state" is analogous to Zukin, et al.'s use of "civic engagement" and "political engagement." Again, Fraser points out that the public sphere "in short, is not the state; it is rather the informally mobilized body of non-governmental discursive opinion that can serve as a counterweight to the state" (Fraser, 1997, p. 90).

While the separation of the civic and the public is theoretically problematic in some ways, it is at the very basic level pragmatically troublesome. Much like the public vs. private argument, the civic vs. public discussion presents a tremendous problem with its ambiguity, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Given the ambiguous relationship between "public" and "private" interests, and "civic" and "political" participation, it can be determined that there is in fact little decisive difference between the public (political) and the private, or between civic and political engagement. This is not to suggest that the terms are in all situations freely interchangeable. For the purposes

of determining the nature of public engagement and its relationship to the Internet, however, it is appropriate, if not necessary, to conflate the terms into the total account of the term "public engagement."

Social Capital and Public Engagement

Many of the components of civic and political participation are amalgamated under the term "social capital." Social capital essentially describes the networks of trust, relationships and participation existent in any given community. Overall, capital is comprised of both political and civic engagement, in addition to the informal connections one has in the community. Putnam includes within the latter category examples such as "card parties and bowling leagues, bar cliques and ball games, picnics and parties" (Putnam, 2000, p. 27). Another critical component is the extent to which individuals trust in one another and give back to the community. Social capital's expansive conception of meaningful participation is useful in thinking about the Internet because it accommodates the range of web-based activities I intend to discuss.

Social capital also captures the nebulous relationship between private vs. public, and civic vs. political. Integral to measuring social capital is assessing political engagement, in conjunction with traditionally civic behaviors. Social capital provides a respected precedent by which to combine political and civic factors into one tool to analyze citizen engagement. Many of the benefits of social capital are civic – trust, community engagement, cooperation (Putnam, 2000). Engagement also improves the quality of life in citizens, by increasing their self-efficacy and broadening their horizons (Macedo, 2005). Yet, many benefits are also political. Even when controlling for

governmental organization, the success of a government is due largely to the levels of social capital within its citizenry (Putnam, 2000).

Social capital encourages a more responsive government by fostering a supply and demand system of governance. Communities with high levels of social capital have governments that are more likely to tend to the citizens' needs and interests. This is because citizens are involved in a capacity that makes their preferences known to their representatives, thus the demand. The government is then able to supply what the citizens demand (Putnam, 2000). This is not to say however, that the government acts on the whim of the people in communities rich in social capital. Rather, the presence of social capital encourages a *working relationship* between the government and the people.

Indeed, the key to this working relationship between citizens and the government is not the fact that citizens are organized enough through systems of social capital to simply make demands. Rather, social capital provides a foundation for networks of trust and reciprocity between the people and their government, adding to the "self-reinforcing and cumulative" cycle of which Putnam speaks (Putnam et al., 1994, p. 177). As Putnam explains, this is because "social capital lowers transaction costs and eases dilemmas of collection [sic] action" (2000, p. 346). The working relationship between the government and the people rests upon their relationship of mutual, generalized reciprocity, which Putnam describes as "I'll do this for you without expecting anything specific back from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road" (2000, p. 21). This contrasts with specific reciprocity, in which the parties except something specific to be done and reciprocated (Putnam, 2000).

In this scenario of generalized reciprocity, the government and the people work hand-in-hand to resolve community issues. The people do not accomplish this through exclusive political activity, but they also engage in civic organizations in addition to using political mechanisms to accomplishing their goals. This citizen involvement in turn reduces the need for the government to step in and mediate community matters[11].

Take, for example, the possibilities that arise when the community and the government work together to solve hunger issues. Many local food pantries are suffering for a variety of reasons. With the declining, the need for food subsidies has increased, yet stricter quality controls have diminished the excess products companies used to create and then donate to food pantries. While many individuals are receiving government subsidies such as food stamps, these often do not provide for the full need of a struggling family (Johnston, 2008). The federal government, however, is actively seeking community involvement in their own food security initiatives, providing tool kits and action plans to organizations in order to maximize their effectiveness (Hunger and food insecurity: Food Assistance Programs, 2008). Thus, if the government were to provide more resources – informational and monetary – struggling food pantries could more effectively fill the gap for individuals participating in a food stamp program.

This partnership, along with the political implications of social capital, demonstrate that political and civic engagement can be appropriately blended into a singular term to effectively analyze to what extent Americans are engaged in their communities.

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[11] Of course, this does not imply that community engagement will render the government obsolete in resolving community issues. Citizen participation, however, works hand in hand *with* the government to take the brunt of the responsibility off of both entities for the most effective solution to community problems.

Nonetheless, social capital under Putnam's model does not most comprehensively grasp American public engagement. Social capital focuses almost solely upon activities done with others, yet there are many ways in which one can meaningfully impact the community in the direct absence of others. For example, voting is an indicator of political participation, but is not considered social capital because it is done "utterly alone" (Putnam, 2000, p. 36). Voting, as well as other forms of solitary participation such as reading the newspaper, making campaign contributions, or donating to a food pantry all impact community and political landscape, despite the fact that they are not "social capital."

While the account of public engagement incorporates solitary activities as a mechanism for meaningful participation, it does not privilege lone participation over more sociable forms of democratic involvement. Despite the fact that one can meaningfully publicly engage in solitude, this of course does not replace the necessity of social interaction to democracy. Rather, solitary engagement comprises but a small segment of the many ways in which one can participate. More so, for one to be truly engaged, the activities one can undertake alone simply *supplement* those done with others. The next section will explore the ways in which deliberation with others is necessary to a healthy democracy. Again, the notion of solitude and the definition of participation will be called into question in order to generate an account of engagement. Social capital is particularly relevant in this discussion because its focus is clearly upon social engagement, yet we will see that the presence of others is not necessarily a precondition for deliberation, nor is it requisite for participation.

Deliberative Democracy: A Brief Discussion

Democracy at its very basic core requires citizen engagement. Adam Przeworski, a self-declared "minimalist" in democratic theory recounted theories of democracy based upon competitive elections, finally posing the following possibility: "suppose this is all there is to democracy: that rulers are elected. Is this little?" (Dahl, Shapiro, & Chebub, 2003, p. 12). Even this simplistic description still relies on at least some level of civic engagement. That is, citizens must vote in order to elect their leaders. While this process is hardly complex, Pzreworski contends that the premise of elected leadership is indeed quite powerful. Without elected representation, resting upon the most simplistic act, democracy would be impossible. Voting, however, only comprises the minimal participation necessary to democracy. For many reasons, solely relying upon voting as the most important mechanism for participation is problematic.

As discussed previously, voting by nature is an act performed in the absence of others. In the American system, private and anonymous ballot-casting is a precondition for a legitimate electoral process. The emphasis upon voting as an individual act however, independent of outside forces, events, interactions, and experiences reinforces the American standard of the lone individual working to maximize his or her self-interest. This, however, does not wholly capture the factors that go into one's decision when voting. Rather, it is precisely the outside circumstances and (of particular interest here) interactions which ultimately result in not only one's decision of *how* to cast a ballot, but *whether* or not to do so in the first place. Thus, when one maintains that the standard of

participation is voting, he or she neglects the interpersonal ties and communication which ultimately result in the casting of that ballot.

Before moving forward, it is important to point out that I do not mean to imply that deliberation always ultimately results in voting, nor that this is the goal. Benjamin Barber speaks to this explicitly, arguing that an emphasis upon voting as a goal perpetuates thin democracy, as opposed to promoting his conception of a strong democracy. That is, it unduly privileges the interest of the individual and fails to highlight the importance of the community. This, in turn diminishes the effectiveness and integrity of democratic governance (Barber, 1984).

At the same time, however, the deliberation that it is so crucial to democracy often influences how one votes, which directly impacts governance. The most appropriate frame for understanding participation in a democracy however, is not voting, but rather the ways in which public engagement – social capital-building activities, in addition to the civic and political activities which are not otherwise included in theories of social capital – promotes deliberative interactions which in turn bolster democratic institutions. These deliberative interactions ideally give more meaning to voting; a vote based upon discussing and debating the options with others means that all of the choices have been carefully considered. Additionally, a vote resulting from an interaction with someone else is hardly a solitary act.

Public Engagement's Role in Deliberative Democracy

Social capital aids democratic problem-solving by encouraging discussion and community involvement. As Putnam writes, "politics without social capital is politics at a

distance." (2000, p. 341). A government operating in the absence of active input and involvement from the community is an isolated one, removed from the very citizens it is there to serve. This impacts the quality of the democracy in two ways. Firstly, citizen preferences are not posed to representatives, resulting in representation that is oblivious to the needs of the community. Without citizen input, the government operates in an entirely separate sphere from the public. Thus, the first way in which democracy is impacted relies upon the ability for citizens to provide input to their representatives.

When representatives are removed from their constituents their quality of governance deteriorates quickly. This is illustrated by two scenarios. The first is a situation in which representatives attempt to speak on behalf of citizens in the absence of their input. The result is a paternalistic determination of what is "best" for the community without actually knowing if it is truly the most beneficial option for those affected. The intentions of the official may be good, however without the proper knowledge of what the community actually needs, their actions may result in disadvantaging their citizens. The second possibility is perhaps more insidious, in which in the absence of input from the community, officials are not held accountable for the preferences of their constituents. Particularly in the latter case, representative democracy is undermined because governmental elites are representing no other interest than their own.

There is a second way in which democracy is jeopardized when operating in the absence of public engagement. The political landscape lacking in engagement robs both the government and the community of resources if the two were to work together. As the food assistance vignette discussed, this curtails the overall effectiveness of the

government and disadvantages not only those who need assistance the most, but the community as a whole. With regard to this example, the citizens who require food assistance are shortchanged in that they would be more effectively served through a partnership between the community and the government. The whole community is affected, however, when most of the responsibility of providing for those in need is placed upon them, rather than if the effort were facilitated by the government. By working together in a collaborative atmosphere, the interaction between government and the citizenry shifts from one-way (citizens providing input, or government handing down legislation) to two-way, as both entities work together on a common goal.

A truly representative government is clearly not achieved by simply casting a ballot once every few years. Rather, a government represents and tends to the people when it receives consistent feedback from its constituents. Letters to representatives, meetings, protests, rallies not only make citizen preferences known to representatives, but also holds them accountable by letting elected officials know that the community is paying attention. While most of these activities fit under political forms of engagement and are most directly tied to the government, apolitical activities – bowling, playing cards, etc. – have political consequence in that they comprise a space for deliberation.

Why Deliberation is Important to Democracy

I have already established that public engagement is integral to quality governance. The discussion in the last section emphasized the importance of dialogue between the public and the government. Of greater importance, however, is the communication between citizens. While democracy can arguably exist in the absence of deliberation, the

ability for citizens to come together and share a dialogue is what maximizes a democracy's responsiveness and ability to represent the needs of citizens. Mark Warren writes that "Participation is *democratic* when every individual potentially affected by a decision has an equal opportunity to affect the decision" (Warren, 2002, p. 693). This is possible in situations allowing citizens to come together and discuss their concerns amongst one another and fully participate in the decision-making process.

As Barber elucidates, dialogue serves several functions in society, from allowing citizens to help set the agenda, to facilitating community interests by building consensus and articulating common goals (Barber, 1984). Deliberation should empower citizens to articulate their own concerns, but also allows them to hear other arguments and communicate with individuals unlike themselves. This is where Putnam's account of bridging social capital is important. Deliberation should also be about disagreement as much as consensus, and it requires the presence of individuals from different backgrounds and persuasions. This in effect opens the doors for all individuals who are affected by community decisions to have a voice in the decision-making, which as Warren points out, makes the process democratic.

In the next section I will expand upon exactly what I mean by deliberation. First, I will discuss a few reasons for why it should be should be a prominent fixture in our society. Deliberation ideally strengthens community bonds by requiring citizens to talk to one another. In this respect, they get to know one another, and begin to take a vested interest in the greater good of the community, rather than merely of themselves. In this

way, communities that deliberate are the same communities that are rich in social capital and consequently enjoy the variety of benefits described by Putnam earlier.

Deliberation should also allow for a marketplace of ideas, in which individuals can come together to argue, agree, and compromise. Through this, issues are seen from many angles and more comprehensively than if merely a few individuals were assessing the situation. When more individuals participate in the discussion, more viewpoints and situations will be represented, adding to the democratic and representative nature of the decision-making. From an economic viewpoint, the best ideas will rise to the top. By "best" I mean, those that most fully take into account the needs of all citizens.

This notion of citizens from all walks of life coming together to deliberate what is best for the community – from those who have the most, to those who are the most in need – may be overly idealistic and utopian. Nonetheless, it is important to at least strive for a space of contestation that is inclusive and attends to the needs of those who are the most underrepresented and underprivileged, in addition to the more privileged segments of society. In the next section, I will explore what this space will look like, and the ways in which one can meaningfully deliberate in this context.

How and Where Deliberation Takes Place

Often, citizen-government interaction takes place through formal channels often categorized as political means of engagement. As Warren writes, "for most decisions, most of the time, citizen participation will be limited to voting for representatives, petitioning, influencing public opinion, participation in public hearings, and protesting" (2002, p. 288). This, however ignores the ability for deliberation in one's ordinary,

everyday activities to constitute public engagement. In this discussion, I will illustrate what I mean by meaningful deliberation, followed by a discussion of where this deliberation can take place. I would first like to briefly address the notion of the "common good."

Deliberation implies that individuals come together to discuss the "common good." This coming together, however, needn't "imply universality in the sense of the adoption of a general point of view that leaves behind particular affiliations, feelings, commitments, and desires," as Iris Young once put it (1990, p. 97). In fact, the purpose of deliberation is that when individuals come together, they do not hold the same views on what constitutes the public good. Indeed, the term "public good" is in and of itself often contested. Yet, when I mention public good, I refer simply to the desire to make the community better in some way. Perhaps there is a semblance of universality to this, if I am assuming that the reason individuals are coming together for the benefit of their communities; it is counterintuitive to imagine that an individual would take the time and effort to make the place where they live worse. This is the only similarity, however, that the individuals must share. The point of deliberation is to gather individuals of different "feelings, commitments, and desires" and to work together to solve an issue.

Next, I'd like to address what I mean by "meaningful deliberation." Again, this is a term which is largely contested in the literature, yet deliberation is most meaningful if it incorporates the following criteria:

1. Deliberation should be a broad term. It should refer not only to formal expression through conventionally political channels (for example, speaking at a city council

meeting, or writing a letter to a representative), but it should embrace informal expression in one's everyday life – talking with the neighbors, discussing issues of either public or private significance amongst friends. If deliberation is considered broadly, then meaning is given not only to forms of expression which have been traditionally marginalized, such as rural English, or rap music, but also to content which has for too long gone unaddressed in the public realm, such as domestic violence or gender roles.

In this same vein, the question of what constitutes expression, and thus deliberation arises. Iris Young (as cited in Benhabib) and John Dryzek both argue that deliberation should encompass many forms of communication, including storytelling, gossip, argument, rhetoric, humor, and emotion (Benhabib, 1996; Dryzek, 2000). Again, this is to prevent traditionally marginalized expression and subjects from continued trivialization. Social capital theory is useful in this sense because it gives credence to the casual interactions, such as the conversations that occur over a game of bowling. Similarly, these interactions are important to public engagement. This is significant for several reasons. Firstly, incorporating informal interactions into a public dialogue reduces the possibility that certain individuals and accounts will be marginalized. When we only give meaning to "proper speech" – that is, speech most often used by those who are educated enough to know the rules of proper grammar and syntax – we marginalize those who are unfamiliar with this linguistic intricacies. Thus, we privilege those who are already overrepresented in our society, and marginalize those who are most underrepresented. Embracing informal communications is particularly important when

speaking about the Internet, as online interactions tend to be less formal than those in person (this will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4).

Listening is also key to deliberation. Afterall, how effective is deliberation when all of the participants are speaking, and nobody is listening? This is a point illustrated by Susan Bickford, who considers listening as a form of active citizenship (1996). Putnam attributes part of the decline in civic engagement to an "imbalance between talking and listening" (2000, p. 174). When individuals (or institutions) only speak and fail to listen, others are discouraged from joining in the discussion. After all, what is the point if nobody will listen? This also plays into one of the following criteria for deliberation: participants must be willing to compromise. Without listening, individuals are unable to reflect upon the preferences posited by others and accommodate their own to new information.

Additionally, silence can constitute deliberation in some situations. Individuals may choose to remain silent sometimes. Rather than laziness, or unwillingness to cooperate, there is often a purposeful reason behind their silence. For example, refusing to vote in an election might be a protest to the two-party system. Silence may also spark deliberation amongst others. For example, one might be inclined to discuss the question "Why do so few people come to our community meetings?" If one remains silent all of the time, however, it is difficult if not impossible for their preferences to be made known to others. This is particularly true in which visibility is requisite for partaking in the discussion – otherwise, nobody will know that one is abstaining, nor their reasons for doing so.

Without at some point engaging in the discussion to establish one's reasons for silence, it is difficult for others to understand the meaning behind it.

2. Deliberation must be reciprocal, and attentive to reasons why others are not contributing. If one individual or group is dominating the conversation[12], and others are either unwilling to unable to respond, deliberation is not occurring. The purpose of deliberation is to communally discuss different matters. By nature, if only one view is represented, the nature of the conversation is more that of "talking at" than "talking with." It would be easy to say that deliberation must occur amongst individuals who are completely equal, and whose voices are given equal weight. This, however, is likely not a realistic goal. Nancy Fraser, for example, argues that even though groups have been formally included into the discussion, there are many informal barriers to their full participation, such as the fact that women are more likely to be interrupted by men and less likely to be listened to (Fraser, 1997). Thus, equal weight to different voices is the ideal. In the meantime, participants in deliberation should be attentive to the informal mechanisms which privilege some voices over others.

3. Deliberation needn't be argumentative, but must accept disagreement when it occurs. Much like social capital is not all about being warm and fuzzy, deliberation needn't be all sunshine and rainbows. Individuals will disagree, and must be prepared to do so. Without disagreement, there is little about which to deliberate in the first place. Of course, the atmosphere should not always be competitive, and it is not necessary for

[12] I do not mean to insinuate that a literal conversation must be taking place, with individuals physically present. Again, deliberation can occur across different media, and response needn't be immediate. Thus, the conversation of which I speak is figurative.

participants to argue nor debate. Young makes this point in her essay “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy” (Benhabib, 2006). As Young says, “Policies ought to be adopted not because the most powerful interests win but because the citizens or their representatives together determine their rightness after hearing and criticizing reasons” (Behnhabib, 2006, p. 122). An atmosphere of heated debate breeds hostility, in which power becomes the deciding factor in the deliberation.

4. Participants must be willing to compromise. Hostilities are mitigated when the atmosphere is one of compromise, rather than winner-take-all. This is not to imply that hostility and heated emotions should be avoided and reason privileged, a point which Young elucidates clearly in Chapter Four of *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990). The primary concern about deliberation absent the willingness to compromise, however, is that individuals are less likely to actually listen to one another when they are unyielding in their positions. Listening, of course, is a precondition for meaningful deliberation. Thus, when participants are open to meeting one another half-way, they are more likely to actually hear what the other is saying.

5. Deliberation may take place in both formal and informal venues. This point is critical to the next chapter and will be explored more fully in the context of the Internet there. However, it is important to make it clear that just as deliberation has a broad meaning and encompasses a variety of forms of expression, deliberation can also take place in a multitude of contexts and venues. Many, including Putnam, Bickford, and Young maintain that engagement must occur in-person for it to be wholly meaningful.

By relaxing the boundaries of what one means by deliberation, however, it is clear that engagement can and does occur across greater time-spans and venues than originally thought. As Dryzek writes, “Sometimes deliberative democracy can find a home in the state, but a vital civil society characterized by the contestation of discourses is always necessary” (Dryzek, 2000, p. 162). This is essentially the reason why social capital is so crucial to a well-functioning government – individuals are engaging with one another through their everyday actions. More so, this engagement is *meaningful*. This engagement needn’t occur in-person to have meaning, however. Individuals engage with one another when they respond to one another’s editorials in the paper; they are listening when they read what others have written; and yes, one can argue and resolve issues over e-mail.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

In this chapter, I have introduced the way in which the Internet is being rapidly embraced by American society, and also laid the theoretical groundwork for the chapters to follow. I have argued that separating private from public, and civic from political, ignores the fact that these terms often overlap both in theory and in practice. I have also referenced a theory which serves as a model for blending the public and the private, and the political and the civic. Though social capital theory is in many ways useful, it is still too narrow to fully encompass the many ways in which citizens engage with each other, their communities, and their government. To remedy this, I have posited public engagement as a comprehensive term to illustrate this relationship, and explained its role in deliberative democracy.

Finally, in order to understand the ways in which the Internet may or may not comprise a space for deliberation, I have delineated five criteria for meaningful deliberation, including that it can take place in many forms across a variety of avenues. The next chapter will further explore the way the Internet has revolutionized communication in America, how it has been harnessed as a more democratic mechanism for promoting deliberation, participation, and mobilization, and whether or not it should be considered a key player in facilitating public engagement.

CHAPTER THREE: THE INTERNET'S ROLE IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Amongst the generation of Americans in which having the Internet in the house is as common as a television in the living room, I'm one of the oldest. The Internet was introduced to my house via America Online when I was eight years old, back in the days when users were allotted a certain number of monthly minutes and the 28k modem would sometimes screech for hours trying to connect to the Web during peak hours. We were the first family I knew to get the Internet in our home and I was immediately fascinated. Even though I wasn't allowed to leave the three-block radius around my house, I had seemingly unlimited access to all of the information I could ever want. More importantly, I could *connect with other people* – other people from around the world. Like many in my generation, I grew up on the Internet, with easy access to friends down the street and in other countries alike just at my fingertips.

With the proliferation of the Internet in the home, more young Americans are becoming socialized on the Web. In this chapter, I will explore how the growing use of the Internet has impacted public engagement in America. I will first present the most recent evidence to illustrate that despite the decline in public engagement discussed in the first chapter, Americans are turning to new ways to participate in public matters. I will also address concerns discussed by authors in the first chapter that Americans are disengaging from political life, using information from the most recent presidential election. The second and third sections of this chapter will explore the ways the Internet has been used to increase public engagement, using the Dean and Obama campaigns as case studies. Chapter 4 will be devoted to the implications of the Internet's use for public

engagement, including whether or not individuals can meaningfully debate in cyberspace. Before moving on, I will first elaborate on why I am choosing presidential campaigns as the case studies for public engagement.

Presidential campaigns are an excellent example of the way public engagement can significantly impact the outcome of a serious issue. The person who wins the presidency determines the country's priorities, and can ultimately alter the course of the nation's history. One need only look to our nation's most prominent presidents, such as Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Delano Roosevelt to understand how the president affects the nation.

Presidential campaigns are also useful because as with all campaigns, the ability to encourage public engagement directly affects whether or not the candidate ultimately succeeds. Campaigns rely upon individuals coming together, working toward a common cause. More so, these individuals must come together and deliberate amongst one another. Impersonal modes of voter contact, such as e-mail, mailings, robocalls, and television ads are far less effective at mobilizing voters than personal interaction amongst neighbors, friends, and family (Green & Gerber, 2008). The purpose of voter contact is in part to mobilize the base, but also to speak with others and transform their preferences. Therefore, the ability to mobilize citizens to public engagement is a necessary component of campaign strategy.

Campaign staff and volunteers epitomize the many aspects of public engagement. They engage in both bridging and bonding social capital, persuading voters of opposite viewpoints, and rallying already-existing supporters. They work, volunteer, celebrate, and

sometimes mourn the loss of a race together. In the long days that come requisite with a political campaign of almost any magnitude, they also find friendship amongst one another. Political campaigns are also a useful tool with which to gauge the effectiveness of the Internet in public engagement because the results are often concrete – the candidate either wins, or loses; one can see how much money a campaign raises, via the Internet and whether or not it is through millions coming together to put forth small donations or primarily from large donors; one can also see how many volunteers and supporters are mobilized.

I should point out here that my ultimate goal is to explore the Internet's impact upon public engagement, not simply political campaigns. Campaigns, however, provide all of the key elements to engagement along with tangible results to analyze. This, in turn, provides a reliable way in which to examine the topic at hand. Before moving on to this discussion at length, however, I will next discuss how the Internet has been used to bolster social ties. Social ties are the connections between people, which are so critical to establishing a foundation to deliberation and thus public engagement.

Recent Trends in Social Networking and Campaign-Related Internet Use

As mentioned in Chapter 2, only 15% of American adults used the Internet in 1995 (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008). In the year I was introduced to the Internet – 1994 – estimates of 30 to 40 million American users were considered far too generous (Lewis, 1994). Yet, in a relatively short amount of time, the Internet has rapidly exploded into every area of individuals' lives, from major health decisions to what we eat for dinner. The Internet has also started playing a larger role in Americans' social and

political lives. The use of the Internet to bolster social connections is evident by the use of social networking sites, such as Facebook or Myspace.

It is not surprising that America's teen population has embraced social networking sites – 65% of teens online use these sites regularly (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008, *Communities).* America's teen generation has grown up with the Internet in their homes, instant messaging friends rather than calling, texting rather than passing notes. America's adult population, however, has also begun turning to websites such as Facebook and MySpace in an attempt to bolster their social ties. While the percentage of adults using social networking sites – 35% - is significantly less than that of teens, Pew Internet & American Life researchers explain that the raw number of adults using these sites is actually greater, since they make up a larger portion of the population (2008, *Communities).*

More interesting perhaps than the percentage of adults using these websites, is its sharp increase. In 2005, only 8% of adults visited social networking websites. This number has since quadrupled in a matter of only a few years (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008, *Communities).* In an age in which social capital and civic engagement are in decline by all traditional standards, Americans are swiftly turning to their computers to remain connected to one another. Not only is the Internet playing a larger role in social connections, but it is also significantly impacting the ways in which individuals interact with American politics.

During the 2008 election cycle, more Americans than ever before used the Internet to either participate in or obtain news about the subject. Nearly 75% of Internet

users did so, representing over half of the adult population in the United States. Specifically, about 44% of the entire adult population solicited news about the campaign via the Internet, while 38% of all Internet users discussed politics online with others. 59% shared and received political information through tools such as instant messages or Twitter. More so, the Internet engaged Americans aged 18-24 to a much greater extent than in the 2004 election, with 43% individuals of this age group seeking political information in 2008 versus 29% in 2008. This group represented the largest increase amongst all other ages (Smith, 2009) and is especially important because young Americans are the least likely to vote.

The facts presented here have several implications. Firstly, the turn to the Internet in the wake of deteriorating public engagement indicates that individuals do not *want* to be disconnected from one another. Individuals will turn to whatever means is most feasible to stay connected to one another. The popularity of Twitter, for example, shows that if nothing else, people are hungry to hear about one another's lives, even in morsels of 140 characters or less. Of course, our connections stand to deteriorate further if we become a nation of recluses, opting for the luring glow of the computer screen versus the physical presence of others. In the following chapter, I will speak to whether or not this is actually the case.

Secondly, there is a great deal of evidence indicating a rising disengagement from public life, as described in the first chapter. Voter turnout is down, as is group membership, church attendance, and even socializing with one's neighbors (Putnam, 1995). Fewer people are reading the newspaper and following politics in general. This

decline is seen predominately amongst Americans under 30 (Wattenberg, 2008). The increasing number of Americans seeking political news on the Internet, however, shows that they are in fact still interested in political information.

Americans are not apathetic about public life, but they are embracing newer technologies as a mechanism for participation and involvement. For example, most newspapers are available for free online today. Likewise, websites have proliferated the Web – it is no longer necessary to procure news from a physical newspaper, nor is it requisite to receive such information from a newspaper company at all. Therefore, the fact that fewer Americans are subscribing to newspapers is not inherently a concern. Blogs and cable news websites also provide a wealth of information[13]. The mere fact that Americans no longer solicit most of their news from newspapers does not necessarily indicate disengagement, but rather a shift in popular sources. The argument that Americans are disengaging from public life is in essence a misreading of current engagement patterns. The ways in which Americans have been using the Internet demonstrates that we will not take the degeneration of public engagement – particularly our social ties and ability to meaningfully participate in our democracy – without a fight. In the following sections, I will further demonstrate how the Internet is the new battlefield.

The Start of It All: The Dean Campaign

Markos Moulitsas Zuniga and Jerome Armstrong, founders of the popular blogs The Daily Kos and MyDD respectively, attribute the rise of Internet activism to the

[13] Of course, these mediums may not be the most thorough, nor reliable. The use of blogs in particular as a source of information will be discussed further in this chapter.

growing dissatisfaction following the 2000 presidential election. They explain that many Americans were upset, by the fact that the presidency was determined in a decidedly undemocratic manner by the Supreme Court, rather than the American people; Americans, they assert, were also upset by the Democratic Party's relative inaction. Following the 2000 election, disenchanted Americans began using Internet-based tools, such as blogs to express their discontent with the Democratic Party's unresponsiveness (Armstrong & Zuniga, 2006). As they explain, "we didn't have the money, the connections, or the pedigree to break into the insular world of traditional politics. But in the democratic world of online activism, we didn't need those things to be heard" (Armstrong & Zuniga, 2006, p. 1).

Armstrong and Zuniga's remarks capture the reality of American politics at the turn of the millennium. Politics seemed to be largely elite-driven, run by party insiders rather than average Americans. Even one of America's most sacred and empowering institutions – voting – proved ineffective after the 2000 election when the presidency was determined by 9 Supreme Court justices as opposed to the popular vote of millions. Even in the absence of normative judgment regarding the outcome of the 2000 election, the mere fact that the popular vote was overridden by a handful of elites is enough to understand why individuals may be discouraged from engaging in formal political channels. With the groundwork of Internet activism laid by bloggers challenging the political elite establishment after 2000, however, a change was on the horizon.

The 2004 presidential primary for the Democratic Party was originally dominated by "establishment candidates," such as Senators Joe Lieberman and John Kerry

(Armstrong & Zuniga, 2006, p. 137). Then-Governor Howard Dean's candidacy seemed more of a statement than a realistic bid for the nomination. As Armstrong and Zuniga so concisely put it, "Nobody gave him much of a chance" (2006, p. 137). The Dean campaign, however, was quietly, and in some ways unknowingly, rallying Americans all over the country to get involved with this dark horse candidacy.

Howard Dean solicited Joe Trippi to serve as his campaign manager, more so because of his campaign experience than his Internet organizing prowess. In fact, it didn't become apparent that the Internet was going to factor into the campaign at all until Trippi and the other Dean for America staffers realized early on that in order to even match President Bush in fundraising, they would have to host a 1,000 guest dinner every night, charging $100 per person, for the next five and a half years (Trippi, 2004). Trippi explains that at that moment, "we could all see that our only hope for winning now was to decentralize the campaign…and let the momentum and the decision making come from the people – stop trying to control the river…just open the flood gates and see where the current took us" (Trippi, 2004, p. 82).

In short, Trippi's campaign strategy was simple: democratize the process so that the decision-making and participation was left mostly to the supporters, rather than solely the campaign staff. The staff would oversee the operation, but the outreach and message would be left to the people. If this worked, the campaign would be spread not from the top-down, but from the bottom up – word about Dean for America would transmit "virally" amongst the populous (Trippi, 2004, p. 83).

This strategy shows that The Dean for America team understood two key things. Firstly they were not going to be successful if they played by the old rules of political campaigning – $2,000 per person fundraising dinners and spending millions of dollars on television ads simply weren't feasible for this fledgling candidacy. Secondly, they knew they had little to lose. Dean was the underdog candidate from the start. Trippi even notes that the "best case scenario" was that they would "make a little noise as a quirky sidelight to the campaign, quickly fade away, and in three months I'd be back home on my farm" (Trippi, 2004, p. 83). Thus, the campaign set out to begin their grassroots movement in light of having no other option. Their first step in democratizing the campaign was to post a link to MeetUp.com[14] on the Dean for America website (Trippi, 2004)[15].

At the time Trippi requested a link to MeetUp.com on the campaign's website, Dean was dead last in the race for the presidential nomination. On the other hand, he had the most MeetUp supporters of any of the other candidates. Within months of posting the link onto the campaign website, the number of supporters skyrocketed, from the initial 432 to over 190,000. The campaign then established it's own version, called GetLocal, which alone grew to 170,000 people (Trippi, 2004).

This is significant not because of the support seen online, but rather because the very premise of MeetUp requires individuals to get together *offline*. Surely, not every one

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[14] MeetUp.com is a networking website in which members join an online group of his or her interest, such as hiking, pets, vegetarianism, etc. MeetUp schedules a location and time in different cities, and members then do exactly that – they meet up in person.

[15] As an interesting aside, Trippi actually found out about MeetUp from Jerome Armstrong's blog, MyDD.com. Trippi initially became an avid reader of MyDD after discovering disparaging remarks posted about him by Armstrong. Upon this discovery, he responded to the remarks and began reading regularly. Through MyDD, Armstrong introduced Trippi to MeetUp (Trippi, 2006).

of them did. The results, nonetheless, were staggering. As the months passed, MeetUp organizers had increasingly more difficulty finding spaces to hold the vast number of supporters signed up for the meetings. For example, the New York meet up location commonly held fifty people. The week before their March meet-up, the numbers kept climbing and eventually the team had to find space for nearly 300. The campaign then announced the day before the meeting that Governor Dean would attend – within 24 hours, another 200 had signed up. At the end of the day, over 800 people attended the March New York meet-up – over a year before the first primary (Trippi, 2004).

MeetUp didn't simply get people away from their computer screens and into a meeting room. It also allowed for the Dean supporters to take control of the campaign in ways never before seen. The day after the March meeting, an anonymous supporter sent an e-mail to all of Dean's MeetUp supporters. The e-mail suggested that if all of the MeetUp supporters could spare $10 for the Governor, they could make a tremendous difference in the campaign. So that the campaign would know the donation was coming from a MeetUp supporter, the sender asked them to "give whatever you can give – and a penny" (Trippi, 2004, p. 84). This occurred completely independently of the campaign staff, which was in fact bewildered by the sudden increase in donations, particularly strange ones with a penny attached. While the campaign tried to figure out what was going on, the e-mail circulated virally through the Internet, making its way to blogs and e-mail boxes throughout cyberspace. Within a few weeks, the campaign received $400,000 in donations – all with a penny attached (Trippi, 2004).

Once the campaign harnessed the power of MeetUp, volunteers came in droves to the New Hampshire office. With fundraising, the locus of the campaign was on the Internet, yet the Web also provided an avenue toward engagement in real life. Trippi notes that individuals mobilized by MeetUp came from all over the country, from a variety of backgrounds. The most striking thing about these new volunteers is that they were *young*. Some of these people were merely giving up their summers; others were taking a semester off of school or quitting their jobs. Students for Dean groups sprouted on campuses all over the country. These young supporters became affectionately known as "Deanie Babies" (Trippi, 2004) and they proved that young Americans do care about politics.

The Deanie Baby movement represents a momentous turn in today's political landscape. The generation of Americans born after 1976 is often considered to be a lost cause in the world of politics. As discussed in the first chapter, the generation Zukin dubs "DotNets" are the least likely to be registered to vote, to cast their ballot, to convince others to do so, or to volunteer for a political group (Zukin, et al., 2006). They are the least likely to seek political news, and are more likely to be "clueless" about politics (Wattenberg, 2008, p. 78).

What was it about the Dean campaign that attracted them in such large numbers? As Zukin et al. explain, the newest generation of voting-aged Americans came of age amidst political scandal. The first political memories of this group include the Iran-Contra Scandal, the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, as well as Clinton's Whitewater and Monica Lewinsky scandals (2006). Additionally, the numerous

inconsistencies and ultimate resolution of the 2000 election reinforced that even if one does vote, it might not count. DotNets, in short, had substantial reasons for wanting to avoid politics.

This generation, however, also came of age during the rapid proliferation of the Internet, and the Dean campaign was the first to actually speak their language – the campaign communicated across their medium. More importantly, it invited them to join. Before 2004, the main medium of political communication was one-way via television ads, or mailers. When the Dean campaign used the Internet to invite supporters to meet-ups, or to encourage their feedback on campaign strategy, young people were highly receptive and willing to get involved. A large reason for this is that the campaign essentially made every supporter a campaign organizer. Trippi explains this strategy in the context of other campaigns:

> They operate under the Field of Dreams paradigm: *If you build it they will come*. And so from 1993 to 2003, they built their web sites and waited for the people to arrive, assuming they'd just appear one day like ghosts out of the corn. We couldn't wait for ghosts. So we operated under a different paradigm: *If you ask, they'll help build it* (2004, p. 106).

Dean for America's use of the Internet revolutionized political campaigning, and the way in which Americans are asked to engage publicly. Through the Internet, Trippi put the campaign into the hands of everyday, ordinary Americans. Most of these people had been written off as apathetic, or disinterested. Once the campaign asked for their help, however – and sincerely listened and allowed supporters to take the campaign into

their own hands – they saw a new kind of engagement in American politics. This engagement encouraged a campaign centered around a *partnership* with supporters, rather than top-down directives.

Trippi explains that the biggest myth about the Dean race was that he was the campaign manager. Rather, "*they* were managing the campaign. It wasn't headquartered in Burlington; it was *out there*. Anything we could do, *they* could do better" (Trippi, 2004, p. 116). The ethereal "they" of which Trippi speaks are Dean for America's Internet supporters. He explains that the campaign would post fliers and other campaign materials online and almost immediately, they'd receive e-mails and blog updates with a better version (Trippi, 2004).

In short, Dean for America gave supporters the autonomy and the network to take charge of the campaign and put politics back in the people's hands. That was, in essence, their strategy from the beginning and they accomplished it by embracing the Internet. In this way, they opened up the discussion to average Americans, inviting them to post on their blogs and actually reading what they had to say. The campaign's use of the Internet made it not only more convenient for individuals to get involved, but it also gave legitimacy to a form of communication and organization already embraced by America's youngest generation of voters. Dean ultimately did not win the presidential nomination, but Trippi attests that "The Dean campaign did not lose because we relied too much on its populist Internet supporters. The truth is this: The only reason the Dean campaign even got close enough that it mattered was because of those people" (2004, p. 179).

There are several lessons to be learned from the success of the Dean campaign with respect to public engagement. The first is that despite the declining numbers in engagement amongst America's youth, they want to be needed and they want to help. The key is that they must be invited, and their work and input must be respected. The Dean campaign welcomed the youth and more importantly, it treated them as equals. Wattenberg recounts the ways in which the American youth are retreating from political life (2008); many of these factors were discussed in Chapter 1. At the same time, he lauds the ways in which more young Americans are participating in more complex civic activities.

Wattenberg argues that "…there is a new kind of political participation that is more attractive to young people: a hands-on type of involvement requiring more effort than the simple act of casting a ballot (Wattenberg, 2008, p. 174). Trippi attributes this renewed political interest amongst America's youth to the attacks on September 11th, 2001. He cites a 2003 survey that found 67% of young adults were more likely to partake in politics as a result of the terrorist attacks (Trippi, 2004). The Dean campaign harnessed this new enthusiasm By encouraging supporters to give their feedback on nearly aspect of the campaign, Dean for America made it clear that they did not merely want the youth vote, but they wanted the youth *input*. They looked at young voters as an integral part to the campaign more so than a point on a poll. With this strategy, Dean for America enjoyed a dense network of volunteers, but it also maintained a creative, dynamic, and adaptable campaign by listening to the fresh ideas posited by this new generation of political activists.

The second lesson is that *the Internet works*. The March New York meet-up was not an isolated event – Dean was received by record-breaking crowds all over the country, even well before the first primaries or caucuses. Through the use of the Internet, word of the campaign spread virally, through inboxes, blogs, and websites. This advertising didn't cost thousands of dollars like most television ads. Rather, it was free, and more importantly interactive. Supporters could contact others with innovative ideas, such as to give the Governor $10 with a penny attached, or sell their bikes for democracy. Trippi notes that there were several reasons why young people would be attracted to the Dean campaign, such as his stance on the Iraq War, but they were mostly attracted by the campaign's willingness to reach out to the youth on their terms, speaking their language – through the Internet (Trippi, 2004).

Finally, the campaign gave a new legitimacy to blogging, and other Internet-based communications. Through this, the campaign gave recognition to the Internet as a space for meaningful deliberation and public engagement. By incorporating the Internet into the campaign strategy, and encouraging supporters to use it, the campaign gave recognition to the fact that the Internet has the potential to actually change the outcome of the race. Additionally, the staff's close attention to blogging discussions and message boards demonstrate that a real conversation about politics was taking place, and that it meant something.

The Dean campaign's use of the Internet bolstered all of the components of public engagement – civic, political, and cultural activities. The MeetUp phenomenon illustrates how the Internet can be used to get individuals out of their homes and into the public

space to talk and work with one another. Additionally, individuals deliberated with one another through over message boards and blogs, ultimately affecting the strategy of the campaign and the way campaigns are run today. Even by Putnam's account of social capital, which is somewhat narrower than that of public engagement, the Internet in this context bolstered both bridging and bonding social capital. Not only did people come together with similar interests, such as Democratic politics, but people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences actually came together by the thousands at meet-ups all over the country, ultimately forming a community of supporters.

The Dean campaign, however, was just the start. As Trippi so presciently states, "…Dean for America is just a sneak preview of coming attractions" (2004, p. 203). After seeing the success of Dean campaign, future campaigns were quick to catch on that it would play a growing role in mobilizing supporters. In many ways, Dean for America was merely the opening act for the Obama campaign's successful use of the Internet in the 2008 presidential election.

The Obama Campaign: An Internet Success Story

On November 4th, 2008 Americans elected Barack Obama to the United States presidency. In some ways, Obama had a better shot at the Democratic nomination than Dean – he had gained national fame after his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic Convention and was quite popular even before he declared his bid for the presidency. At the same time, electing an African-American as president – one whose middle name is Hussein no less – seemed somewhat unlikely in a nation which instituted racial segregation less than fifty years ago.

Though as of this writing the election was less than a year ago, one thing is clear: the Internet played a critical role in Obama's win. Like the Dean campaign, the Obama organizers sought to build a campaign based upon grassroots efforts. Rather than organizing through the top-down structure so often seen in past campaigns, the Obama campaign used the Internet to democratize his candidacy. They used Internet tools to encourage supporters to publicly engage and in turn impact the outcome of the election.

Even the campaign's slogan – Yes We Can – embodied the notion of working together toward a common cause. To do this, the campaign set up an interactive organizing website entitled MyBarackObama.com, known affectionately amongst supporters as MyBO. The intent was to provide every supporter with a toolkit to organize his or her own community. To make this process understandable to anyone with a computer, the campaign set up a free tutorial on YouTube.com which supporters could access at any time.

Supporters were encouraged to create a profile and blog on MyBO, so other members could get to know them. MyBO also offered links to local online communities centered around the supporter's geographic location and interests, as well as a personal fundraising page so the supporter could connect with friends and family to meet their campaign fundraising goal. The site also points the supporter to a voter contact tool, providing them with the information of voters to contact right in the supporter's neighborhood (BarackObamadotcom, 2008). By linking virtual space to material space, the Internet holds the power to increase public engagement and deliberation.

MyBO prompted supporters to interact with the individuals living right in their communities by providing walk lists – these are essentially lists of information including the names and addresses of voters in the area. Using the list, the supporter was encouraged to approach their neighbors in person for a face-to-face discussion about the campaign. Here, Putnam's vision of bonding social capital is also at work – individuals are given the tools to communicate with others in their community and strengthen these neighborhood bonds. This tool falls short of fostering bridging social capital, however, as individuals are only encouraged to talk to people in their immediate localities. This makes it unlikely that they will encounter individuals of different socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, this feature serves as an example of how the Internet can encourage people to leave their homes and actually interact with others. This is also an indispensable campaign tool, as the supporters could then log onto MyBO with the results of their discussion, which was then plugged into the campaign database.

In Obama's case, the Internet helped facilitate his historic victory on Election Day. Trippi commented on the campaign's use of the Internet, pointing out the fact that the amount of time the campaign's videos were watched on YouTube equates to $47 million worth of broadcast television time (Miller, 2008). Public engagement, however, isn't about watching videos online. It is about interacting with others in order to either implicitly or explicitly impact a public issue. The key to the Obama win was not in mobilizing supporters, but rather the campaign was won by empowering supporters to *mobilize other supporters*. Through the use of Internet tools such as MyBO, just as with the Dean campaign, supporters became organizers and were given autonomy over the

direction of the candidacy. This sense of agency and responsibility encouraged supporters to reach out to others, discuss the campaign and why it was important to them, and ultimately decide the election.

Of course, phone banking from one's home is not the same as doing it from a campaign office teeming with supporters. Additionally, printing out an individualized walk list isn't the same as driving out to a new part of town with a car-full of volunteers and pairing up with other people to knock on doors together. In the first chapter, I discussed how being part of a campaign brings people closer together and forges new friendships. This camaraderie also contributes to a candidate's success; individuals feel directly connected to the campaign and feel responsible to one another when they volunteer through the office. It is important to recognize the efforts of the sleep-deprived and frazzled volunteers and field organizers who dedicated enormous amounts of time to the campaign. As much as the Internet fueled Obama's success, so did the efforts of his ground team.

Tools like MyBO cannot realistically *replace* the campaign's organized ground effort, but it can *supplement* it – much like Internet communication cannot replace face-to-face contact. MyBO is important to reaching out to individuals who may not otherwise regularly volunteer in the campaign office. It would be ideal to get every supporter into a headquarters, however this is simply unrealistic given the time constraints facing most Americans. For this reason, Internet tools should be considered part of the campaign toolkit, rather than the toolbox itself.

Importance of the Dean and Obama Campaigns

The Dean and Obama campaigns prove the politically importance of the Internet. The Obama campaign built upon the framework established by the Dean campaign and was thus equipped to employ the Internet from the beginning as a critical element to the election. Trippi, as cited by Evan Thomas in his book *A Long Time Coming*, "often said that if the Dean campaign was like the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk, then Obama was the Apollo program – in other words, in one cycle skipping over commercial aviation, jet travel, and supersonic transport to go straight to the moon" (2008, p. 109). The Internet was not simply a supplement to the Obama campaign – it *was* the campaign. It served as the grounds for deliberation about policy, for organizing, for rebuttals against attacks, and for critiques.

Of course, the matter at hand is not how the Internet impacted campaigns, but how it impacted public engagement. Campaigns were used as the lens through which to examine the Internet's effect upon public engagement because they incorporate all of the key aspects therein – communicating and transforming preferences through both formal and informal channels, deliberating with friends, neighbors, and strangers, voting, working with others for a common cause. At the heart of public engagement is deliberation with others. It is clear that the Internet invited individuals into the process of public engagement by making the process easier and more accessible.

In the next section, I will examine the potential for the Internet to expand the participation base in democratic politics, as well as possible disadvantages to using the Internet for this purpose. I will also discuss my other reservations with the use of the

Internet as an essential tool to public engagement. Finally, I will also explore the ways in which deliberation over the Internet constitutes meaningful discourse, and thus whether net-based communication fits into the model of public engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLICATIONS

Throughout the previous three chapters I have discussed existing literature illustrating current trends in social capital, political engagement, and civic engagement. I established that for the purposes of studying the way in which the Internet impacts citizen involvement, the activities associated with social capital as well as political and civic forms of engagement should be conflated into a singular term. This is because in most situations there is no clear distinction between what is public versus private, or political versus civic – the activities and consequences integrated into each of these terms often overlap and blend together. Therefore, to establish how I understand citizen participation, I sought a model that combines the civic and the political, as well as the public and the private into its account.

I have explored how social capital integrates these terms into a collective measure of citizen participation. Social capital, however, is not entirely adequate as it excludes some measures that should be included in a comprehensive account of participation. For example, voting is a participatory act which has public relevance, as it determines who represents a certain constituency. Since it is done in solitude, however, it is not considered social capital. It should nonetheless be incorporated into the account of public engagement because voting is intended to influence public matters. Additionally, social capital theory does not sufficiently elaborate upon the kinds of interaction necessary between individuals to elicit all of the benefits associated with a capital-rich community – for example, a more responsive government and higher levels of trust amongst individuals. While deliberation is referenced in social capital theory, it is important to

develop an ideal of how this interaction should take place so as to determine what types of communications are preferable in a democratic society.

Social capital provides an underdeveloped sense of citizen engagement yet it is still useful to its understanding. Therefore, I have used it as a basis to build my own conception of participation, public engagement. Public engagement is a comprehensive term consisting of all of the components of social capital, as well as those activities conducted in solitude directed at influencing public matters such as voting or donating to a campaign. Public engagement also emphasizes the importance of meaningful deliberation between individuals. In this way, public engagement can take place in both formal and informal venues; for example, it occurs when neighbors socialize at a cookout, and when citizens lobby their representatives for a cause. The key is that individuals are communicating their preferences to one another, and those preferences have the possibility of being transformed by the interaction with others. In Chapter 2, I further elucidated what I mean by meaningful deliberation and the ways and places it can occur.

As the Internet has rapidly played a more important role in Americans' lives, its impact upon public engagement is a relatively new field of study. In order to explore how the Internet has been used as a tool to motivate public engagement, I have discussed its role in Dean 2004 and Obama 2008 campaigns. In this chapter I will explore several aspects of using the Internet as a tool for mobilizing public engagement. Firstly, I will directly apply the terms of public engagement - particularly deliberation - to the Internet, and will determine in what ways cyberspace can comprise a venue for contestation. After

this, I will further express my reservations with relying upon the Internet to engage Americans. I will then conclude by asserting my overall conclusion about the relationship between the Internet and public engagement.

Is the Internet an Avenue for Public Engagement? Part I.

The question of whether the Internet provides an avenue for public engagement is twofold. The first side concerns whether or not Internet-use mobilizes individuals to turn off their computers and actually leave their homes to engage in traditional forms of engagement. For example, does using the Internet make it more likely that one will actually go to his or her polling location and vote? Does it increase the likelihood that someone will go to a rally, or attend a meeting in person? This first dimension assesses to what extent individuals use the intangible tools of the Internet to engage in tangible, real-life, face-to-face activities. This will be addressed in this section, Part I.

The second side explores whether or not the activities conducted solely on the Internet constitute public engagement, particularly deliberation. The questions with respect to this dimension include: does a conversation on a blog constitute deliberation? What about via e-mail? Does attending an online rally build the same amount of social capital as attending one in person? Using the principles outlined in Chapter 2, I will assess to what extent popular Internet-based activities constitute public engagement in the following section, Part II.

The first facet was largely addressed in the last chapter. The Dean and Obama campaigns demonstrated that when individuals are invited to participate and given an easy way to do it, they will. Take, for example, the Dean meet-ups. In this situation,

MeetUp organizers did all of the work – they organized the meeting space, set the time, and advertised it to users. All the supporters had to do was show up. If organizing the New York meet-up were left to the average concerned citizen, it probably would not have boasted 800 people.

This is not because the average person is lazy, but simply because organizing successful events take a great deal of time and effort. MeetUp organizers constantly had to work with different venues to change the location as the number of people attending steadily rose. That, in addition to advertising the meeting and keeping an eye on the number of people attending, could be a full-time job in and of itself. Social structures exist which preclude many Americans from physically being able to devote the kind of time necessary to being community organizers in the absence of the Internet. Longer work-weeks, the necessity for more than one job in a struggling economy, and lack of affordable child-care constrain already tight time budgets. The Internet, however, lowers the transaction costs of engagement by making it simpler. As demonstrated by the Dean meet-ups and tools provided by MyBO, the Internet can be a powerful tool to mobilize individuals to actually leave their homes and engage with other citizens because it informs individuals of how, when, and where to get involved.

With respect to the question of whether the Internet encourages people to leave their homes and engage in traditional participatory activities such as voting and meeting with others, it is indeed a powerful tool. Online resources deliver the nuts and bolts of public engagement – the how, when, and where. They also provide a mechanism by which to personally invite individuals to engage, whether by joining a rally or a block

party. Popular social networking websites like Facebook provide a variety of tools for individuals to create and organize their own events, making this technology accessible to anyone with a computer and an Internet connection. Online tutorials and videos make these processes quick and simple. In short, the Internet makes it easier for people to organize and attend activities that allow them to publicly engage by traditional standards.

Before moving on, I should address the concern that some participatory activities cannot be done "in-person," per se. For example, contributing to campaigns and following the news are signs of public engagement requiring only that one mails a check or picks up the paper. For these types of activities, the Internet also bolsters the ability for an individual to engage. The Dean and Obama campaigns demonstrated how the Internet can be used to elicit huge sums of money from many small donations. For example, when Dean for America became the first campaign to publicly announce its fundraising goal, so many Dean supporters went online to donate that the campaign website crashed. Ultimately, they raised $828,000 in a single day from donations averaging $100 or less (Trippi, 2004). In September of 2008, Obama shattered campaign records, bringing in nearly $150 million in just that month, again from donations averaging less than $100 (Moss, 2008). The Internet made it easier to invite millions of people to donate; when a campaign can do this, they can rely on a great number of smaller donations.

The Internet is also a useful tool in soliciting news by providing an easily accessible pool of sources that can even be tailored to one's unique interests[16]. This was discussed in more depth in the previous chapter and illustrated by the rapid increase in

[16] This is not necessarily positive. Possible consequences of this will be discussed further in this chapter.

Americans seeking political news on the Internet. News media that has traditionally charged a price; today, papers like *The New York Times* provide most of their articles free of charge. Some popular news sources, such as the *Christian Science Monitor* have ceased daily print editions altogether and rely almost entirely upon the Internet. The Web also provides a wealth of information from alternative sources, such as underground newspapers, blogs, and wikis[17]. Essentially, Americans find the Internet useful not only in accessing news from established sources, but also to find political information absent from the mainstream (Kavanaugh, Kim, Perez-Quinones, Schmitz, & Isenhour, 2008).

In response to whether or not the Internet increases public engagement with respect to the first facet – that is, whether it bolsters traditional forms of engagement – the answer is a resounding yes. The Internet in several ways provides the information necessary for an individual to easily get involved in their communities in tangible ways. Firstly, it makes this information accessible – for example, one can relatively effortlessly look up how to register to vote, where to do so, and what the requirements are. Citizens can easily locate information on how to volunteer for a cause, or where a rally is taking place. Additionally, social networking sites provide tools for individuals to be organizers themselves, whether they are arranging a formal political event or a casual evening with friends. Finally, the Internet is useful even with activities commonly performed alone, such as making a campaign contribution or following the news.

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[17] A wiki is a collaborative website that allows users to change the content. As a humorous example, Stephen Colbert once urged viewers to falsely post on Wikipedia that the African elephant population tripled over a period of only six months. So many did so, that Wikipedia moderators had to freeze all entries pertaining to African elephants and blocked Colbert's account.

The Obama and Dean campaigns have clearly illustrated how the Internet can be used to get citizens out of their homes and into their communities to deliberate with others and otherwise partake in public engagement. The key is to invite individuals to engage and to make it easy for them to do so. The more pressing question, however, is whether or not activities which take place *strictly* on the Internet constitute public engagement. Are social connections on the Internet the same as the ones in real life? Is deliberation as meaningful in cyberspace as it is in the tangible world? I will explore these questions in-depth in the following section.

Is the Internet an Avenue for Public Engagement? Part II.

There are a variety of activities in which one can partake to constitute public engagement. It is a broad term, not due to design but rather necessity. As private matters such as domestic violence become public issues, or political activities such as those organized by the MyBO website are undertaken in the home, the separation between the outside and inside worlds are blurred. Similarly, an individual can interact with the Internet in a variety of ways. Some simply use it to shop, others to see photos of their grandchildren. Some prefer to connect over e-mail, while others associate over Facebook messages or instant messenger services. Some of these forms of online communication have greater possibilities for public engagement while others are more limited.

I have established that one can publicly engage in solitude. One can follow the news or read a blog without ever actually interacting with another person. This constitutes public engagement, but only in the narrowest sense as the communication is one-sided. Of greater interest is whether or not two-way online communications

constitute engagement. Using the Internet to pay one's bills or to buy new shoes is not of interest in this discussion. These activities alone present almost no public utility,[18] and though they might demonstrate society's larger comfort level with the Internet, they are of little interest in the present exploration of public engagement.

What *is* of interest are activities individuals use to maintain or expand their social networks and the ways in which people communicate their preferences on the Internet. Deliberation is a key element because it is the means by which norms of trust and reciprocity develop. Thus, the social ties one establishes is based upon how that person communicates and interacts with others. The foundation for public engagement lies within deliberation – this is how individuals come to know one another's preferences and perhaps change their own; it is also how they choose under what circumstances they become involved in their communities and their mechanisms for doing so. Thus, to determine whether or not activities conducted solely on the Internet constitute public engagement, it is first necessary to establish whether or not they foster meaningful deliberation.

To examine this, I will discuss popular modes of web-based interaction in the context of the five criteria outlined in Chapter 2. These activities include e-mail, instant messaging, blogging, participation in online petitions/rallies, and the use of social networking websites. I will then conclude this section by considering to what extent these

[18] An argument could be made that these actions stimulate the economy, which in turn impacts public matters, but this is a stretch at best, and is furthermore largely irrelevant to the greater discussion.

activities constitute meaningful deliberation overall. First, however, I will apply these communications to each of the five criteria individually:

1. Deliberation should be a broad term. By this, I mean that it should include both formal and informal expressions of preferences. Thus, informal expressions such as storytelling or gossip are just as relevant as a formal letter to a representative. The Internet makes both formal and informal communication easier for individuals. For example, citizens can e-mail their representative, which is more convenient than finding the address, obtaining postage, and mailing a letter. Likewise, the Internet makes informal communication between friends easier for the same reason. Additionally, it provides a way to post one's stories and thoughts before a seemingly endless audience.

The Internet is also effective because its communications are by nature informal. By this, I mean that interactions are casual and conversational. By contrast, formal interactions are more planned and structured – for example, writing a letter or speaking before city council. Most communications are expected to be short and to the point. This could be for several reasons – perhaps because it was rapidly embraced by younger generations, because it takes longer to type, or because the lack of face-to-face interaction presents a partial shield of anonymity.

Without the physical or auditory presence of another person, individuals often relax traditional standards of etiquette. This opens up the potential for less formal communications to be taken seriously. Informality is not a precondition for inclusionary deliberation, but it allows for statements to be judged by their content rather than their delivery. Individuals should still be careful about the way they communicate online –

especially when the Web's content is almost always visible and permanent – but it is encouraging to see a wider variety of voices accepted in cyberspace.

I should note that some standards of Internet etiquette in effect place boundaries upon interactions. TYPING IN CAPS DENOTES YELLING and is considered rude, much like it is in a physical conversation. Flaming – purposefully inciting hostility on a message board or blog is also a faux pas. Social networking websites also have their own set of conventions. Claire Suddath's *Time* article presents an online video created by YourTango.com that discusses some of these conventions. For example, individuals can display with whom they are in a relationship on their Facebook profiles. It is poor manners to change one's relationship status from "In a Relationship" to "Single" without consulting the other person. Posting embarrassing photos of another person on Facebook is also impolite, as is "friending" individuals whom you do not actually know – Suddath concisely explains that no matter what the situation, "That's still weird.[19]" (2009).

Internet etiquette is not always apparent to individuals who are new to these forms of communication. These norms may in fact exclude individuals who are not familiar with them. This is somewhat lessened by the fact that online conventions are based upon those in the real world, making them more intuitive. It is not surprising that it is inappropriate to publicly post humiliating photos of another person on the Web, or that it is gauche to break up with someone by changing your relationship status. By using the

[19] Suddath's phrase also serves as an example of how Internet communications are inherently informal. Such a phrase would be out-of-place in a print article, but it is seemingly appropriate for an online article, especially one commenting on social networking.

same judgment that guides one through tangible encounters, one can navigate the world of online courtesy with relative ease.

By embracing both formal and informal communications, on the Internet, preferences are transformed not by the loudest or most eloquent voice, but by the most reasonable. There is no precondition for extensive oratory skill. This is not to say that extensive misspellings and poor grammar are not frowned upon; communications riddled with these errors are difficult for the reader to understand and therefore also violate Internet etiquette. Because of the informal nature of Internet interaction, however, these mistakes are more easily forgiven. Informal interaction is not only tolerated, but it is expected and accepted in the online community. There is no underlying expectation of literary prowess in the context of e-mail or posting on a friend's Facebook profile. Of course, this is not always the case – professional Internet communication demands proper grammar and etiquette. But for the purposes of casually interacting with others, the Internet is perhaps the most accepting format for informal speech available today.

E-mails are the most versatile form of online communication in this context. They can either be extremely formal, or highly informal depending upon the recipient and the intent of the sender. Blogs and message boards similarly can be either formal or informal. In most situations it helps the credibility of the blogger or poster to maintain proper linguistic technique, however colloquial language, slang, and various other informalities are largely acceptable. This is mostly because blogs are intended to be managed and written by average people and to be accessible to average people. In this way, the intent behind blogs and message boards is highly democratic.

Informality is even more acceptable among instant messages and social networking sites. By nature, interactions are meant to be short and to the point. Additionally, conversations taking place over these mediums are most often between people who already know each other. Thus the comfort level with the other person also contributes to the informality. Abbreviations such as brb (be right back) and g/g (gotta go) are commonplace. Because instant messages occur in real-time, speed is valued over syntax.

On the whole, Internet-users not only tolerate informality, but they expect and embrace it. This adds to the ability of the Internet to be a deliberative medium by expanding the types of expression which are given meaning. While informality is not acceptable in every online situation, it is accepted more so on the Internet than anywhere else. Of course, embracing a variety of communications is only one criteria for meaningful deliberation.

2. Deliberation must be reciprocal, and attentive to reasons why others are not contributing. The Internet is inherently a two-way medium. The process, on the whole, is interactive and perhaps more equitable than in-person or phone communications. Research has demonstrated that online communication is "more frank and egalitarian;" women are interrupted less, and users pay less attention to racial or sociocultural factors (Mossberger, et al., 2008, p. 52). Nancy Fraser expresses concern that groups which have been formally included are still informally marginalized – when users pay less attention to these differences, they are given more opportunity to be heard in the conversation.

The question remains of whether or not simply masking difference with anonymity is the same as understanding and/or embracing difference. Fraser calls this "the bracketing of social differences," which she describes as "proceeding as if [social inequalities] don't exist when they do" (Fraser, 1997, p. 78). For example – as mentioned previously, women are less likely to be interrupted on the Internet than in-person (Mossberger, 2008). Is the only reason the Internet is more egalitarian because users don't *know* they are talking to a woman? And if so, is this really a societal advancement? Probably not. If a woman is not interrupted online merely because the person with whom she is speaking does not know she is a woman, then that hardly represents an egalitarian interaction. It is unlikely, however, that this is most often the case.

In most situations, people know with whom they are conversing on the Internet. For interactions occurring on social networking websites, most of the time individuals know exactly with whom they are speaking. In fact, the use of these sites has been shown to supplement already-existing relationships that also occur in the material world (Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). With the use of these websites growing rapidly, there is a greater likelihood that individuals are already aware of any differences between them. Nonetheless, these communications have proven to be more equitable than in-person, even when differences are known.

Even when the two individuals do not personally know one another, the very nature of Internet communication requires a response from the other participant. An e-mail is usually sent because a response is desired or needed. Instant messaging is, by definition, the exchange of information in real-time between two people. Therefore, it

requires that at least two people are participating in the discussion. These interactions may still fall prey to existing prejudices regarding “improper” speech, but I have already established that the Internet is an inherently informal medium. Therefore, wider varieties of expression are more often accepted. Whether or not the individuals know one another before-hand, the Internet makes it easier for the conversation to be reciprocal.

Some methods of online contact less obviously require two-way communication. For example, with blogs, the individual posts a main “thread.” This thread is the major topic of the post. It can be a link to a news website, a personal story, a picture – anything. This, in and of itself is not interactive. The unique aspect of blogs, however, is that they invite responses to the main thread, which usually appear directly below. With this feature, readers are encouraged to join in the dialogue about the main post. This is similar to the way in which newspaper readers can respond to a story by writing an editorial. The difference is that the process is more interactive -- everyone’s responses are shared, and they can branch off into their own conversation. In many cases, users can even find one another and privately discuss the issue over instant message or e-mail. Blogs essentially revolutionize the way in which individuals process information because they know they are welcome to respond. They are not merely absorbing the information, but are encouraged to formulate a response with an easy process.

Advances on the Internet are making it easier for individuals to invite responses from others, thus fostering an environment of reciprocal communication. In many situations, such as e-mail and instant messaging, a response is expected. Programs such

as Google Friend Connect[20], make even non-interactive websites responsive. Of course, this makes elective non-participation and/or silence difficult to recognize. When one doesn't post a response on a blog or join Facebook, despite how serious their reasons, there is no way to tell that he or she is *choosing* not to participate. Because web-based interaction is contingent upon textual visibility, it is impossible to recognize when someone is opting to remain invisible. It is consequently more difficult to identify and understand *why* others are not contributing in this context. Nonetheless, the Internet's expectation of responsiveness in most situations provides a useful foundation for reciprocal communications.

3. Deliberation needn't be argumentative, but must accept disagreement when it occurs. In some respects, the informality and anonymity on the Internet can furnish a less respectful interaction. This is, perhaps, where the Internet's possibilities for meaningful deliberation are weakest. In a tangible interaction, or even on the phone, one can detect hurt, sorrow, or anger in the person with whom they are communicating. In cyberspace, however, the other person is a thread on a blog, or a box with an "x" in the corner one can click and it will disappear. With the anonymity of the Internet comes a psychological distance making it is less likely for someone to see that the person at the other end is a living, breathing being.

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[20] Google Friend Connect is a new program that is easily integrated into an existing website. It provides a toolbar that allows users to rate the website, leave feedback, and to connect with other people who visit the site. Therefore a website that was previously non-interactive – such as an online store – now has the potential to become an online community.

In this way, disagreement is less likely to be respectful, and even less likely to be resolved. Hidden behind the veil of a computer screen, individuals feel less responsible for their actions. If it becomes too inconvenient to work through one's differences, the Internet makes it easy to cease communication.[21] Online programs serve as a go-between, removing the necessity for an individual to actually address their differences with another person. With the click of a button, one can prevent the other person from even seeing if they are online. When two individuals disagree and physically live or work within close proximity to one another, they are often forced to labor through the disagreement and seek a resolution. On the Internet, there is no reason for this. The individuals are not forced to live with one anotherThis also reduces the likelihood that preferences will actually be transformed in light of disagreement. This will be explored further in the context of the following criterion.

At the same time, it is important to address that disagreement on the Internet is visible and it is more acceptable for responses to transpire over a longer period of time than in-person. Therefore, individuals may be better equipped and more at ease participating in a heated discussion when they are able to take their time and think through their response. In this respect, it is inconclusive to what extent the Internet accommodates respectful disagreement.

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[21] For security reasons, networking programs make it easy to cut online ties with another person. On Facebook, one can "unfriend" someone, meaning that neither party can access the other's profile anymore. They can also "block" them, so that neither person will even be able to tell the other is using Facebook. Additionally, instant messenger programs offer a similar feature that prevents other users from seeing if you are online.

4. Participants must be willing to compromise. While participants needn't always compromise, a major component to deliberation is that individuals may transform their preferences. Thus, they must be willing to actually listen to what others are saying and consider their own preferences in light of what others are discussing. The Internet holds great possibilities for allowing individuals to access to a wide variety of information. The Internet is a democratic medium in which users are given relatively equal access to post their views and find alternatives. The Internet is not commercial, nor is it regulated. Many sites offer free blog hosting, e-mail, instant messaging, news, and videos. If there is a space in American public life in which virtually every viewpoint can be equally represented, it is on the Internet.

This freedom of information is a double-edged sword, however. Yes, individuals can seek information and post their views easier than ever before. On the other hand, they are also free to ignore alternative views and seek out only those reinforcing their already-existing beliefs. As Sunstein points out, the Internet allows us to compartmentalize our information (2007). News is filtered to fit our own preferences of what we want to hear; individuals no longer have to sift through sections of the newspaper they don't care to read when they can create a homepage offering only the information they are interested in seeing. This situation, in which the masses "are mainly listening to louder echoes of their own voices" makes it less likely that individuals will actually expose themselves to the variety of views found on the Internet, despite how easy it is to obtain them (Sunstein, 2007, p. 13).

When individuals rely upon blogs for their information, they are also less likely to come into contact with alternative views. At face-value, blogs seem like an excellent online mechanism for deliberative democracy. Users can freely post their views, discuss their positions with one another, bolster their opinions with facts, and back this information up with links to other websites. Researchers have found, however, that 91% of the links on blogs are to like-minded sites. Take for example the blog that introduced Joe Trippi to MeetUp.com – the same study found that the Daily Kos linked to 292 liberal blogs, yet only to 46 conservative ones. (Sunstein, 2007).

Of course, many Americans take advantage of the Internet's vast information base. A 2004 study demonstrated that 43% of Americans who declared support for a presidential candidate followed arguments both for and against the other candidate. At the same time, however, the same study confirmed that 29% knew arguments in favor of their candidate but not of the other, and a quarter of respondents admitted that they sought news from sources which would confirm their already-existing beliefs (Sunstein, 2007).

The Internet's capacity to introduce individuals to dissimilar views and transform them is in the end up to the user. If the individual is committed to hearing both sides of a story, then that information is easily available on the Internet. At the same time, when one can readily find the information that will placate their existing viewpoints there is little incentive to seek and give due credence to the other side. That is, unless the individual merely wants to be familiar with it so as to debunk it in future debate. This is not the kind of willingness to compromise necessary for meaningful deliberation. In

Individuals must come into the situation with a willingness to truly listen, hear, and think about other viewpoints. The Internet opens up greater possibilities for this, but only if users take advantage of them. At the same time, this is not a new phenomenon. Newspaper and television news sources have reputations for liberal or conservative biases and individuals seek those that make them most comfortable. Thus, this issue is not unique to the Internet.

5. Deliberation may take place in both formal and informal venues. While the first criterion elucidates *how* deliberation can take place, this one emphasizes *where.* The question at hand is whether or not the Internet can in and of itself comprise a space for deliberative democracy. Sunstein thinks not, on account of the fact that individuals are more likely to seek out information that will bolster their pre-existing beliefs (Sunstein, 2007). Additionally, discourse is less likely to be respectful, and individuals are not forced to reconcile their differences in the same way that they are in-person. The Internet, however, is changing the ways in which we conceptualize space.

The Internet is creating a new kind of space in American society. Communities are no longer linked so much by physical space, but by ideology and shared interest. Political and community matters are now expected to take place within the private realm of the home versus the local coffee shop or community center (Wellman, 2001; Warren, 2002). Communications are becoming contingent upon the individual versus shared location.

With this trend, as well as the increase in individuals using e-mail, social networking websites, and other forms of online communication, it appears that

Americans are accepting this change in community and thus change of deliberative space. Research analyzing web-based interactions demonstrates that individuals "interact happily and fruitfully online…and in ways similar to face-to-face contact" (Wellman, 2001, n.p.). Studies interviewing over 200 people about their online interactions have also shown that "the exchanges that occurred between people on the Internet showed evidence of honesty, trust, and reciprocity, and the individuals involved often expressed heartfelt attachments to each other" (Davis et al., 2002, p. 109). Individuals self-reported that they use the Internet to establish relationships with new individuals who "shared beliefs, a sense of identity, a course of action, or thought-provoking discourse" (Davis et al., 2002, p. 110). As the nature of interpersonal communication changes, we must also accept that the space where this occurs will also change. By giving importance to the location where communication takes place, we also give meaning to the deliberation occurring within that context.

Dryzek writes that "The only condition for authentic *deliberation* is then the requirement that communication induce reflection upon preferences in a non-coercive fashion (2000, p. 1-2). In many ways, Internet communications fit this description. I have also delineated several other criteria to establish how deliberation can be meaningful. Internet-based discourse is more accepting of less formal types of speech. It is less likely that prejudices will taint the conversation, and individuals are encouraged, if not expected to participate. The Internet lessens coercion as the relative anonymity and distance from one another allow individuals to more securely put forth their preferences. At the same

time, the anonymity and distance can make the discussion less respectful, and can reduce the need for compromise.

In many ways, Internet communications bring new types of individuals into the deliberative process by diversifying accepted speech and focusing more upon content rather than a person's appearance or diction. At the same time, simply because discourse is taking place on the Internet does not mean that all individuals are always on an equal playing field. It is not a magical space in which biases about gender, race, or sexual preference are completely eradicated. Much like norms of Internet communication are rooted the etiquette of physical space, the same real-world biases will still exist in cyberspace so long as they exist in the real world.

The Internet, overall, is becoming an increasingly more important place for deliberation and thus public engagement. I do not argue that public engagement is most effective when it occurs solely on the Web, but rather that in many ways it has the potential to be one of the many venues for engagement – one more tool in the box. Despite the Internet's growing importance as a space and mechanism for engagement, there are several downsides, which I have discussed in the context of meaningful deliberation. In the next section I will elucidate the rest of my reservations regarding the Internet's possibilities for public engagement.

Further Reservations

In the previous section, I have analyzed some preliminary reservations with relying upon the Internet as an avenue for public engagement. Other reservations remain. Firstly, the digital divide makes it difficult for a number of already underrepresented

Americans to participate in online discourse. Warren writes that "ideally, individuals should have equal access to the full range of organizations and institutions which affect their lives" (2002, p. 695). There is a clear gap in the Americans who have access to the Internet and those who do not, however. While roughly equal numbers of men and women access the Internet, discrepancies occur when taking into account other sociocultural factors. 77% of White individuals regularly use the Internet, compared to 64% of African-Americans and 58% of Hispanics. 71%-74% of urban and suburban dwellers use the Internet, but only 63% of those who live in rural areas do.

This divide is even clearer when assessing income and education. 94% American households earning more than $75,000 annually have the Internet, yet only 57% earning less than $30,000 have access. Finally, 95% of Americans who have attended college use the Internet, whereas only 35% of adults who have less than a high school education do (Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Trend Data*, 2008). The digital divide is something that can be mitigated with the proper policy and funding. The Obama administration has made this a priority, allotting $7.2 billion to pursue broadband development nationwide, including grants for rural communities (Technology, 2009). Putnam explains that as this technology becomes more of a necessity, more effort will be put forth to subsidize the Internet, much like the telephone was (2000). Thus, in Putnam's words, the digital divide is "serious but not insurmountable" (2000, p. 175).

Another issue with the Internet is the quality of information available. While the vast amount of information allows willing individuals to educate themselves on almost any issue, there is little oversight to this information. This is largely an issue within blogs,

as some individuals heavily rely upon these for news. Much like established news sources have a reputation for bias and legitimacy, so do certain blogs. Indeed, it is in the best interest of any blogger to maintain his or her legitimacy by posting links to their references. Additionally, given the interactive nature of blogs, inaccuracies can instantaneously be addressed by the readership. In newspapers, by contrast, errors may not be addressed until at least the next day, and are often buried on a back page. The ability for a user to instantaneously and publicly question the credibility of a blog's content within the message board below helps add to a blog's legitimacy.

A final concern with the Internet was briefly referenced in Chapter 3. That is, I expressed concern that by relying too heavily upon the Internet for public engagement we stand to become a nation of recluses, our faces illuminated only by the eerie glow of our computer screens. It is indisputable that Internet use is increasing rapidly. When one thinks about it, the implications are akin to perhaps a Ray Bradbury novel: a nation of glassy-eyed individuals, connecting in an environment devoid of all visual and auditory social cues, using abbreviations and emoticons[22] instead of genuine communication and emotion. Is this the case, though? Are we really *replacing* material contact in favor of online communications?

Empirical research demonstrates that we are not. In fact, Internet use "is increasing interpersonal connectivity and organizational involvement" (Wellman, et al., 2001, p. 450). Wellman concluded this by analyzing survey data on how individuals use the Internet to connect with one another, as well as the amount of time they spend online.

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[22] An emoticons is a textual representation of an emotion. For example, to indicate that I am smiling, I may type :>D.

These studies also find that the Internet is used to "fill the gaps between in-person meetings" rather than replace them (Wellman, 2001, n.p.). These findings were also supported by responses in Kavanaugh et al.'s focus groups, in which participants expressed that they used the Internet to connect with other people in their communities and to "navigate their involvement in their neighbourhoods, schools or communities" (2008, p. 953).

Perhaps the most exciting finding is that rather than replacing our physical interactions, the Internet is instead substituting for television watching (Wellman, 2001). Rather than turning on the television and tuning out at the end of the day, the Internet is providing an easy way to connect with other people when time or distance might stand in the way. Additionally, this evidence shows that we are not opting for our computers instead of each other. Individuals still like connecting with one another in-person. We like going to cook-outs and parties; we still go to rallies, and yes we still go bowling. Perhaps not in leagues, which holds implications for bridging social capital. The fact that in-person and telephone interactions are not being replaced by the Internet, coupled with individuals' enthusiasm for using the Web as a tool to get individuals out of their homes (as demonstrated by the Dean and Obama campaign) provides encouraging evidence that individuals still prefer to see and hear one another in person.

Overall Conclusion

Despite the troubling evidence signifying a disengagement from public life, the Internet holds the potential to get individuals involved again. Warren discusses the ways in which "democratic expectations are growing" in our society (2002, p. 680). It is now

expected that we participate not only through formal channels, but also that we embrace participation in our very homes. With the television, individuals were able to retreat to their homes, turn on the tube, and absorb the information coming through the screen. With the proliferation of the Internet in the American home, however, individuals are now able to boot up their computers and engage with each other. They still absorb information – but they are encouraged to contemplate and respond to it.

Even Sunstein, who seems somewhat pessimistic regarding the Internet's possibilities admits "…the world of blogs is helping to improve the operation of deliberative democracy because it involves a great deal of citizen involvement and because arguments are often supported by facts and reasons" (2007, p.139). In fact, Sunstein has benefited quite a bit from the use of the Internet as a public engagement tool. It was, after all, the Internet that played such a large role in President Obama's winning campaign strategy. On April 20th, 2009, Sunstein was officially appointed to serve as Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs in the President's administration.

The Internet holds a great deal of possibilities for engaging Americans, even outside of the context of political campaigns. Take, for example, the company, 1BOG. With former Obama organizer Kanyi Maqubela as its field director, 1BOG organizes a collective of individuals who can then use their numbers to bargain for a group discount on solar panels. The company uses a campaign strategy, complete with bumper stickers and supporters, who most closely resemble precinct captains (Walker, 2009).

Perhaps the most exciting possibility for Internet engagement is its ability to bring young Americans into the political process. This was seen with the Deanie Babies, and with the slew of young supporters enjoyed by the Obama campaign. The Internet is so effective at involving the youth because it reaches them where they are: online. It gives them an easy, interactive way to get involved, and invites them to use their technological expertise. The Internet creates a mechanism by which to easily, quickly, and effectively participate by opening the doors of the political world to the masses.

I am not concluding that the Internet is the *best* space for community, deliberation, nor public engagement. However, it is becoming an increasingly important aspect to Americans' lives. As institutions mandate less time for the average person, individuals are using the Internet as a tool to bolster their social ties and public engagement. The biggest promise of the Internet is to serve as an avenue to get individuals out of their homes and into their communities, whether it be at a candidate meet-up, or helping them join a buying collective for solar panels. The Internet still has merit in making it easier for individuals to deliberate, yet its greatest potential lies in the ability to make it easier to tangibly get involved.

In the first chapter, I mentioned an online rally. I conclude that a virtual rally isn't the same as a physical one. The thing is, the creators of that online event probably knew that. 17,000 people marching outside of City Hall is a far more powerful visual than the same number "attending" an online Facebook rally. This is obvious. At the same time, this was a creative attempt to draw attention to a topic in a new way. I've received hundreds of online invitations to join a support group for a cause. The sheer absurdity of

an online rally stuck out, however, and though I probably can't name one Facebook "cause" that I've turned down, I do remember the purpose behind that online rally. This is a testament to the ways in which people can and will mold and adapt the Internet to their own needs. Some might not always work, but with users able to shape the Internet's tools to their own needs, it serves only to become a more expressive medium.

In conclusion, despite the Internet's drawbacks, it is a useful tool to encouraging public engagement. It allows individuals to get involved in their own space and on their own time. It makes it easier to incorporate public engagement into one's busy life. By making engagement accessible to more people, the Internet serves as a democratizing force in American culture. The Internet is a largely egalitarian space where individuals and collectives can organize to form common bonds and work toward shared goals. By recognizing the Internet as a legitimate space for and path toward public engagement, we invite and giving meaning to individuals in the political process who may have otherwise gone unrecognized. The Internet alone isn't the only thing we need in the public engagement tool kit – it is, however, definitely worth keeping in there.

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